

Bard College Pronoun FAQ

Bard College is committed to fostering and maintaining an inclusive and safe community in which all gender identities and expressions are valued and validated. To create a gender-inclusive environment for faculty, staff, students, and visitors, Bard College encourages all members of the campus community to indicate the pronouns they use for themselves, if desired, in classes, residence halls, workplaces, electronic communications, and other settings, and strongly encourages community members to respect pronoun usage. This FAQ is to help community members educate themselves so that we can grow and evolve as a community.

What is gender identity?

Gender identity is an individual's internal sense of gender, which may or may not be same as the sex or gender assigned to them at birth or on their legal documents.

What is a pronoun?

A pronoun is a word used to refer to an individual or group instead of using their name (grammatically speaking, pronouns are used as a substitute for a noun or a noun phrase). Pronouns can be in the first person singular (I, me) or plural (we, us); second person singular or plural (you); and the third person singular (e.g., she/her, he/him, they/them, ze/hir) or plural (they/them). Some people go by just one set of pronouns, others use more than one set.

Here is a list of some common pronouns, but it's not exhaustive, so always be sure to ask about someone's pronouns!

they	them	their	theirs	themselves
she/he	her/him	her/his	hers/his	herself/himself
ze	hir (pronounced "here")	hir	hirs	hirself
ze	zim	zir	zirs	zirsself

What are gendered pronouns?

Gendered pronouns specifically reference someone's gender: he/him/his or she/her/hers.

What are non-gendered or non-binary pronouns?

Non-gendered or non-binary pronouns are not gender specific and are often used by people who identify outside of the gender binary (the gender binary is a social system that provides only two genders and requires everyone to be raised as a man or a woman, depending on the sex assigned to them at birth). The most common set of non-binary pronouns is they/them/their used in singular. You may have heard these referred to as "gender-neutral" pronouns, but that's not always an accurate term because many gender-nonconforming people see themselves as having a gender.

What about “it” and “he-she?”

The terms “it” or “he-she” are offensive and harmful slurs that devalue the humanity of transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming individuals.

Why should I be asking people what pronouns they use?

It is important to ask for pronouns because you cannot assume how someone identifies their gender based on their appearance. Using the wrong pronouns for someone may lead them to feel disrespected, invalidated, and marginalized. Everyone has pronouns – not just trans, non-binary, and non-conforming people – and asking about pronouns is important to avoid misgendering someone and so that trans, non-binary, and non-conforming individuals are not the only ones who need to share their pronouns.

What is the best way to ask someone about their pronouns?

You can simply ask, “What pronouns do you use?” or “What pronouns should I be using for you?” Asking for pronouns may feel awkward at first, but it’s important to avoid misgendering people. When asking someone for their pronouns, don’t ask them what their “preferred pronouns” are because pronouns are not a preference, but an important aspect of someone’s gender identity. The pronouns that someone uses are *their* pronouns and the only ones that should be used for them.

What if I don’t know someone’s gender pronouns and don’t have the opportunity to ask before using a pronoun to reference them?

When you don’t know someone’s gender pronouns, use non-binary pronouns such as “they/them.”

What if I make a mistake?

Everyone slips up from time to time, but it’s important to correct yourself quickly and/or graciously accept correction from others, and move on. If you use the wrong pronoun for someone, you can say something like, “Sorry, I meant they,” and continue your conversation.

If I ask someone their pronouns once, is that enough?

No, the best practice is to ask regularly because gender identity is not always fixed and static, and some people may change their pronouns.

What if I hear others making a mistake?

If you are able to gently correct the person who made the mistake without further embarrassing the individual who was misgendered, you should do so. You can say something like, “Actually, Jordan uses ‘they’ for themselves.” However, you should be mindful of the dynamics of the specific situation and be careful not to further exacerbate any misgendering.

Resources on How to Use, Ask, and Share Pronouns

- “Resources on Personal Pronouns”: www.mypronouns.org
- “Practice with Pronouns”: www.practicewithpronouns.com

Suggestions for Faculty

Faculty may use various methods to provide students with the ability to indicate their pronouns, including:

- Asking students to introduce themselves by giving their name and the pronouns they use for themselves
- Requesting that students turn in a sheet of paper that indicates the name and pronouns they use for themselves

However a faculty member may choose to learn the gender pronouns used by their students, it is a good practice to note them on the class roster for future reference.

In large classes, faculty may be unable to learn every student's name and pronouns. In these scenarios, the most inclusive practice would be to simply avoid referring to students with gendered pronouns. For example, if a faculty member wants to acknowledge something that a student has said, the instructor may refer to the person using "they" ("as they said...") or by gesturing to the student and using "you" ("as you said..."). A faculty member may also elect to avoid calling on students by gender. For example, instead of calling on "the man by the window" to ask or answer a question, an instructor can call on "the person in the blue t-shirt by the window."

Faculty members may choose to have a name and pronoun policy on their syllabi, such as the following:

***Name and Pronouns:** Everyone has the right to be addressed and referred to by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity, including the use of non-binary pronouns. Class rosters have student's legal first name, unless they have entered a preferred/chosen name on BIP/Banner. Pronouns are not included on rosters, so students will be asked to indicate the pronouns that they use for themselves whenever they are asked to share their names (however, a student is not obligated to provide their pronouns). A student's chosen name and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom.*

Suggestions for All Bard Meetings

In meetings and groups of any cohort – faculty, staff, students, and/or visitors – it's important to offer pronouns during introductions. When introducing yourself in any group setting, say something like "I'm Nola and I use she/her/hers pronouns."

When addressing a group, avoid using gender binary language such as "ladies and gentleman," "boys and girls." Instead use "everybody," "folks," or "all people."

*This FAQ has been adapted in part from *UMass Amherst Pronoun FAQ*.