

What is a Pronoun?

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like “I” or “you”) or someone that is being talked about (like “she” or “he”)

Common Terms

Sex: Male, female or intersex – this is a sex label that you are assigned by a doctor at the time you are born based on the genitals you are born with and the chromosomes you have. It does not necessarily match someone’s gender / gender identity.

Gender: it is a social and legal status, and set of expectations from society, about behaviors, characteristics, and thoughts.

Gender Identity: is how a person presents and/or expresses their gender to the world. Gender expansive definitions understand that some persons identify as male, female, or both male and female, neither male or female, and/or a combination of gender identities.

Cisgender: a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Gender Non-conforming (GNC): is a person whose behavior or appearance does not conform to prevailing cultural and social expectation about what is appropriate to their gender.

Transgender: applies to a person whose gender is different from their “assigned” sex at birth. Doctors typically assign gender based on sexual organs, but sex and gender are different as described above.

Non-binary: Non-binary, similar to genderqueer, is a spectrum of gender identities that are outside the gender binary of being exclusively male or female as some persons may identify with more than one gender, neither gender, or a combination of gender identities.

Queer: The term queer is a word that describes sexual orientation and gender identities other than straight and cisgender. Any person that identifies with the LGBTQIA+ community may choose to identify with the word queer. Some people regard “queer” as offensive, others embrace it.

Genderfluid: Describes a person who is fluid between two or more genders. For example, sometimes Corey presents to the world as female and uses she/her pronouns whereas other times Corey presents to the world as male and uses he/him pronouns. Some genderfluid persons describe themselves as using the pronouns he/they, she/they, or he/she/they or other neopronoun.

Pronoun	Sounds Like	Variations
He/Him	You already know this one!	His, Himself
She/Her	You already know this one!	Hers, Herself
They/Them	Yes, it’s okay to use this referring to a singular person!	Theirs, Themself
Ze (or Zie)	Zee (like “see” with a “Z”).	Can also be spelled as xe
Name	Whatever their name is!	His, Himself



Why do Pronouns Matter?

Using someone’s proper pronouns make a difference in the mental health and well-being of everyone, particularly transgender/GNC individuals. Using a person’s chosen name and desired pronouns is a form of mutual respect and basic courtesy.

Our most commonly used pronouns (he/she) specifically refer to a person’s gender. For queer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and transgender people, these pronouns may not fit, can create discomfort, and can cause stress and anxiety.

Anyone should have the option of articulating their preferred name/pronouns and the way this is articulated may vary across settings (formal vs. informal, email vs. in-person meetings, name badges, business cards and so on).

The key word here is optional. While some persons feel validated by identifying their pronouns; other persons may not want to bring attention to how they feel about their pronouns and being forced to identify them can cause mental health distress.

It is important to remember that gender identity is not visible; it is an internal sense of one’s own gender. While most people align across their birth-assigned sex, their gender identity, and their gender expression and how everyone else interprets their gender -- some people do not.

What is a Pronoun?

Gender pronouns refer to people that you are talking about. Gender pronouns are the way we constantly refer to each other’s gender identity – except we often do not think a whole lot about them. We usually read a person’s gender based on their appearance and expression, and “assign” a pronoun.

We do not know a person’s correct gender pronoun by looking at them. Additionally, a person may identify as a genderfluid or genderqueer and may not identify along the binary of either male or female (“him” or “her”). Some people identify as both masculine and feminine, or neither.

Some persons use a neopronoun as their identified pronouns. A neopronoun is a word created to serve as a pronoun without expressing gender. Examples of some neopronouns include “ze”, “xe”, and “zir”. For instance, Xe likes to play video games by Xemselves.