

INCLUSIVE STYLE GUIDE: PART 1 – GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

At the University of Westminster, diversity, inclusion and equality of opportunity are at the core of how we engage with students, colleagues, applicants, visitors and all our stakeholders.

We are fully committed to enabling a supportive and safe learning and working environment which is equitable, diverse and inclusive, is based on mutual respect and trust, and in which harassment and discrimination are neither tolerated nor acceptable. It is important to appreciate that misgendering someone is as derogatory and demeaning as using racist or sexist language, none of which is consistent with the atmosphere of positive respect the University seeks to encourage.

SCOPE

This document provides summary guidance on the use of gender-inclusive language in University documents (e.g. policies, reports, meeting minutes); written communications (e.g. emails and Microsoft Teams messages); teaching and research practices, in engagements with colleagues, students (e.g. meetings, lectures and tutorials).

GETTING STARTED¹

- Individuals should be referred to by their assigned names when these differ from those they were assigned at birth.
- All formal documents should use gender-neutral pronouns.
- If you are not familiar with using gender-neutral pronouns, practice.
- For cis² people, including pronouns in your email signature line or social media bio is a way of signalling allyship, communicating kindness and usualising a practice which makes it safer for people who are not cis.
- If you are made aware of someone's pronouns, use them and respect them.
- If you are teaching a new class, check with students that your institutional registers reflect their chosen names.
- Invite participants in meetings or classes to provide pronouns (e.g. by sending you an email in advance) but don't do this in a way which might force someone to identify in a way they are not comfortable doing in public.
- If you notice that you have made a mistake with someone's pronouns, apologise quickly, make the correction and continue.
- If you notice someone using the wrong pronouns, politely correct them, even if the person they are talking about isn't there.

¹ Royal Historical Society [blog on Gender-neutral pronouns](#)

² *Cis* is short for *cisgender*, which refers to when a person's gender identity corresponds to their sex as assigned at birth

PRINCIPLES³

1. Use gender-neutral pronouns in all formal documents

When drafting or revising formal documents (such as strategies, policies, codes or procedures) include gender-neutral pronouns.

Repeat the noun (for example, “a student is entitled to an extension if the student...”); change the pronoun (for example, by using “they” or “their” in the singular: “if a colleague fails to comply with their duty...”); and/or rewrite to avoid the need for a pronoun (for example, “It is an offence for a student to...”, rather than “A student commits an offence if s/he...”)⁴.

2. Don't assume when it comes to pronouns.

If you're referring to someone before you know what pronouns they use, opt for gender-neutral pronouns (like they/them/their) or none at all (for example, by using their name), until you know more.

3. Ask about someone's pronouns or better yet share yours.

Avoid any language around preference (such as “what pronouns do you prefer?”), because correct pronouns are not really a preference, they are a requirement. To avoid any misunderstanding, lead by example and introduce your own pronouns, then give people space to optionally tell you theirs.

4. Take the lead

If you are in a position of privilege - because you are in a management role, a member of a senior committee or simply white, straight, cisgender, a man, etc. - it can be a powerful statement if you begin making change by adding your pronouns to your email signature, wearing a pronoun pin, introducing yourself with your pronouns or bringing it up in conversation as a subject of learning for you.

If they do turn out to be TGNC (trans or gender-nonconforming), make sure to get clarity around how they want to be referred to in front of co-workers, as they may not be out yet.

5. React appropriately

When someone shares their pronouns with you, avoid doubting them or debating the grammatical accuracy of its use. Thank them for sharing, share yours, and ask for clarification if you are not sure or wish to get the spelling right.

6. Be aware of other gendered language

Mind your language in general. Misuse of pronouns is only one aspect of how we misgender people or reinforce gender stereotypes in our writing. Being inclusive of everyone requires us to be mindful of the words we use and ensure that they are not intentionally or unintentionally excluding anyone. For example, use ‘Chair’ or ‘Chairperson’ rather than ‘Chairman’.

7. Correct yourself, but do not dwell

If you get it wrong, make a quick and private apology to the person you misgendered. Ask if they would like you to make a more public correction. Whatever they decide, respect their wishes and make sure that you are correct next time.

Do not make a small mistake worse by dwelling on it. Do not try to explain yourself or say how hard you are trying; just own it and move on. Addressing people how they wish to be addressed is a demonstration of respect.

8. Practice

It takes practice to stop using gendered references. Culture and habits are difficult to change. It will require a conscious effort to train yourself to use a more inclusive language in your writing and demonstrate your willingness to treat everyone with the level of respect and dignity we all deserve.

9. Find support and be accountable

Join, or create, a safe space where you and other colleagues or students can ask questions and find support as you collectively make our everyday written language more inclusive⁵.

³ Drawn from [Guide to using pronouns and other gender-inclusive language in the office](#) (themuse.com)

⁴ Adapted from the 2019 [Guide to Gender-Neutral Drafting](#) produced by the Government Legal Department

⁵ Call or email the Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Officer – [Bereket Berakhy](#) - for support if required

FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Guide to using pronouns and other gender-inclusive language in the office](#) (themuse.com)
- [Blog on Gender-neutral pronouns](#) (Royal Historical Society)
- [Guide to Gender-Neutral Drafting](#) (Government Legal Department)
- [Pronoun guide](#) (GLSEN)
- [Pronouns matter](#) (Gender and Sexuality Campus Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison)
- [LGBT+ writing: a glossary](#) (University of Bristol)
- [Gender identity for beginners: a guide to being a great trans ally](#) (Amnesty International UK)
- [Conscious style guide \(resources by characteristic\)](#)
- [The Trans Journalists Association's Style Guide \(includes a long list of terminology\)](#)
- [Gender Neutral titles](#)
- [Test yourself for bias](#)
- [Phrases that have discriminatory origin](#)
- [Test yourself for hidden bias](#)