

## Personal Pronouns and Gender Inclusivity in the Classroom

### What is a preferred name?

A preferred first name is a name that you commonly use that is different from your legal first name.

### What are personal ('preferred') pronouns?

A **personal pronoun** is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for themselves. You may have heard of this referred to as a 'preferred gender pronoun' (PGP). However, there are good reasons to avoid the term 'preferred' pronoun (that you can read more about in [this blog](#)) so within this guide it will be referred to as **personal pronoun**.

### What are common personal pronouns?

She/her/hers and he/him/his are commonly used gendered pronouns. They/them/their are gender-neutral pronouns commonly used along with a few others. Please refer to the table below for common personal pronouns and how they might be used. Pronouns are listed in the table in the following order: subjective, objective, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, and reflexive.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
He	Him	His	His	Himself
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves
Ze	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
Ze	Zim	Zir	Zirs	Zirself
Ze	Zir	Zir	Zirs	Zirself
Ey	Em	Eir	Eirs	Eirself
Per	Per	Per	Pers	Perself
Some individuals prefer to be called only by their name and not by any pronouns.				

### How do I know what pronouns to use?

Do not assume that you can correctly guess someone's personal pronouns by merely looking at them. It may be best to ask. If you are communicating with a student one-on-one or in a small group you can try the following:

- Introduce yourself and share your pronouns before asking the same in return
- "What pronouns do you use?"
- "How should I refer to you?"

What are some strategies that can be implemented to create a gender inclusive classroom environment?

- Set a respectful tone in the classroom by establishing guidelines for the classroom on the first day. Tell students that “it is important to have a respectful environment in which everyone can feel comfortable to fully participate and this includes referring to students by their preferred names and personal pronouns.”
- Making a practice of letting students introduce themselves. Or at least allow students to indicate the name they would like to be called, either aloud or in writing, on the first day of class, before reading the class roster aloud.
- Offering your name and pronouns when introducing yourself, even to familiar colleagues and students.
- Including your gender pronouns in your email signature and syllabus.
- Asking students their names and pronouns rather than making assumptions from the class roster or their gender presentation.
- Referring to students by their requested names and pronouns both inside and outside of the classroom.
- Substituting gender binary language for more inclusive language such as “everybody”, “folks” or “this person.”
- Respecting students’ privacy and only sharing their gender identities after receiving their consent.
- Apologizing when you make a mistake and misgender someone.
- Correct others if they make a mistake to show your respect for inclusive language.

(References for above list: Harbin 2016 & “Designating Personal Pronouns and Moving Towards Gender Inclusive Classrooms”)

See also this [Pronoun Etiquette sheet](#) by David Spade to guide through how to be polite in situations in which you misidentify someone’s personal pronouns (Spade 2011).

Why is it important that you respect and use your students’ personal pronouns?

Teachers play an important role for setting the tone of the class and creating an inclusive learning environment for all students. Some common classroom practices might reinforce inequities that negatively affect students from underrepresented backgrounds. You should set an example for your class and play an active role in using inclusive gender language in your classroom. Referring to someone with the wrong pronoun can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, and/or alienated. Respecting non-conforming gender pronoun requests is important for the promotion of success for all learners in your classroom. We must treat all students with respect and embrace diversity in our teaching practices to promote equitable learning.

Other resources:

[KU’s Name Change Policy](#)

[KU’s Institutional Opportunity and Access Policy](#)

[Faculty Focus article on “Supporting Transgender Students in the Classroom”](#)

References:

“Designating Personal Pronouns and Moving Towards Gender Inclusive Classrooms.” Center for Research on Learning and Teaching. University of Michigan. 26 October 2016.

<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/blog/designating-personal-pronouns-and-moving-toward-gender-inclusive-classrooms> Accessed 28 November 2017

Harbin, Brielle. “Teaching Beyond the Gender Binary in the University Classroom.” Center for Teaching. Vanderbilt University. 24 February 2016. <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-beyond-the-gender-binary-in-the-university-classroom/> Accessed 28 November 2017

Spade, Dean. 2011. “Some Very Basic Tips for Making Higher Education More Accessible to Trans Students and Rethinking How We Talk about Gendered Bodies.” *Radical Teacher* (92): 57–62.