



A Guide to using Preferred Gender Pronouns And Why They Matter



Amnesty International is an international human rights organization that works to welcome and uphold human rights for all sexualities, genders, and identities. As human rights activists, we seek to understand human rights issues in an intersectional framework and are dedicated to continuous, inclusive learning. In this light, we encourage you to learn more about pronouns and how people might identify themselves:

What Is A Pronoun?

Pronouns are parts of speech that replace other nouns. When we talk about preferred gender pronouns, we're talking about personal pronouns, words that refer to a person (the person talking or someone that is being talking about). Pronouns include first person (I), second person (you), or third person (he, she, they).

What Is A "Preferred Gender Pronoun"?

A "preferred gender pronoun" (or PGP) is a consciously chosen pronoun that a person chooses to use for themselves to reference their chosen gender. A PGP allows a person to accurately represent their identity in a way that is safe and comfortable for them, and it lets others know what pronouns to use when talking about or to that person.

How to Use Preferred Gender Pronouns:

- **Know Your Own Pronoun.** How do you identify yourself? Introduce yourself with your own pronouns "Hi, my name is Marie, I'm a human rights activist, and my preferred pronouns are XX."
- **Ask for Preferred Pronouns.** When you meet someone new, don't assume how they identify or what their pronouns are. Try asking: "What are your preferred pronouns?", or "What pronouns do you like to hear?"
- **Respect Preferred Pronouns.** Consistently use the pronouns someone has shared with you. Listen carefully to what you're told. Don't assume that someone's pronouns have changed based on their appearance or your perception of them.

What Not To Say When Talking About and Using Gender Pronouns

- When introducing yourself, think carefully about what you say. It is a privilege to not have had to think about your own pronouns or have to worry which pronouns someone will use for you based on your perceived gender.
- When introducing yourself, try to avoid phrases like:
 - "Well, I guess I use male pronouns."
 - "I don't care."
 - "Whatever, you can call me a unicorn or something"

Each of these phrases can be very hurtful because it can show disrespect towards those for whom a pronoun is not "assumed" or safe. Further, many people genuinely want to be respectful toward your chosen gender and identity and want to be able to use the pronouns with which you are comfortable. If you haven't thought about it before, that's okay: think about how you want to be identified and let others know.



- Never refer to a person as “it” or “he-she” (unless they specifically ask you to.) These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender nonconforming individuals that suggest that person is not gendered in a “right” or “correct” way.

Making Mistakes

It's ok! Mistakes happen. Understanding gender, sexuality and identity is a learning process for everyone.

- **If you forget someone's pronoun.** Respectfully ask for their preferred pronouns, “Can you remind me what your preferred pronouns are?” Asking is always better than assuming or guessing and shows your respect for their gender identity.
- **If you use the incorrect pronoun.** When you use the incorrect pronoun for someone, they may feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric. Apologize and correct yourself right away. “I'm sorry, I meant to say X.” If you do not realize your mistake immediately, apologize in private as soon as possible and move on.
- **If you are corrected after using the incorrect pronoun.** If you use a pronoun incorrectly and are corrected by the person whose pronoun's you misused, apologize. If you use a pronoun incorrectly and are corrected by someone who is familiar with the person whose pronoun's you misused, apologize and if necessary, check in with the person in private later. “I believe I misused your preferred pronoun earlier. Can you remind me what pronouns you prefer?”
- **Respecting preferred pronouns is your responsibility.** If you make a mistake about someone's preferred pronoun, whether you forget or use an incorrect PGP, just apologize and commit yourself to working harder on remember. Don't try to explain yourself, go on about how bad you feel that you messed up, or talk about how hard it is to remember pronouns. This may make the person you mis-gendered feel uncomfortable and responsible for making you feel better about your mistake, which is never their job. You are responsible for remembering PGPs.

Acting As Allies

Ally is a verb, not a noun. Do your best to *act* as an ally when it comes to PGPs.

- **If you hear someone mis-gendering another person.** Gently correct the person who is using incorrect pronouns. This can be as simple as saying “Oh hey, Erin prefers the pronoun xe.”
- **If someone is consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone.** If possible, take this person aside for a quiet conversation about respecting pronouns. “I've noticed you've been using *she* for Lena, when Lena actually uses the pronouns *they*. It's important to be respectful towards a person's preferred gender pronouns. What can you do that will help you remember to refer to Lena using their chosen pronouns?”
- **Making spaces inclusive of preferred gender pronouns.** Open your activist spaces up to the conversation of preferred pronouns. Always introduce yourself using your pronouns, and be respectfully vocal about using other's pronouns. When in a group, start by introducing yourself using your pronouns, explain why we use preferred pronouns, and then go through group introductions.

Sources:

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Cornell College: <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/advising/PreferredGenderPronouns.pdf>

What You're Saying When You Ignore Pronouns: <http://letsqueerthingsup.com/2014/09/15/what-youre-actually-saying-when-you-ignore-someones-preferred-gender-pronouns/>

