

Communicating with your instructors can feel challenging, but your faculty and other instructors are open to hearing from you to create a supportive learning community. The following templates may provide you with a starting place for communicating about relevant components of your identity, including name, pronouns, gender identity, gender expression, etc. Undergraduates may find it helpful to discuss communication strategies with their advisor. More information can be found at the Brooks College Advising Center website: <https://www.gvsu.edu/brooksadvising/>. Both graduate students and undergraduates may also find it helpful to talk to staff at GVSU's Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center and/or reach out by email to lgbtcenter@gvsu.edu. If you are not comfortable making this direct communication on your own, LGBT Resource Center staff can communicate on your behalf.

Some tips for writing an email to faculty:

- a) You have the right to be seen and respected in all learning environments. This means you have every right to state your needs and ask for changes. At the same time, you should not feel compelled to reveal anything more personal than you feel comfortable disclosing, nor do you need to justify why using your correct gender pronouns is important.
- b) If there is something that you enjoy about the course/subject, etc., you could consider starting the email off with this – if not, you do not need to write something that feels emotionally dishonest. If the instructor has explicitly mentioned creating community in the class, you might align your feedback with this goal.
- c) A faculty member may need to learn more. If you want to, you may offer yourself as a resource, but *you do not need to take that on if you do not want to be in that role*. Feel free to suggest available resources from the [Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center](#). We have a whole tab of resources for faculty/staff at GVSU including “[In the Classroom](#)”, “[Employee Resources](#)”, “[Trainings/Workshops](#)” and direct connections.

We have created the following email templates to help you get started:

1. Introductory email prior to class starting:

Dear Professor X,

I am really looking forward to your class this semester. I'm emailing to ask you to refer to me as ___ in class and use ___ pronouns when referring to me and my ideas. When professors model this, it helps other students respect each other and their gender identity and/or expression.

This name and my pronouns may or may not be reflected in your course roster (and you may notice that my name is different in other university systems). If you would like to know more about X/Y/Z, I would be happy to speak further AND/OR you may check out materials here: ___ or [reach out to a staff member at the Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center](#).

Thank you!

Name, pronouns

2. Misgendered or dead-named by other students:

Dear Professor X,

I am seeking your help in navigating something that happened in class. I had an experience in your ___ class the other day in which another student/a TA/etc. misgendered/dead-named me (add a brief synopsis of the incident). I am reaching out to you because I am hoping that you will (*select all that you would like to see happen*) a. think with me about what we can do OR b. talk with the student(s) OR c. offer general guidance to the class as a whole about inclusive practices regarding names, pronouns, gender identity, and gender expression. If you are not sure what the most constructive next step might be, the Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center staff has [recommendations about best practices for resolving the issue/making a more inclusive classroom.](#)

Thank you!

Name, pronouns

3. Misgendered or dead-named by your instructor:

Dear Professor X,

I am in your ___ class. I wanted to remind you/share with you that I use X pronouns/name because [x event happened]. It is very important to me that you use my correct gender pronouns and name. These reflect who I am, and I know that you see and respect me when you use them correctly. If you would like to learn more about X/Y/Z, I would be happy to speak with you further OR you may check out resources here: ___ or [reach out to a staff member at the Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center.](#)

Thank you,

Name, pronouns

4. Transition Email (name change, pronoun change, gender expression change):

Communicating information about your transition(s) to faculty to ensure you have the most positive classroom experience is challenging and can be stressful, scary and anxiety-provoking. It can also bring feelings of empowerment and provide an opportunity for you to receive words of affirmation from colleagues and friends who support you. Feel free to reach out to staff at the Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center who can help you draft up an email that you feel comfortable with. It can be helpful to think through the questions below before communicating with faculty, as an email may or may not be the best option:

- a) How familiar (and friendly) are you with the faculty member/colleague? This helps with tone: more familiar might let you feel comfortable sharing more personal information, while less familiar might mean you are more direct and less vulnerable in your sharing.

- b) How aware of your gender process is this faculty member/colleague? Is this the first time they are becoming aware of this part of your life?
- c) Does the faculty member/colleague need basic understanding of trans and non-binary topics to make sense of the information you are sharing with them?
- d) Resources for faculty: Do you want to be the educator, or would you prefer someone else do that job (confidentially)?
- e) What salient information do you want to communicate about your transition to faculty/colleagues?
- f) What do you want to ask for (practically) from faculty? In what ways will specific actions or behaviors from them be supportive and constructive for you? List specific things for faculty to do in support of you: this enables them to implement positive changes quickly and in the manner you specify. It also makes it easier to give them feedback if they are not following through on the actions you have asked of them because you can reference your initial email.

