

Helpful, Friendly
They/Them Pronoun Info Sheet
for Inclusive Workplaces & Communities

Thanks for taking a moment to learn about they/them pronouns! Some of your peers, colleagues, and students may already use them/them pronouns. By offering your support, you are helping make your workplace and/or community an inclusive space for people of all genders.

Why educate yourself about they/them pronouns?

When you meet someone who uses they/them pronouns, you may want to ask lots of questions. That instinct comes from a really good place. However, marginalized folks are asked questions a lot, and answering them can take a surprising amount of time and emotional energy. That's why it's great that you are educating *yourself* about they/them pronouns!

What are they/them pronouns?

They/them pronouns are gender-neutral words for referring to someone in the third-person. Common gender pronouns you may be more familiar with are "he/him" or "she/her." They/them pronouns function very similarly. Here is an example of a sentence that uses they/them pronouns: "When I talked to Sam last night, they reminded me that they are giving their presentation in class today." Some other gender-neutral pronouns you may encounter include "ze/zir" and "xe/xyr."

Why do people use they/them pronouns?

Different people use they/them pronouns for different reasons. For a person who does not identify with a binary gender (that is, someone who does not identify as either a "man" or a "woman"), they/them pronouns can be important for expressing oneself and feeling comfortable around others. Remember that everyone has the right to use the pronouns that feel correct to them.

Who uses they/them pronouns?

There is no one type of person who uses they/them pronouns, and there is no way of telling by looking at someone what their pronouns are. Some folks who use they/them pronouns identify as transgender, gender non-binary, genderfluid, and/or agender, but other folks identify differently. It's always best to avoid making assumptions. When you meet someone, tell them your pronouns. This shows that you are conscientious about pronouns and it gives them a chance to tell you theirs.

Why is it important to use they/them pronouns?

Using a person's correct pronouns (i.e. the pronouns they have asked you to use for them) demonstrates that you respect and acknowledge them. Folks who use they/them pronouns may feel alienated or judged when they are referred to as "she" or "he." If someone used the wrong pronouns for you, you might feel confused, upset, or even angry. A person who uses they/them pronouns but whom someone refers to using the wrong pronouns may feel similarly. Remember, it's important to use a person's correct pronouns whenever you write or speak about them with others, not just when that person is present.

What if you find they/them pronouns awkward or hard to use?

If you find they/them pronouns tricky to use in everyday speech or writing, you are definitely not alone. Don't worry! That tongue-tripping feeling goes away with practice. A helpful tip: practice using someone's they/them pronouns in conversation with a third-party, like a partner or close friend, so you can get the hang of that person's pronouns without worrying that you'll "slip up" in person.

What if you accidentally forget to use someone's they/them pronouns?

It's totally ok. Everyone makes these mistakes, especially when they're new to they/them pronouns or they've only recently learned about a friend or colleague's correct pronouns. If you catch yourself making a mistake, point it out and offer a really quick, low-key apology (a big apology might make the person you're apologizing to feel uncomfortable). It's that easy, and chances are that the person you're speaking about will appreciate that you didn't get defensive or avoid the issue.

What can you do to help advocate for folks who use they/them pronouns?

There's a lot you can do to help support those in your community who use they/them pronouns. Share what you have learned with your colleagues and gently correct others if you hear them using incorrect pronouns. Consider having students or peers share their pronouns when they introduce themselves in class and meetings. This can help lots of different types of folks feel comfortable speaking up about their pronouns.

On behalf of your community members who use they/they pronouns, **THANK YOU!**

Developed by Bonnie "Beaux" Ruberg at USC and UC Irvine April 2017 -- with special thanks to the many folks who use they/them pronouns who generously donated their time and offered feedback on this info sheet!