EQUITY & COMPLIANCE

TRANS 101: EDUCATION & ADVOCACY
PRONOUNS MATTER

SOURCE: PRONOUNS.ORG

For more information, help, or training, feel free to contact the Equity & Compliance staff at equitycompliance@risd.edu

WHAT ARE PERSONAL PRONOUNS?

People often use pronouns when they're talking about us. Often, when speaking of a singular human in the third person, these pronouns have a gender implied. These associations are not always accurate or helpful.

- People often make assumptions about the gender of another person based on the person's appearance or name
- The act of making an assumption (even if correct) sends a potentially harmful message—that people have to look a certain way to demonstrate the gender that they are or are not

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

- Using someone's correct personal pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive environment—just as using a person's name can be a way to respect them
- It can be offensive and/or harassing to guess someone's pronouns and refer to them using those pronouns if that is not how that person wants to be known
- Actively choosing to ignore the pronouns someone has stated that they go by could imply the oppressive notion that intersex, transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people do not or should not exist
- Purposeful misgendering is also considered discriminatory harassment at RISD.

HOW TO USE PERSONAL PRONOUNS

- When a person shares their pronouns, they are naming the pronouns that they want to be referred to by in the singular third person.
- Usually, the "they/them" pronouns set is acceptable to use when you don't yet know if a person goes by another set or sets of pronouns
- Just because a person goes by a certain set or sets of pronouns is not indicative of that person's gender
- It is also possible to avoid pronouns
- There are additional sets of pronouns that some people might use (e.g. ze/zir, per/pers, ey/em, xe/xem, etc.). Please check with the person who goes by those pronouns and/or look for online resources to determine the proper ways to utilize them.
- Some people go by multiple sets of pronouns, and usually that means that it is okay to use any of the sets they go by (e.g., she/they, they/he, any pronouns, etc.).
- Please note that there are also nonbinary, gender-neutral titles (e.g., Mx.) and nonbinary, gender neutral language that can be used (e.g., folks, all, everyone, colleagues, students, friends, etc.)

SOME EXAMPLES

- **She/Her:** "She is a writer and wrote that book herself. Those ideas are hers. I like both her and her ideas."
- **He/Him**: "He is a writer and wrote that book himself. Those ideas are his. I like both him and his ideas."
- **They/Them**: "They are a writer and wrote that book themself. Those ideas are theirs. I like both them and their ideas." Please note that although "they" pronouns here are singular and refer to an individual, the verbs are conjugated the same as with the plural "they" (e.g. "they are"). Also note that in this singular pronoun set many use "themself" rather than "themselves," although both are typically acceptable.
- **Ze/Hir**: "Ze is a writer and wrote that book hirself. Those ideas are hirs. I like both hir and hir ideas." Please note that "ze" is usually pronounced with a long "e" and that "hir" and its forms are usually pronounced like the English word "here."
- **No Pronouns - Use My Name**: "Lan is a writer and wrote that book. Those ideas are Lan's." I like both Lan and Lan's ideas." "Lan wrote that book unassisted" or "Lan was the sole author of that book." "Lan wrote the book Lan's self."
- More information about some of the more common pronouns sets through www.pronouns.org/how

SHARING & ASKING

Sharing your own pronouns is a great idea, but it isn't requisite. Keep in mind, however, that there is a privilege of appearing in a way that fits both your gender and the pronouns that many people associate with your gender. In other words, if people's assumptions are correct, never having to name those assumptions begins to normalize the very process of making assumptions (which for others may be incorrect). Thus, sharing pronouns is a great way to disrupt the normalization and privilege of assumption.

- You can write your name & pronouns on a name tag and include your pronouns in your signature line
- If meeting someone new you might say, "Hi, I'm [NAME] and I go by [x] pronouns. How should I refer to you?"
- We don't recommend ever forcing people to share their pronouns. However, people could be invited or encouraged to do so. That is what we mean by "asking" — it's about invitation.
- In a group setting you might say, "Before we begin, we'd like to go around and share our names, departments, and pronouns. If you are uncomfortable sharing or unable to participate in a respectful way, it's okay to just say your name."

- Please also keep in mind that people may change their names or pronouns or go by different ones at a later time or in another space with other people.

At RISD, sharing your personal pronouns/asking others their personal pronouns is a valued practice showing respect for the people with whom you interact. Here are some ways in which you can encourage that practice:

Sample Syllabus Statements of Inclusion

- In this course, each voice in the classroom has something of value to contribute. Please take care to respect the different experiences, beliefs, and values expressed by students and staff involved in this course. We support RISD's commitment to diversity and welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, citizenships, disabilities, sexes, education levels, ethnicities, family statuses, genders, gender identities, geographical locations, languages, military experiences, political views, races, religions, sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses, and work experiences.
- Course rosters do not list gender or pronouns so you may be asked to indicate the personal pronouns you use so that I don't make assumptions based on your name and/or appearance/self-presentation (you are not obligated to do so). If you use a chosen name that is different from the one listed on the roster, please let me know. Chosen names and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom. Mistakes in addressing one another may happen, so I encourage an environment of openness to correction and learning. I will not, however, tolerate repeated comments which disrespect or antagonize students who have indicated pronouns or a chosen name. Chosen names and personal pronouns may evolve over time, so if at any point during the semester you would like to be addressed differently, please let me know.

Sample Email Signature with Personal Pronouns

Full Name
Current pronouns: ([insert pronouns here]) - What's this?
Position/Title
Office
e: name@risd.edu
p: xxx xxx-xxxx

MISTAKES HAPPEN

Depending on the cultural, organizational, and situational context, and the personalities and positionalities of the people interacting, there are many different ways to act if there has been a mistake in referring to someone with the incorrect pronouns:

- Don't linger or dwell: correct yourself in the moment, move on, and work to do better next time. You don't have to make a big deal out of your mistake or draw a lot of attention to it. You mostly need to fix it. You might have a follow up conversation with the person you referred to incorrectly to apologize or see if there's something else you can do to correct it moving forward besides doing better. Making it a bigger deal in the moment is not necessarily helpful and could be harmful unless that's what the person who was incorrectly referred to wants.
- Address your assumptions: "I know we've known each other a long time, and I've always used 'she' and 'hers' pronouns to refer to you, but I realized I might be making some assumptions. Is 'she' and 'hers' okay or should I be using another set of pronouns to refer to you?"
- Feel empowered to call people in if they are making a mistake: gentle reinforcements & reminders of a person's correct pronouns may help others to remember to use them.

RESOURCES

https://pronouns.org/inclusivelanguage
https://pronouns.org/resources
https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/category/gender-identity/
https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender
https://www.hrc.org/resources/allies