5. Sharing information about your gender identity and expression with a faculty member who teaches you in a particular class, especially if you already have an existing relationship:

Dear Professor X,

I wanted to let you know about some exciting changes that are going on in my life. I identify as (trans/non-binary/etc.) and recently have started using a different name/different pronouns. I am now using the name ___/the following pronouns and would appreciate if you could make sure this information is reflected on the class roster, in communications with me, in class, etc.

In addition, it would be helpful if you could create some space in class for us to go around and share our names and pronouns so that I can share the information with the students in class.

Thank you for your support with this!

Best,
Name, pronouns

6. Grad Students: Sharing information about gender identity/expression, name, and pronouns with advisors or other faculty you TA for:

This type of email will naturally be more personal and situation-specific due to the long relationships we have with our advisor(s). Here are a few examples of types of communication and paths forward that encompass what to consider when bringing news/information of your transition to your advisor(s):

a. Email to an advisor for initially informing them of names, pronouns, and gender expression changes:

Dear (advisor),

Mentorship often extends beyond the years that one spends in graduate school. Given that, I value the relationship that we currently have and will build over the next several years. I wanted to let you know about some exciting changes that are going on in my life regarding my gender identity and expression. I am hoping that together we can navigate how I can successfully convey these changes within professional academic circles moving forward. It would be helpful to discuss this matter with you and talk about the use of my name and pronouns in different contexts. In the interim, here are some experiences of people like me [link]. My experience is unique, and I also think it will help support our discussion if you have a bit of background knowledge that these resources can provide.

Thanks for your support,
Name, pronouns

b. This is an example email sent by a graduate student at Stanford University to nearly 100 people at once, several that already knew of changes in the student's gender expression and many that did not. This email generated a great deal of positive support from those who received it:

Dear friends and colleagues,

I am writing to let you know that I am changing my name to _____. As part of my process of living into my nonbinary transgender identity, my name change is a complement to asking that you refer to me using the pronouns they/them. You may encounter folks who have forgotten or have not heard about my name change, and in that case please feel free to correct or inform them.

I know from my own experience that switching from one set of name and pronouns to another is hard and requires a bit of mental gymnastics until it feels more natural. I don't expect you to successfully switch without making any mistakes, and I'll be patient as you get better at it. But it's important to me that you do switch because I want to feel like you see me and respect me in the way that is most true to who I am.

The pronouns "they/them" can also be tricky because they are commonly thought of only as plural. In this case, you're referring to me as an individual, but you'll conjugate verbs as you normally do with the plural "they". This grammar might feel wrong at first but is in fact correct. An example sentence might be: "_____ said they are going to the lab today." Or "_____ can speak for themselves." When you do mess up my name or pronouns, it might feel embarrassing, but I would prefer that you quickly correct the sentence and then move on. This way I know that you noticed and aren't pretending it didn't happen.

While this process has been very personal for me, it is also necessarily public in that it changes how you and others will refer to me. In enacting this important shift in my public persona, I am asking for your respect and support, both in your interactions with me and with others. Please feel free to ask me if you have any questions or need clarification.

All the best,
Name, pronouns

c. Email from a TA to faculty before the course begins on how to use names and pronouns in the course:

Hi (faculty),

I wanted to mention before class begins that I've changed my name to ___ and I use the pronouns ____. I would appreciate if you could use these pronouns in reference to me, especially in class so that the students know as well. I have had success getting this information to new groups of people (especially in classroom settings) if there is an explicit name-tag activity on the first day of class. This way it does not have to be stated out loud, but the information is visible for everyone to see and learn to associate with my name. It also provides the opportunity for any of the students to share their pronouns with you and their peers. I think it would be valuable for the students to set the precedent, and to display them in subsequent classes. For example, they might look something like this:

NAME	
Pronouns	field/department

This will help to make the classroom more inclusive for everyone, as well as make this process easier for me.

Thanks,
Name, pronouns

[This guide was created from an online resource from Stanford University.](#)
You can find more GVSU resources related to chosen name and myName on the
[Milton E. Ford LGBT Resource Center website](#)