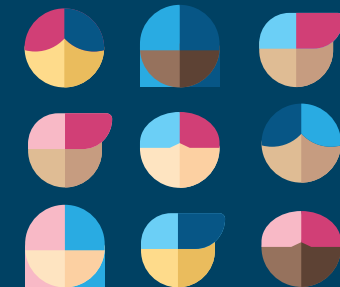


PRONOUNS CAN WORK!

What are Pronouns?

Pronouns are words that refer to either the people talking (like you or me) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, they, and this). Gender pronouns (like he or them) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.



Here's why they're important.

If a person has never had to worry about which pronoun others use for them, gender pronouns might not seem important. For most, their singular and visible gender identity is a privilege. Not everybody has that privilege; those that are referred to with the wrong pronoun can feel disrespected, invalidated, and alienated. You can't assume what someone's gender pronouns are by looking at them. Knowing and using someone's gender pronouns is a positive way to support the people you work with.

In other words...

As a Cisgender (non-transgender person), heteronormative (Straight), binary person (Male or Female), by using the correct pronoun you are acknowledging the privilege you have:

- You've never had to worry about which pronoun others

use for you.

- Your singular and visible gender identity is a privilege
- Not everybody has this privilege
- Those that are referred to with the wrong pronoun can feel disrespected, invalidated, and alienated.
- Knowing and using someone's gender pronouns is a positive way to support the people you work with.

Is the introduction of a singular nonbinary pronoun **THEY** the invention of millennial special snowflakes? **NO!** As a matter of fact...

The singular gender-nonspecific *they* has been around since the 13th century, and it was only as recently as the 1850's that it began, at the bidding of academics, to disappear.

To understand the importance of pronouns, let's go back in time.

12th Century

The modern feminine "she" appears in the mid-12th century to seemingly, at least in part, fight against ambiguity over gender.

1375

Since forms may exist in speech long before they're written, it's likely that singular *they* was common even before the late 14th century. That makes an old form even older.

So what happened?

They clearly forgot that *you* was a plural pronoun that had become singular as well. In the 17th century singular *you* replaced *thou*, *thee*, and *thy*, except for some dialect use. *You* had functioned as a polite singular for centuries.

That change had also met with some resistance. In 1660, George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, wrote a book labeling anyone who used singular *you* an idiot or fool. This is similar to how singular *they* is ridiculed by some today.

Hopelessly out of date

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, by the 12th century masculine and feminine pronouns developed to where they were, "almost or wholly indistinguishable in pronunciation," beginning as "He (Hay), Heo (Hayo) and Hit (Hit). The H's slowly grew silent, rendering them neutrals.

The modern feminine "she"

The Oxford English Dictionary traces singular *they* to 1375 where it appears in the medieval romance *William and the Werewolf*. Except for the old-style language, its use of singular *they* to refer to an unnamed person seems very modern.

And it's probably older than that!

Grammarians (mostly men) began warning that singular *they* was an error because a plural pronoun can't take a singular antecedent.

Did you know that you was a pronoun?

1660

18th century grammarians like Robert Lowth and Lindley Murray enforced the use of *thou* as singular and *you* as plural, even though anyone who said *thou* and *thee* was seen as a fool and an idiot, a Quaker, or at least hopelessly out of date.

Were there other gender neutral words that already existed?

YES!

Both the Oxford English Dictionary and Joseph Wright's English Dialect Dictionary included the use of "a" for "he", "she", "it", "they" and even "I".

Even those who don't respect other people's pronouns use singular they.

2015 Word of the Year

Among today's existing words, the singular *they* is winning popularity as a gender neutral pronoun. The American Dialect Society named it "Word of the Year" in 2015, even though the word first surfaced as a neutral singular pronoun as far back as the 17th century.

How to avoid being hopelessly out of date

Not everyone is down with singular *they*. The well-respected *Chicago Manual of Style* still rejects singular *they* for formal writing. In 2019, a transgender Florida teacher was removed from their fifth-grade classroom for asking students to refer to them with the gender-neutral singular *they*.

And in 2018, the Diversity Office at the University of Tennessee suggested that teachers ask their students, "What's your pronoun?" since some students might use a recent nonbinary pronoun like *zie* or something more conventional, like

singular *they*. In response, the Tennessee state legislature passed a law banning the use of taxpayer dollars for gender-neutral pronouns, despite the fact that no one knows how much a pronoun actually costs. It's no surprise that

Tennessee, the state that banned the teaching of evolution in 1925, also failed to stop the evolution of English 100 years later, because the fight against singular *they* was already lost by the time the 18th century critics began objecting to it.

Failed to stop

This change is irreversible

In *The New Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, Robert Burchfield dismisses objections to singular *they* as unsupported by the historical record. He observes that the construction is 'passing unnoticed' by speakers of standard English as well as by copy editors. He concludes that this trend is "irreversible".

People who want to be inclusive and respectful use the singular pronoun they.

Even people who object to singular *they* as a grammatical error use it themselves when they're not looking. This is a sure sign that anyone who objects to singular *they*, if not a fool or an idiot, is at least hopelessly out of date.

To avoid being hopelessly out of date

try using pronouns in your daily introductions, and add them to email signatures, business cards, name tags, etc.

HELLO
MY NAME IS _____

AND I USE _____ PRONOUNS

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Acknowledge that evolution is not stopping.
Be open to how language is evolving.

Use inclusive greetings

"Thanks, friends."
"Good morning, folks!"
"Hi, Everyone"
"And for you?"
"Can I get you all something?"

Please avoid:
Ladies, Gentlemen,
Ma'am, Sir, Girls, Guys, etc.
Instead say "Thanks, Friends."

Gender Grammar Primer

INCORRECT	CORRECT	REASON
"transgendered" (adjective)	transgender	Only adjectives that are derived from nouns and/or verbs (unlike transgender) end in "-ed".
"transgendered" (verb)	transition	Only verbs can have "-ed" added onto the end of the word to become a participle. Transgender is an adjective. One does not "transgender", they transition.
"a transgender", "transgenders"	a transgender person, transgender people	Transgender is not a noun. "Jo is a transgender" is not only grammatically incorrect, it can also be offensive.
"sex change", "sex/gender reassignment"	gender confirmation surgery	Surgery does not change one's sex or gender, only genitalia
"intersexed"	intersex	Only adjectives that are derived from nouns and/or verbs (unlike intersex) end in "-ed".



Here's a glimpse of the future:

Ze/Hir

Tyler ate **hir** food because **ze** was hungry

Ze pronounced like "zee" and **hir** as "here"

I know, I know, it's different, it's unfamiliar... and that's ok!

Thank you for going on the pronouns journey with us! This tool was made possible by a grant from the City of West Hollywood.

