PRONOUNS

What They Are, and Why They Matter

Gender pronouns are words that people use to refer to others without using their names. Using a person's correct pronouns fosters an inclusive environment and affirms a person's gender identity and expression. Pronouns are not "preferred" but instead are required for respectful communication. Not only transgender or nonbinary communities use pronouns, as it is something we all use and have since we were little. A person of any gender can use multiple sets of pronouns.

Pronoun examples:

she/her/hers	he/him/his	he/they & she/they
they/them/theirs	ze/zir/zim	hir/hir/hirs (pronounced "here")
ey/em/eirs	ve/ver/vis	ne/nem/nirs

Or, no pronoun! Some people prefer that you just use their name where you would normally use a pronoun.

If someone uses multiple pronouns, don't be afraid to ask how they would like to use the pronouns. Some people are okay with either one being used, or they accept both, but have a preference towards one. If you have any questions, respectfully ask the person! This is not a rude question to ask and might help avoid a rude assumption.

Why does this matter?

Although the workplace is a professional space with clear personal boundaries, our identities and social constructs enter this space, and we all want to be seen. Respect and Dignity in the workplace looks like creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for people to feel accepted regardless of gender or sexuality.

When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (often all of the above). Studies reveal that correct pronoun usage can reduce suicidality by up to **50%**. All major professional American psychological and psychiatric associations recognize that inclusive language usage for LGBTQ+ youth and adults drastically decrease experiences of depression, social anxiety, suicidal ideation, and other negative mental health factors. In 2023 alone, more than **400** legislative attacks have been directed at the trans and gender non-conforming community, and it has never been more important to make our colleagues feel safe.

Using correct pronouns is a sign of respect!

What can I do?

Set a precedent!

- Even if you do not use gender neutral pronouns and identify as cis-gender, lead by example by sharing your pronouns both in writing and in person! This can make a huge difference in reducing transphobia in the workplace and help your trans colleagues feel comfortable, accepted, and safe.
- Make asking pronouns a common workplace practice: You cannot assume someone's pronouns, just as you cannot assume someone's name. A simple way to do this is "Hi, I didn't catch your pronouns. Mine are ___, what are yours?"

Mistakes Happen!

Correct pronoun use takes practice and constant reinforcement. If you or someone else makes a mistake with a colleague's pronoun:

DO:

- Do say thank you for the correction, correct yourself and move on.
- Do privately talk to a person and correct them if you witness/overhear someone being misgendered.

DON'T:

- Don't over apologize or overemphasize that you feel terrible about the mistake you made. It is inappropriate and makes the person who was misgendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is absolutely not their job.
- Don't tell them to keep reminding or correcting you.
- Don't tell them that using this new pronoun is hard for you.
- Don't say anything about the pronoun, i.e., they/them sounds plural and its grammatically incorrect (it's not, nor is it a new concept. Even Shakespeare used 'they' as a singular!)
- Don't ask them to be patient. They already are being patient with you.

Remember, it's ok to ask respectful questions, and continue to educate yourself about gender expression and identity! We want all our colleagues to feel seen, respected, and safe.

Helpful Terms

Gender	A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual as man, woman, a mixture of both, or neither.
Gender Identity	One's innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from the socialized gender that corresponds with the sex assigned at birth.
Gender Expression	External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine. The important thing to recognize is that an individual's gender expression does not automatically imply one's gender identity, pronouns, sexuality, or biological sex.
Cisgender	A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth.
Transgender	An umbrella term used to describe people whose true gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex and/or gender they were assigned at birth.
Gender non-conforming	A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.
Nonbinary	Refers to individuals who identify as neither man or woman, both man and woman, or a combination of man or woman.

Remember: gender does not predetermine sexuality! How a person wishes to be referred to has nothing to do with their sexual orientation.