

# Why pronouns matter in the workplace



# Why should we pay attention to pronoun use?

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Pronoun use is so embedded throughout our everyday interactions, that it is easy to take for granted how much we rely on it to make assumptions about a person's identity.

In-person or over other mediums, pronoun references are present in all our conversations. In fact, as a default many of us fall back on gendered language to express respect, formality, and/or sometimes to even convey a customer-friendly tone:



## Mis-Pronoun-Cing: What it is and how it can be harmful

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Much like our individual names, pronouns are tied to our deepest sense of identity. They express who we are and how the outside world should recognize and address us.

Even if well-intentioned, when someone makes the wrong assumption about someone's gender identity or expression, and, by extension their pronouns, it can be **insulting, harmful**, and if done often enough, **constitute harassment**.

# Pronouns matter

People everywhere thrive when they are supported and affirmed in who they are. Using an individual’s correct pronouns is a powerful affirmation of their self, especially for transgender or gender non-confirming individuals.

**It validates their identity, encourages authenticity, and conveys respect and acceptance.**

## Your short pronoun guide

Please note that this list is not exhaustive. There are an infinite number of pronouns as new ones emerge in our languages. To be respectful and inclusive, always ask someone for their pronouns.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

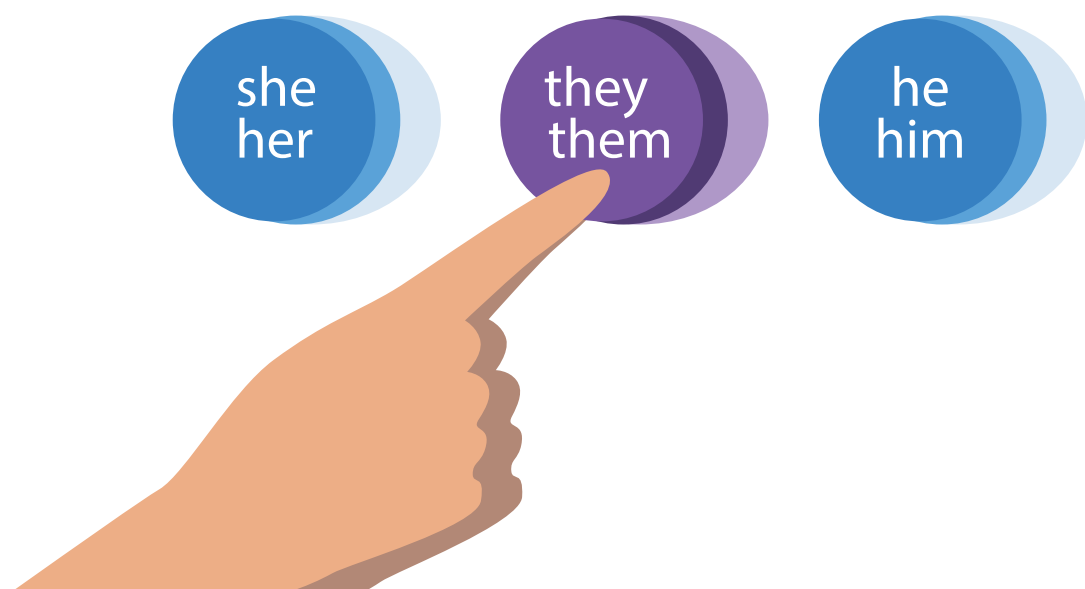


# Initiating correct pronoun practices: what you can do

**If you are a leader, manager or supervisor**, you can start the meetings by inviting people to introduce themselves and share their pronouns.

**When addressing groups of people**, replace gendered introductions like “ladies and gentlemen” which can alienate staff who identify differently. Options can include:

- All of you
- Colleagues
- Everyone
- Valued guests
- Friends
- Team
- Folks



**Email signatures** are simple, cost-effective ways for individuals to communicate their personal pronouns to colleagues. If this is not a practice in your organisation, you may request your HR department to see if they can implement it.

If you are meeting someone for the first time, **be proactive in introducing yourself with your name and pronouns**. This gives the other person the space and opportunity to share their own name and pronouns.

**When in doubt, always ask.** However, it is better to do so in private versus a group setting so as not to draw additional attention to the conversation.

**Keep it optional.** Sharing pronouns should be a voluntary activity as some individuals may not be ready to do so.

**Simple changes, a conscious effort, and consistent practice can go a long way in creating a welcoming and supportive environment at the workplace.**

**This in turn can allow us to bring our whole and authentic selves to work.**

## Reference

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