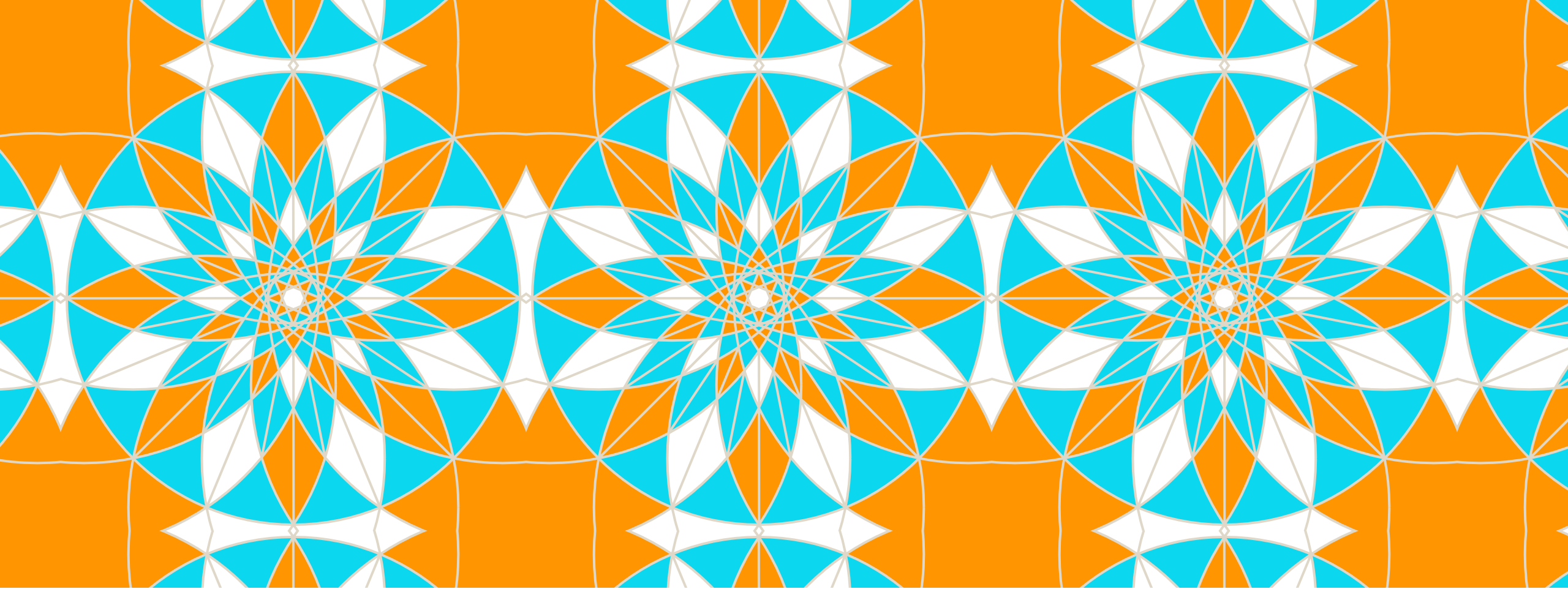


# **GENDER DIVERSITY IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

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# OVERVIEW

- Introduction to Gender
- Terminology

# WHY IS THIS OUR TOPIC TODAY?

- ❖ ODI + A&S Initiatives

<https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/resources/resources-diverse-populations/lgbtqia-resources/guidelines-inclusion-relating-gender>

- ❖ Specific Guidance for Language Instructors in the Language Classroom

- ❖ It's Just the Right Thing<sup>©</sup>

# IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY

1. **Biological Sex:** The sex assigned to a child at birth, most often based on the child's external anatomy and/or hormones/chromosomes; also referred to as "assigned sex at birth"
2. **Gender Identity:** One's innermost concept of self; ex. female, male, a blend of both, sometimes one, sometimes the other, neither – in short, how individuals **perceive themselves**; can be the same as sex assigned at birth (cisgender) or different (transgender/genderqueer; terms may vary)
3. **Gender Expression:** External performance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, etc. and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine
4. **Sexual Orientation**
  - a. Sexual Attraction: the gender(s) a person finds themselves attracted to sexually, and the degree to which they are interested in sexual intercourse
  - b. Romantic Attraction: the gender(s) a person finds themselves attracted to romantically and the degree to which they are interested in romantic relationships

