

UN-GLOBE Guidance on Pronouns Use

More and more people are sharing their pronouns in various spaces, including digital, like via--social media accounts, email signatures, as well as other mediums including business cards. Sharing and using the correct pronouns are one way of promoting inclusivity in our workplaces and a start to raising awareness on gender diversity.

What are pronouns?

Pronouns include the words we use to refer to a person when not using their name. For example, third person pronouns include he/him, she/her, they/them or others.

In all of the UN's official languages and in many other languages, pronouns are gendered, which means that the pronouns refer to that person's gender.

Many of these languages also have gender neutral pronouns. In English, for example, gender-neutral pronouns can include they/them/theirs, or "ze/hir," [pronounced: zee/heer] as well as others. In French, the gender-neutral pronoun is "iel" and in Arabic. هو/لاء.

Why do we use pronouns?

One of the main reasons we use personal pronouns is to avoid repeating the person's name.

The pronouns we use can also be one way of sharing how we identify with respect to our gender, which may or may not align to the sex we are assigned at birth or our gender expression.

Using the right pronouns for people is one way we can promote an inclusive environment, demonstrate solidarity and raise awareness. It can also be gender affirming, especially for trans and non-binary colleagues. Using the right pronouns is also a way of recognising a person's right to self-identify their own gender.

It is also a way of sharing how you would like others to refer to you, so that they don't make any assumptions based on your appearance or name. This can be particularly helpful in the UN's multicultural working environments, when interacting with people from different cultures. where gender expression is very diverse.

What pronouns do I use when referring to my colleague?

When you are meeting a new person, you can initiate by sharing your own pronouns, as a way of inviting the other person to do so. "I use he/him" or "I use he/him/his pronouns." It is helpful to share pronouns even if you think you know what pronouns the other person uses based on how they look, as you may be incorrect.

Your colleague may or may not share their pronouns. If they do not, depending on the circumstances, you may want to ask, "What pronouns do you use?" If a person does not feel comfortable in sharing their pronouns, it is important not to insist they do.

Asking for their “preferred pronouns” is not correct and it implies that their gender identity is simply a preference, rather than an innate characteristic.

You can also refer to the person using gender neutral pronouns “they/them/theirs” if they have not provided other pronouns.

What if I don’t want to share my personal pronouns?

It is OK if you don’t want to share your pronouns, and you have no obligations to do so. There are many reasons why a person may not want to share their pronouns. There are also some safety considerations to take into account. For example, you may be living or working in a country where being gender diverse (i.e., trans or non-binary) is not legally or culturally accepted. You must assess your personal safety and security when sharing your pronouns in these situations.

How to use pronouns...

... in an email and on a business card:

In your email signature, you can add your pronouns after your name, like so:

Gurchaten Sandhu (*He/They*)

Or

Fred Level (*He/Him*)

Or

Amina Mohammed (*She/her*)

Or

Mohammed Rafi (*ze/hir*)

...when introducing yourself

When meeting a colleague for the first time, and introducing yourself, or other situations where you are asked to introduce yourself (such a webinar or online or in-person meeting) you can share your pronouns by simply stating them or adding a short phrase. For example “Hi, I am Gurchaten Sandhu, He/They.” Or “I’m Gurchaten and I use he/they pronouns.”

You can practice using different types of pronouns in sentences until you can use them easily.

For example:

- My colleague Gurchaten uses “he/they” pronouns. That means I can use either “he” or “they” for **him**. **They** are one of my favourite colleagues.
- My colleague Gabe uses “they/them” pronouns. **They** are great at **their** work and should be proud of **themselves**.
- My colleague Mohammed uses “ze/hir” pronouns. **Ze** does a great job every time it is **hir** turn to present in front of our boss, even when **ze** presents by **hirself**.



- My colleague Marina doesn't use any pronouns, just **Marina's** name. When I'm talking about **Marina** I use **Marina's** name in place of **Marina's** pronouns.

Practice with pronouns is a website that helps you become familiar with different sets of English pronouns: <https://www.practicewithpronouns.com/#/?k=33vexp>

For further information or questions please contact UN-GLOBE: ohrm_globe@un.org