

An Evans School Guideline for Gender Pronouns

What is a “gender pronoun”?

A “gender pronoun” is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for themselves. For example: If Xena’s pronouns are she, her, and hers, you could say “Xena ate her food because she was hungry.”

What are some commonly used pronouns?

She, her, hers and he, him, his are the most commonly used pronouns. Some people call these “female/feminine” and “male/masculine” pronouns, but many avoid these labels because, for example, not everyone who uses he feels like a “male” or “masculine.”

There are also lots of gender-neutral pronouns in use.

Here are a few you might hear:

- **They, them, theirs** *Ex. Xena ate their food because they were hungry.* This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun. You would still conjugate associated verbs as you would for the plural version, as in “they are an activist” or “they like to go shopping.”
- **Ze, hir** *Ex. Xena ate hir food because ze was hungry.* Ze is pronounced like “zee” can also be spelled zie or xe, and replaces she/he/they. Hir is pronounced like “here” and replaces her/hers/him/his/they/theirs.
- **Just my name please!** *Ex. Xena ate Xena’s food because Xena was hungry.* Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.

Never, ever refer to a person as “it” or “he-she” (unless they specifically ask you to.). These are offensive to trans and gender non-conforming individuals. Be mindful of this language.

How do I ask someone what their pronouns are?

These suggestions are all great places to start. It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.

- “What are your preferred pronouns?”
- “Which pronouns do you like to hear?”
- “Can you remind me which pronouns you like for yourself?”
- If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what a pronoun is, you can try something like this: “Tell us your name, where you come from, and your pronouns. That means the pronouns you like to be referred to with. For example, I’m Xena, I’m from Amazon Island, and I like to be referred to with she, her, and hers pronouns. So you could say, ‘she went to her car’ if you were talking about me.”

Why is it important to respect people's pronouns?

- You can't always know what someone’s pronouns are by looking at them.
- Asking and correctly using someone's preferred pronoun 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, or dysphoric (or, often, all of the above.)
- Remember that it is a privilege to not have to worry about which pronoun someone is going to use for you based on how they perceive your gender. It is therefore extremely important to respect everyone’s gender identity.

Why is it really important to respect your students' pronouns as a Faculty Member?

As a faculty member, you are often in a position of power.

- Asking your students what their preferred pronouns are and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected at the Evans School or not
- **You will be setting an example for your class:** If you are consistent about using someone's preferred pronouns, they will follow your example.
- Many of your students will be learning about gender inclusive pronouns for the first time, so **this will be a learning opportunity** for them that they will keep forever.
- **Discussing and correctly using gender inclusive pronouns sets a tone of respect and being ally that trans and gender nonconforming students do not take for granted.** It can truly make all of the difference, especially for incoming first-year students that may feel particularly vulnerable, friendless, and scared.

What if I make a mistake?

- It's okay! Everyone slips up from time to time. The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like "Sorry, I meant she." If you realize your mistake after the fact, apologize in private and move on.
- A lot of the time 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! **It is inappropriate and makes the person who was mis-gendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is unacceptable.**

Take an active role

- In your classes, you may hear one of your students using the wrong pronoun for someone. In most cases, it is appropriate to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individual who has been mis-gendered. This means saying something like "Xena prefers the pronoun she," and then moving on. **If other students or faculty are consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone, do not ignore it! It is important to let your student know that you are their ally.**
- It may be appropriate to approach them and say something like "I noticed that you were getting referred to with the wrong pronoun earlier, and I know that that can be really hurtful. Would you be okay with me taking them aside and reminding them about your preferred pronoun? I want to make sure that this group is a safe space for you." Follow up if necessary, **but take your cues from the comfort level of your student. Your actions will be greatly appreciated.**

References

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