Definitions adapted from Human Rights Campaign <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

# WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY?

## Gender identity *is*...

- ❖ Personal, flexible, and subject to change over time
- ❖ Something you *do*, not something you *are*
- ❖ Separate from biological sex
  - ❖ Biological sex can also vary widely, but that is a conversation for another day

## Gender identity is *not*...

- ❖ Fixed for life or “set in stone”
- ❖ Predetermined by a medical professional, your family, or society
- ❖ Related to what body parts, hormones, or chromosomes you do or don’t have

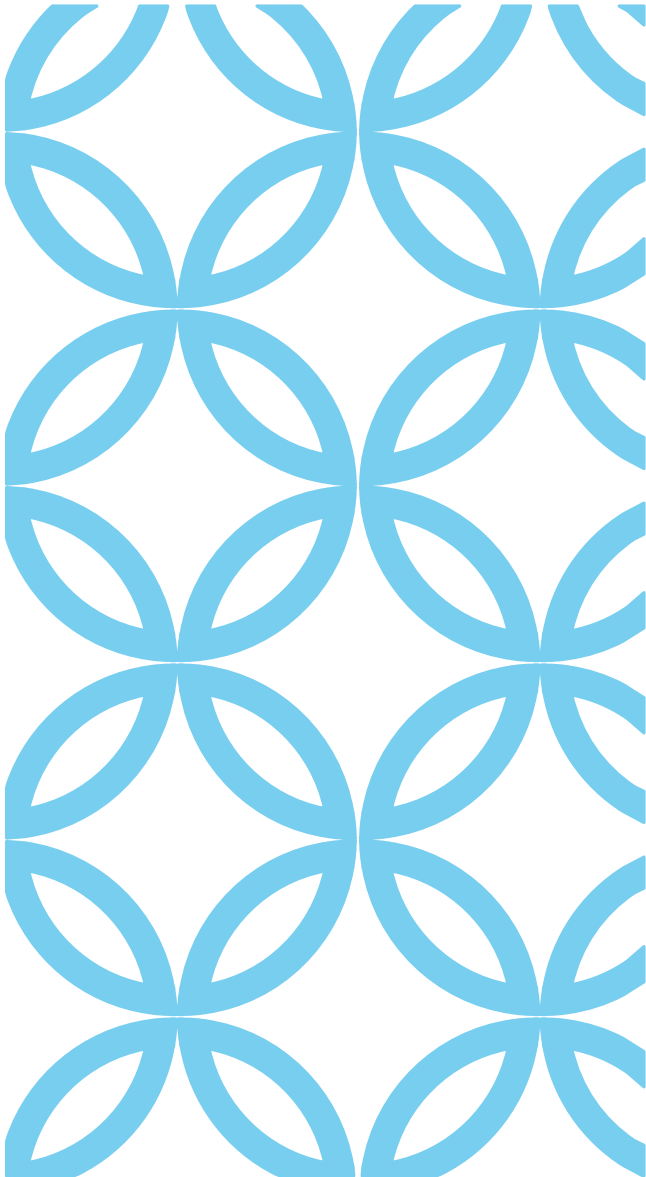
# TRANSGENDER AND NON-BINARY GENDER IDENTITIES

## Transgender

- ❖ Umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on sex assigned at birth
- ❖ Identifying as trans does not imply an intent to medically transition
- ❖ Trans people may still identify within the traditional gender binary, i.e. transitioning from female to male, **or** outside the gender binary altogether!

