

PRONOUN PRIMER

GENDER AND
LANGUAGE



BELONG
partners

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WHY WE ASK

We ask for people's pronouns because we can't accurately assume everyone's gender, and everyone's relationship to gendered words.

Hearing people share what pronouns to use when we reference them gives us an opportunity to show genuine respect to one another, and to **reduce the burden on transgender and gender-nonconforming folks to navigate potentially inhospitable social spaces.**

WHAT ARE PRONOUNS?

Pronouns are words that replace nouns. We often use them to replace a person's name, including our own! **Examples:**

this, each, who, you, everyone
I, she, he, they, we

Anyone can experience being incorrectly gendered, but the experience is more common and more harmful for trans and gender-nonconforming people. **Together, we can stop being (sometimes unconsciously) disrespectful.**

Sometimes when people experience new ideas, they turn to humor as a way to deflect their discomfort. If you feel inclined to say “my name is Jordan, I use he/him/The Champion pronouns” or “you can call me whatever you want as long as you bring me coffee”, **we invite you to reflect on what conditions allow you to dismiss a practice that communicates to marginalized people whether or not they’re welcome within a space.**

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH GENDER?

When talking in the third-person about other people, the English language has two major pronoun categories:

"FEMININE"

she/her/hers
for women

"MASCULINE"

he/him/his
for men

In our language and our culture, those words communicate a ton of information about another person.

Sometimes that information is **inaccurate** or based on **inappropriate** assumptions about other people.

CISGENDER PEOPLE

(those who are not trans) often experience the luxury of being referred to by friends, family, and strangers with the pronouns that align with their gender.

Not everyone is afforded this privilege.

Cis men and women whose appearance or gender expression falls outside of our culture's understanding of gender experience similar, though ultimately less discomfort, distress, and danger than trans people when misgendered.

TRANS Latin prefix meaning "on the other side of", "across", "through", "beyond"

transcend, transit, translate, transfer, transmit, transcontinental

CIS (pronounced like "sis") Latin prefix meaning "on this side of", "on the same side"

cisalpine, cis fatty acids, cis-acting elements, cisplatin anticancer drugs

Using the correct pronouns for people ensures that **everyone is respected**. We can also actively highlight the need for inclusive and affirming spaces for trans people.

BUT WAIT!

WHAT ABOUT SINGULAR "THEY" PRONOUNS?

Some people think that in English, using the word "they" refers to a group of people instead of an individual. Bigwig literary figures such as Shakespeare and Hemingway used it to refer to an individual, so that's not explicitly true. **Many people, especially nonbinary trans people who are not men or women, use "they" instead of "he" or "she" because it more closely aligns with their gender.**

And before you get too stressed out, take a deep breath and remember that we all use singular they pronouns all the time!

It takes intention and practice to get used to using pronouns we're unfamiliar with (or to work towards the elimination of the gender binary), and **it's a choice worth making when someone's basic human dignity is at stake.**

There are also less common—but still totally valid—pronouns like ve/ver/vis or xi/hir/hirs (pronounced "zee/here/heres").

All language is constructed by the people that use it!

"Oh no, someone left **their** book here, I hope **they** didn't need it."

A 2020 study by The Trevor Project found that trans and nonbinary youth whose pronouns were respected by “all or most of the people in their lives attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected.”

“MISGENDERING A TRANS PERSON IS AN ACT OF VIOLENCE... CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE.”

LAVERNE COX

Out in the wider world, misgendering a trans person can risk their **safety** or their **life**. Within this space, correct pronoun usage is a totally bite-sized effort to respect and welcome all members of our learning community.

DID YOU KNOW!

The singular, gender-neutral pronoun “thon” (a combination of “that” and “one”) was dreamed into being by Charles Crozat Converse in 1858! It was even included in multiple dictionaries. In the last 150 years or so, people have proposed around 80 different English language gender-neutral singular pronouns! Many languages have these types of gender-neutral pronouns, and many other languages don’t have gendered pronouns at all!

DID YOU KNOW! **(SUPER NERD EDITION)**

Within the field of linguistics, the grammatical category of “gender” is not explicitly related to the biological sex associated with a word, or the word’s attributes or connotations, but rather gender assignment is classified by the morphology (formation of words, parts, roots, suffixes, stems) or phonology (arrangement of sounds) of the noun!