



# Use of Pronouns in External Communications

## Background

Historically we have used gendered pronouns such as he/him/his or she/her/hers when referring to individuals in third person.

Although this language has been commonplace, it is not inclusive. There are many individuals who identify as non-binary, gender nonconforming, and/or genderqueer, which means they do not identify as either exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine. People who do not use he/him/she/her pronouns will likely feel excluded when reading materials published by the State of Washington if gendered pronouns are used.

It has become more appropriate to use the pronouns they/them/theirs when referring to a third party, as these pronouns make no assumption about the gender of the intended audience.

## Communicating with the Public via Email

When state employees communicate with individuals, they often rely on names and/or voice to determine which pronouns they should use. Names and voice may provide clues about an individual's gender, but they also may not. This gray area could cause state employees to misgender, or use the wrong pronouns, when providing services. Misgendering can be especially harmful for trans, non-binary, and/or genderqueer individuals. If a state worker reaches out to someone via e-mail and they have their pronouns on their signature line, space is created for individuals to share how they would like to be addressed.

## Recommendation

The RAIN Best Practices Subcommittee recommends state agencies use non-gendered pronouns and non-gendered language in place of gendered pronouns and gendered language in external communications and when creating public facing web content.

## Examples

- Use the prefix Mx. or the person's name instead of Mr./Mrs./Ms.
- Job Applications: Create a space for applicants to include their pronouns.
- Encourage those who feel comfortable to include their pronouns in their e-mail signature line.

## Moving Forward

The Best Practices subcommittee recognizes that this change will take time to implement. While it would be ideal to revisit previous content and update existing public communications, we understand it is more feasible to focus on ensuring new content created and published follows this practice.



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## Humanizing the Experience

Using correct pronouns for individuals is a way to show that Washington State wants employees to bring their authentic selves to work. There are many reasons why a person may or may not want to share pronouns. Identity work is a process, and while some people might feel very comfortable identifying and sharing their pronouns, there are also individuals who may not have found pronouns that feel like a good fit or who may be more gender fluid. The important thing is to create an environment that gives employees the opportunity to share if they feel comfortable.

## Recommendation

The RAIN Best Practices Subcommittee recommends state agencies use non-gendered pronouns and non-gendered language in place of gendered pronouns and gendered language in internal communications and when creating internal web content.

## Examples

- Replace the pronouns he/him and she/her with they/them/theirs.
- Replace words or phrases such as “sons and daughters” or “ladies and gentlemen”, with “employees”, “children”, “people”, “everyone”, or “person”.
- Encourage those who feel comfortable to include their pronouns in their e-mail signature line.
- Create space for sharing pronouns during introductions at meetings.\*

## Moving Forward

The Best Practices subcommittee recognizes these changes will take time to implement. While it would be ideal to revisit previous content and update existing communications, we understand it is more feasible to focus on ensuring new content created and published follows these practices. Doing this work helps reduce stigma and has the potential to help repair historical damage.

\*Please see attached resources for more information.

# Suggestion to Add Pronouns to the Signature Line

The following is a quick example of language that could be used to ask people to add pronouns to their signature line that was pulled together from various resources listed in the appendix.

## Suggestion:

Today we ask you to consider putting your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.) in your signature line as a show of support to the LGBTQ employees and customers you serve.

Adding pronouns to your signature lines will help create a more inclusive environment for our LGBTQ employees and customers. It starts conversations and educates individuals bringing understanding to the workplace. By offering your pronouns it increases visibility as well as shows support for those whose pronouns do not fit into the binary or don't align with their gender expression.

Visibility along with creating a safe and accepting environment for LGBTQ individuals in the workplace is important. Just this year the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) released findings from research on LGBTQ individuals in the workplace and some of the findings; were that 46% of LGBTQ workers are closeted at work and 1 in 10 LGBTQ workers have left a job because the environment was not very accepting of LGBTQ people<sup>1</sup>.

