Pronouns at Work

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What are pronouns?

Pronouns – A word that refers to someone or something that is being talked about (like "she", "them", "this" and "it").

Gender pronouns (e.g. "she/her", "he/him" and "they/them") are the way that we constantly refer to one another's gender identity. We may assume a person's gender based on their name, appearance, voice, and/or expression, and "assign" a pronoun, but this may not always be correct.

Why are pronouns important?

A person's identity is very important to them. Being misidentified (accidentally or on purpose) is uncomfortable for all parties and can be offensive (and can be a form of harassment).

For a university, with many Doctor and Professor titles, identifying pronouns is made more difficult. Uncommon, reversed formatting or unisex names may also lead to mistakes being made.

What if I do not know which pronoun to use?

Just ask, never assume! "They" can and should be used to refer to an individual who doesn't identify with gender-specific pronouns, and can also be used to refer to an individual whose gender identity is not known.

Other gender-neutral language such as "colleagues", "students", "team members", "participants", "people" etc. should also be used generically.

Gendered terms such as ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls etc should be avoided.

Is "they" not a plural pronoun?

It is a common misconception that this usage is new and ungrammatical; in fact, it has precedence dating back to the 1300s and is recognised by the [Oxford English Dictionary](#).

It may also be already used commonly: e.g. "someone has left their coat behind".

What if I make a mistake?

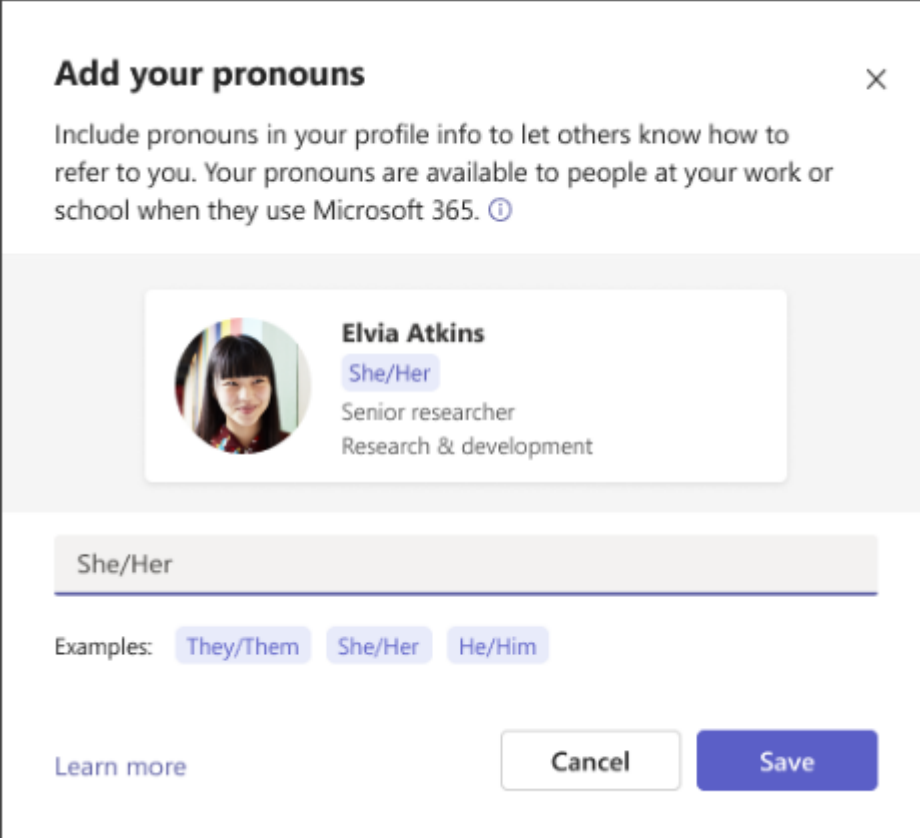Nobody will mind an honest mistake. Just apologise, correct yourself and try not to do it again.

What can I do to help?

Many colleagues have added their pronouns to their email signatures. This is a simple and visible way to show your awareness of the importance of using the correct pronouns and to show your support. It is something everybody can do. You can do it too - a suggested format is in the Appendix: example email signature.

Use gender-neutral language and terms and help others to do so too.

