

meridian

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are **words used instead of the names** of people, things or ideas. When everyone involved knows what you're referring to, pronouns make conversations easier.

You use pronouns every day. The words **'I', 'she', 'he', 'you', 'it', 'we' and 'they' are all pronouns.**

When people say 'pronouns', they usually mean singular third-person pronouns, which is what we'll mean from here on. These are words used to refer to someone who isn't the person speaking or listening.

Respecting someone's pronouns is just as important as respecting their name. The same way you'd likely feel insulted if someone kept calling you by the wrong name and didn't make the effort to learn the right one, deliberately or carelessly using the wrong pronoun shows that you don't respect a person.

Common pronouns

Many languages only have one singular third-person pronoun, which is gender-neutral. However, English has a range of pronouns. The 3 most common are:

She/her/hers: typically used by feminine people, girls, women and anyone else who wants these pronouns used for her, regardless of gender history.

He/him/his: typically used by masculine people, boys, men and anyone else who wants these pronouns used for him, regardless of gender history.

They/them/theirs: typically used by non-binary people and anyone else who wants these pronouns used for them, regardless of gender history.

There is also **'it/it/its'**, which is most often used to refer to objects but can be used by people.

As language continues to evolve, some people use neo (new) pronouns like **'ey/em/eir'** or **'ze/hir/hirs'** as an alternative to 'they/them/theirs'.

Many people use the same pronouns their whole life, but some may find that a different pronoun matches better with their identity at different stages and change pronouns.

Some people also use multiple pronouns. They may have preferences when each is used or how often.

Key tips for being a good ally

Respect the individual as the expert

You can't tell what pronouns someone uses just by looking at them. Remember that people use the pronouns that are right for **them**, not for others.

Offer your pronouns

When introducing yourself, it's a good idea to include your own pronouns after your name, like **'Hi, I'm Jim. I use he/him pronouns'**. This shows that you know what pronouns are and how they're used, and normalises sharing pronouns so other people feel more comfortable doing it.

When you make a mistake

We all make mistakes. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun to refer to someone, correct yourself and move on. It's as simple and easy as **'I saw Sarah yesterday, she – sorry, they – said to say hi.'**

Likewise, if you hear someone using the wrong pronoun for a person, you can quickly and politely say something like **'he, not she'** and move on.

It is best not to dwell on it, and don't let it stop you from continuing to try to get it right!

Learn more about pronouns

- > www.wearitpurple.org/s/PRONOUNS-MISGENDERING.pdf
- > www.minus18.org.au/pronouns
- > www.transhub.org.au/101/pronouns

they/
she

they/
them

he/
they

she/
her

ze/
zir

they/
he

she/
they

he/
him

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