



Information gathered from  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Division of Student Life

# Pronouns Matter

A guide to  
using gender  
neutral  
pronouns



## *Always remember to*

### LISTEN

How does the individual refer to themselves?

### ASK

If you are unsure of which pronouns to use, ask.

### UNDERSTAND

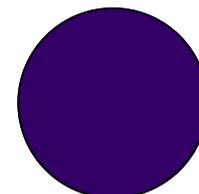
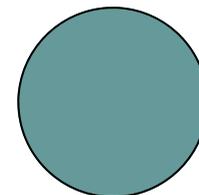
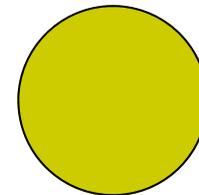
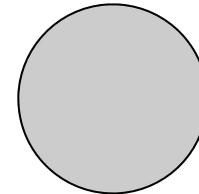
A person's pronouns can change, do not assume the preferred pronouns from yesterday will still apply today.

### CLARIFY

If you are unsure of the conjugation of a particular set of pronouns, ask.

### RESPECT

If a person has shared their pronouns with you, use them and refer to them by their stated pronouns, even if they are not present.



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# Gender Neutral Pronouns



Some people don't feel like traditional gender pronouns (she/her, he/him) fit their gender identities. Transgender, genderqueer, and other gender-variant people may choose different pronouns for themselves. The following guide is a starting point for using pronouns respectfully.

## How do I know which pronouns to use?

If the person you're referring to is a stranger or brief acquaintance (like a server, cashier, fellow bus patron, etc), you may not need to know. If the person is a classmate, student, or coworker, for example, it is best to ask. Try:

- "What pronouns do you use?"
- "How would you like me to refer to you?"
- "How would you like to be addressed?"
- "My name is Tou and my pronouns are he and him. What about you?"

## How often do pronouns change?

Remember that people may change their pronouns without changing their name, appearance, or gender identity. Try making pronouns an optional part of introductions or check-ins at meetings or in class.

Pronoun	Normative (subject)	Objective (object)	Possessive determiner	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
He	He laughed	I called him	His eyes gleam	That is his	He likes himself
She	She laughed	I called her	Her eyes gleam	That is hers	She likes herself
It	It laughed	I called it	Its eyes gleam	That is its	It likes itself
They	They laughed	I called them	Their eyes gleam	That is theirs	They likes themselves
Ne	Ne laughed	I called nem	Nir eyes gleam	That is nirs	Ne likes nemself
Ve	Ve laughed	I called ver	Vis eyes gleam	That is vis	Ve likes verself
Ey	Ey laughed	I called em	Eir eyes gleam	That is eirs	Ey likes emself
Ze/Hir	Ze laughed	I called hir	Hir eyes gleam	That is hirs	Ze likes hirself
Ze/Zir	Zie laughed	I called zir	Zir eyes gleam	That is zirs	Zie likes zirself
Xe	Xe laughed	I called xem	Xyr eyes gleam	That is xyrs	Xe likes xemself

## What if I make a mistake?

Most people appreciate a quick apology and correction at the time of the mistake. Try:

- "Her books are—I'm sorry, hir books are over there."

By correcting yourself, you're modeling respectful pronoun use for others in the conversation. If you only realize the mistake later, a brief apology can help. Try:

- "I'm sorry I used the wrong pronoun earlier. I'll be more careful next time."

## When should I correct others?

Some people may not want a lot of public attention to their pronouns, while others will appreciate you standing up for them. If someone uses the wrong pronoun for a person who isn't present, try a brief correction:

- "I think Sam uses she and her pronouns. And yes, I'm going to her house later too!"

It can be tough to remember pronouns at first. The best solution is to practice! Correct pronoun use is an easy step toward showing respect for people of every gender.