

Faculty/Staff Resources

Personal Pronouns: For Faculty

What is a pronoun?

- A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like I or you) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this). Personal pronouns (like he and hers) specific call reference to people that you are talking about.

What is a personal pronoun?

- A **personal pronoun** is the pronoun that a person uses in reference to them self. For example, if Kyle preferred pronouns are she, her, and hers, you could say “Kyle ate her food because she was hungry.”

What are some commonly used pronouns?

- She, her, hers and he, him, his are some common pronouns. Some people call these "female/feminine" and "male/masculine" pronouns, but it is important to avoid these labels because not everyone who uses he identifies as "male" or expresses as "masculine."
- There are also many other pronouns in use. Here are a few you might hear:
 - They, them, theirs (Kyle ate their food because they were hungry.)
 - They/them/theirs is commonly used as a gender-neutral pronoun, though, not always... and yes, they can in fact be used in the singular.
 - Ze/hir/hirs (Kyle ate hir food because ze was hungry.) Ze is pronounced like "zee" can also be spelled zie or xe. Hir is pronounced like "here."
- Just my name please! (Kyle ate Kyle's food because Kyle was hungry) Some do not use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.
- Never, ever refer to a person as “it” or “he-she” (unless they specifically ask you to.) These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals. If a student says “It doesn’t matter what pronoun you use to refer to me as”, it is recommended that you use the name they want to go by when referring to them (like the example above).

Why is it important to respect people's pronouns?

- You will never know what someone’s pronoun is by looking at them.
- Asking and correctly using someone's pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
- When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (or, often, all of the above).
- If you fail to respect someone else's gender identity, it is not only disrespectful and hurtful, but also oppressive.

Why is it important to respect your students' pronouns as a Faculty Member?

- As a faculty member, you are often in a position of power, and students look to you for guidance.
- Asking your students what their personal pronouns are and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected or not.
- You will be setting an example for your class: If you are consistent about using someone's personal pronouns, they will follow your example.
- Many of your students will be learning about pronouns for the first time, so this will be a learning opportunity for them that they will keep forever.
- Discussing and correctly using pronouns sets a tone of respect. It can truly make all of the difference, especially for incoming first-year students that may feel particularly vulnerable, friendless, and scared.

How do I ask someone what their pronoun is?

- Try saying "Hi...my personal pronoun is he, what pronoun do you go by?" or "What are your personal pronouns, my pronouns are she, her, and hers." or "Can you remind me which pronouns you use for yourself?" It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what a pronoun is, you can try something like this: "Tell us your name, where you come from, and your personal pronoun. That means the pronoun you like to be referred to with." For example, I'm Kyle, I'm from Salt Lake City, and I like to be referred to with she, her, and hers pronouns. So you could say, 'she went to her car' if you were talking about me."

What if I make a mistake?

- Everyone slips up from time to time. The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like "Sorry, I meant she." If you realize your mistake after the fact, apologize in private and move on.
- Often time, it can be tempting to go on and on about how bad you feel that you messed up or how hard it is for you to get it right. But please...don't! It is inappropriate and makes the person who was mis-gendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is not their job. It is your job to remember people's PGPs.

Taking an active role

- In your classes, you may hear someone using the wrong pronoun for someone else. In most cases, it is appropriate to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individual who has been mis-gendered. This means saying something like "Actually, Kyle prefers the pronoun she," and then moving on. If other students or a faculty member is consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone, do not ignore it! However, it is also critical that you are checking in with the individual about how/if they would like you to approach it.

- It may be appropriate to approach them and say something like "I noticed that you were getting referred to with the wrong pronoun earlier, and I know that that can be really hurtful. Would you be okay with me taking them aside and reminding them about your personal pronoun? I want to make sure that this group is a safe space for you." Follow up if necessary, but take your cues from the comfort level of your student. Your actions will be greatly appreciated.