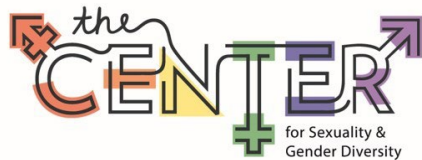


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# The University of Kansas Pronoun Guide

*Gender-inclusive Teaching and Writing Tips for KU Faculty,  
Instructors, and Staff*





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## Pronouns Matter!

Faculty, staff, and teaching assistants have a responsibility to make classrooms welcoming and inclusive for all students. Transgender and gender nonconforming students can face numerous obstacles to participating fully in class and in campus life. Included here are some best practices and helpful tips to make your campus interactions and classrooms more welcoming and eliminate unintended exclusionary practices that harm students.

## Why This Matters

Using a person's chosen name and pronouns is not only right and respectful, it has safety implications. Outing a transgender or gender non-conforming person can impact their safety and livelihood. Consider that many gender non-conforming people on campus, particularly students, live in shared housing environments, rely on family financial support, and navigate complex social situations. Some may even use different pronouns in different situations to reduce their likelihood of harm or discomfort. Thus, it is crucial to respect the name and pronouns offered by transgender and gender non-conforming people in every situation.



Hello, Big Jay!  
What pronouns do you use?

## Learning Pronouns

### Make it a habit!

When doing introductions, simply make a habit to state your pronouns and ask others to share their pronouns with you. Here are some helpful prompts:

- What pronouns do you use?
- How would you like me to refer to you?
- What name and pronoun do you go by?

## Pronoun Options

### Pronouns defined

*Pronouns refer to and substitute nouns, meaning people, places, and things. Some, though not all pronouns also communicate the gender of a person. Below are some helpful tables of pronouns commonly used for and by people that both signify gender and do not.*

### Pronouns that Signify Gender

<i>Gender Communicated</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Possessive</i>
<i>Feminine</i>	<i>She</i>	<i>Her</i>	<i>Hers</i>
<i>Masculine</i>	<i>He</i>	<i>Him</i>	<i>His</i>

### Gender Neutral Pronouns

<i>Gender Communicated</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Possessive</i>
<i>Non-Binary</i>	<i>They</i>	<i>Them</i>	<i>Theirs</i>
<i>Non-Binary</i>	<i>Ze</i>	<i>Zir</i>	<i>Zirs</i>
<i>Non-Binary</i>	<i>Ze</i>	<i>Hir</i>	<i>Hirs</i>
<i>Non-Binary</i>	<i>Individually defined</i>	<i>Individually defined</i>	<i>Individually defined</i>

## Correcting Mistakes

### Mistakes happen! Fix them.

Whether you accidentally refer to a student using the wrong pronoun or another colleague or student does so, it is very important to correct yourself and others, regardless of whether the person wrongly gendered is present. Pretending it didn't happen only further disrespects the mis-gendered person. Simply say, "I'm so sorry, I meant to say..." or "I think that person actually uses the pronouns ..."

Feeling awkward about mistakes or correcting others? Sometimes it is helpful to think of it from a different perspective- if someone was mispronouncing your name, wouldn't you prefer they said a quick apology or let someone else know the correct pronunciation? Of course! It is the same for transgender and gender nonconforming people but with an added layer that some people chose to mis-gender them intentionally as a small act of aggression (a microaggression). To ensure everyone feels welcome on our campus and classrooms correct and apologize for mistakes and help those around you to use correct names and pronouns.



## Projecting Gender Inclusion

There are a few easy actions that can have tremendous impact on transgender and gender non-conforming people feeling welcome at KU.

### E-mail Signatures and Online Profiles

Add your pronouns to your e-mail signature and online KU profile page! Why? Well, for one it can help others use the proper pronouns when they address you. Secondly, it communicates to transgender and gender non-conforming people that you are informed and invested in gender inclusion.

If someone else has gone to the trouble of adding their pronouns to their e-mail signature or online profile, be sure to use the correct pronouns in your correspondence to them!



### Name Tags

Our staff and administrators who wear permanent nametags can get pronouns included on them. Learn more about name tag guidelines on the SGD website.

When creating temporary nametags for a campus event or class, include a place for pronouns. This is also easy to apply to the classroom.

### Personal Introductions

On such a big campus we are constantly introducing ourselves. Add your pronouns to your introduction to communicate useful information about yourself and make everyone feel welcome.



# Avoid Gender Bias

## Write Inclusively

Many of us learned to write in very gendered ways, where “he” stood in for any person and where “he/she,” “s/he,” or “he or she” appeared as a welcome, if somewhat clunky, move in a more inclusive direction. As we write about people in the abstract, there are better ways to avoid gender bias in our writing and in the writing we ask of students. There are a handful of great writing strategies that can help avoid gender bias.

