

A Guide to Inclusive Language and Pronouns

In the Gender Affirmation Guide, *gender affirmation* is used as it has become the most common and well-received term by the wider community. Alternatively, some transgender and gender diverse people may refer to their processes as “gender transition,” or “transitioning,” but these references may sometimes be considered inappropriate.

People undergoing this process may wish to use the concepts and pronouns they feel most comfortable with, and you should similarly use those same pronouns.

Some of the most common pronouns are:

Pronoun	Use in a sentence
Co/cos	Co wants to use cos pronouns
He/him/his	He wants to use his pronouns
Hy/hym/his	Hy wants to use hys pronouns
No pronoun/name	(Name) wants to use (name’s) pronouns
She/her/hers	She wants to use her pronouns
They/them/theirs	They want to use their pronouns
Xe/xem/xyr	Xe wants to use xyr pronouns
Ze/hir	Ze wants to use hir pronouns

People can communicate their pronouns to others in many ways. This can be in the form of email signatures, Zoom profiles, or directly when introducing themselves in a conversation.

If you notice that a person uses someone’s pronouns incorrectly, you can subtly mention the person’s correct pronoun:

- *I talked to him this morning.*
- *Oh yes! I sent them a message too.*

However, if you notice that someone is actively using the incorrect pronouns, mocking the other person, or is otherwise ill-willed, you can intervene if it’s safe to do so. Actively misusing someone’s pronouns could be considered unlawful discrimination.

Getting used to pronoun changes may take time, especially for people who have English as a foreign language, or whose native language doesn’t distinguish between male and female pronouns. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes when addressing someone, as this is a continuous learning process. The most important part of the process is to be respectful to others. If you make a mistake, quickly apologise and continue using the correct pronouns.

Why use gender-inclusive language?

Apart from pronouns, English is a language where nouns often make gender assumptions. To avoid unnecessary problems or awkward encounters, you can simply choose gender-neutral words. For example, words like “husband” or “wife” imply the gender of the person and can be easily replaced with words like “partner” or “spouse.” Being cognisant of gender-neutral language is a small and easy way to make people feel included.

You can find out more on the use of gender-inclusive language via this [International English Language Testing System \(IELTS\) article](#).

Using gender-inclusive language means speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, gender identity or social gender, which refers to the norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other that have been socially constructed. Given the key role of language in shaping cultural and social attitudes, using gender-inclusive language is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias. Gender-inclusive language, or gender-neutral language, is language that avoids bias toward a particular sex or social gender and therefore is less likely to convey and perpetuate gender stereotypes.

The language we use does not only reflect our culture, but also constructs it. That means that language can set expectations about how people are supposed to be. This could be evidenced through a job advertisement stating, “Barman required!” it implies they are looking for a man, not a woman. Similarly, how many men would apply to an advert asking for “waitresses”?

It is good to use words that avoid bias towards a particular sex or social gender. In the list of gender-inclusive language you can see terms such as “chairman.” This word contains the component -man. Yet, women are equally capable of holding senior positions. If you use the term chairperson, it means the same but demonstrates inclusion of all people.

In the English language, gender-biased words can be easily identified. It’s also simple to replace them with neutral language.

List of gender-inclusive words

Gendered words	Gender neutral options
Man/Woman	Person, adult
Boy/Girl	Child, children
Sister / brother	Sibling
Mother / Father	Parent
Grandma / Grandpa	Grandparent
Waiter / waitress	Server
Actor / Actress	Performer
Fireman	Firefighter
Policeman	Police officer
Maiden name	Family name
Dude	Friend, person, folk
Ladies and gentlemen	Folks, everyone
The common man	The average person
Kinsmen	Relatives
Mankind	Humankind
Stewardess	Flight attendant
Maid	Housekeeper
Husband / wife	Spouse / partner
Congressman	Legislator
Freshman	First-year student
Businessman	Businessperson
Man-made	Synthetic
Chairman	Chair, chairperson
Foreman	Foreperson
Manpower	Workforce, salesforce
Mailman	Letter carrier, postal worker

Glossary

This is a Glossary of common terms you may come across and is not intended as prescriptive or all-encompassing. Identifying with or adopting terms on this list does not invalidate one's identity.

