

Learn about pronouns

Pronouns refer to people that you're talking to or about. When a person chooses to share their pronouns, they're letting you know how you can refer to them.

On this page

- [Why we use pronouns](#)
- [How to use pronouns](#)
- [Making a mistake and using the wrong pronoun or name](#)
- [How to display pronouns](#)
- [Bilingual pronouns table](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Contact us](#)

Why we use pronouns

Some find that traditional gender pronouns (she/he/her/him) do not accurately represent their gender identity. Certain members of the 2-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQIA+) community prefer using alternate pronouns that validate their identities. Promote inclusion and respect by taking the time to learn these pronouns.

Promoting proper pronoun usage ensures that:

- correct pronouns are used when referring to someone else
- the exchange of pronouns is normalized
- the notion that one can assume someone else's pronouns based on their appearance is deconstructed

Pronouns are deeply personal and are used to reinforce and support the identity of the individual. All employees have the right to have their pronouns respected and used when interacting in their work environment. Pronouns are not subject to negotiation, judgment or questioning, and should always be respected.

To normalize pronoun exchange, and where individuals are comfortable in doing so, it is recommended that pronouns be included in:

- staff verbal interactions
- email signatures
- official biographies
- name tags and name cards
- Zoom and Teams calls
- introductions during meetings or at events
- business cards

Note: the practice of sharing pronouns is still relatively new. Not all staff will be comfortable sharing their pronouns for fear of outing themselves, or because they do not understand the value. As we normalize the practice of sharing pronouns, we should see a work culture shift and an increase in the number of staff who feel comfortable sharing their pronouns.

How to use pronouns

In the English language, pronouns are used as replacements to individuals' names when we talk about them. It is crucial that they are accurate and affirming of the person in question. The English language has 3 sets of pronouns that are part of its grammatical system. They are:

- the feminine "she"

- the masculine “he”
- neutral “they”
 - “they” is used frequently in the singular form to refer to someone whose gender is unknown

Neopronouns

Members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community have created neopronouns to reflect their gender identity more accurately. While not exhaustive, the following is an overview of both traditional pronouns and neopronouns:

SUBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	POSSESSIVE	REFLEXIVE	EXAMPLE
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking I listened to her The pencil is hers She looked at herself
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking I listened to him The pencil is his He looked at himself
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking I listened to them The pencil is theirs They looked at themselves
You	You	Yours	Yourself	You are speaking I listened to you The pencil is yours You looked at yourself
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/Zirself	Ze is speaking I listened to hir

				The pencil is zirs Ze looked at zirself
Xe	Xem	Xyrs	Xemself	Xe is speaking I listened to xem The pencil is xyrs Xe looked at xemself

Some may use more than one pronoun to describe themselves. Examples include:

- she/they
- he/they
- no preference
- all pronouns

Sometimes, people who use more than one pronoun will let you know the context in which to use their pronouns. This context can be related to mood, comfort level, or even safety. In some cases, there is no defined context. Therefore, it is recommended to use whichever pronouns listed by the individual and change them up regularly. You can even use different pronouns in the same sentence, although that may be confusing.

It is important to remember that we cannot guess someone's pronouns or honorifics (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss) based on their voice or name. Instead of assuming, ask the person which pronouns and honorifics they would like used to describe them.

Remember, being a part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community is not a choice, a lifestyle, or a preference. It is an identity intrinsic to who people are.

Making a mistake and using the wrong pronoun or name

Mistakes happen. What is most important is the way we react to them. The biggest point to remember is to not make a big deal out of an error, as it places the person who was misgendered in the awkward position of having to provide comfort or even forgiveness. Instead, here is what you can do:

- Don't make excuses or get defensive. Acknowledge your mistake by correcting yourself with the proper pronoun or name immediately after realizing your mistake
 - for example, "I went to the market with him...I mean her."
- Try to downplay the mistake and avoid drawing attention to it, which could result in accidentally outing someone
- Acknowledgement can include an apology if the person is present, but do not draw too much attention to the mistake
- Make sure you practice using the person's pronouns and or chosen name on your own time so that the mistake is not repeated

How to display pronouns

Demonstrate your allyship to colleagues who are members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community by:

- including your pronouns in your signature block
- using the drop-down list in Public Services and Procurement Canada's (PSPC) [Directory](#) to display your pronouns in Microsoft 365 applications, such as Teams and Outlook
 - you can also access the PSPC Directory through the PSPC Directory icon on your desktop

Bilingual pronouns table

PRONOUN TYPE	ENGLISH	TYPE DE PRONOM	FRANCAIS
Refers to a feminine individual	She/her/hers	Féminin	elle/la/lui
Refers to a masculine individual	He/him/his	Masculin	il/le/lui
Refers to an individual of any gender; or to a non-binary individual	They/them/theirs	Inclusif ou non binaire	iel/ellui/ellui iel/iel/ielille/elluie/ellui ielle/iel/iel
Feminine and masculine combination	She, he/her, them/hers, theirs	Combinaison féminine et masculine	elle, il/la, le/lui
Feminine and inclusive/non-binary combination	She, they/her, them/hers, theirs	Combinaison féminine et inclusive/non binaire	elle, iel/la, ellui/lui, ellui elle, iel/la, iel/lui, iel elle, ille/la, ellui/lui, ellui elle, ille/la, iel/lui iel
Masculine and inclusive/non-binary combination	He, they/him, them/his, theirs	Combinaison masculine et inclusive/non binaire	il, iel/le, ellui/lui, ellui il, iel/le, iel/lui, iel il, ille/le, ellui/lui, ellui il, ille/le, iel/lui iel
Feminine, masculine, and inclusive/non-binary combination	She, he, they/her, him, them/hers, his, theirs	Combinaison féminine, masculine et inclusive/non binaire	elle, il, iel/la, le, ellui/lui, ellui elle, il, iel/la, le, iel/lui, iel elle, il, ille/la, le, ellui/lui, ellui elle, il, ille/la, le, iel/lui, iel elle, il, iel/la, le, ellui/lui, ellu
Neutral	Ze/zie/zir	Neutre	UI/il/ille/ille

			OI/ille/ille OI, ul/ille/ille
--	--	--	----------------------------------

Resources

- [Canada's first Federal Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and additional sexually and gender diverse Action Plan](#)
- From the Government of Canada:
 - [Gender and sexual diversity glossaries - Glossaries and vocabularies - TERMIUM Plus® - Resources of the Language Portal of Canada - Languages - Canadian identity and society - Culture, history and sport - Canada.ca \(termiumplus.gc.ca\)](#)
 - [Inclusive writing: Guidelines and resources](#)
 - [Canadian Human Rights Act](#)
 - [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
 - [Canadian Human Rights Commission](#)
 - [Course INC111: Positive Space Initiative: Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and additional sexually and gender diverse Awareness](#)
 - [Course INC112: Positive Space Initiative: Becoming an Ambassador for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and additional sexually and gender diverse Inclusion](#)
- From federal departments:
 - [Guide on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology \(PSPC\)](#)
- Outside of government:
 - [Egale Canada](#)