

Toolkit: Pronouns and Gendered Language

Pronouns

He/him/his and she/her/hers are gendered pronouns. It should not be taken as certain that someone uses a gendered pronoun, unless they have specified so (for example, it might appear in their Twitter bio). When referring to someone for whom you do not have pronoun confirmation, they/them/their is the best practice for a gender-neutral pronoun.

There are numerous additional gender-neutral pronouns available, including xe/xem/xirs, ey/em/eir and zie/zir/zis. These are best used only upon specific request. When in doubt, use they/them/their.

Gendered Language

Using gendered language in English, particularly for salutations, is a hard habit to break, but it's worth trying. Common gendered phrases to avoid: "hey guys", "ladies and gentlemen", "dudes", "boys and girls" etc.

Some suggested alternatives are "y'all", "folks", "everyone", and "friends".

When greeting others

Avoid:

ladies gentlemen ma'am sir girls guys etc.

Consider using instead:

"Thanks, **friends**.
Have a great
night."

"Good morning,
folks!"

"Hi, **everyone!**"

"And for **you?**"

"Can I get
you **all**
something?"

Why?

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

Be mindful of language

Based on Toni Latour's "Hello there" cards.

Learn more at qmunity.ca

Further Resources

GLSEN.ORG: Pronouns & Gender Terminology

qmunity.ca: Gender-Neutral Language & Queer Glossary

The 519: Gender-Neutral Pronouns & Media Reference Guide to Trans & Gender Diverse People

Anti-Defamation League: Gender Bias in Language & Resource Library