



# Understanding Pronouns

Writing Support Desk

[writingsupport@uwindsor.ca](mailto:writingsupport@uwindsor.ca)



University  
of Windsor

# WHAT IS INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

- Language that does not exclude or other individuals or groups
- Language that does not perpetuate discrimination or stereotypes
- Language that strives for equity & to avoid harm



# WHY USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

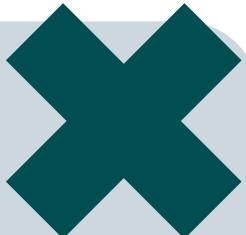
- Language is powerful. It not only describes but can perpetuate and create our realities.
- Respect for others is paramount. Inclusive language demonstrates respect.
- UWindsor is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion.



# LANGUAGE & GENDER

- Much commonly used language is gendered, even if we do not notice
- Using gendered terms and language can exclude people
- Use gender-neutral terminology to be inclusive

AVOID



mankind

spokesman

ladies and gentlemen

guys

USE

humankind

spokesperson

distinguished guests

people, friends, folks, all

# GENDER IDENTITY

- Is distinct from sexual orientation
- Is each individual's sense of their own gender
- Exists on a continuum, not as a binary of male/female
- Language should be inclusive of cis, trans, non-binary, Two-Spirit, gender-non-conforming, and all gender-expansive people.



# PRONOUNS, TITLES, & GENDER

- Singular “they” is grammatically correct when the gender of the subject is unknown or the subject uses they/them pronouns
- Pluralizing can also help keep phrases gender neutral
- Dr. is a gender-neutral honourific for anyone with a doctorate
- Do not assume someone’s gender/pronouns/honourific

AVOID



his/her

each student should choose his classes

Ma’am, Sir, Mr., Mrs., Ms.  
(when gender is assumed/unknown)

USE



their

each student should choose their classes  
OR students should choose their classes

Dr. (when applicable)  
or ask for the appropriate honourific

# PRONOUNS, TITLES, & GENDER

- Always use the correct pronouns identified by an individual. Be aware that they may use neo-pronouns (ex. xe/xem/xyr) or gender-neutral pronouns (they/them)
- In research, avoid providing only binary options for participants to declare gender or pronouns

AVOID



Select gender: male or female

Select pronouns:  
he/him, she/her, or they/them

USE



Write in your gender

Write in your pronouns

# Quick Tips

- If you are meeting someone for the first time and do not know their pronouns, ask them.
- Focus on communicating clearly and respectfully.
- It is okay to make mistakes when you misgender someone, as long as you apologize and correct yourself.

# QUESTIONS?

Remember, this slideshow and many others are available to download via the Writing Support Brightspace page.

Students can self-enroll as 'learners' either by selecting 'Discover' from the Brightspace landing page and clicking 'Enroll' on the Writing Support organization.