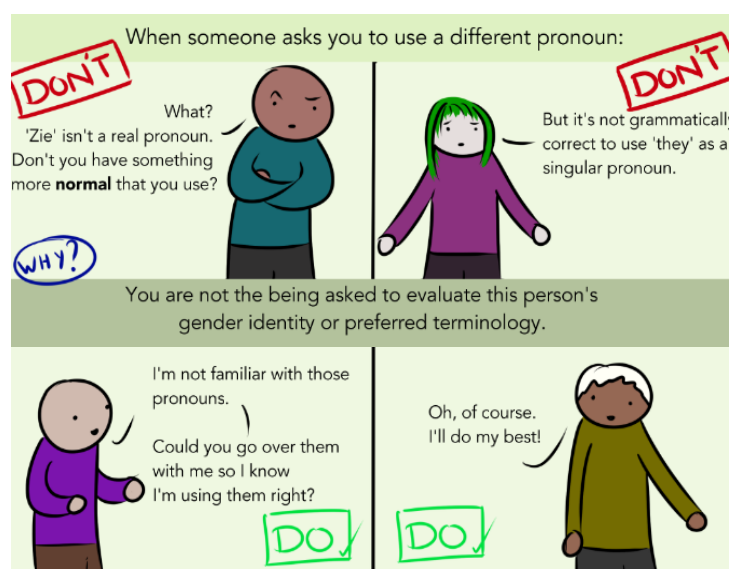


Gender Pronouns

What is a gender pronoun?

A gender pronoun is the pronoun a person uses for themselves. They can be gender-specific (binary) - he, she, hers, his; or **gender-neutral** - **them, they, theirs**.

Others may choose to use gender neutral pronouns other than 'them, they, theirs'. Common examples of these pronouns would be zie, hir and xe, but some individuals use others so be sure to clarify these with them. Some people do not use pronouns at all and use their name as a pronoun instead (e.g. Anna ate Anna's food because Anna was hungry).



Why are gender pronouns important?

The use of gender neutral pronouns is becoming more widespread. It is not always possible to know what someone's pronouns are by their outward appearance or gender presentation.

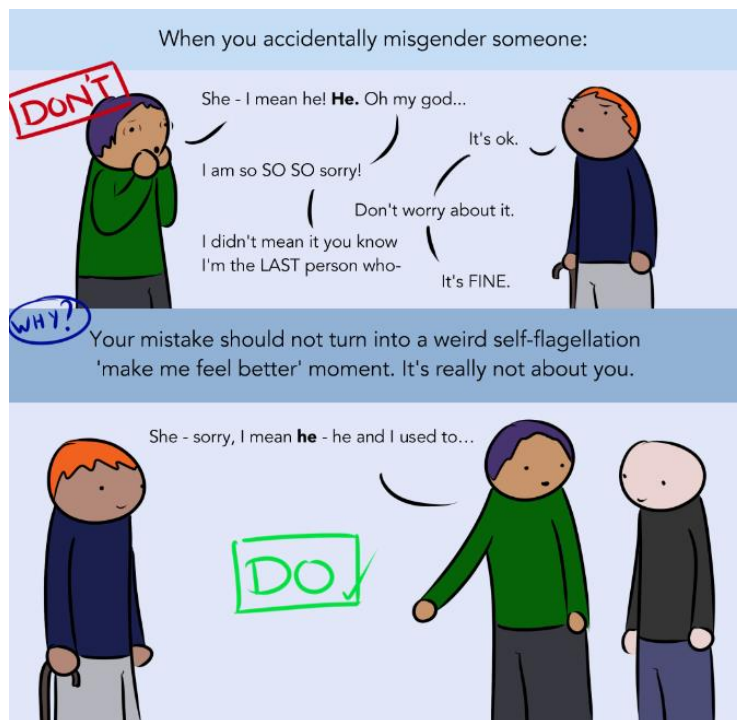
Often we assign gender-specific pronouns "he" or "she" to those around us, but many people have a gender expression that is neither male nor female; it may be fluid, neutral and may not align with your own (often subconscious) assumptions or expectations. Some people may use gender pronouns that are unfamiliar to you. Asking and correctly using someone's personal pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity. When someone is referred to with wrong pronoun, it is known as mis-gendering and can be offensive and hurtful.

How to use pronouns:

- If a **visitor** asks where the toilets are offer both options: "all toilets are behind Reception" rather than "the ladies toilets are on the left behind Reception".
- In meetings or when teaching (e.g. tutorials) **share your pronouns** when you first meet and ask members of a group to do the same. For example "My name is Tom and my pronouns are they, them, theirs". This is standard practice in many YUSU committees at York already.
- If you don't know someone's pronouns and you are **writing an email** to them (e.g. about them visiting next week) or about them (e.g. arranging an access card for their arrival) use the gender-neutral 'them, their, they'. Include your own pronouns in your email signature.
- **Using neutral pronouns** such as "they" ensures that everyone is involved in a conversation regardless of their identity. Avoid using binary terms such as "Ladies and Gentlemen", use gender neutral terms e.g. "hello everyone" instead.

What if I make a mistake?

It's okay! Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun is to correct yourself straight away. If you realise your mistake afterwards, apologise in private and move on. It can be tempting to say how bad you feel that you made a mistake, but this can make the person who was mis-gendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is not appropriate.



What if someone else makes a mistake?

If you hear others using the wrong pronoun for someone, it is appropriate (in most cases) to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individual who has been mis-gendered. This means saying something like "Actually, Sam uses the pronoun he," and then moving on.

If other people are consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone, it is important that you do not ignore it. It may be appropriate to approach the mis-gendered person and say something such as "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?" You should take your cues from the comfort level of the person who has been mis-gendered. Repeated or deliberate mis-gendering should be considered a form of harassment.

A note about 'preferred'

There has been a shift away from use of the term 'preferred pronoun'. This change was made because it might imply that using the correct pronouns for someone is optional.

Adapted from <https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/>

Sources: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-34901704>

Images: <http://www.robot-hugs.com/pronoun-etiquette>