

Using Appropriate Pronouns in Classes at USask

We all need to recognize and honour students for who they are and how they identify. Students are more likely to be successful in courses where they feel a sense of belonging. One important way instructors can create that for all students is to use the names and pronouns that students use for themselves. Below you will find explanations, suggested language, and resources to assist educators and staff members to create a community of belonging by using inclusive and respectful language when addressing students in class or individually.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why can't I just use she/her and he/him?

- We all want to be respected for who we are. When someone indicates their pronouns to you, you should show them respect by using the pronouns they have identified. In addition to respect, using someone's indicated pronouns helps with their overall wellness. Finally, it is illegal to discriminate based on gender identity under the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code. Intentionally misgendering people or using the wrong pronouns when someone has requested otherwise constitutes gender discrimination.

How do I create an inclusive space for students with diverse gender identities?

- If you feel comfortable doing so, when introducing yourself to the class start by offering your own name and pronouns.
- Include your pronouns in your Canvas course(s), Zoom name, email signature, and in the syllabus.
- Substitute gendered language with more inclusive language, such as “everybody”, “folks”, or “this person”, or use names.

Should I ask for my student's pronouns and if so, how?

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- Try asking: “What are your pronouns?” or “Which pronouns do you use?” or “Can you remind me which pronouns do you use for yourself?” It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- You may want to ask your students in formats exclusive to you, like a syllabus quiz; some students may feel comfortable disclosing their gender identity to you, but not the other students in the class.
- If a student discloses their pronouns to you, but they aren't comfortable with others knowing them yet, ask the student what pronouns they would like you to use in class/public.

What if I make a mistake? (We're all learning)

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- Despite our best efforts, we sometimes misgender people. As a culture, we are in the habit of assuming pronouns based on appearance. This habit can be hard to break. When you misgender someone, correct yourself, apologize, and move on. When you get defensive, apologize profusely, or try to explain the mistake it shines a spotlight on the other person, so it's more helpful to take accountability and then move on, remembering to do better next time.

What if a student in my class misgenders another student in the class?

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- If you hear other students, educators, or staff using the wrong pronouns for a student, first check in with the student to see if and how they would like you to address it. They might not want to be the object of someone else's political education. But if it becomes an ongoing problem, don't ignore it. Take the person who continues to misgender aside and have a private conversation with them, much the same way you might if they used racist or homophobic remarks. If the problem continues, you may need to include others (e.g., a department head or supervisor) in any further conversations.

How can I support a student who is facing bullying or discrimination at USask, but outside of my class?

- Students may have approached you based on their trust in you to be supportive. Support you can provide could include attentive listening and/or sharing of resources - including the [Student Affairs and Outreach](#) team, who are positioned to provide students with additional support, coaching, and guidance on all available resources including the Discrimination, Harassment and Prevention policy and the Standard of Student Conduct in Non-Academic Matters. Students can be referred directly to Student Affairs and Outreach and can be reached by email, phone, or students can meet with someone in person.
- If the student is looking for counselling support, they can contact the [Student Wellness Centre](#) which provides physical and mental health care to students.
- If the respondent is an educator or staff member, you can refer the student to [Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Services](#).
- In addition, there is an option for [Safe Disclosure Reporting](#), but anonymous reporting does not allow for the person being bullied or discriminated against to receive any needed support.

Do I need to share my pronouns?

- While there are benefits to sharing your own pronouns, including supporting students to share theirs throughout the class, you are not required to do so. If you're comfortable sharing your pronouns, you may include them in your syllabus and/or when you introduce yourself on the first day of class.

How can I begin to address the appropriate use of pronouns in my courses?

- Your syllabus can be a great place to get started. Include a section in your syllabus about respecting the pronouns of others for respect and because gender identity is a protected class under the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code.
- You may also wish to share your pronouns either in a section on pronouns or within an instructor profile or next to your name at the beginning of your syllabus.
- In addition, try to use gender-neutral terms within your teaching. For example, use "okay folks" instead of "okay guys", or "welcome students" rather than "welcome ladies and gentlemen".
- Refer to people who use they/them or other nongendered pronouns, or use they, them, and theirs when talking about specific people or authors to get comfortable and model alternate pronoun use.

What are common pronouns that are used?

This answer is modified from https://law.usask.ca/socialinnovationlab/documents/resource_pronouns.pdf and has a CC license.

Common Pronouns How to use the pronoun properly

She/her/hers	She has red hair. I haven't seen her. That jacket is hers.
He/him/his	He has brown eyes. I talked to him in class. His car is there.
They/them/theirs	They wear glasses. I met them already. That cat is theirs.
Ze/zir/zirs	Pronounced "zee," "zur," and "zears" (rhymes with she, her, hers). Ze is biking. I went with zir. The idea was zirs.
Ey/em/eirs	Pronounced "ay," "em," and "airs" (rhymes with they, them, theirs). Ey plays soccer. I'm the same age as em. Dan got eirs already.
Xe/xem/xyrx	Pronounced "zee," "zem," "zear" (rhymes with they, them, theirs) Xe is taller. Sandy is shorter than xem. Can I see xyrs?
No Pronouns	Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, in which case you can use their name in place of the pronoun. "Jay was here. Jay's dog is brown. Mine is next to Jay's."

You can't always know someone's pronouns based on the way they look, and you can't know someone's gender based on their pronouns. Remember not to make assumptions and to practice any pronouns that you find difficult. You've got this!

Useful resources

- A Pronoun Primer: https://law.usask.ca/socialinnovationlab/documents/resource_pronouns.pdf
- Diversity and Social Justice – Faculty Guide: Gender Pronouns (Open Washington): <https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/dsj2021/chapter/on-gender-pronouns/>
- Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission – How Am I Protected: <https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/your-rights/how-are-you-protected/>