

Intro to personal pronouns

When you're not referring to someone by name, personal pronouns can be used. Respecting personal pronouns is an important way to affirm identity and create safe and inclusive spaces.

Pronouns

There are gendered and gender-neutral pronouns.

Examples of gendered pronouns are:	Examples of gender-neutral pronouns are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• she/her/hers, and• he/him/his	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• they/them/theirs• ze/hir/hirs (pronounced: zhee, here, heres)• ze/zir/zirs (pronounced: zhee, zhere, zheres)• xe/xem/xys (pronounced: zhee, zhem, zheres)

Some people use a mix of gendered and gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. *she/they, he/they, they/she, they/he, he/they/she*). This can be for different reasons and usually means that the person uses both/all pronouns, and you can alternate between those when referring to them. (e.g. *I saw lauren on the weekend, she was at the farmers market. They were telling me about a new course on facilitation*).

Sometimes it means that they use one specific pronoun in one context and another set of pronouns in another. The best way to find out is to ask the person if they prefer one or the other or are happy alternating between both/all.

Making mistakes

Using the wrong pronoun can cause harm even if it is unintended. This is called **misgendering**. This can lead to that person feeling disrespected which, in turn, might lead to **dysphoria** (severe distress experienced when someone's gender identity doesn't match their biological sex), exclusion and alienation.

Using pronouns can take some time getting used to and accidents do happen. When you mistake someone's pronouns it is important to acknowledge your mistake, apologise, use the right pronoun, and move on. Don't make a big deal of it. Practice helps so keep trying and know that with time and practice it gets easier.



Being in groups

Power imbalances exist in groups when there are participants with different living experiences and are at different places in their learning about gender.

When participating in or facilitating groups, it's important to acknowledge that this power imbalance exists and to validate the gender identities present. An example of this can come up when creating group agreements. You might hear a participant say: *"I think we should all agree that it's ok if we get pronouns wrong. I mean this is all new to me."*

As a strategy to actively engage this comment, you might say:

"I'm hearing that you want to feel safe in the group to make mistakes with language. This is something I'm sure we can all agree on. However, when it comes to language and behaviours that create emotional work or pain for another person, we have the responsibility to create an environment that supports their participation. This means the onus is on us to correct our language and behaviour and be willing to point out mistakes others might make too. I'm wondering if that's something we commit to and whether we can craft that into an agreement..."

Practicing allyship

When you do not know someone, it is helpful to ask them what pronouns they use. It is best to do this in a safe environment in case the person you are talking to isn't openly using their new pronouns. If it doesn't seem like a good time to ask, simply refer to them by name rather than using any pronouns.

You can also support pronoun use by always introducing yourself with your pronouns, adding it to your name on zoom if you are online, on a name tag if you are at an in person workshop, in your email signature, in your LinkedIn and other social media profiles, and on your business card. Using pronouns openly like this can normalise seeing them and using them.

Further reading

- [What are pronouns and why are they important? | Minus18](#)
- [The Pronoun Lowdown – Nevo Zisin](#)
- [What are pronouns?? – TransHub](#)
- [What Are Pronouns? Why Do They Matter?](#)
- [Pronouns and Terminology - Transcend Australia](#)
- [My Pronouns Are She/They. What Are Yours?](#)
- [English neutral pronouns - Nonbinary Wiki](#)
- [The Radical Copyeditor's Style Guide for Writing About Transgender People](#)

Note: This is not a static document. Learning is made better when it is built by many so please add your comments to help build our collective understanding.

