PRONOUNS
MATTER
Everyday

Approved by LLNL Pride Employee Resource Group (ERG)
and Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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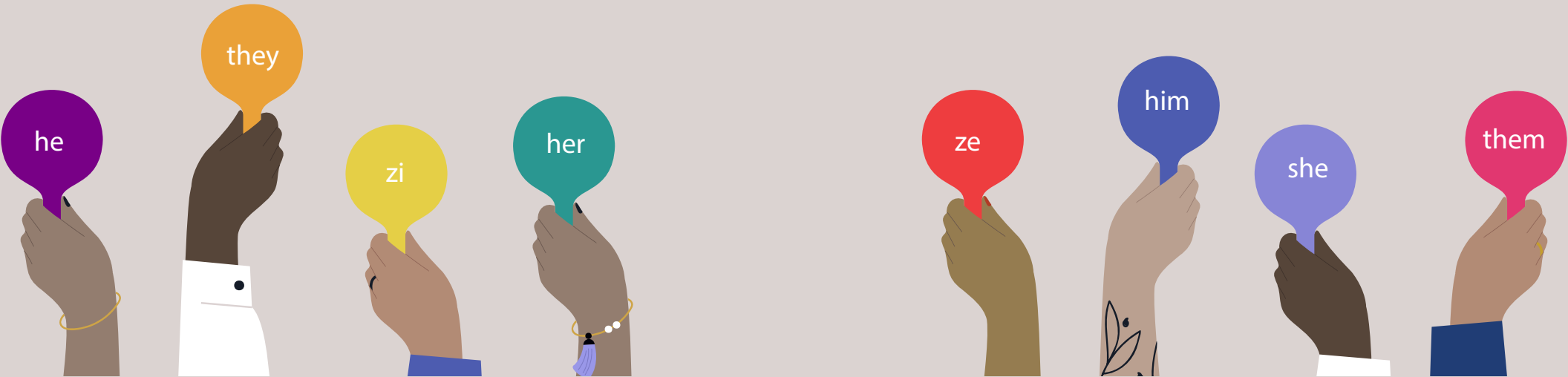


Terminology

The following are terms that are helpful to understand when reading through this guide. Some people may have different interpretations of these terms that may also be correct.

ally
A person who actively advocates for a marginalized group but does not identify as part of that group. These groups include communities excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational, and/or cultural life, e.g., but not limited to, groups excluded due to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, language, and/or immigration status. Being an active ally means empowering and learning from marginalized voices.

deadnaming
Using an incorrect name for someone, often their birth name. Trans and non-binary folks may change their name after coming out but not all do.

genderqueer
An umbrella term for gender identities that identify with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.

gender fluid
A person who does not have a fixed gender.

gender non-conforming
A person who has, or is perceived to have, gender characteristics, behaviors, and/or appearances that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. These expectations can vary across cultures and have changed over time.

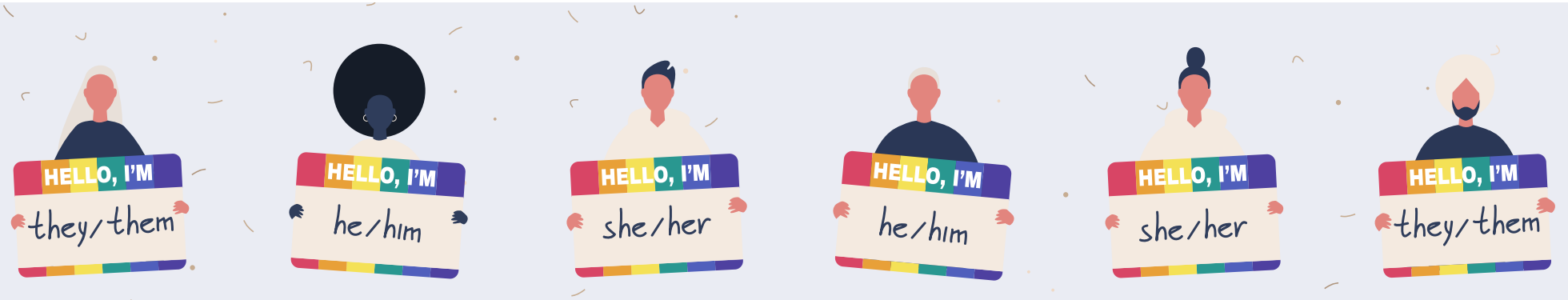
misgendering
Using a word, usually a pronoun, that incorrectly reflects someone's gender identity.