## Non-Binary/Genderqueer

- ❖ Adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as masculine or feminine
- ❖ Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories
- ❖ While many non-binary people identify as transgender, not all do



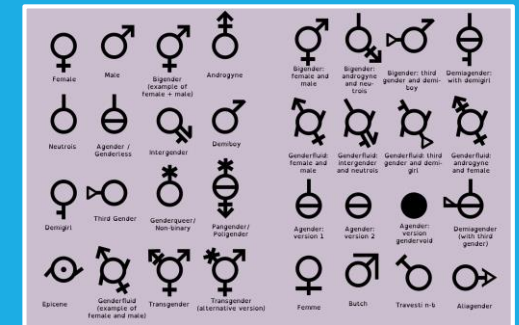
❖ I will divide you into groups of 3-5

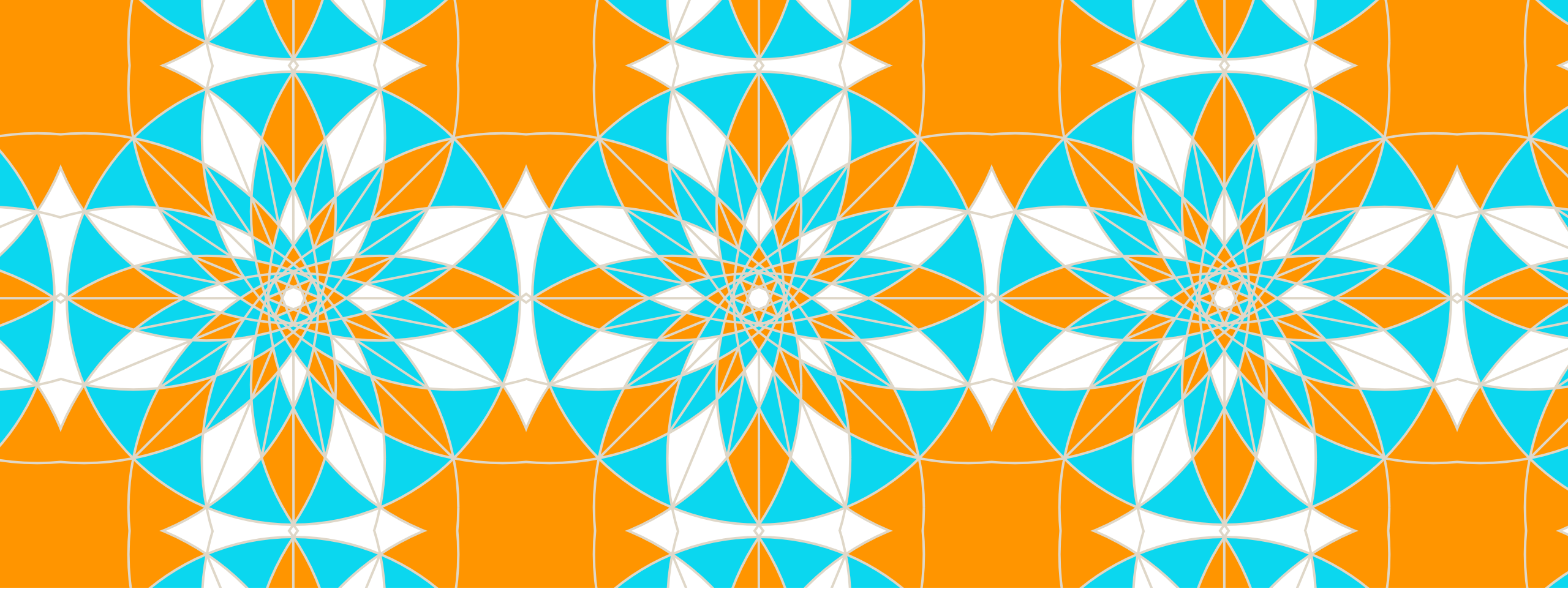
❖ In your groups, think through the following prompt together:

You are a student at Pitt on your way to your first class. How many times does your gender identity affect your morning between waking up and reaching your first class?