Use plural
Use singular they
Don't use any pronouns
Use the imperative (give instructions)
Use “one”



## Assign Inclusively

Extensive research has shown that students from marginalized backgrounds feel more valued, welcome, and engaged in classes where assigned readings and assignments reflect and acknowledge their identities and experiences. When building programs, events, or syllabi consider who is included and who is left out. Are there scholars of different backgrounds whose research could be assigned, or speakers that could be invited, or participants that could be included? Doing so not only makes your work more engaging but also makes it more welcoming to everyone!

When writing handouts, tests, syllabi or writing prompts, think inclusively and be aware of any assumptions you might be making about your colleagues, students, or members of the public. Here are some helpful tips:

- Check use of terminology for gendered pronouns.
- Develop and share ground rule and expectations around classroom discussions, participation, and respecting each other.
- Include a statement about names and pronouns.
- Take a Safe Zone training through the Center for Sexuality and Gender Diversity and SILC.
- Explore the resources about creating inclusive classrooms available through the Center for Teaching Excellence.

## Singular They is OK!

Many faculty struggle with using and accepting they as a singular pronoun, particularly in student writing and assignments, in part due to grammatical rules in place when faculty were trained and habits that have been reinforced by society. However, the rules around the use of they as a singular pronoun have changed and not just conversational language or colloquially.

In 2015, the American Psychological Association [articulated its acceptance](#) of the use of they as a singular pronoun in order to be inclusive of gender diversity. By 2017, both the Chicago Manual of Style and the AP Stylebook [adopted](#) the use of they as a singular pronoun. Meanwhile, *The American Heritage Dictionary* altered its definition of they to include singular pronoun use. Major publications including *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* have also embraced the use of they in this way. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has gone so far as [to trace](#) the use of singular they all the way back to the 1370s.

In short, singular they is OK!!!

Still reluctant or concerned that allowing for singular they might somehow mask a different grammatical misunderstanding? Offer students the ability to use singular they but insist upon a footnote or citation explaining their intentions in using they. This practice allows for more inclusive language and reinforces students' grammatical understanding.

# THEY is OK!



Singular they is OK!

KU

## Gender Inclusive Teaching

Making transgender and gender non-conforming people feeling welcome in class is easy. Here are some tips for the first day of class and the entire semester:

- Do not use a roster! Just ask students to introduce themselves and their pronouns.
- Adopt inclusive language- swap out “ladies and gentlemen” for “folks” or “everyone”
- Pass around and use a seating chart that includes names and pronouns
- Include your pronouns in your e-mail and on the syllabus
- Encourage students to come to your office hours to chat about how to make them feel more welcome in class.
- Include gender non-conforming examples and texts in your class.
- Apologize when you make a mistake and correct yourself.
- Gently correct other students when they make pronoun mistakes.
- Do not ask personal questions of transgender or gender non-conforming people that you wouldn’t ask others, particularly about their bodies, medical care, sexual identity, family relationships, or name given at birth. These are all irrelevant to the classroom and are private.
- Set a tone of respect and clearly lay out expectations for the rest of the class and semester.

### Inclusivity with Blackboard and Canvas

The University of Kansas has worked with Blackboard and Canvas to ensure that transgender and gender non-conforming students are not outed when they participate in online discussion boards, etc. Students have the ability to go into the platforms and chose the name that appears in such forums. If students need support in navigating that process, please direct them to the SGD website for our click-by-click guides on updating personal identifying information. This is important information worthy of sharing on the first day and in the syllabus.



## Closing

Practicing Gender inclusivity is easy, important, and in line with who we strive to be as members of the University of Kansas community. We want everyone to feel welcome and supported. We want our working environments to be productive and collegial. We want our classrooms to be engaging and challenging. We want these attributes to apply to every single person across all of KU. Many of these changes are small, but they have a BIG impact. Beyond this guide, there are a number of resources that can help you be more gender inclusive in your everyday interactions and in working with students. We are here to help!

## Resources

<https://sgd.ku.edu/>

<http://cte.ku.edu/creating-inclusive-syllabus>







## Citations

This pamphlet drew from texts by Dean Spade, Seattle University School of Law, The LGBT Campus Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Augsburg College, and the English Language Center at Vanderbilt University as well as these publications:

Brielle Harbin, "Teaching Beyond the Gender Binary in the University Classroom," Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University, 2016.

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Oxford English Dictionary, "A Brief History of Singular They," <https://public.oed.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/>, published September 4, 2018.

Merrill Perlman, "Stylebooks Finally Embrace the Single 'They'," Columbia Journalism Review, [www.cjr.org/language\\_corner/stylebooks-single-they-ap-chicago-gender-neutral.php](http://www.cjr.org/language_corner/stylebooks-single-they-ap-chicago-gender-neutral.php), published March 27, 2017.

Chelsea Lee, "The Use of Singular "They" in APA Style," <https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2015/11/the-use-of-singular-they-in-apa-style.html>, published November 16, 2015.