As seen in Directive 16-11: LGBTQ Inclusion and Safe Place Initiative<sup>2</sup> issued by Gov. Jay Inslee in 2016, as a state we strive for inclusivity and acceptance. Putting your pronouns in your signature line is a small effort to show your individual support of this community.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Campaign (HRC) A workplace Divided: Understanding the climate for LGBTQ Workers Nationwide, Page 6 and 7. Accessed 7/19/18. [https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/AWorkplaceDivided-2018.pdf?\\_ga=2.162624444.187541126.1532026429-1916039898.1529956763](https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/AWorkplaceDivided-2018.pdf?_ga=2.162624444.187541126.1532026429-1916039898.1529956763)

<sup>2</sup> State of Washington, Directive of the Governor 16-11. June 23, 2016. [http://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/directive/dir\\_16-11\\_0.pdf](http://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/directive/dir_16-11_0.pdf)

## Appendix: Language and Resources

### **GLSEN<sup>3</sup> Example:**

“You have probably noticed that our signatures display not only names but also our pronoun(s).

You may be wondering why, so here is some more information:

**GLSEN is working to make our spaces more inclusive and affirming of how everyone wants to be called.**

GLSEN does this by using email signatures, nametags with pronoun spaces, and introductions that include pronouns as an opportunity for people to make their gender pronouns visible. This is a first step toward creating a more welcoming and inclusive practice for people of all genders.

People’s pronouns sometimes relate to their gender identity. For example, someone who identifies as a man may use the pronouns “he/him.” But, we do not want to assume people’s gender identity is based on their pronouns or gender expression (shown through someone’s clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, name, etc.).

If this is the first time you're thinking about your pronoun, you may want to reflect on the privilege of being cisgender, or having a gender identity that matches the sex assigned to you at birth.”

### **Samuel Merritt University<sup>4</sup> Example:**

#### Sample Email Signatures for Gender Pronouns

##### Example 1

#### **Samuel Merritt (they, them, theirs)**

Clinical Instructor

Samuel Merritt University

1720 S. Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300

San Mateo, CA, 94402

##### Example 2

#### **Samuel Merritt, RN**

Campus Coordinator

Pronouns: he, him, his

Samuel Merritt University

450 30th Street

Oakland, CA 94609

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<sup>3</sup> GLSEN. Pronouns in Email Signatures. Accessed July 19, 2018. <https://www.glsen.org/article/pronouns>

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Merritt University. Gender Pronouns Resources. Accessed July 19, 2018. <https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/pride/gender>

Example 3

**Samuel Merritt, PhD**

Administrative Assistant  
Sacramento Regional Learning Center  
2710N Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95833  
Pronouns: she, her, hers

Example 4

**Samuel Merritt**

Associate Professor  
Samuel Merritt University  
510-869-6511  
Pronouns I respond to: she/her/hers and they/them/theirs

**TSER<sup>5</sup> Example:**

# Gender Pronouns

Please note that these are not the only pronouns. There are an infinite number of pronouns as new ones emerge in our language. Always ask someone for their pronouns.

| Subjective | Objective | Possessive | Reflexive           | Example  |
|------------|-----------|------------|---------------------|--|
| She        | Her       | Hers       | Herself             | She is speaking.<br>I listened to her.<br>The backpack is hers.      |
| He         | Him       | His        | Himself             | He is speaking.<br>I listened to him.<br>The backpack is his.        |
| They       | Them      | Theirs     | Themselves          | They are speaking.<br>I listened to them.<br>The backpack is theirs. |
| Ze         | Hir/Zir   | Hirs/Zirs  | Hirself/<br>Zirself | Ze is speaking.<br>I listened to hir.<br>The backpack is zirs.       |

[transstudent.tumblr.com](https://transstudent.tumblr.com)  
[facebook.com/transstudent](https://facebook.com/transstudent)  
[twitter.com/transstudent](https://twitter.com/transstudent)

Design by Landyn Pan

For more information,  
go to [transstudent.org/graphics](https://transstudent.org/graphics)

**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources

<sup>5</sup> Trans Student Educational Resource (TSER) Gender Pronouns. Accessed on 7/19/18.  
<http://www.transstudent.org/pronouns101/>

# Suggestion to Create Space for Sharing Pronouns during Introductions at Meetings

## Suggestion:

The Best Practices Subcommittee asks that it become standard practice to create space for individuals to share their pronouns at the beginning of meetings. In doing so, Washington State employers will encourage staff to bring their authentic selves to work.

