Adding Pronouns to Your Signature Line FAQ

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are used when referring to someone in the third person, without using their name. The most common pronouns are she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs. Examples of less common pronouns are xe/xem/xyzr (pronounced zee/zem/zeers), fae/faer/faers (pronounced fay/fair/fairs), ey/em/eirs (pronounced ay/em/airs), or combinations of pronouns like she/chi or sikatu/she.

Why are people adding pronouns to their signature lines, virtual meeting platform titles, or giving them during introductions?

You cannot know someone's pronouns unless they tell you, so by adding them to your signature line or giving them during introductions it lets others know what pronouns to use.

Everyone already knows what my gender is, why is it useful for me to share my pronouns?

Pronouns do not always correlate with a person's perceived gender. People have many reasons for using the pronouns they do, and they sometimes use different pronouns in different settings. An example: someone is transgender but is not out (hasn't told everyone) at work. They may use distinct pronouns at work and at home. It is best not to assume someone's pronouns.

I'm not part of the LGBTQ+ community, should I still share my pronouns?

Yes, if you are comfortable doing so. Sharing pronouns, especially if you are not part of the LGBTQ+ community, helps create a welcoming and inclusive space for others to share their pronouns. The more people share pronouns, the more it is normalized, making it more comfortable and safer for transgender and nonbinary folks to share their own. Sharing your pronouns is a good way to show your support of the LGBTQ+ community as an ally.

I don't work with any transgender or non-binary people, is it still useful to share pronouns?

Yes. It may not be apparent what a person's identity is; it is best not to make assumptions. Regardless of whom you work with, and customers you serve, using your pronouns helps create a culture where sharing pronouns is the norm regardless of who is in the room. By being consistent we avoid tokenizing anyone and create an inclusive environment for everyone.

What if I am not comfortable sharing my pronouns?

That is okay! No one should be forced to share their pronouns unless they are comfortable doing so. There are many reasons people would not feel comfortable sharing their pronouns.

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What if I make a mistake and use the wrong pronouns for someone?

An acceptable response is to apologize, correct yourself, and move on.

Of course, you should never intentionally use incorrect pronouns for someone. However, sometimes mistakes happen. It's essential to recognize that the impact can still be harmful even if our intention was not to make a mistake. Because of that, you should try to minimize those mistakes. It helps to practice on your own to get comfortable using different pronouns. For more guidance on what to do when you mess up check What If I Make a Pronouns Mistake? - MyProunouns.org Resources on Personal Pronouns

What if I don't know someone's pronouns and I want to say the right thing?

The only way to know someone's pronouns is if they tell you. So, it's best not to make assumptions. Circumstances vary and context is crucial.

Until you know someone's pronouns, you can use one of these approaches to be respectful.

- Use the person's name instead of assuming their pronouns.
- Use another word to describe the person like "customer" or "client."
- Use gender-neutral pronouns such as they/them until you're confident about someone's pronouns.

What else should I know about pronouns?

It is no longer best practice to say "preferred" because it implies that a person's pronouns are optional. That is not the case, someone's pronouns are their pronouns.

How a person presents does not indicate pronouns or gender. What someone wears and how they appear does not always correlate with their gender or what pronouns they use.

Around new people create space for someone to share their pronouns by sharing your own. Be mindful not to force disclosure and understand that some people may not want to share. Asking for someone's pronouns upon meeting for the first time, in many cases, is not recommended. If that person is transgender and not out yet, they would have to make a choice in that moment whether to out themselves or to misgender themselves.

For RAIN Best Practices Pronoun Guidance see: Use of Pronouns in External Communication

What are some additional resources?

- Mypronouns.org
- Human Rights Campaign *Talking About Pronouns in the Workplace*
- Minus 18 pronoun game

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