
Pronouns Matter



Pronouns are everywhere. We use them every day in speech and in writing to take the place of people's names. We use them without even thinking about it. Pronouns may not seem like that big of a deal, but for some folks, pronouns are a very big deal because other people don't always use the correct pronouns to describe them.

In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are "I", "you", "she", "her", "he", "him", and "it". "I", "you", and "it" are what we call "gender neutral" or "all gender", but "she", "her", "he", and "him" are gendered. This can create an issue for transgender and gender nonconforming people, because others may not use the pronouns they prefer when speaking to them or about them.

One way to make sure that your GSA or club is being inclusive and welcoming for transgender or other gender nonconforming people is to incorporate pronouns into your regular introduction activities. If you start every meeting by having those present share their names, ask them to share their pronouns as well. For example: "My name is Jasmine, I'm a sophomore, and my pronouns are 'she' and 'her'." "Hi, I'm Diego. I'm 17, a senior, and my pronouns are 'he', 'him', and 'his'."

Some people prefer that you use gender neutral or gender inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. Some of the more commonly used singular gender neutral pronouns are **ze** (sometimes spelled **zie**) and **hir**. "Ze" is the subject pronoun and is pronounced /zee/, and "hir" is the object and possessive pronoun and is pronounced /heer/. This is how they are used: "Chris is the tallest person in class, and ze is also the fastest runner." "Tanzen is going to Hawaii over break with hir parents. I'm so jealous of hir."

Remember: Just like sexual orientation, a person's gender identity can be a very personal and private thing. GSA members (or anyone, for that matter) should never feel pressured to share how they identify. If someone does choose to share, that's great, and that information should remain confidential within the GSA unless that person has specifically said that it's okay to talk about elsewhere. Additionally, do not assume that someone's pronouns are the same as their gender identity. Could a person identify as female and also prefer he/him/his? Sure!

We should also remember that the idea of pronouns and gender neutral or gender inclusive pronouns will be a new concept to a lot of folks, and that mistakes will happen. For more information, check out our "Pronoun Practice!" and "What to Do if You Misgender Someone" resources on the GSAFE website.

The list of pronouns being used in the English language is ever growing, so below we have included a short list of some of the ones we know. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, and we plan to keep it updated as much as we can. If you know of a set of pronouns that should be on this list, let us know!

A (Short) List of Pronouns

SUBJECT PRONOUN	OBJECT PRONOUN	POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS	REFLEXIVE PRONOUN
_____ is an activist.	I am proud of _____.	That is _____ book. That book is _____.	That person likes _____.
she	her	her/hers	herself
he	him	his	himself
ze*	hir	hir/hirs	hirsself
ze*	zir	zir/zirs	zirsself
e or ey	em	eir/eirs	eirsself or emself
per	per	per/pers	Perself
hu	hum	hus/hus	Humself
They**	them	their/theirs	Themselves
Name	Name	Name's/Name's	Name
fae	faer	faer/faers	faerself

*Additional alternate spellings for “ze” are “zie”, “sie”, “xie”, and “xe.”

**More and more people are using “they”, “them”, and “their(s)” as singular, gender neutral pronouns, even though these are often considered plural pronouns. When using “they” as a singular gender neutral pronoun, you would still conjugate associated verbs as you would for the plural version, as in “they are an activist” or “they like to go shopping”, not “they is an activist” or “they likes to go shopping.”

Some people might try and argue that using the pronouns “they”, “them”, and “their” in the singular is not grammatically incorrect when, in fact, it is pretty common for people to use the singular “they” in everyday spoken English. Here is an example:

Mom: “Shawna, someone is on the phone for you.”

Shawna: “Can you have **them** call back in 5 minutes? I’m doing my hair.”

If it helps you make your case, the Oxford English Dictionary says that “they” and “them” can be either plural or singular pronouns. So according to the OED, it is grammatically correct. In the end, we would say that it is far more important to be inclusive and respectful of people’s identities than it is to be “grammatically correct.”