

One Inclusive Thing: Gender Neutral Pronouns

WHAT ARE GENDER NEUTRAL PRONOUNS?

Gender neutral or gender inclusive pronouns are unspecific to one gender. Using gender neutral pronouns does not label or associate the person being discussed with a specific gender. This is especially important for people who don't identify with their assigned gender at birth. Physical sex does not determine gender, so rather than assume someone's pronouns based on their perceived gender or appearance, it's crucial to ask what their pronouns are. One's gender can be communicated with the use of pronouns, so mistaking their pronouns mistakes their gender. It is important that faculty respect students preferred pronouns as it validates a student's identity. Disrespecting a transgender person's pronouns could threaten their safety and jeopardize their security.

HOW DO I USE PRONOUNS PROPERLY?

Female pronouns include she, her, hers. In contrast, male pronouns are he, him, his. Commonly used gender neutral pronouns are "they, them, theirs."

- Instead of saying "He's not in class today," one would say "They're not in class today."
- Instead of saying "I have an advising appointment with her today," one would say "I have an advising appointment with them today."
- Instead of saying "employers presume if a student can't write well, he won't be a good employee," one would say "employers presume a student who can't write well won't be a good employee."

WHAT CAN I DO IN MY CLASSROOM?

First and foremost, remember you are modeling inclusive behavior at all times. Students will follow your lead!

Include a welcoming statement in the syllabus that confirms your commitment to creating and maintaining a respectful and inclusive classroom environment for all students regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age ability, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation.

On the first day of class, introduce yourself and include your pronouns—"Hi class, I'm Dr. _____ and my pronouns are she, her hers." Post your photo and pronouns in the syllabus along with other contact information.

Consider adding a hyperlink to educational resources on pronoun use and encourage students to learn more.

Connect with students in your class early via an introductory email or pre-class survey and ask them their preferred name and pronouns.

Use the photo roster in Blackboard as a means to learn students preferred names and faces.

Use terms like “welcome everyone” or “welcome students” instead of “welcome ladies and gentlemen” to incorporate gender inclusive language when addressing the class. Saying “Hey guys,” leaves out all the other people who are present and do not identify as men. There could be women, gender queer, trans or gender non-binary folks in the group.

Keep in mind that it is important for all students to see themselves reflected in what is around them—incorporating a broad range of inclusive classroom materials and discussions are the simplest ways to do this.

Don’t assume! It’s important to remember that even if a student looks cisgender or appears to look like a man or woman, it doesn’t mean you can assume their pronouns. Using pronouns creates safer and more inclusive spaces for people to be themselves knowing that other people are going to respect their identity.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Resources for working with students who identify as LGBT:

- [Milton Ford LGBT Center](#)
- [Specifying your preferred name via MyName](#)

Inclusive and welcoming classrooms:

- Dana Munk, Pew Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, munkd@gvsu.edu or 616-331-8539
- [Blackboard Photo Roster](#)

Creating heteronormative learning and working environments:

- [Interrupting Heteronormativity, Syracuse University](#)
- [Nine techniques for achieving gender neutrality](#)
- [Reducing Heteronormativity, University of Houston, LGBT Resource Center](#)