
What the heck is a “PGP”?



Pronouns are everywhere. We use them every day in speech and in writing to take the place of people’s names. We use them without even thinking about it, but have you ever tried speaking without using any pronouns? Give it a try. Whoops, I meant to say “Give speaking *without using any pronouns* a try.” It’s not easy, is it?

Pronouns may not seem like that big a deal, but they become a bigger deal when you try to live without them. And for some people, pronouns are a big deal because other folks don’t always use the correct pronouns to describe them. A **preferred gender pronoun**, or **PGP Δ**, is simply the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about that individual.

Δ What about PGP?

There has been a shift away from the term “preferred gender pronoun” or “PGP” to using “pronoun.” This change was made because a person’s pronouns are not just preferred; they’re the pronouns that must be used. [GLSEN]

In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are: I, you, she, her, he, him, and it. “I”, “you” and “it” are what we call “gender neutral” or “all gender”, but “she”, “her”, “he” and “him” are gendered. This can create an issue for transgender and gender nonconforming people, because others may not use the pronouns they prefer when speaking to them or about them.

One way to make sure that your GSA or club is being inclusive and welcoming for transgender or other gender nonconforming people is to incorporate PGPs into your regular intro activities. If you start every meeting by having those present share their names, ask them to share their PGPs as well. For example: “My name is Jasmine, I’m a sophomore, and my PGPs are ‘she’ and ‘her’.” “Hi, I’m Diego. I’m 17, a senior, and my preferred gender pronouns are ‘he’, ‘him’, and ‘his’.”

Some people prefer that you use gender neutral or gender inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, the most commonly used singular gender neutral pronouns are **ze** (sometimes spelled **zie**) and **hir**. “Ze” is the subject pronoun and is pronounced /zee/, and “hir” is the object and possessive pronoun and is pronounced /heer/. This is how they are used: “Chris is the tallest person in class, and ze is also the fastest runner.” “Tanzen is going to Hawaii over break with hir parents. I’m so jealous of hir.”

Remember: Just like sexual orientation, a person’s gender identity can be a very personal and private thing. GSA members (or anyone, for that matter) should never feel pressured to share how they identify. If someone does choose to share, that’s great, and that information should remain confidential within the GSA unless that person has specifically said that it’s okay to talk about elsewhere.

We should also remember that the idea of PGPs and gender neutral or gender inclusive pronouns will be a new concept to a lot of folks, and that mistakes will happen. The activities on the next page will help you gain more practice using gender neutral pronouns and PGPs.

Note on updated language: This resource was updated in 2012 to reflect the growing movement to share one’s PGPs by simply listing them rather than saying “my PGPs are male” or “my PGPs are feminine,” recognizing that we can’t necessarily infer one’s PGPs simply by hearing them described as “male” or “feminine”. Could a person identify as female and also prefer he/him/his? Sure

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(Modified May 2020 – I. Glenn, Hollins University, ΔΔ)

Handy dandy list of pronouns! The list of pronouns being used in the English language is ever growing, so here is a list of the ones we know. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, and we plan to keep it updated as much as we can. If you know of a set of pronouns that should be on this list, let us know!

We should also point out that some people don't want you to use pronouns at all; they would simply prefer that you just use their name. Additionally, more and more people are using "they", "them", and "their(s)" as singular, gender inclusive pronouns, even though they have been traditionally used as plural pronouns.

SUBJECT PRONOUN	OBJECT PRONOUN	POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	REFLEXIVE PRONOUN
_____ is an activist.	I am proud of_____.	That is_____book. -or- That book is_____.	That person likes_____.
She	her	her/hers	herself
He	him	his	himself
Ze*	hir	hir/hirs	hirsself
Ze*	zir	zir/zirs	zirsself
E or Ey	em	eir/eirs	eirsself or emself
Per	per	per/pers	Perself
Hu	hum	hus/hus	Humself
They (are)**	them	their/theirs	Themselves
Name	Name	Name's/Name's	Name

**Additional alternate spellings for "ze" are "zie", "sie", "xie", and "xe."*

***When using "they" as a singular gender inclusive pronoun, you would still conjugate associated verbs as you would for the plural version, as in "they are an activist" or "they like to go shopping", not "they is an activist" or "they likes to go shopping."*

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xe - Etymology - Apparently independently invented by several people, including Don Rickter (the pronoun appeared in the Unitarian Universalist publication *UU World* on 1 May 1973 and Mario Pei gave Rickter credit on page 145 of his 1978 book *Weasel Words*).

(<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/xe>)