

A Focus on Pronouns – courtesy of the GSCC at MSU (www.gscclmsu.edu)

People should be referred to by the pronouns which they identify with. Using the pronouns that a person asks for you to use is a way to **show them respect** and to create a more trans-inclusive environment. Using someone’s pronouns is about **basic human dignity**.

Having people automatically use the pronouns with which you identify is a part of having cisgender privilege. If you are cisgender, sharing your pronouns and using the pronouns that someone asks you to use are powerful ways to be an ally to the trans community.

Tips About Pronouns

- Do not refer to a person’s pronouns as their “preferred” pronouns or “gender” pronouns. Using “preferred” implies that a person’s pronoun selection is merely a preference and, therefore, something that is not required. Using “gender” ignores people who are agender.
- Always use the pronouns that a person asks you to use.
- When you make a mistake, ACT: Apologize > Correct > Try Again.
- Do not assume you know someone’s pronouns based on their name, the way they look, their voice, how they dress, or any other factor.
- If you don’t know someone’s pronouns, ask (politely). Don’t just ask people who you assume are trans.
- Share your pronouns and create opportunities for people to share their pronouns, like in email signatures or at the beginning of meetings. Please note that some transgender and nonbinary people will opt out of sharing as a means of self-protection.

Pronouns FAQ

Why should I share my pronouns?

We share our pronouns to let people know how they should refer to you. We do this because a person’s pronouns aren’t necessarily obvious, and this avoids the uncomfortable and sometimes-incorrect practice of guessing which pronouns to use. Sharing our pronouns invites others to share theirs.

Why is it important to respect people’s pronouns?

You can’t always know what someone’s gender pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone’s pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity. When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel

disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, and/or dysphoric (but most often, it is all of the above).

Additionally, using the correct pronouns for a person is **suicide prevention**. According to the Trevor Project, Transgender and Nonbinary youth who reported having their pronouns respected by all or most of the people in their lives attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected.

Why do I share my pronouns when I don't introduce myself with any other identities?

When you share your pronouns you are **not** actually sharing an identity. You are sharing **how you would like a person to reference you**. Pronouns have a link to identity, but the goal of sharing pronouns is not to share identity. We share our names and pronouns to communicate how people should talk about us.

What if I make a mistake and use the wrong pronouns for a person?

First of all, it is likely that you will make mistakes. Just apologize, correct yourself, and try again (or ACT). The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to correct yourself right away, like “Last week, she and – he and I went to the store. I'm sorry for that.”

If you realize you made a mistake after the fact, apologize in private and move on.

It can be tempting to go on and on about how bad you feel that you messed up or how hard it is for you to get it right. But please, don't do that. It is inappropriate and makes the person who was misgendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is absolutely not their job. It is your job to remember people's pronouns.

How do I share my pronouns?

Sharing your pronouns is as simple as saying “I use the pronouns [she/her/hers]” or whichever pronoun set(s) you use. If someone is confused by this, you can explain that these are the pronouns you want people to use to refer to you.

You can also share your pronouns in your email signature, on your business cards or name-tags, next to your name on Zoom, your biography on your unit website, and on your office door or workspace entrance.

You can link your pronouns in your email signature to **this page** or mypronouns.org. This helps share resources and educational information on pronouns across our community.

How do I ask for someone's pronouns?

You can ask for someone's pronouns by simply asking “what pronouns do you use?” or “what are your pronouns?” If this is in the course of introducing yourself to someone new, it is good

practice to share your own pronouns first: “I use he/him/his pronouns. What pronouns do you use?”

It is important to ask this question to everyone, and not only those people who are visibly gender non-conforming.

When is it okay to ask someone’s pronouns?

The simple answer to this question is - you should ask when you first meet someone and/or when you realize you do not know or have forgotten. Of course, time and place matter. Most of the time people would rather you ask their pronouns than have you use the wrong pronouns for them.

People can feel awkward or uncomfortable when they forget someone’s pronouns--similar to when you forget someone’s name. In both cases, there are polite ways to ask:

“Hey, Jasmine, can you remind me of your pronouns?”

“Cy, I just realized that I am not sure what pronouns you use. What are your pronouns?”

How do I create a culture of gender inclusion where sharing pronouns feels more natural?

Sharing your own pronouns is a first step, followed by consistently using other people’s correct pronouns and correcting errors as soon as they are made. Here are some other possibilities for creating a culture of gender inclusion:

- Ensure that you consistently use the name people ask you to use and be cautious to avoid “deadnaming.” Warn students if they will see their deadname.
- Be sure that your forms are inclusive (both in gender-inclusive language and in identity terms and options)
- Intentionally use gender-inclusive language. Be conscious of gender specific language and seek more inclusive alternatives.
- Ensure that your office, department, or class collects demographic information in a gender-inclusive manner.
- Update your forms to be more inclusive to trans and nonbinary identities.
- Learn more about the accessibility of facilities such as restrooms for people of all genders.
- Commemorate LGBTQA+ observances, especially those related to trans and nonbinary identity. Bring trans and nonbinary identities and stories into your curriculum.
- Host trans and nonbinary speakers. Invite the GSCC to provide a workshop for your department or participate in Quest I: Foundations Online
- Slow down and pay attention to how and when you attribute gender to other people. Be curious and try not to assume the gender of a person or their pronouns.

In addition to being a generally good practice, these steps will create an environment that signals to transgender and gender non-conforming people that their identities will be respected.