# Pronoun guide

Normalizing the sharing and use of people's personal pronouns is important to help transgender, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people feel acknowledged and included.

Why should I learn more about pronouns?

Pronouns like *she, he* and *they* are extensions of our identities, just like our names. Getting pronouns right is important.

You may have noticed more people including their pronouns on email signatures, social media profiles or name tags. These are simple ways to let others know what pronouns you use for yourself. Normalizing correct pronoun usage is inclusive for transgender, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people because you can't assume someone's pronouns just by looking at them. When cisgender people, the term for those whose gender identity aligns with their sex at birth, include their pronouns, they're helping create an inclusive space for all people.

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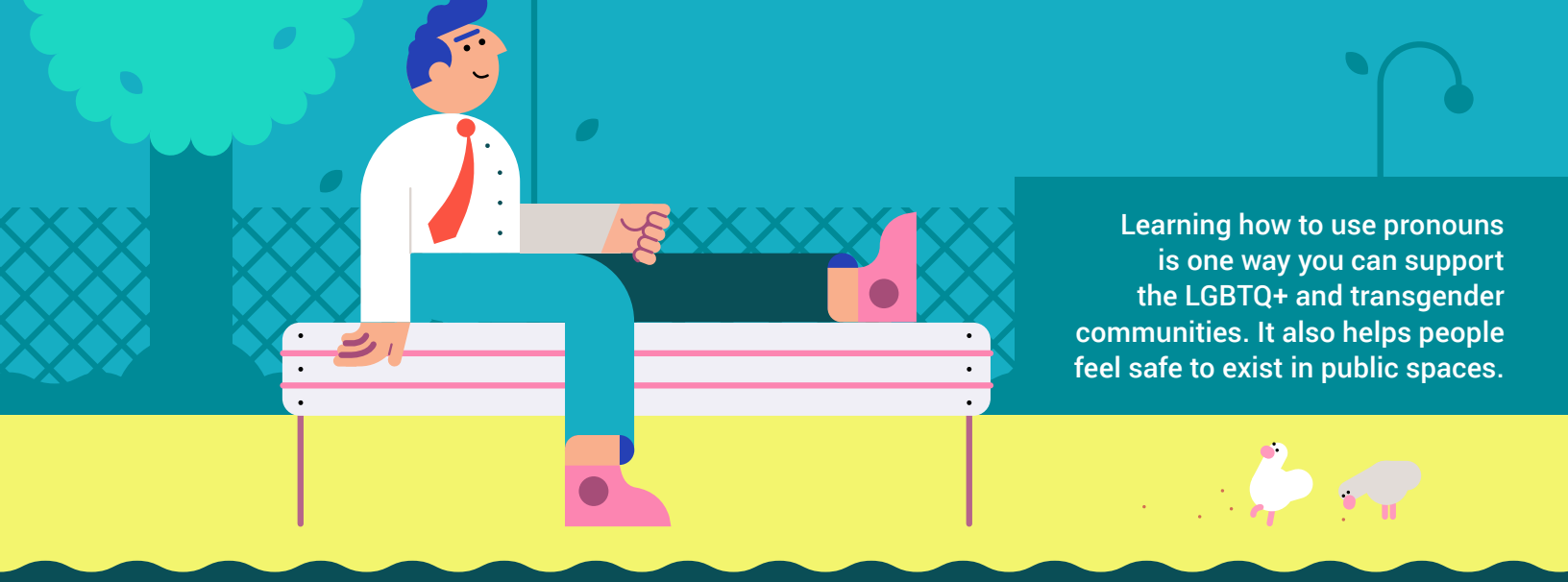
What are pronouns?

Personal pronouns are short words we use to refer to a person in place of their name. You shouldn't assume what someone's pronouns are based on their appearance. Examples of common pronouns are *he*, *she*, *they*, *xe*, *ze* and more. Some people don't use any pronouns and use only their names. Some use a combination of pronouns, such as *she/her* and *they/them*. Using someone's correct pronouns is essential for respectful communication.

Here are some examples of how to use personal pronouns:

He/him/his: Michael arrived early but then realized that he forgot his phone.

Xe/xem/xyr: Hunter has an assignment due tomorrow, so xe skipped the party to finish xyr homework.

They/them/their: Richard enjoys working from home, but they miss socializing with their coworkers.

She/her/hers: Maria is excited that she is getting a new jacket because her current one is very old.

No pronoun: Sidney needs to leave the meeting early in order to pick up Sidney's sick child from school.

How to start sharing your pronouns with others

Share your personal pronouns when introducing yourself to others. For example: "Hi, I'm Dr. Gold and I use *she/her* pronouns" or "Hi, I'm Frank and I use *he/him* or *they/them* pronouns, both are fine."

Add your personal pronouns to your email signature alongside your name. For example: Eliza Smith (she/her/hers), eliza@email.com.

Include your personal pronouns on your name badge at events.

Use your personal pronouns on Teams, LinkedIn and other social media profiles.

Why should cisgender people declare their pronouns?

It helps normalize the sharing of pronouns in all settings, not just in LGBTQ+ spaces. We should never assume someone's pronouns because of how they look. It can be harmful to everyone to expect only transgender, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people to share their pronouns. Sharing your pronouns shows that you care for people and respect their identities.

What if I accidentally use the wrong pronoun or notice someone else doing it?

