



GENDER PRONOUNS & WHY THEY MATTER

Why Are There Pronouns In My Email Signature?

The Y is committed to creating welcoming and inclusive spaces for all. Including pronouns is a first step toward respecting and affirming people’s gender identity, working against assumptions, and engaging people of all genders, including those who identify as transgender, gender nonconforming, and gender non-binary.

Why Is It Important To Use Correct Pronouns?

People’s pronouns relate to their gender identity. For example, someone who identifies as gender non-conforming may use the pronouns “they/them/theirs.” We do not want to assume people’s gender identity based on gender expression (typically shown through clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, etc.).

Gender can be very important to someone’s sense of self. To incorrectly gender someone can cause the person to feel disrespected, alienated, or dysphoric (or a combination of the three). It is very important to know that you cannot visually tell someone’s gender. This means that you can also not visually tell if someone is transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, gender-variant, etc. Asking what pronouns someone uses in that specific space** can prevent emotional distress from happening, and sets an example of respect and inclusion.

How Do I Know What Pronouns To Use?

Asking for pronouns can depend on the setting. When speaking to a member, camper, coworker, or other community member to whom you introduce yourself, it is best to ask for their pronouns. Some ways to do this might be –

- “What pronouns do you use?”
- “What pronouns should I use for you in this space?”**
- “My name is Dan, and my pronouns are he and him. What about you?”

If you aren’t sure of someone’s name or pronouns but you have already asked or met the person, it is okay to ask for them again or later.

***Asking what pronouns to use in a specific space makes room for people to be affirmed and express themselves in a variety of ways, including if the person does not want to out themselves in certain spaces. People may not be out everywhere and may not want to be out elsewhere or with others.*

What Should I Do If I Make A Mistake?

Most people appreciate an apology and correction. Try not to draw more attention to your mistake. For example, “She likes – I’m sorry, ze likes swimming more than basketball.” Correcting yourself shows that you respect the person and

A QUICK GUIDE TO PRONOUNS

Listed below are commonly used pronouns and examples. There are many different pronouns that individuals may use that are not listed. It is important to continuously educate ourselves on terminology as both language and gender adapt with society.

He/Him/His	That scarf is his. He made it himself. I saw him wearing his scarf.
She/Her/Hers	That scarf is hers. She made it herself. I saw her wearing her scarf.
They/Them/Theirs	That scarf is theirs. They made it themselves. I saw them wearing their scarf.
Ze/Hir/Hirs	That scarf is hirs. Ze made it hirself. I saw hir wearing hir scarf.
Ze/Zem/Zirs	That scarf is zirs. Ze made it zirself. I saw zem wearing zir scarf.
Ey/Em/Eirs	That scarf is eirs. Ey made it emself. I saw em wearing eir scarf.



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What Should I Do If I Make A Mistake? (continued)

their identity. Do not address people by pronouns or names that they do not use, even if the person used the names or pronouns in the past. If you realize or are told later that you made mistake, a brief apology can help. For example – “I’m sorry I used the wrong name and pronoun for you. I’ll be more careful in the future.” Most people prefer only an apology and reassurance that you will respect their pronouns and name going forward.

When Should I Correct Others’ Mistakes?

Some people may not want a lot of attention drawn to them. Some people may not want someone else standing up for them. Others may appreciate you standing up for them. You can ask if the person would want you to correct others. One way to ask might be, “I heard our colleague use the wrong pronoun for you in a meeting. Should I correct them or others in the future?” If the wrong pronoun is used for a person who isn’t present, try a brief correction. Remember, you may not know the correct pronoun or want to out the person. For example, “I think Skylar uses ‘they/them’ pronouns. Is that correct?”

Do Names and Pronouns Change?

To answer simply: yes! Knowing your gender identity is not always an easy process. For example, some people may change their pronouns and names based on their personal gender fluidity, and some people may just need to “try

Do Names and Pronouns Change? (continued)

something out”. Making space for this is important to be respectful and inclusive. People may change their pronouns without changing their name, appearance, gender expression, or gender identity. Names may change without changing pronouns, appearance, or gender identity. In short, it is not possible to know without asking. One way to make space for this is to include optional pronoun introductions in meetings or adding pronouns to nametags.

Respecting Boundaries

While it is important to take an active role in being inclusive – whether it is through educating yourself, checking in if a person’s name or pronouns have changed, or correcting yourself and others who make mistakes – it is also important to do this at the comfort level of the person with whom you are interacting. **Do not ask about a person’s body, their potential former names, their gender, why or how they know they are a certain gender, their sexual practices, or any other questions that are invasive unless the person invites you to ask.** If this is the first time you’re thinking about your pronouns, you may want to reflect on the privilege of being cisgender, or having a gender identity that matches the sex assigned to you at birth. Take a look at more resources and practice using pronouns. Follow this [link](#) to a video about privilege.

SOURCES

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