Can I update my pronouns on Teams/Outlook?

Yes! The latest release of Teams/Outlook/Microsoft 365 includes pronouns on your profile card (hover over a user's profile picture to view).

For further details and instructions on how to add them to your own profile, please visit: Pronouns on your profile in Microsoft 365 - Microsoft Support, Frequently asked questions about pronouns in Microsoft 365 - Microsoft Support and Pronouns best practices - Microsoft Support.

Resulting view for other users:
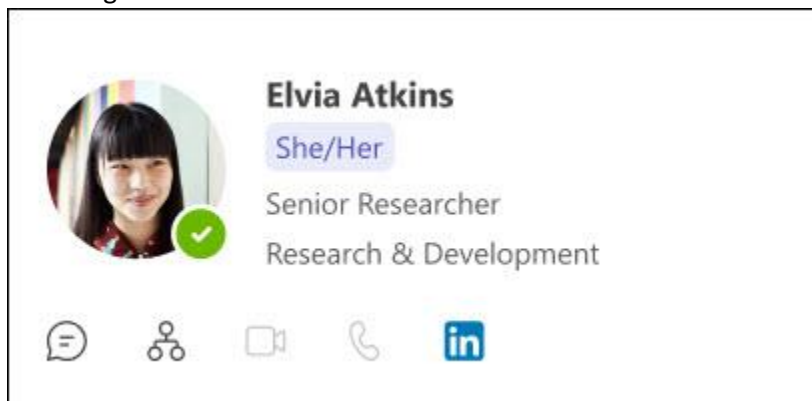
Can I update my pronouns on Zoom?

Customize your profile to include your pronouns and choose when to share them during a meeting or webinar.

1. Sign-in to the Zoom web portal.
2. In the navigation panel, click **Profile**.
3. On the right side of your name, click **Edit**.
4. In the **Pronouns** field, enter your pronouns.
5. In the **How would you like to share your pronouns?** drop-down field, choose from the following options:
   - **Always share in meetings and webinars:** Your pronouns will appear next to your display name automatically in any meetings that you host or join, and any webinars that you're the host or panellist for.
   - **Ask me every time after joining meetings and webinars:** You will be asked if you want your pronouns to appear next to your display name in every meeting that you host or join, and any webinars that you're the host or panellist for.
   - **Do not share in meetings and webinars:** Your pronouns will not appear next to your display name in any meetings or webinars. You will have to manually choose to share your pronouns.
   - **Note**: Even if you choose not to share your pronouns in meetings or webinars, your pronouns will still appear in your profile card and be visible to your Zoom contacts if you have entered them in the **Pronouns** field.
6. Click **Save**.

How to share and un-share your pronouns in a zoom meeting

At any point during a meeting or webinar, you can choose if you want to share or un-share your pronouns.
Note: If selected, your pronouns can be shared in any meeting that you host or join. Only webinar hosts and panellists can share their pronouns in a webinar. Webinar attendees' pronouns are never visible.

Sharing your pronouns when prompted

If you selected "Ask me every time after joining meetings and webinars" in the Zoom web portal, you will be asked if you want to share your pronouns and must confirm in each meeting that you host or join, or webinar that you're the host or panellist for.

1. Start or join a meeting, start a webinar as the host, or join a webinar as a panellist.
2. In the main meeting/webinar screen, a prompt will appear and give you the options **Don't Share** and **Share**.
3. When prompted if you'd like to share your pronouns in the meeting or webinar, click **Share**. Your pronouns will appear next to your display name in your participant video or thumbnail and next to your display name in the **Participants** list.

Where can I find further guidance?

- Visit the University of Exeter [Style Guide](#).
- Visit the Human Rights Campaign [Website](#), where you can download their "[Talking About Pronouns in the Workplace](#)" guide.

Appendix: example email signature

Note the word pronouns links to this guidance in the template.

Name
Pronouns: she/her
Job Title
University of Exeter

Telephone number
exeter.ac.uk
Building name, Address line 1, Address line 2, City, County, Postcode

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Social media links

If you would like to have links to your social media channels (ie Facebook, Twitter etc...) we suggest having these as hyperlinks that display below your contact details and above the disclaimer. You can find links to all of the University's social media pages here.