

## Pronouns

*This guide has been created to provide information about the use of pronouns at the University.*

### What are pronouns?

Pronouns – A word that refers to someone or something that is being talked about (like “she”, “them”, “this” and “it”). Gender pronouns (eg. “she/her”, “he/him” and “they/them”) are some examples of the way that we refer to one another’s gender identity. We may assume a person’s gender based on their name, appearance, voice, and/or expression, and “assign” a pronoun, but this may not always be correct.

### Why are pronouns important?

Personal identity is very important. Using someone’s correct personal pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive environment, just as using a person’s name can be a way to respect them.

As a University we have Doctor and Professor titles which can make identifying pronouns more difficult. We also have a diverse, international workforce and therefore less common, reversed, or unisex names may lead to mistakes being made. For trans and non-binary people pronouns can be particularly important. Using the right pronouns for someone will make them feel acknowledged and valid.

### What are personal pronouns and why do they matter?

Whether we realise it or not, people frequently refer to us using pronouns when speaking about us. Often, when speaking of a singular human in the third person, these pronouns have a gender implied -- such as “he” to refer to a man/boy or “she” to refer to a woman/girl. These associations are not always accurate or helpful.

Often, people make assumptions about the gender of another person based on the person’s appearance or name. Making assumptions about someone’s gender can cause offence or embarrassment, even when it is unintentional. To judge someone by their appearance can be very harmful.

### What if I do not know which pronoun to use?

Just ask, never assume! What may seem obvious may actually be incorrect, and please keep in mind that while many people associate “he” or “she” as meaning men or women, respectively, this is not always the case.

“They” can be used to refer to an individual who doesn’t identify with gender-specific pronouns and can also be used to refer to an individual whose gender identity is not known. Other gender-neutral language such as “colleagues”, “students”, “team members”, “participants”, etc. can be helpful to use generically.



### **Is “they” not a plural pronoun?**

It is a common misconception that this usage is new and ungrammatical; in fact, it has precedence dating back to the 1300s and is recognised by the Oxford English Dictionary.

### **What if I make a mistake?**

It is understandable mistakes will be made at times. It is worth remembering that the phrase ‘preferred pronouns’ is no longer used. Terms like this make it sound like someone’s gender is up for debate. Intentionally using the wrong pronouns for someone repeatedly is a hurtful form of misgendering.

If you get someone’s pronouns wrong please apologise and correct yourself – but don’t worry we all make mistakes. You can also show solidarity with someone who uses pronouns that others may mistake by politely correcting someone who has used the wrong pronoun even when the person is not there.

### **What can I do to help?**

You can take the lead by saying your pronouns when you introduce yourself at the start of a meeting, event, seminar or discussion. Not only will this encourage your colleagues to do the same, but also it will help everyone get used to talking about pronouns, which will help trans people feel more comfortable to do the same.

Many colleagues have chosen to add their pronouns to their email signatures. This is a simple and visible way to show your awareness of the importance of using the correct pronouns and to show your support. It is something everybody can do. You can do it too.

It may also be helpful to take other opportunities to ask for or offer pronouns such as during interviews, as part of induction or training.

### **What are the benefits of sharing pronouns?**

As well as creating a more welcoming space for a diverse staff group internally, having visible pronouns also sends signals of inclusivity to those outside of the organisation, promoting our University value of embracing diversity to our students, partners, candidates and the wider community. This helps people respectfully refer to one another.

Sharing pronouns can help staff avoid mistakes, like misgendering someone, which can be especially hurtful for trans people, but also embarrassing for non-trans people. It can also be a great tool for visibly demonstrating trans allyship both internally to the University and externally.

### **Where can I find further guidance and information?**



- Visit the E&D Unity pages
- Human Rights Campaign Website, where you can download their “[Talking About Pronouns in the Workplace](#)” guide
- [The truth about trans \(stonewall.org.uk\)](#)



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