

Annex 4 - Pronouns and how to use them

Pronouns are one of the many ways we can express our gender and identity to the world. Respecting and using the correct pronouns for our colleagues, friends and acquaintances is an important move towards inclusivity.

Why are pronouns important

You probably already know that a pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence. What you can't always know is a person's gender, just by looking at them or communicating over email. If your gender matches the one assigned to you at birth, you might not have given much thought to your pronouns, but for many members of the trans and non-binary community, exploring and finding the right ones is an important step.

The most well-known gender pronouns are she/her and he/him, however many gender non-conforming and non-binary people choose to use they/them, or a combination of different pronouns.

<Embed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iKHjI5xAaA>>

The history of pronouns

Contrary to popular belief, they/them has been used as a singular pronoun in the English language for centuries and is included in such works as The Canterbury Tales, Hamlet, Pride and Prejudice and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It first appeared in the 1300s, around a century after the plural form of 'they'. The singular 'they' is defined in Merriam-Webster's dictionary as a gender neutral term, however in 2019, in a move towards inclusivity, Merriam-Webster expanded this definition to specifically include referring to a non-binary person. *If you make a mistake with someone's pronouns*

It's okay! Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, and navigating the world of pronouns can be both a delicate and complex matter. The important thing is that you're doing your best. Being misgendered can be upsetting, and it's important to understand that the person may be offended by the use of the incorrect pronoun. If you do make a mistake, correct yourself, apologise and move on.

If you hear someone misgendering another person, check with the misgendered person whether they are comfortable with you sharing their correct pronouns. If this happens repeatedly, further discussion may be required. Please feel free to reach out to the PRIDE network for help and advice.

Being a better ally

Remember, you don't have to understand what it means to be trans or non-binary to show respect. Using a person's correct pronouns validates them and their experiences. What might seem a small change to you may mean a lot to another person.

One step towards being a better ally is to add your pronouns into your email signature. This show of support helps to create a more welcoming environment for all genders, and normalises the practice of not assuming gender.

This is why UKRI has now included a space for pronouns in our email signatures, right next to your name. This field is not mandatory but perhaps understanding more about pronouns will prompt you to add yours to your email signature.

If you would like to learn more about pronouns, or the spectrum of the LGBTQ+ community, please visit [REDACTED] website. [REDACTED]