



University of
St Andrews

Pronoun guidance

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Diversity and inclusion should be at the heart of the St Andrews experience, and should inform all that we do. As a truly international and world-class university, our ambition is to be a beacon of inclusivity.
-University strategy

For a lot of people, a pronoun is something that can be taken for granted. However, for a growing proportion of the community, there is a heightened level of awareness of the pronoun which represents them. This guidance seeks to explain some of the concepts around pronoun use and to help you develop practice that contributes to creating an inclusive environment for all members of the St Andrews community.

When we talk about pronouns, we mean...

...the way someone refers to you. The most commonly used pronouns referencing gender identity are 'she/her/hers', usually used for women, and 'he/him/his', usually used for men. Some people will use gender neutral pronouns, which include the singular 'they/them/theirs' or 'ze/hir/hirs', and some people will use a mixture of pronouns. It is not always possible to know someone's gender identity from the pronouns they use. Using the wrong pronoun to refer to someone is one way of misgendering¹.

What do we mean when we say non-binary?

Some people feel that their gender identity cannot be simply defined by the expected binary terms of 'man' or 'woman'. Instead, they experience their gender in another way. Typically, we refer to this group of people as being 'non-binary'. The term non-binary refers to a person:

Identifying as either having a gender which is in-between or beyond the two categories 'man' and 'woman', as fluctuating between 'man' and 'woman', or as having no gender, either permanently or some of the time

How is this different to trans?

Sometimes trans is used as an umbrella term to represent all those who have a gender identity that does not match the assignment they were given at birth which will include people who identify as non-binary. For trans people who do have a binary gender identity, a trans man is a person who was assigned female at birth but has a male gender identity and therefore transitions to live fully as a man. A trans woman is a person who was assigned male at birth but has a female gender identity and therefore transitions to live fully as a woman.

How can I be more inclusive to someone who is non-binary?

There are lots of ways that you can help improve the experiences of people in the St Andrews community. The following story about Jay includes a few examples of how we can all be more inclusive.

Jay was assigned female at birth but has never really felt comfortable being identified as a woman but didn't feel like a man either. Jay learned about non-binary gender identity in the university induction training session and over the course of the next few months began to use the pronoun 'they' among friends. As the second semester approached, Jay began to think about how to tell their lecturers and tutors that they would prefer to be referred to with 'they' as their personal pronoun when they received an email from their lecturer Jonathan to all students introducing himself, specifying that he preferred he/him/his as personal pronouns and inviting students to let him know anything they felt would make them more comfortable when interacting with him and in his lectures. This could include a preferred name or pronoun, highlighting that they have caring responsibilities or that they need materials in advance. Jay

¹ Deliberate misgendering could be considered harassment under the Equality Act 2010.

was relieved to receive Jonathan’s email and wrote back to tell him they preferred ‘they/them’ pronouns and was happy for him to use they/them to address Jay around other people.

In the first tutorial of the second semester, during introductions Jay took the opportunity to include their preferred pronoun when they introduced themselves, most of the other students did the same. However, during Week 3, Jay’s friend Arvind noticed that another student had referred to Jay as ‘she’. Arvind didn’t say anything at the time but after the tutorial went to talk to Jay about it. Arvind asked Jay how they would have felt if he had told the other student that Jay preferred ‘they/them’ pronouns? Jay was grateful that Arvind had come to talk to them before taking action. In this tutorial Arvind speaking up would have been welcome but Jay felt less comfortable in one of the other tutorials and would have preferred to handle it themselves outside of the classroom.

How is the university is doing its part:

- When applying for a position at the university (staff or student) there are a selection of titles to choose including Mx and the chance to write in an alternative.
- Let us know if there is something you’d like us to change and we can do so. There are some areas where we are limited by the requirements of HMRC but check with us and we’ll do all we can.
- All Schools have a staff lead for equality, diversity and inclusion to talk to if you have any questions or need any support.

Is there anything else I can do to be more inclusive?

Jay’s story won’t include all scenarios, but the most important thing to remember is to be respectful of members of the St Andrews community. Keep the following in mind to help:

- If you’re not sure, then it’s okay to ask.
- If you make a mistake, then apologise, sincerely but don’t overdo it.
- If you want to learn more, check out the resources below before you quiz someone.

With thanks to:

Scottish Trans (<https://www.scottishtrans.org/non-binary/>)

Minorities and Philosophy (<https://www.mapforthe-gap.org.uk/>)

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