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## GROUP ACTIVITY





# GENDER SENSITIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

- Day One Best Practices
- Quick Tips
- Common Challenges and Advice
- Resources and Syllabi Statements



# DAY ONE BEST PRACTICES

- ❖ Many instructors ask students to provide some basic information about themselves on the first day already
- ❖ Let your students provide a name you would like to call them in class and pronouns they would like you to use in class (these may differ from what they ask you to use in private)
- ❖ **Do not** force students to share their pronouns aloud in class if you have students go around to introduce themselves
- ❖ Let students know that they can change their preferred name in PeopleSoft!

## MSA 1/Levantine Arabic 1 *Student Info*

1.) What name would you like to be called in class? What pronouns would you like me to use in class?

2.) Where are you from?

3.) What is your (intended) major? (Minor? Certificate?)

Major: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Minor: \_\_\_\_\_)  
(Cert.: \_\_\_\_\_)

4.) Do you have any prior experience with the Arabic language? Check all that apply.

- ☐ High School Classes
- ☐ College/University (non-Pitt)
- ☐ Immersion Program/Study Abroad
- ☐ Heritage Learner (Family Background)
- ☐ Independent Study



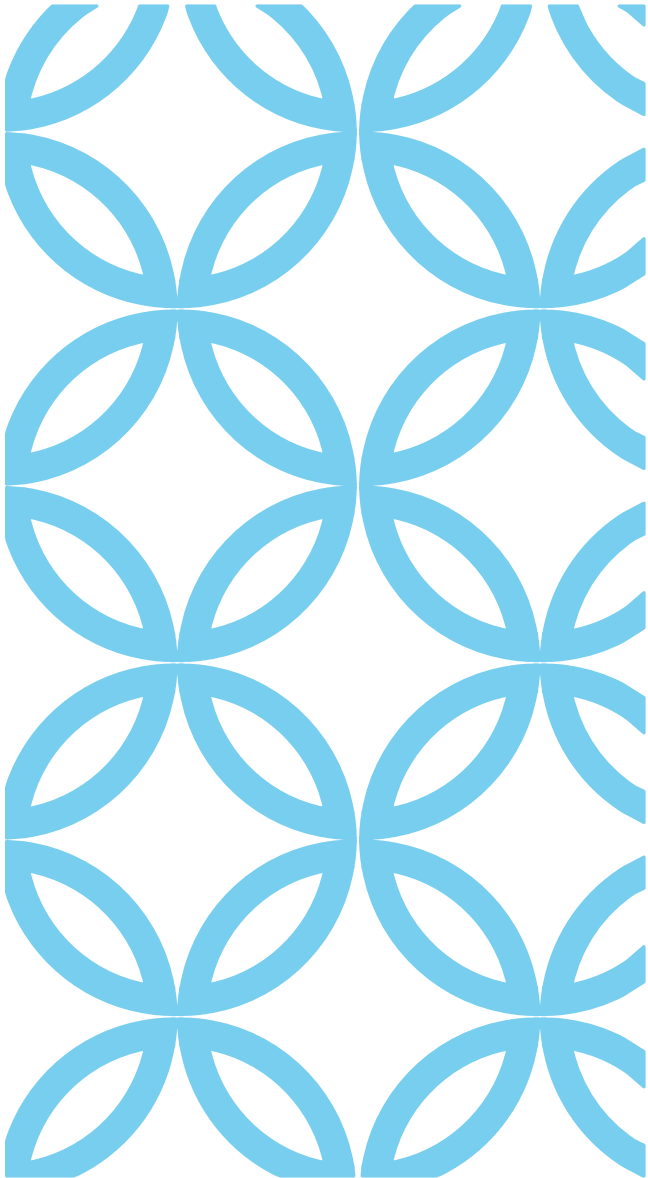
# QUICK TIPS

## Instead of:

- ❖ Assuming what name and pronouns to use for your students
- ❖ Writing “he or she” or “his/her” in syllabi and class activities that are provided in English
- ❖ Using “hey guys” or “ladies and gentlemen” or their equivalents
- ❖ Asking students to “work with someone of the opposite gender”
- ❖ Using pink and blue for grammatically masculine and feminine objects

