PRONOUNS: GENDER-INCLUSIVE SPACES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

What is a pronoun?

A pronoun takes the place of a noun. For example, instead of saying "The *chair* is in the corner," this statement can be rephrased with a pronoun: "*It* is in the corner."

What is a gender pronoun?

Gender pronouns refer specifically to people. For example, if Luke uses the pronouns *he/him/his*, we can say that "Luke is a hard worker, and *he* is full of great ideas."

Each individual identifies their own pronouns, so be sure to (1) ask for people's pronouns and (2) use them.

What are some common gender pronouns?

Most commonly, individuals use **she/her/hers** or **he/him/his**. However, increasingly, people are self-identifying with gender-neutral pronouns like these:

- **They/them:** Melissa walked to *their* car because *they* needed to leave for work. (Note: In this context, "they" and "them" are used to refer to a singular subject).
- **Ze/hir:** Max walked to *hir* car because *ze* needed to leave for work. (Note: "Hir" is pronounced "here," and "ze," which is also sometimes written as "zie" or "xe," is pronounced "zee").
- **Name only**: Max walked to Max's car because Max needed to leave for work. (Note: Some people choose not to use pronouns).

This is not an inclusive list; there are many additional options. If a person uses a pronoun you do not recognize and/or are not sure how to use, just ask them for a quick lesson or clarification.

Why is it important to respect people's pronouns?

This list is adapted from LGBTcampus.org and Samuel Merritt University:

- When we ask for and use someone's pronouns, we demonstrate respect for their gender identities and promote a safe and inclusive environment. We become allies.
- We cannot tell which pronouns a person uses just by looking at them.
- If a person is misidentified with pronouns they do not use, that person may feel alienated, disenfranchised, disrespected, oppressed, dismissed, and/or dysphoric.
- Many gender pronouns may be new to some people. By asking for and using a person's pronouns, we can set a good example for others – students, colleagues, and people in our personal lives – to follow.

How can I be inclusive with using and respecting pronouns?

This list is adapted from LGBTcampus.org and Samuel Merritt University:

- *Use your pronouns in **introductions**, and ask for others' pronouns in their introductions. Here are some sample questions that can facilitate these interactions:*
  - o "What pronouns do you use?"
  - o "How should I refer to you?"
  - o "Will you please remind me which pronouns you use?"
  - o "My name is Juan, and I use they/them. What about you?"

  - o For introductions in a classroom or group setting, you might start with, "Welcome, Everyone! Please introduce yourself to the group by providing your name, pronouns, and one interesting fact about you."

- *Include your pronouns in your **email signature**. Along with your name and any other information you list (such as your title, address, office phone number, etc.), you might also add a section like this:*
  Example 1: Mai Nguyen (she, her, hers)

  Example 2: Mai Nguyen

    Pronouns: he/him/his

  Example 3: Mai Nguyen

    Pronouns I respond to: they/them

  Example 4: Mai Nguyen

*Please let me know how you self-identify. I go by Mai, and I use she/her/hers. How should I refer to you?

What happens if I make a mistake?

When you make a mistake, remember this important rule: Oops.

Ouch. Educate!

In other words, apologize for the error, acknowledge that you are not intentionally disrespecting the person, and correct yourself or ask for a correction. It can be tough to learn pronouns, especially when they are new to you, and people will appreciate your efforts and diligence as you learn and adapt.

Coast Colleges- Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Compliance. (2018). *Pronouns: Gender-Inclusive Spaces* [PDF File] Retrieved from
https://www.cccd.edu/employees/hr/equity/Documents/Inclusion/Inclusion_Pronouns_Final_EIC_Accessible.pdf