

Why a pronoun guide?

Some people feel like the most common gender pronouns (she/her, he/him) don't represent their gender identities or expressions because of how they are typically attributed to binary conceptions of sex (male/female) and gender (man/woman). Transgender, genderqueer, and other gender non-conforming people sometimes opt to use other pronouns that better fit their gender identity and expression. Gender-neutral pronouns (for example, they/them, ze/hir, ey/em) provide more opportunities for people with non-binary identities to define themselves.

(Note: You may hear people refer to pronouns as "preferred pronouns." This is no longer ideal language because it implies that a trans person's pronouns are optional or up for debate. Instead, simply say "pronouns.")

How do I know which pronouns to use?

You can't know which pronouns someone uses or what gender they identify as just by looking at them. If you're unsure of what pronouns someone uses, you can simply ask, "What pronouns do you use?"

You can also just refer to the person by their name. For example, "I've invited Morgan to the meeting because Morgan has expertise in marketing."

Note that some people may be okay with more than one type of pronoun. For example, you may hear someone say "my pronouns are she/her/hers or they/them/theirs."

In some cases, transgender and gender non-conforming people may use different pronouns in different spaces depending on their comfort and safety. If you hear someone introduce themselves differently in different spaces, follow their lead or ask them where you should use which set of pronouns.

Why is it important to get someone's pronouns right?

Using someone's correct pronoun is one important way to show that you respect their identity. For some trans people, being referred to by the wrong pronoun can be invalidating, hurtful, and humiliating. Furthermore, using the wrong pronoun for someone can be dangerous if it results in outing them to others who don't know their gender status.

Learning how to use new types of pronouns or learning to use a different set of pronouns for someone you already know can take some getting used to, but it is important that you make the effort.

How should I correct myself and others when we use the wrong pronouns?

Be sure to apologize and correct yourself if you mispronoun someone. This can be a simple, "Sorry, I meant she," and then moving on with the conversation. If you notice a peer mispronoun someone, you can offer a brief correction: "Remember, Sam goes by 'he' and 'him.'"

If you realize after the fact, apologize to the person in private and let them know you'll make every effort to get their pronouns right in future. It is important that the conversation does not become centered on your feelings after making a mistake (such as difficulty or confusion you feel), but instead on validating the gender identity of the person you are apologizing to. A simple, "I realized I used the wrong pronoun for you earlier. I'm sorry about that; I'll do better in future" will suffice.

	Nominative (subject)	Objective (object)	Possessive determiner	Possessive pronoun	Reflexive
He / Him	<i>He</i> laughed	I called <i>him</i>	<i>His</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>his</i>	He likes <i>himself</i>
She / Her	<i>She</i> laughed	I called <i>her</i>	<i>Her</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>hers</i>	She likes <i>herself</i>
They / Them	<i>They</i> laughed	I called <i>them</i>	<i>Their</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>theirs</i>	They like <i>themselves</i>
Spivak	<i>Ey</i> laughed	I called <i>em</i>	<i>Eir</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>eirs</i>	<i>Ey</i> likes <i>emself</i>
Ze (zie) /Hir	<i>Ze</i> laughed	I called <i>hir</i>	<i>Hir</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>hirs</i>	<i>Ze</i> likes <i>hirsself</i>

Adapted from the LGBT Campus Center's Gender Pronouns Guide at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
(https://lgbt.wisc.edu/documents/LGBTCC-Gender_pronoun_guide.pdf)