If you catch yourself making a simple mistake, it's usually best to correct yourself quickly and move on without drawing more attention. For example, "I'm pretty sure she sent you an email last week. I'm sorry, I meant to say they sent an email." If you realize later that you made a mistake, you can apologize afterward. For example, "I'm sorry, I think I used he instead of they in our meeting. I'll try not to do that next time!" Acknowledge your mistake and try to remember the correct pronouns in the future.

If you hear someone else using incorrect pronouns, try responding with the correct pronoun if you think it was a mistake. For example, if someone says, "Did he leave you a voicemail?" you can reply, "Yes, they did." If you think the person might not know the correct pronouns or seems to not be paying attention to their mistake, try a small correction like, "Actually, Sam uses they/them pronouns, and yes, they left me a voicemail."

If someone uses incorrect pronouns when talking to you, how you respond might depend on how well the person knows you:

- If the person doesn't yet know your pronouns or name, you could correct them with "Actually, my name is [Name]" or "Please use [pronouns] with me."

- If the person knows your name/pronouns but they've made a mistake, you could correct them with something like "[Correct Name/pronoun], please."

- If the person is doing it on purpose, that's verbal abuse. You should respond as you would to any sort of bullying.

What is misgendering?

Referring to someone by pronouns other than the ones they use is called misgendering. Pronouns are extensions of our identities and using them correctly is important. Just as someone may feel disrespected if they're called the wrong name, someone may feel disrespected if they're referred to by the wrong pronouns. Misgendering can be offensive, especially if it's intentional or an ongoing issue.

Is *they/them* correct grammar for singular use?

In a word, yes! The English language has often used *they* and *them* in a singular form since the 14th century. Consider this example: "Somebody forgot their textbook. If they come back, will you please return it to them?" While the singular use of *they* for nonbinary genders has emerged in the last few decades, most dictionaries and style guides now include this modern usage.

Pronoun chart

Below is a chart of some of the most common pronouns. Remember to allow people to define whatever language they want to use for themselves.

	Subject	Object	Adjective	Possessive	Reflexive
He/Him	he	him	his	his	himself
	"He talked"	"Talk to him"	"His shoes"	"That is his"	"He likes himself"
She/Her	she	her	her	hers	herself
	"She talked"	"Talk to her"	"Her shoes"	"That is hers"	"She likes herself"
They/Them	they	them	their	theirs	themself
	"They talked"	"Talk to them"	"Their shoes"	"That is theirs"	"They like themself"
Ze and hir	ze or (zie)	hir	hir	hirs	hirself
	"Ze talked" ("zee")	"Talk to hir" ("here")	"Hir shoes" ("here")	"That is hirs"	"She likes hirself"
Ze and zir	ze or (zie)	zir	zir	zirs	zirself
	"Ze talked" ("zee")	"Talk to zir" ("zeer")	"Zir shoes" ("zeer")	"That is zirs" ("zeers")	"Ze likes zirself" ("zeer-self")
Xe	xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself
	"Xe talked" ("zee")	"Talk to xem" ("zim")	"Xyr shoes" ("zeer")	"That is xyrs" ("zeers")	"Xe likes xemself" ("zim-self")

This is not an exhaustive list. It's always best to ask people what pronouns they use.

Some people may be comfortable using two or more different pronouns (*she/they*, for example). This is sometimes referred to as rolling pronouns. While some people have a preference for a certain pronoun set but are ok with others ("I prefer *they/them*, but *she/her* is ok, too."), some may treat their acceptable pronouns as interchangeable. You can always ask each person how they want to be addressed.

Glossary

Language is always evolving, so terms may shift and change with time. But we strive to keep this list as up to date as possible.

Cisgender (or cis): Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Deadname: The birth name of someone who has changed it. The term is especially used in the LGBTQ+ community by people who are transgender and elect to go by their chosen name instead of their given name.

Gender nonconforming: A term used to describe some people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. Not all gender nonconforming people identify as transgender, nor are all transgender people gender nonconforming. Many people have gender expressions that are not entirely conventional—that fact alone does not make them transgender. Many transgender men and women have gender expressions that are conventionally masculine or feminine. Simply being transgender does not make someone gender nonconforming. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* and should be used only if someone self-identifies as gender nonconforming.

Misgendering: Misgendering occurs when you intentionally or unintentionally refer to a person, relate to a person, or use language to describe a person that doesn't align with their affirmed gender. Misgendering can have negative consequences for a transgender person's self-confidence and overall mental health. As reported by healthline.com, those who are misgendered more frequently feel that their identity is very important but experience lower self-esteem around their appearance. They also often have a reduced sense of strength and continuity in their identity.

Nonbinary and/or genderqueer: Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman or see it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* and should be used only if someone self-identifies as nonbinary and/or genderqueer. For some, gender identity or expression can be fluid, changing over time or depending on the situation.

Transgender (or trans): An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including *transgender*. Use the descriptive term the person prefers. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people take those steps, and a transgender identity does not depend on physical appearance or medical procedures.

Personal pronouns, correct pronouns (no longer using preferred pronouns): The term *preferred pronouns* used to be an acceptable way to describe a person's pronouns. However, calling them *preferred* indicates that using correct pronouns is optional.

In reality, using correct pronouns is a basic need for a person to feel safe and exist in public spaces. The correct terminology is *correct pronouns* or *personal pronouns*.

Adopted in part from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) website.

Additional resources:
Review the GLAAD Guide