



A beginner's guide to pronouns and using pronouns in the workplace

In the workplace everyone should feel safe, welcomed, and free to be ourselves.

Judging by name or appearance is not always an accurate method for determining a person's pronouns.

This guide offers an introduction to pronouns and how to use them in the workplace. This information is taken from Stonewall, [pronouns.org](https://www.pronouns.org), and LGBT Lifecentre.

What's a pronoun?

You may be unfamiliar with the word "pronoun," but you use them all the time! Pronouns are used in place of a proper noun (like someone's name). We use pronouns most often when referring to someone without using their name.

Example: Have you heard from Tom? **He** hasn't texted me back all day. *He is the pronoun.*



What are pronouns?

They can be an important way to express your gender identity. 'I', 'me', 'she/her', 'he/him' and 'they/them' are some examples of pronouns.

['They' has been used as a singular pronoun since 1375!](#) We use a singular 'they', 'them' or 'their' often. For example, if you find a jacket that was left behind in the office, you may ask: 'Did someone leave their jacket here?'

Some trans and gender non-conforming people may use 'they', 'them' and 'theirs' as personal pronouns. 'They' is considered a gender-neutral pronoun, compared to pronouns like 'he/him' or 'she/her' which are generally perceived as gendered terms.

Example: 'Sarah works in the customer service department. They delivered an informative presentation today about their most recent project.'

Multiple pronouns

Some people may wish to use more than one set of pronouns to refer to themselves. For example, a gender non-conforming person may feel equally comfortable with they/them, he/him or she/her pronouns. Other trans and gender non-conforming people may use different pronouns so they're comfortable in different situations.

If someone uses more than one set of pronouns, you can ask them what they would prefer you to use. They may prefer you use all of them interchangeably, or keep to one set. Remember that this can be contextual, for example because someone may use different pronouns at work or at home.

Example: 'Emma has performed so well this year. She plans to apply for a promotion opportunity with us soon.'

Not using pronouns

For some people, the correct way to refer to them is by using their name only. If you're unsure of someone's pronouns, you can also refer to them by name instead.

Example: 'Jay is taking the minutes for Jay's next meeting'.



Neopronouns

Neopronouns are newer pronouns used by some to refer to themselves without the context of gender. Some examples are xe/xir or ze/zir, both pronounced zee and ze-er (rhymes with 'here'). Some people may use a noun as a pronoun instead. Neopronouns are less common, but it is important to respect their usage. [Read further guidance on use and pronunciation.](#)

Example: 'Bill has been successful in xir interview. Xe starts xir new job on Monday.'

Global usage

Some languages may not have an established gender-neutral pronoun. In this case, you can simply ask the person how they would like to be referred to. Words used as gender neutral pronouns may exist, but not be common in usage. For example, some Welsh speakers may use the word 'nhw' as a gender-neutral pronoun. Seek to educate yourself on the language of the communities you are working with.

Pronouns in the workplace

Correct use of pronouns is key to helping all staff feel included at work. It can reassure trans and gender non-conforming colleagues that they are welcome and included at Eden Futures.

Here are some tips you can share with staff:

- If you're not sure what a colleague's pronouns are, ask them or listen to what pronouns the employee uses. You can also use gender neutral pronouns to refer to someone you've not had contact with yet, or simply refer to them by their name.
- Use a colleague's correct pronouns or form of address once you're aware of them. It may feel simpler to refer to everyone with gender neutral pronouns (e.g. they/them), but you could accidentally misgender someone by doing so.
- If you make a mistake when referring to a colleague, apologise, correct yourself and move on. Avoid apologising too much, as this can draw further attention to your mistake and make your colleague uncomfortable. Try practicing referring to your colleague by their correct pronouns.



Trans allyship

Pronouns can be used to role model trans allyship.

We're not asking anyone to do anything they're not comfortable with like sharing their own pronouns if they don't want to. This is really about understanding and respecting others' preferences, having good intent and compassion and trying our best to make everyone feel included.

Why I use my pronouns in my email signature...

By Alex Pugh – Head of HR

To end on, I want to share a little bit about why I choose to include my pronouns in my email signature.

My name is Alex, a name that many might say fits anyone, so it can also lead to some mix-ups.

A lot of times in the past, when people read "Alex" in an email, they assume I'm male. Then, when we meet on Zoom/Teams or in person, there's this moment of surprise, sometimes even a bit of embarrassment, because I'm not. I'm a cis woman, which means I was born female and identify as female. This mix-up doesn't really bother me personally – I'm okay with being referred to as "Mr" now and then. But I've started adding "she/her" next to my name in emails because it clears up any confusion right away. No fuss, no muss.

And there's something bigger here, too. For some of my friends and many people out there, being called by the wrong gender really hurts. It's not just a minor mix-up for them; it's about being seen and recognised for who they truly are. I can't fully understand how that feels, but I can listen and respect it. By adding my pronouns, I'm saying, "I see you, and I want to make things a little easier for you, too."

It's a small nod to those who it may comfort. It doesn't hurt anyone, and it might just make someone's day a bit better.

I don't judge anyone for not detailing their pronouns; it's personal.

I know there are some strong views on the use of pronouns in email signatures or in social media bios, with it often being referred to as "virtue signalling." Let me unpack that a bit. "Virtue signalling" is when people say or do something mainly to show others that they're a good person, not necessarily because



they believe in what they're doing. I get why some might see it that way. But for me, it's not about showing off. It's about making things smoother and more comfortable for everyone.

I hope this gives you a little insight and maybe something to think about...

Additional Support Materials

Alongside this module, please also take a look at the handy tools and guides that we have on ERNIE under the **Equality, Diversity and Dignity at Work module**: <https://intranet.edenfutures.org/index.php/edenevolve/>