

# Preferred Gender Pronouns: A Guide for Faculty, Staff, and Allies at Michigan State

## What is a pronoun?

- A pronoun is any word that can replace a noun or noun phrase (*I, you, them*).

## What is a gender pronoun?

- Gender pronouns refer specifically to people that are being talked about (*he, she, him, his, her*).

## What is a preferred-gender pronoun (PGP)?

- A preferred-gender pronoun (PGP) is a pronoun an individual chooses to identify with and would prefer others use when talking to or about that individual.

## What kind of pronouns can be used?

- *She, her, hers* and *he, him, his*

These pronouns are most common. They are traditionally referred to as masculine or feminine pronouns, but some prefer to avoid these labels, as it may allow for unwanted stereotypes.

- *Ze/Zie/Xe* (all pronounced like “Zee”), replaces *she/he/they*

*Hir* (pronounced like “here”), replaces *her/hers/him/his/they/theirs*

These are referred to as gender-neutral pronouns

- Name preference

Some people prefer to not use pronouns, and would like their names to be used instead.



## How should I ask what someone's PGP is?

- You can simply ask “**What are your preferred pronouns?**” to an individual in private.
  - This may feel uncomfortable at first, but you do not want to say the wrong pronouns based on assumptions, and the student will most likely appreciate your effort.
- You can also ask about PGPs as part of a group exercise, which would allow you to explain to the group what a PGP is. You could say something like: “**Everyone tell your name, a fun fact about you, and your preferred pronoun. A preferred pronoun is the pronoun you like to be referred to with. For example, my preferred PGPs are she, her, and hers.**”
- When taking attendance, one method is to call roll by last name, and have students respond with their preferred name and pronouns.

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- **If you make a mistake:** That's okay! If you use the wrong pronoun, apologize, correct it, and then move on. Avoid continually talking about how bad you feel for making the mistake, for it makes the person feel like they need to console you. If you forget someone's PGP, follow the same protocol: **apologize, correct it, and move on.**
- If other students or faculty are using the wrong pronoun for a person, try to correct it by saying something like "Actually, Alex prefers the pronoun *she*."
  - If students or faculty continue to use the wrong pronoun, do not ignore it. It might help to ask the individual who has been misidentified if they would like you to take the person aside and remind them of the proper pronoun. Steps like this let the person know you are an ally.
- **Never** refer to a person as "it" or "he-she," unless the individual requests that you do so.

## What should I do if I don't know what gender someone identifies with?

- Depending on one's preferred gender pronouns, you can often determine a person's gender identity. If you are still unsure of one's gender identity, however, you can again be straightforward and ask the person which gender they identify themselves with.

## Why is it important to respect PGPs as faculty staff members, or allies?

- You can't always tell someone's PGP by looking at a person.
- Faculty and Staff are often in positions of power, so by respecting one's PGP consistently, you set an example for peers and other students.
- When someone is referred to by the wrong pronoun, it can make the person feel disrespected and alienated.
- Inquiring about PGPs is a simple way to show that you want to cultivate an environment that respects all gender identities.

To learn more about Preferred Gender Pronouns at Michigan State University, contact the LBGT Resource Center  
Phone: 517-353-9520  
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