The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) have provided guidance and resources on how to incorporate this practice into our current work.

## What Does Creating Space for Pronouns Mean?

Creating space is as simple as asking employees to share their pronouns at the beginning of a meeting.

### Example 1

#### Human Rights Campaign

##### Creating Opportunities to Ask for (or Offer) Pronouns

For the workplace, it may be best to explore where opportunities to ask for or offer one's pronouns may exist. The best practice may vary depending on the nature of the workplace - for example, corporate office vs. dispersed retail locations.

Here are some examples of opportunities to ask for or offer pronouns:

- Interviewing process: Create a place to declare preferred name and pronouns. Many Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) are driven by legal name. Creating an opportunity to disclose preferred names is a recommended best practice not only for transgender people, but for anyone who uses a preferred (or "nick") name.
- Onboarding process: Create a place to declare preferred name and pronouns. Use these as basis of introducing new employees.
- Corporate social networks or platforms, digital directories: Allow employees to self-ID preferred name and pronouns as part of their profile.
- Include personal pronouns in email signature lines.
- **Make offering personal pronoun part of introduction process at the start of meetings or events.**  
**Example:**  
*"We're going to go around the room to introduce ourselves. Please say your name, the department you work in and, if you want, your personal pronouns."*  
*"My name is John Smith. I work in Quality Control. My pronouns are they, them, theirs."*
- Role model appropriate pronoun when introducing people to their new workgroup. Ex:  
*"Everyone I am pleased to introduce John Smith who is transferring over from Quality Control. They will be the lead person on the new product development project."*

To read the full document, click here:

[https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/TalkingAboutPronouns\\_onesheet\\_FINAL.pdf?\\_ga=2.184263205.2085538674.1541620654-1059190272.1541620654](https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/TalkingAboutPronouns_onesheet_FINAL.pdf?_ga=2.184263205.2085538674.1541620654-1059190272.1541620654)

## What if Employees Choose not to Share Their Pronouns?

There are many reasons why individuals may not feel comfortable sharing their pronouns. GLSEN has created a resource that explains more about how to create a supportive environment.

### PRONOUNS: A RESOURCE

SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NONCONFORMING (GNC) EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

#### **Why focus on pronouns?**

You may have noticed that people are sharing their pronouns in introductions, on nametags, and when GSA meetings begin. This is happening to make spaces more inclusive of transgender, gender nonconforming, and gender non-binary people. Including pronouns is a first step toward respecting people's gender identity, working against **cisnormativity**, and creating a more welcoming space for people of all genders.

#### **How is this more inclusive?**

People's pronouns relate to their gender **identity**. For example, someone who identifies as a woman may use the pronouns "she/her." We do not want to assume people's gender identity based on gender **expression** (typically shown through clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, etc.) **By providing an opportunity for people to share their pronouns, you're showing that you're not assuming what their gender identity is based on their appearance.** If this is the first time you're thinking about your pronoun, you may want to reflect on the privilege of having a gender identity that is the same as the sex assigned to you at birth.

#### **Where do I start?**

Include pronouns on nametags and during introductions. Be cognizant of your audience, and be prepared to use this resource and other resources (listed below) to answer questions about why you are making pronouns visible. If your group of students or educators has never thought about gender-neutral language or pronouns, you can use this resource as an entry point.

#### **What if I don't want to share my pronouns?**

That's ok! Providing space and opportunity for people to share their pronouns **does not** mean that everyone feels comfortable or needs to share their pronouns. Some people may choose not to share their pronouns for a variety of reasons, e.g. they are questioning or transitioning their pronouns, they don't use or like any pronouns, they don't feel comfortable sharing them at that moment or in that space, or they fear bullying or harassment after sharing.

In the case that someone has left pronouns off the nametag or chosen not to share their pronouns, please refrain from using pronouns for that person and refer to the person by name.

To access the full document, click here:

<https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/GLSEN%20Pronouns%20Resource.pdf>