



Frequently Asked Questions About Pronouns in the Bureau Email Signature July 2018

What are pronouns?

- A pronoun is a word that is used instead of a noun or noun phrase. For instance, if you found a wallet on the bus, you might say, “Oh no! They left their wallet!”
- There are many pronouns available. The most common pronouns are “he”, “she”, and “they”. Some people do not use any pronouns, and are addressed only by their name.

Why do pronouns matter to people?

- It is a useful, natural part of our language that conveys gender identity¹.
- Regardless of gender, it is disrespectful to use the incorrect pronouns for someone.
- For some transgender and gender non-binary people², pronouns are an important part of expressing their identity. Consistently using the wrong pronouns, especially after being corrected, is invalidating.

¹ *Gender identity: A person’s internal, deeply-felt sense of being male, female, both, neither, or other gender(s).*

² *Transgender people: People whose gender does not match their sex assigned at birth. Gender non-binary people: People whose gender is neither male nor female.*

Why should I put my pronouns in my email signature?

- As City employees, it shows that we value creating safe, inclusive spaces for people of any gender and that gender cannot be assumed based on appearance, voice, or name.
 - This recognition creates a safer, more inclusive environment for transgender and non-binary folks.
- As a cisgender¹ person (or “cis” for short), sharing your pronouns normalizes the practice and is often more impactful than a transgender person doing so.

¹ *The word “cisgender” was coined as a more respectful way of saying someone is “not transgender”. From Latin, “cis” is a prefix that means “on the same side of” while “trans” is a prefix that means “transcend or across”.*

Why should the bureau make this standard practice?

- Unity is an essential part of normalization, and a bureau-wide commitment is much more impactful than an individual commitment.
- It makes it easier to avoid misgendering someone.
- It helps combat sexism.
 - It is a common assumption that gender-neutral names belong to men. By not sharing their pronouns, some folks are treated with greater respect because the other party believes they are a man¹.
 - Sharing our pronouns combats this bias by stating openly that one can occupy a position of power without passing as a man.

¹ A [2012 Yale study](#) confirmed a similar instance of gender bias. *Résumés with traditionally male names were disproportionately considered more competent and hireable than the same résumés with traditionally female names.*

If we ask employees to include their pronouns, wouldn't that "out" trans employees who might not be ready or comfortable sharing that information?

- This addition is optional.
- Some transgender and non-binary people are decidedly not "out" in any way, and this would not change that.
- Volunteering our pronouns creates a safer space for people who are not "out" but would like to be. It also lowers the chances of someone being misgendered due to their appearance, voice, or name.

What do I say if someone asks why I have pronouns in my email signature?

- "It is an optional part of the bureau's signature block that helps create a more inclusive space for people."
- "It supports the City's HR 2.04 admin rule against discrimination."
 - The City's HR 2.04 Gender Identity Non-Discrimination administrative rule prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression.
 - <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/citycode/article/12123>

Where can I go if I have more questions?

- For questions or concerns, please contact your supervisor, HR representative, or Equity & Inclusion team.
- If you'd like to learn more about the City's DEEP LGBTQ & Friends Affinity Group, please visit their webpage!
 - <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/50896>