



Pronouns matter: how small words make a big impact!

A guide to better understand gender identity and the use of gender pronouns

2023 Edition

Discussions about terminology related to gender and sexual orientation have become increasingly common in culture and media in recent years. Although sometimes framed as a controversial topic, this terminology is ultimately about ensuring that everyone can be comfortable with how they are referenced and respected.

But this is undoubtedly a complex area. If you're still learning about these terms, you've come to the right place. **This guide to gender**

pronouns walks you through what gender identity and gender pronouns are, how to use them and shows why they are important for fostering inclusion and showing respect.

At Allianz Global Investors, fostering inclusive behaviours and empowering all our colleagues to succeed as themselves is **integral to how we work**. That way, we add value for our clients, enhance our brand and grow our business. **Inclusion echoes our values of respect and**

integrity and underpins our culture of entrepreneurship and leadership meritocracy.

We believe **language exists not to confuse, but to clarify**, and that **it can bring us closer together and foster deeper empathy**. While talking about gender pronouns might feel uncomfortable at first – especially for anyone who is new to LGBT+ related topics – this is an opportunity to **show that you care about non-binary and transgender colleagues**. The way to get better is to practice!

Keep reading for a better understanding of the complexity of gender identity and how we can use language to be more inclusive!





“Sex” vs. “gender identity”

Sex

is the classification of a person as male, female or intersex and is assigned at birth.

Our sex assigned at birth may or may not correspond to our gender identity.

Sex

Female

Male

Intersex:

A person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological characteristics do not fit within traditional societal assumptions about what it means to be male or female.

Gender identity

is a person’s innate sense of their own gender whether male, female or another identity (see non-binary below). This may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth. It is a living, growing experience that can change over time. Each person’s experience of their gender identity is unique and personal and cannot be known simply by looking at a person.

Common gender identities

Cisgender:

people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transgender:

people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Non-binary (gender fluid, gender queer, bigender, agender):

people who don’t identify as only male or only female, or who identify as both, or who identify sometimes as male and sometimes as female.

What’s a pronoun?

Gender pronouns are the way that we constantly refer to each other’s gender identity, although we often don’t think a lot about these terms. Usually we interpret or “read” a person’s gender based on their outward appearance and expression, and “assign” a pronoun. But **our reading may not be a**

correct interpretation of the person’s gender identity. Because gender identity is internal – an internal sense of one’s own gender – **we don’t necessarily know a person’s correct gender pronoun by looking at them.** **Today’s most commonly used pronouns are “he, him, his” and “she, her, hers”.**

People who are transgender or gender non-binary may choose to use pronouns that don’t conform to binary gender categorisations, such as “they, them, theirs”. Gender pronouns provide one of the best and simplest opportunities to help respect someone’s gender identity.



	Subject	Object	Pronoun
Gender binary	She	Her	Hers
	He	Him	His
Gender neutral	They*	Them*	Theirs*
	Ze	Hir	Hirs
	Ze	Zir	Zirs
	Xe	Xem	Xyrs

*Used as singular

Why do pronouns matter?

Few things are more personal than the way in which people refer to us through our name and pronouns. **Using a person’s chosen name and pronouns is a form of mutual respect and basic courtesy.** The experience of being misgendered can be hurtful, angering, and even distracting. It can be embarrassing for both parties, creating tension and leading to communication breakdowns across teams and with clients. It can even cause distress for the person who is misgendered, particularly when they are misgendered

consistently or intentionally, because they may feel that their gender identity is not validated and respected. **It’s important to remember that gender identity is not visible. Rather, it’s an internal sense of one’s own gender.** While most people align across their birth-assigned sex, their gender identity, their gender expression and how everyone else interprets their gender, some people do not. A culture that readily asks or provides pronouns is one committed to reducing the risk of disrespect or embarrassment for both parties.



What is misgendering?

Using the wrong name or pronouns to describe someone **else** is referred to as “misgendering”.

Wondering **why** **this would upset** **someone?**

Think about your pronoun. Now imagine someone referring to you using a pronoun that you don't recognise for yourself. Imagine them doing it over and over, even after you've corrected them.

What if I make a mistake?

It happens, we all make mistakes! Apologise and move on. If you make a mistake in front of a group of people, you may want to apologise to the person privately later on – there’s no need to draw attention to your mistake. The best thing to do is use the correct pronoun the next time.

When someone asks you to use a different pronoun, try to avoid saying the following:

“Oh I’ll try but I am warning you, I’m going to mess that up so much.”

Why? Everyone can mess up at first. But it’s boring to be reminded right up front about how difficult and inconvenient a gender pronoun is to someone else.

“But it’s not grammatically correct to use “they” as a singular pronoun.”

Why? Language evolves, and some people feel that “they” is most appropriate for them. You should avoid challenging their choice.

