

# Pronoun Usage Guide

**Egale**

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# Overview of Pronouns

Pronouns are words that can replace nouns – words referring to people, places, or things – in a sentence.

- ▶ **For example**, we could say, “Has anyone seen my jacket? I left it on the table.” In this sentence, it is a pronoun referring to my jacket.

## First-Person Pronouns:



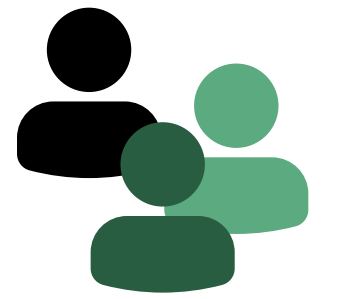
When a person speaks about **themselves** e.g., I, me, my, myself; we, us, our, ourselves.

## Second-Person Pronouns:



When a person speaks about the person to **whom they are speaking** e.g., You, your, yours, yourself.

## Third-Person Pronouns:



When a person speaks about someone **other than themselves or the person to whom they are speaking** e.g., She, her, hers, herself; he, him, his, himself; they, them, their, themselves or themselves.

## Personal pronouns are pronouns that refer to a person.

Grammatically, pronouns are in the first, second, or third person depending on whether the speaker is referring to themselves, to the listener, or to another person.

She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/  
Em/Eirs/  
She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/  
Em/Eirs/  
She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/  
Em/Eirs/  
She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/

# Respectful Practices & Allyship Around Gendered Pronouns

In Canada's official languages, English and French, third-person singular pronouns are gendered. It's important to most people, whether they are cis, trans, nonbinary, or gender diverse, to be acknowledged and respected in their gender.

**Using the correct pronouns for people is like using the correct name: it's a basic signal of respect.** And for trans, nonbinary, and gender diverse people, being referred to by the correct pronouns is a signal of affirmation and acceptance.

Being misgendered can be extremely hurtful for trans, nonbinary, and gender diverse people, and correcting people on one's pronouns or gender can often be exhausting and humiliating. **Normalizing, sharing your own pronouns, and asking for other people's pronouns will make it less likely that anyone will be misgendered.**

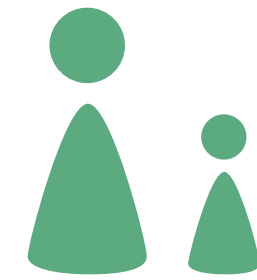


## Don't say "preferred pronouns"

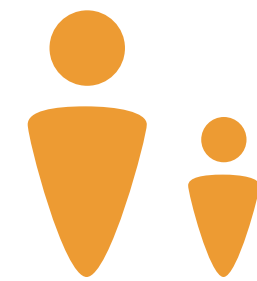
The term "**preferred pronouns**" is misleading because it implies that a trans, nonbinary, or gender diverse person's pronouns are just a preference and that it might be acceptable to use other pronouns for them.



# Commonly Used Pronouns



**Most women and girls are referred to by she/her/hers/herself pronouns**, but not all people who use these pronouns are women and girls and not all women and girls use these pronouns.



**Most men and boys are referred to by he/him/his/himself pronouns**, but not all people who use these pronouns are men and boys and not all men and boys use these pronouns.



## **They/them/their/theirs/themselves**

pronouns are most often used when talking about multiple people who are neither the speaker nor the listener (the third person plural).

► **For example:** “Alice and Jo left **their** jackets on the table.”

**They/them pronouns are sometimes used to refer to a single person when that person’s identity, gender, and/or pronouns are unknown.**

► **For example:** “Someone left **their** jacket on the table.”

By extension, some people, particularly nonbinary people, use they/them pronouns because they/them pronouns are an existing gender-neutral way to refer to a person.



# How to Use Singular They/Them Pronouns

They/them pronouns for an individual are used the same way as in the example above where an individual's identity is unknown.

For example, we might say about a nonbinary person named Alex,

▶ “Alex left their jacket on the table.”

People who use they/them pronouns are still referred to in the **singular**:

▶ “Alex isn't cold, so they left their jacket on the table.”

It would be **incorrect** to say,

✘ “Alex aren't cold, so they left their jacket on the table.”

However, **verbs** following they/them pronouns take the plural form:

▶ “Alex just went outside. They aren't cold, so they left their jacket on the table.”

