

Gender and Pronoun Guide

It is important to understand that gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex are all different concepts because they are often confused with one another.

1 Gender Identity is an internal understanding of our gender, based on what we understand about gender from our culture.

Examples: man, woman, nonbinary, transgender, agender, demigender, genderqueer, pangender

2 Gender Expression is how we present ourselves to the outside world through clothing, hairstyles, our voice, mannerisms, and more. Often how we present is related to our gender identity, but not always.

Examples: masculine, feminine, androgynous

3 Biological Sex is a medical determination based on primary and secondary sex characteristics, hormones, and chromosomes. Often, this is assigned at birth.

Examples: female, intersex, male

Each of these is also different than sexual orientation. In reality, these components of identity are independent of one another. Therefore, even if you know any one of these things about a person, you do not necessarily know the others. The same is true for pronouns.

Examples:

- I know that Fred identifies as a man, but I don't know how Fred likes to dress, or what chromosomes/hormones Fred has.
- Alisha uses they/them/theirs pronouns, but I can't assume Alisha's gender identity or sexual orientation based on that information.

While you may feel justified in making assumptions based on your prior experiences, it can be harmful to incorrectly assume information about people. For example, people select the pronouns that make them feel comfortable, so it is worthwhile to respect others by avoiding assumptions based on generalizations. While it is usually unnecessary to ask people about their identity, it is appropriate to ask what pronouns they would like you to use in reference to them.

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Pronouns are words that are used in place of nouns. If you say "That's Eric. He is nice," the word "he" is the pronoun, which is being used in place of "Eric." There are many pronouns that exist in the world, and you are the only person who can decide which are the right pronouns to be used for you! This means that we should ask others for their pronouns, listen carefully to their answers, and use those pronouns when referring to that individual.

Practice using gender neutral language:

- Freshman ➤ First-Year Student
- Policeman ➤ Police Officer
- Mankind ➤ Humankind

There are many respectful ways to ask someone about their pronouns. Try:

“ Sorry, I forgot to ask. I use they/them/theirs pronouns, how about you?”

“ Can you remind me which pronouns you use?”

Subjective	Objective	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
She laughed	I love her	Her eyes gleam	That is hers	She likes herself
He laughed	I love him	His eyes gleam	That is his	He likes himself
They laughed	I love them	Their eyes gleam	That is theirs	They like themself
Ze* laughed	I love zir	Zir eyes gleam	That is zirs	Ze likes zirsself
Ae* laughed	I love aer	Aer eyes gleam	That is aers	Ae likes aerself

*Ze/zir/zirs pronouns sound like zee, zur, zurs, etc. Ae/aer/aers pronouns sound like ay, air, airs, etc.

If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, you can use their name in place of any pronoun:

"Sam was feeling hungry, so Sam went to the Dairy Bar for a snack."

Sometimes a person's pronouns will change. Using pronouns other than the ones a person has asked you to use can make them feel unwelcome, invisible, or unsafe. This is called misgendering someone. If you make a mistake, quickly correct yourself with the correct pronouns and apologize. Making a big deal out of the mistake can make the misgendered person feel worse.