neopronouns
New pronouns beyond "he," "she" and singular "they," introduced by the transgender and gender non-conforming communities.

non-binary
Non-binary refers to gender identities outside the binary of being only male or female.

transgender
A person who has a different gender identity than the one assigned at birth.

Additional terms can be found in the LLNL Gender Transition Workplace Guidelines



Purpose

What is the purpose of this guide?

A 2019 Pew Research Center survey showed that one in five Americans know someone who uses a pronoun other than "he" or "she." This is reflected by employees increasingly entering the workplace with gender identities and expressions that may be different from what we most frequently think of when discussing gender. While many people identify on the binary scale—as either male or female—some do not. They may instead refer to themselves as:

genderqueer
gender fluid
non-binary

Using a person's name and pronouns is a form of mutual respect and basic courtesy. Everyone deserves to have their name and pronouns respected in the workplace. Non-binary and transgender people have always existed. Many non-western cultures have recognized multiple genders. These gender identities have been erased throughout history, but new terminology has evolved to allow us to recognize these identities.

This short guide aims to help anyone learn how to use everyone's correct pronouns.

> ***PRO**noun TIP*
>
> Using appropriate pronouns matters and is a question of respect.

What are pronouns and why do they matter?

Pronouns are words we use to refer to people in lieu of their names. Generally, pronouns have implied a gender, e.g., "he" to refer to a man or boy and "she" to refer to a woman or girl. These associations rely on assumptions built upon primary and secondary sex characteristics. Such characteristics can be:

facial hair or lack thereof
high or low vocal range
stereotypical "feminine" versus "masculine" clothing

But gender and pronouns cannot be assumed based on an individual's appearance. When you assume, you might be misgendering someone unintentionally. Pronouns are personal because they refer to a unique individual. Guessing someone's pronouns, or misusing someone's pronouns, accidentally or purposefully, can make that person feel judged, dismissed, or misunderstood. Using a person's correct pronouns matters—it acknowledges one's humanity and shows respect and inclusion.

> ***PRO**noun TIP*
>
> Pronouns cannot be assumed based on an individual's appearance.

How to use personal pronouns

Chart

The chart on the right shows how binary and non-binary pronouns are used.

At this stage it is also important to mention that some people may use multiple pronouns (e.g., she/they or he/they) or no pronouns at all. In the latter case, use their name. When you don't know someone's pronouns, it is generally acceptable to use "they/them." The singular "they" pronoun has been used since the 14th Century.

Multiple pronouns

For people who use multiple pronouns, using any of their pronouns is acceptable. For example, when talking about Eco (she/they), any of the following are appropriate:

Her body of work is extensive.

Their body of work is extensive.

Eco's body of work is extensive.

For some people, the situation may determine which pronoun is used, e.g., workplace versus home. If in doubt, let the person know that you want to be respectful and supportive and ask for more information. Some multilingual individuals may list their pronouns in multiple languages (e.g., she/ella).

Gender & Pronouns

It is also important to note that a person's set of pronouns is not always indicative of that person's gender identity. Many non-binary people use "they" while others use "he" or "she" (sometimes, but not always, interchangeably), and others use other neopronouns.

Fluidity

Just as sexuality or gender identity can evolve, pronouns can also be fluid. Someone's pronouns may change over time; they can question which set or sets better reflect their identity, and this could motivate them to not share any pronouns.

PRONOUNS

A how to guide

Subject: __1__ is* a new employee at the Lab.

Object: I see __2__ often at the cafeteria over lunch.

Possessive: __1__ is* well sought after in __3__ field.

Possessive pronoun: This badge is __4__ .

