



## PRONOUNS: GENDER-INCLUSIVE SPACES

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

#### What is a pronoun?

A pronoun takes the place of a noun. For example, instead of saying “The *chair* is in the corner,” this statement can be rephrased with a pronoun: “*It* is in the corner.”

#### What is a gender pronoun?

Gender pronouns refer specifically to people. For example, if Luke uses the pronouns *he/him/his*, we can say that “Luke is a hard worker, and *he* is full of great ideas.”

Each individual identifies their own pronouns, so be sure to (1) ask for people’s pronouns and (2) use them.

#### What are some common gender pronouns?

Most commonly, individuals use **she/her/hers** or **he/him/his**. However, increasingly, people are self-identifying with gender-neutral pronouns like these:

- **They/them:** Melissa walked to *their* car because *they* needed to leave for work. (Note: In this context, “they” and “them” are used to refer to a singular subject).
- **Ze/hir:** Max walked to *hir* car because *ze* needed to leave for work. (Note: “Hir” is pronounced “here,” and “ze,” which is also sometimes written as “zie” or “xe,” is pronounced “zee”).
- **Name only:** Max walked to Max’s car because Max needed to leave for work. (Note: Some people choose not to use pronouns).

This is not an inclusive list; there are many additional options. If a person uses a pronoun you do not recognize and/or are not sure how to use, just ask them for a quick lesson or clarification.

## Why is it important to respect people's pronouns?

This list is adapted from LGBTcampus.org and Samuel Merritt University:

- When we ask for and use someone's pronouns, we demonstrate respect for their gender identities and promote a safe and inclusive environment. We become allies.
- We cannot tell which pronouns a person uses just by looking at them.
- If a person is misidentified with pronouns they do not use, that person may feel alienated, disenfranchised, disrespected, oppressed, dismissed, and/or dysphoric.
- Many gender pronouns may be new to some people. By asking for and using a person's pronouns, we can set a good example for others – students, colleagues, and people in our personal lives – to follow.

## How can I be inclusive with using and respecting pronouns?

This list is adapted from LGBTcampus.org and Samuel Merritt University:

- Use your pronouns in **introductions**, and ask for others' pronouns in their introductions. Here are some sample questions that can facilitate these interactions:
  - "What pronouns do you use?"
  - "How should I refer to you?"
  - "Will you please remind me which pronouns you use?"
  - "My name is Juan, and I use they/them. What about you?"
- For introductions in a classroom or group setting, you might start with, "Welcome, Everyone! Please introduce yourself to the group by providing your name, pronouns, and one interesting fact about you."
- Include your pronouns in your **email signature**. Along with your name and any other information you list (such as your title, address, office phone number, etc.), you might also add a section like this:

Example 1: Mai Nguyen (she, her, hers)

Example 2: Mai Nguyen

Pronouns: he/him/his

Example 3: Mai Nguyen

Pronouns I respond to: they/them

Example 4: Mai Nguyen

\*Please let me know how you self-identify. I go by Mai, and I use she/her/hers. How should I refer to you?

## **What happens if I make a mistake?**

When you make a mistake, remember this important rule:

Oops. Ouch. Educate!

In other words, apologize for the error, acknowledge that you are not intentionally disrespecting the person, and correct yourself or ask for a correction. It can be tough to learn pronouns, especially when they are new to you, and people will appreciate your efforts and diligence as you learn and adapt.

## **Are you ready for more information on inclusion in the classroom?**

Be sure to visit the Inclusion Resources section of the [Coast Colleges Equity, Inclusion, and Compliance](#) site for further information.