She/They/ They/He/She  
He/They She/He/ She/  
They/ They/He/She

**When people use multiple pronoun sets, they can be referred to using any of the pronouns they use.**

▶ **For example**, a person might use she/they pronouns. That means that we could say either, “**She** left **her** jacket on the table” or “**They** left **their** jacket on the table.”

It's often important to make an effort to use all pronoun sets for a person who uses multiple pronoun sets (i.e., not just the ones that are easier for you to use because you're used to it).

Some people may also prefer one pronoun set over another even if they use multiple pronouns, and for others the pronouns they'd like to be referred to can change depending on the context. **It's important to check in and ask.**

She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/X  
Em/Eirs/  
She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/X  
Em/Eirs/  
She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/X  
Em/Eirs/  
She/Her/  
Them/ Th  
His/ Xe/X

# Neopronouns

Some people use personal pronouns other than she, he, or they in order to better express their gender. These are called **neopronouns**.

Some neopronouns are used by more people than others – in fact, some people create their own pronouns that only they use.



Common neopronouns include:

|         |        |         |
|---------|--------|---------|
| Ze      | Ey     | Xe      |
| Hir     | Em     | Xem     |
| Hirs    | Eir    | Xyr     |
| Hirself | Eirs   | Xyrs    |
|         | Emself | Xemself |

It's okay to be unsure of how to use **neopronouns**, especially if you haven't practiced using them before. It can be difficult to figure out the grammar of pronouns that you're unfamiliar with.


► **For example**, you might not be sure if it would be more correct to say, "I was talking to xem" or "I was talking to xyr."

**If you're not sure how to use someone's pronouns, just ask!** People will appreciate that you want to learn to refer to them correctly.

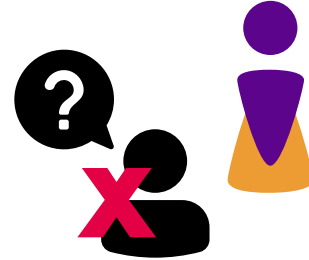
There are websites you can use to practice using neopronouns.




# Practical Tips For Allyship

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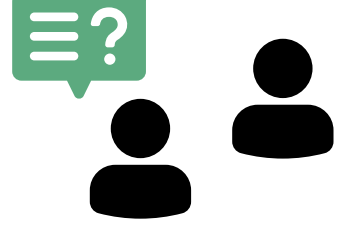
**1. Introduce yourself with your pronouns in addition to your name;** this invites other people to do the same without standing out. In group introductions – including school or work settings and social settings where people are meeting for the first time – propose that everyone add their pronouns to their introduction.

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**2. Don't ask only people whose gender expression or gendered appearance is unexpected to you for their pronouns.** This is a form of othering, or making a person feel singled out for their differences. Don't push anyone to give their pronouns if they decline to do so.

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**3. Don't assume a person's pronouns based on their appearance.** If you need to refer to someone whose pronouns you don't know, use the neutral they/them pronouns.

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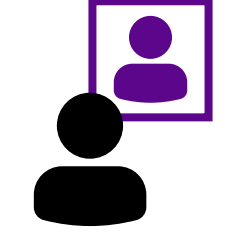
**4. If you don't know someone's pronouns and they are present, ask them for their pronouns before you refer to them.** If they aren't present, you may be able to find their pronouns in their social media profiles or their professional online presence. If you forget someone's pronouns, it's okay to ask for a reminder.



**5.** If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun for someone, simply correct yourself and commit to getting it right next time. Don't dwell on your mistake or make a big deal of it; this often leads to the person being misgendered needing to make you feel better for your slip up.



**6.** **Practice!** If you find yourself slipping up often, it is your responsibility to practice how to use pronouns you are not used to. Don't worry though, the more you practice, the more it becomes part of your everyday language.



**7.** If you find yourself making mistakes often, you may also need to do some internal reflecting about the mental image you have of this person. See the person for who they are, and not who you think they are.



**8.** If you notice someone has used the wrong pronoun for another person, you can correct them. For example, you might have heard someone say, "Alex left his jacket on the table." You could respond by saying, "Alex uses they/them pronouns. I think they left their jacket on the table because they weren't cold."



**9.** Some people use different pronouns in different settings. For example, a person might use the pronouns associated with the gender they were assigned at birth at work or with their family if they aren't out as trans, nonbinary, or gender diverse in those settings. If you aren't sure whether someone uses the same pronouns in all settings and you're worried about accidentally outing them, just ask.



**10.** You can normalize sharing pronouns by including your pronouns in situations where you wear a name tag, in any email signatures, and in verbal introductions.



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