Reflexive: __1__ taught __5__ to code in R.

**Replace "is" with "are" when using singular "they."*
The pronoun list below is not an exhaustive list.

1	2	3	4	5
he	him	his	his	himself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
(name)	(name)	(name)'s	(name)'s	(name)'self
ze [zee]	hir [heer]	hir [heer]	hirs[heers]	hirself[herself]
ze [zee]	zir [zeer]	zir [zeer]	zirs [zeers]	zirself [zeerself]

Questions about pronouns

How to ask (or not to ask!) for someone's pronouns

A basic rule is always offer your own pronouns before considering asking somebody else's. This practice encourages others to share and more importantly sets the tone as an open and safe environment. When you meet a stranger, isn't your first instinct to tell them your name first, before asking theirs? The same is true of pronouns.

Meeting someone one-on-one you may say "Hi, my name is Clara, I use she/they pronouns. How should I refer to you?"

It's also essential to respect that some people may not understand or feel uncomfortable sharing their pronouns, for different reasons, and that's OK! If you are asking everyone in a group to introduce themselves, let people know that they do not have to share their pronouns if they don't wish to.

What to do when someone asks why you are listing or offering your pronouns?

Explaining the sharing of pronouns is a great opportunity to inform others about avoiding assumptions concerning a person's identity based typically on physical appearances, haircut, clothes, and voice. The best way to not make these assumptions is to ask—again, offering your own pronouns first is important because it creates an atmosphere of trust and safety.

How allies can be gender inclusive everyday

Mistakes happen: Own it and move on.
When you use the wrong name, also referred to as deadnaming, or wrong pronouns for someone, the worst thing to do is make it an even bigger issue. For example, if you used someone's maiden name or an incorrect title, you would correct yourself and move on. Use the same method here. Over-apologizing or making excuses makes it more about your discomfort and will likely make the other person feel even worse for standing up for themself.

Be willing to take feedback and act.
If someone else points out your mistake, the best thing to do is thank them and correct yourself. If you realize later that you made a mistake, reach out to them to apologize. If you or a friend are having trouble with someone's pronouns (such as they/them or a neopronoun), research how to use them and practice using them.

Intervene when someone is using the wrong name or pronouns.
Intervention is important even when the person is not physically present. Correcting someone by saying, for example, "That person uses they/them pronouns" helps prevent further misgendering. Standing up for your colleagues is respectful and lessens the burden of LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, and other identities) colleagues explaining themselves.

Do not assume someone's pronouns based on their appearance.
You can't tell if someone is non-binary or transgender by looking at them, just as you can't infer someone's full heritage or religion by looking at someone. Further, peoples' pronouns may change over time.

Stay curious: Our identities are complex.
No one has a single attribute that defines them, including non-binary and transgender folks. And not all non-binary and transgender folks identify in the same way. For example, some non-binary folks identify as transgender and others may not. Some non-binary folks use pronouns like she or he and may also be comfortable being called a woman or a man; some may not. These identities are not singular but are umbrella terms for a variety of experiences and perspectives.

How allies can be gender inclusive at work

Show you are an ally.
If you feel comfortable, add your pronouns to your online biography, email signature, LinkedIn, and/or WebEx/Zoom displayed names. Most people list their pronouns in subject/object format or subject/object/possessive, like she/her or they/them/theirs.

Remember not everyone fits into the binary.
Most folks do not have to think about which bathroom they go to. Others think about this every day. A truly accessible workplace includes gender-neutral bathrooms and considers other ways we unnecessarily use gender in our work life.

Stay updated.

Furthering education and inclusivity is an ongoing process. Terms change so keep up to date. Taking time to learn about all of the LGBTQ+ identities, such as 2Spirit, intersex, and asexual identities, makes you a more compassionate and understanding colleague and friend.

