

Pronouns at Work

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are used to refer to someone or something that is being talked about, for example "she", "them", "this" and "it".

We use gendered pronouns based on a person's name, appearance, voice, and/or expression, and "assign" a pronoun, however this may not always be correct.

Why are pronouns important?

A person's identity is very important to them. Being misidentified (accidentally or on purpose) is uncomfortable for all parties and can be offensive (and can be a form of harassment).

At a global university such as UCL, many names might be unfamiliar to someone from a different cultural background. For example, varying naming conventions can be used to affirm their gender identity. Trans and non binary people may use a name that is not their legal name.

What if I do not know which pronoun to use?

Take your lead from the person and use the pronouns they do. Those identifying as non binary may choose to use 'they' rather than 'he' or 'she', or may use other pronouns entirely, such as 'ze' or 'zir'. Someone may want multiple pronouns used to refer to an individual whose gender is not known. In colloquial English we already do this all the time: "Oh, someone forgot to close the door; I hope **they** come back for it – it's pouring".

Using generic language such as "colleagues", "students", "team members", "participants", "staff" is often preferred over gendered terms generically.

Isn't it rude to ask someone for their pronouns?

The more we ask everyone for their pronouns (and state our own pronouns), the more it becomes part of the status quo. Avoid asking only people with what you consider to be an unusual gender presentation as that would be rude and potentially awkward.

Is "they" really a plural pronoun?

It is a common misconception that this usage is new and ungrammatical; in fact, it has precedence in English for centuries.

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RU JHQGHU H[SUHVWLRQ GHIIWVKH\IQRBEILDWKLJQHG DW

7UDQV RU 7UDQVJHQRZRPDQ\ XVH @KLVFUEHFWWRPVHOYH
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7UDQV RU 7UDQVJHQBPHRZRPDQ\ XVH @KLVFUEHFWWRPVHOYH
WKH\ ZHUH DVVLJQHG EDVH LGWH EWLII\ DV D ZRPDQ

1RQ %LQDU\ DOVR *HQQGHU 4XMRBH EGGYHUGYDCLGGR QRW
HLWKHU PDOH RU IMPDOH W,RVULHFBBQBYH LGKDWWRBH QRW Z
EH UHIHUHG WRUDYVKHVKEDW KUDYWKKIDWDVUSHUQRWXQHQGHU
DV WKH\RU]H\ DQVPRKOWPSOH RLXGVHQRDEH XSHRQIRU
WKHP VRPH SHRSOH PD\ ZLVK SURQRXQV