## Try:

- ❖ Asking your students on the first day what pronouns they would like you to use with them
- ❖ Using the singular “they” or its equivalent in your language, when possible
- ❖ Use “hey everyone” or “hey folks” or an equivalent in your language
- ❖ Asking students to “work with someone of a **different** gender (than your own)”
- ❖ Using arbitrary colors for grammatical gender, like purple and green; orange and blue; vermillion, ivory, and azure



- ❖ Take a few minutes to go through your syllabi and your activity and underline any and all occurrences of gendered language (ex. “she,” “he,” “s/he,” “his or her,” etc.)
- ❖ Keep count of how many times gendered language occurs in these documents, including any times you use gendered colors
- ❖ You do not need to share this number with anyone, but please take a moment to yourself to reflect on it

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## SOLO ACTIVITY

# COMMON CHALLENGES AND ADVICE 1

## Challenge

❖ My language or culture doesn't allow for gender neutrality in all cases

## Advice

- ❖ Look to how people **in your language community** express their identities: chances are there are people having these conversations, but it's up to you to listen
- ❖ You don't have to have *an answer*, just be sympathetic, willing to engage, and ready to help your learners find ways to express themselves safely in the language they are learning
- ❖ Example:  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/arab-tunisia-move-immigration-canada-language-in-arabic-to-describe-being-transgender-qtipoc-a7909951.html>

# COMMON CHALLENGES AND ADVICE 2

## Challenge

❖ Some pronoun changes don't make grammatical sense (i.e. singular they pronoun usage)

## Advice

- ❖ Grammar is fundamentally changeable and does indeed change over time on its own
- ❖ **Descriptive grammar** is based on how people actually *use* language in reality, not attitudes about how language *should* be used
- ❖ Grammar can also be *officially* changed
- ❖ Example: the overt addition of a gender-neutral pronoun 'hen' into Swedish

# COMMON CHALLENGES AND ADVICE 3

## Challenge

❖ I feel uncomfortable talking about gender identity with people when I'm afraid I might offend them by accident

## Advice

- ❖ Most importantly, people will appreciate **kindness** and **effort** above all else
- ❖ It is better to try, make a mistake, and **apologize** than to avoid the issue entirely and let it become a bigger problem
- ❖ Everyone makes mistakes: I have, you are going to, and you will learn and be better for it

# GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

“Aspiring to create a learning environment in which people of **all identities** are encouraged to contribute their perspectives to academic discourse, the University of Pittsburgh Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program provides guidelines and resources regarding gender-inclusive/non-sexist language ([gsws.pitt.edu/node/1432](https://gsws.pitt.edu/node/1432)). Following these guidelines fosters an inclusive and welcoming environment, strengthens academic writing, enriches discussion, and reflects best professional practices.

Language is gender-inclusive and non-sexist when we use words that **affirm and respect how people describe, express, and experience their gender**. Gender-inclusive/non-sexist language acknowledges people of **any** gender (e.g. first-year student versus freshman, chair versus chairman, humankind versus mankind). It also affirms **non-binary gender identifications**, and recognizes the difference between **biological sex** and **gender expression**. Students may share their preferred pronouns and names, and these gender identities and gender expressions should be honored.

These guidelines fulfill the best intentions of the University of Pittsburgh’s Non-Discrimination Policy: <https://www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/07/07-01-03.html>.”

<http://www.gsws.pitt.edu/faculty/gender-inclusivenon-sexist-language-syllabi-statement>

# RESOURCES

## Gender-Inclusive Guidelines

- Expands on the contents of this presentation and provides even more recommended resources and further reading
- Prepared by Dr. Julie Beaulieu, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, University of Pittsburgh, and Dr. Scott Kiesling, Department of Linguistics, University of Pittsburgh

## The Educator's Playbook: Respecting Pronouns in the Classroom

- Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, this is an excellent, quick reference to look at from time to time

## **“Nanette” by Hannah Gadsby**

- One-hour comedy special available on Netflix that explores the difficulties of being an “incorrectly gendered” person

## **Suggested Statements for Syllabi**

- Gender-Inclusive/Non-Sexist Language Syllabi Statement
- Suggested Syllabus Statement: Sexual Misconduct, Required Reporting, and Title IX