Term	Definition
AFAB	Assigned female at birth
AMAB	Assigned male at birth
Agender	Someone who doesn't have agender identity
Androgynous	Someone who expresses a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics. Can be used for people's appearances or clothing.
Asexual	Someone who is not sexually attracted to anyone
Assigned gender	The gender that is given at birth based on external genitalia that may, or may not, match the person's future gender identification
Bisexual	Some who is attracted to both men and women
Cisgender	A person whose gender identity matches social expectations for their sex assigned at birth. This term is preferred to terms like "non-trans," "biological," or natural." Cisgender is the opposite of transgender.
Deadname	A term used by some transgender people to refer to the name they were given and known by prior to affirming their gender and/or coming out.
DSG	Diverse sexualities and genders. An umbrella term to refer to people whose sexuality and gender does not conform to heterosexuality.
FtM	Female-to-male transgender person. Sometimes identifies as a transgender man. Someone assigned the female gender at birth who identifies on the male spectrum. Genderqueer and/or nonbinary: People whose gender identity and/or gender expression falls outside the binary categories of man and woman
Gender	The characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other.
Gender Affirmation Date	The official commencement date when you ask university staff and classmates to address you in your affirming name and pronouns.
Gender dysphoria	A medical term to refer to the feeling of having a different gender identity to that assigned at birth.
Gender expression	Individual's characteristics (appearance, clothes, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions) that may be perceived as masculine, feminine, or other.
Gender euphoria	The experience of comfort, connection and celebration related to our internal sense of self and our gender. The pride of feeling and being affirmed as who we are.

Gender-fluid	Gender fluidity describes people whose gender identity is not fixed and may shift over time or depending on the situation.
Gender identity	The sense of whether someone is a man, woman, nonbinary, gender fluid, gender identifications present in other cultures, or a combination of one or more of these identities.
Gender nonconforming (GNC)	A person or action that does not conform to the heteronormative gender division of female and masculine and the expected behaviours of all of these.
Gender queer	Someone whose gender does not have a particular word in the gender spectrum
GRS	Gender Reconfiguration Surgery sometimes also known as Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS)
HRT	Hormone Replacement Therapy, a treatment consisting of taking new hormones and/or blocking the existing hormones in the body
Third Gender/Third sex	For many communities in the worlds, the binary notions of gender are extraneous. This concept is an umbrella term to group the gender identities that escape the male/female binary. Examples of these include the Hijra communities in India, the Kathoey in Thailand and the Bissu, Calabai and Calalai in Bugis societies in south Sulawesi, Indonesia.
Transphobia	Negative beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours hold against transgender populations.
Intersex	Having physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither whole female or male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male. In the past, intersex people were commonly referred as “hermaphrodite,” however, this term has become obsolete and is now considered offensive.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual. The ‘+’ holds space for the expanding and new understandings of different parts of the very diverse gender and sexual identities.
Misgendering	Addressing someone in a language that does not align with their gender identity.
MtF	Male-to-female transgender person. Sometimes known as a transgender woman. Someone assigned the male gender at birth who identifies on the female spectrum.
Mx or Mixter	A gender-neutral title. In opposition to Mr. and Ms.
Non-binary	Someone whose gender identity doesn’t conform to binary genders. They may identify with both genders simultaneously or none at the same time.

Pansexual	Someone who is attracted to people irrespective of their gender identity.
Queer	An umbrella term for people who are gender or sexuality non-conforming.
Sex	Chromosomal, gonadal and anatomical characteristics associated with biological sex.
Sexual identity	People's sexual or romantic attraction to other people.
Sistergirl	A term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders to refer to
Stealth	A term for transgender individuals who do not disclose their trans status in their public lives.
Tanner Stages	A scale of sexual maturation used in medicine to describe the stages in the development of secondary sex features.
Transgender	An umbrella term for people who identify with a diverse gender to that assigned at birth. Some people may identify as male or female. Some may identify as MtF or FtM. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders may identify as Sistergirl or Brotherboy.
Transitioning	The process of someone changing the gender identity that was assigned at birth. In some cases, this may include medical transition. The term gender affirmation is considered more proper than transitioning.
Transsexual	A controversial term used to refer to people who are perceived as wanting to undergo some form of gender affirmative surgery. Some people, on the other hand, consider it an outdated term that is insulting.