How can I support transgender and non-binary colleagues?

One of the best ways that you can support transgender and non-binary colleagues is to try to **use a person’s correct name and pronoun**, whether that person is around or not.

You can’t always know what someone’s pronouns are by looking at them. **Asking** is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.

Including your own pronouns on your email signature* (see example below) is a great place to start when it comes to supporting and including transgender and non-binary colleagues. When everyone includes pronouns on their

signature, it normalises the practice, and makes it easier for transgender and non-binary people to include theirs.

Even if they don’t feel comfortable adding their own pronouns to their signature, including your own is a small way to help them feel more comfortable in the workplace.

Also, adding pronouns to your email signature is an easy way of communicating that everyone is safe and welcome within our company. Whether they’re applying to work here, or they are a client, it can make a huge difference to a trans or non-binary person when they see your pronouns listed.

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For more information, please refer to the document: **“Another step toward inclusion: Gender pronouns in email signature blocks.”**

* Should you have any doubts or worries regarding disclosing a non-binary identity or an identity different from your sex assigned at birth, feel free to contact InclusionDiversity@allianzgi.com for further clarifications and support.

How do you approach asking people for their pronouns?

Kicking off the gender pronoun conversation doesn't have to be awkward. Here's what you can do:

Start meetings with new people by sharing pronouns:

Since pronouns are just a way to refer to someone (like their name), start meetings by sharing pronouns when new people are in the room. That way it becomes part of your culture.

Share your pronouns first: When you introduce yourself, state your pronouns after your name and job title. While this may not guarantee the other persons respond with their pronouns, it makes pronouns a clear part of the conversation without any additional awkwardness.

Put gender pronouns in your email signature:* This simple act makes pronouns visible and part of the conversation. If your email recipient sees pronouns in your email signature, they might be more comfortable sharing their own.

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Isn't it insulting to ask people about their pronouns?

This question can be interpreted as an insult, since traditional ideas about gender tell us that a person's gender is supposed to be obvious.

But if we accept that gender is a matter of self-identification, and that it is more than

simply binary, then we can't be sure of anyone's gender just by looking at them. This makes asking for a person's pronoun more like asking for their name – **it's not an insult, because there's no other way to know.**

Why are people asking me about my pronouns even though I'm not transgender? How should I answer?

The person asking this question wants to **make sure they refer to you respectfully rather than making assumptions.** Chances are they ask many people this question, so it isn't intended as a personal judgement; nor does it necessarily mean they think you're trans.

Your answer should be the pronouns you want people to use when talking about you. People usually list them as a set: eg, "he, him, his". But it's also fine to just give one pronoun: "I use 'he' pronouns."

Isn't it intrusive – like outing someone – to ask them about their pronouns?

Let's take an example of someone who identifies as a trans woman and uses "she/her/hers" pronouns with friends, but who isn't out as trans at work yet. When she is asked about her pronouns, she can say whatever will make her most comfortable. She might decide to ask for "she/her/hers" pronouns, taking the opportunity to voice a preference that would

otherwise be much harder to announce. But she could just as easily say she's fine with "he/him/his" pronouns because she doesn't want to come out to her colleagues. Or she could say she doesn't care what pronouns people use, or that she wants "they/them/theirs" or another gender-neutral option.

What if it's difficult to do this?

It might be. But **consider whether it's harder for you to try your best to use the pronoun or for the person you're talking about to be referenced with the wrong pronoun.** People are sometimes intimidated by using a new pronoun but **trying and not fully succeeding will be far more welcome than ignoring the pronoun you've been asked to use.**

Remember that communication is your friend. If you've just been asked to use a pronoun you've never encountered before, it's ok be honest. You can tell the person you're glad they told you their pronouns and, while you're worried you might make a mistake, you'll make your best effort to use them.



Is this about being politically correct?

You might see these ideas about inclusive language as “political correctness”. Regardless of what we call it, linguistic inclusivity is about realising that what we say impacts others. There is no downside of being aware of the implications of what we say so that we can make informed choices about our language.



What should I do if I hear someone else misgender a person (whose pronouns I know)? Should I correct them?

Ask the person who is being misgendered. Some people would love to have your help making corrections of this sort. But you also don't want to out someone, so it can be useful to ask people when you get their pronouns, “What would you like me to do if I hear someone use the wrong pronoun?”. This is especially appropriate for people who use pronouns other than she or he and anyone else who might be especially vulnerable

to being misgendered. If you find yourself in this situation and have to make a choice before you can ask the person what they want, be careful and use contextual cues. Did the person tell you their pronoun in private or public? Was it in a context similar to the one you're currently in? Have you heard others that know the person well using a pronoun in the same context? (eg, people who have just come out as trans).

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