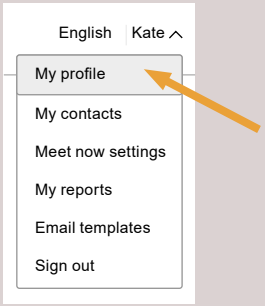
Although it can be okay to ask questions, don't expect your trans or non-binary colleagues to be your educator. Continue to seek out resources:

- Read the LLNL Gender Transition Workplace Guidelines.
- Join the LLNL Pride ERG (pride-info@llnl.gov).

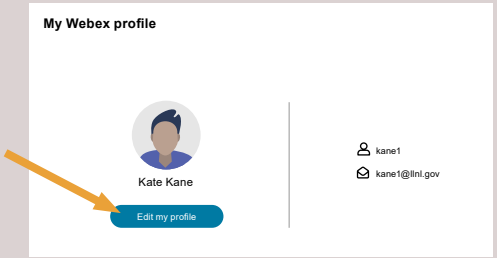
> ***PRO**noun TIP*
>
> You don't have to understand what it it means for someone to be non-binary to respect them.

Tip: change your displayed name in Webex

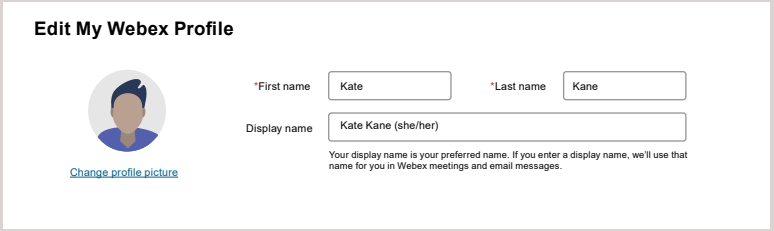
1. From your browser, got to the **Webex website**
2. Click on your name in the upper right corner, and from the dropdown menu select *My profile* to access your *My Webex Profile* page.



3. In *My Webex Profile*, select *Edit My Profile*.



4. In *Edit My Profile*, edit the box *Display name*.



History of Pronouns

14th century

Singular they first appeared in 1375 in a French poem William the Werewolf. (Source: What's Your Pronoun?: Beyond He and She by Dennis Baron)

1850s

Newspapers use many variations of gender-neutral pronouns such as: Xe, Ze, Phe, Er, Ou and Ne.

1858

Brief use of the gender-neutral pronoun "thon," which is a contraction of "that one," but didn't catch on.

1970s

Public push for gender neutral pronouns. "Le" was used briefly.

2010s

Increase of gender-neutral pronouns use and awareness from the LGBTQ+ community to a broader global conversation, thanks in part to social media and a greater visibility of transgender and non-binary people.

2019

Merriam-Webster chose "they" as its 2019 Word of the Year based on the number of dictionary lookups, and the singular "they" was added to its online dictionary in September 2019.

Some historical non-binary figures*

The Public Universal Friend (1752-1819), American, preacher

We'wha (1849-1896), Zuni Native American, lhamana

Thomas Baty (1869-1954), English, lawyer

Pauli Murray (1910-1985), American, lawyer, poet, Episcopal priest

*Based on modern vocabulary, these historical figures could identify as non-binary, transgender, and/or several other identities.

Facts & Resources

Fun Facts

Neopronouns, meaning new pronouns beyond "he," "she," and singular "they," mainly arise from the transgender and gender non-conforming communities. Some are adapted from other languages, like "ze" from the German word "sie," and some are found in science fiction literature.

There is an International Pronouns Day on the 3rd Wednesday of October.

Authors, including Shakespeare, have for centuries used singular they in text. Various other gender-neutral pronouns were used, but most did not catch on, resulting in the word "they" becoming the most common gender-neutral pronoun.

Tagalog is one of several languages that uses gender-neutral pronouns. Siya is a pronoun that is used to describe anyone. Many languages also have pronouns for "he," "she," and a singular "they."

Resources

https://www.mypronouns.org/

https://pronounsday.org/

https://lgbt.ucsf.edu/educational-resources

https://lgbt.ucsf.edu/international-pronouns-day

https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7ElX4GFQpI

https://pls-int.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/Workforce_Committee_Meeting_Notes_12-2020_pronouns-pls-workforce.pdf

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