

# Gender-Neutral Pronouns

When we use pronouns like "she" or "he" to identify a person, we might be making an assumption about that person's gender that differs from their gender identity. Some people express their gender identity ambiguously, meaning you might not know which pronoun to use just by looking at them and have to make an assumption. For other people, appearances can be deceiving-- even people who clearly look to be one gender may identify as a different gender than you would assume. When someone has a different gender identity than you would assume that means a different pronoun.

So, how do we avoid making incorrect assumptions about gender pronouns? ASK! Or, use gender-neutral pronouns, like "they" or "them."

**Asking for people's pronouns could be awkward. Here are some tips to help you become a pronoun ask-er:**

- Kick things off by asking: "What pronouns do you use?"
- Recognize that while this might make some people confused, it's also an awesome opportunity to explain why you're doing it, and it will really mean something to those who have been mis-identified or care about the issue.
- Don't expect that if you ask once, you're set forever -- people's (gender) identities can change, so check in!
- One great way to ask for pronouns is to incorporate pronoun usage into introductions, particularly in student organization meetings. So, for example, you could say, "Hey, I'm Schiller, I'm from Germany, I'm a super-senior, English and Philosophy double major and my pronouns are he/him." See, wasn't that easy? Your turn!

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What do you mean by gender-neutral pronouns?

Loosely speaking, a **pronoun** is a part of speech that takes the place of other nouns. Some pronouns are: I, we, he, she, all, it, they, their, etc.

**Gendered pronouns** are those that indicate gender: he, she, him, her, hers, his, himself and herself. All others, like "it," "one," and "they," are **gender-neutral**.

You probably already use some gender-neutral pronouns: they, their, and them. Suppose you are expecting a call from someone of unknown gender... you might say something like:

"If the person from the insurance company calls, tell **them** I'll call **them** back tomorrow."

## 2. Why would people feel uncomfortable about a gendered (male or female) pronoun?

For many people, gender is simple and clear-cut: either gender identity aligns with biological sex or gender presentation falls closely enough within traditional norms that most people assume the appropriate “he” or “she.” Many other individuals, however, do not identify within the gender binary, causing traditional assumptions about gender to be irrelevant or incorrect. Additionally, some individuals may feel more comfortable using a pronoun different from the one associated with their biological sex or apparent gender expression. Moreover, gendered pronouns like “he” and “she” are uncomfortable and limiting for some who prefer gender-neutral pronouns (see attachment). Whatever the case, it quickly becomes uncomfortable for these students when the larger community assumes a pronoun with which they do not identify.

## 3. So what are some examples of gender-neutral pronouns?

"They" and "ze" are some of the more common forms of gender-neutral pronouns.

## 4. How would I use this?

	Nominative (subject)	Objective (object)	Possessive determiner	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
<b>Traditional pronouns</b>					
<u>He</u>	<i>He</i> laughed	I called <i>him</i>	<i>His</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>his</i>	He likes <i>himself</i>
<u>She</u>	<i>She</i> laughed	I called <i>her</i>	<i>Her</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>hers</i>	She likes <i>herself</i>
<u>It</u>	<i>It</i> laughed	I called <i>it</i>	<i>Its</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>its</i>	It likes <i>itself</i>
<u>They</u>	<i>They</i> laughed	I called <i>them</i>	<i>Their</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>theirs</i>	They like <i>themselves</i>
<b>Neutral pronouns</b>					
<u>Ne</u>	<i>Ne</i> laughed	I called <i>nem</i>	<i>Nir</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>nirs</i>	Ne likes <i>nemself</i>
<u>Ve</u>	<i>Ve</i> laughed	I called <i>ver</i>	<i>Vis</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>vis</i>	Ve likes <i>verself</i>
<u>Spivak</u>	<i>Ey</i> laughed	I called <i>em</i>	<i>Eir</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>eirs</i>	Ey likes <i>emself</i>
<u>Ze (or zie) and hir</u>	<i>Ze</i> laughed	I called <i>hir</i>	<i>Hir</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>hirs</i>	Ze likes <i>hirself</i>
<u>Ze (or zie) and zir</u>	<i>Ze</i> laughed	I called <i>zir</i>	<i>Zir</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>zirs</i>	Ze likes <i>zirsself</i>
<u>Xe</u>	<i>Xe</i> laughed	I called <i>xem</i>	<i>Xyr</i> eyes gleam	That is <i>xyrs</i>	Xe likes <i>xemself</i>

Adopted from <https://genderneutralpronoun.wordpress.com/tag/ze-and-zir/> and <http://aetherlumina.com/gnp/faq.html#gnp> and <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34901704>