

## Why do people list their pronouns?



Broadly, people include pronouns in their email signature, or as part of their name/ID in things like Zoom and Teams, to promote gender equity and gender inclusion in the workplace and our community. It also communicates to others how they want to be addressed in a clear, unambiguous fashion. This document serves as a brief explainer/guideline for the practice, and you can read more about the different aspects in the subsections below.

### What are pronouns?

- A pronoun is a word that is typically used instead of a noun, like a name. For instance, if you found a wallet on the bus, you might say, “Oh no! Someone left their wallet! I need to get it back to them.”
- There are many pronouns available. The most common pronouns in the English language are “he,” “she,” and “they.” Some people do not use any pronouns and are addressed only by their name. You may also meet people who use “neopronouns” such as “hir,” “ver,” or “xem.”
- Some people may have more than one set of pronouns, and list them as (for example) “they/she” or “he/they.” If someone has more than one set listed, you can ask them which they prefer, and in what contexts.

### Why do pronouns matter to people?

- Pronouns are a natural part of many languages that can convey *gender identity*. Gender identity is a person’s internal, deeply felt sense of being female, male, both, neither, or some other gender(s).
  - **Cisgender**: coined as a respectful way of saying someone is “not transgender.” From Latin, “cis” is a prefix that means “on the same side of”.
  - **Transgender or Trans**: someone whose gender identity does not match the gender assigned to them at birth. From Latin, “trans” is a prefix that means “transcend or across.”
- For many people, pronouns are an important part of their identity. Consistently using the wrong pronouns, especially after being corrected, is invalidating, and sometimes violating to people. This act is like how many people feel when others mispronounce their name or when people are called the wrong name.
- Regardless of gender, it is disrespectful to use the incorrect pronouns for someone once you have been informed about them, and it’s best to aim to get it right.

## **Why should I list my pronouns in my email signature or on Zoom/MS Teams?**

- Listing pronouns shows that we value creating safe, inclusive spaces for people of any gender. Presenting pronouns can be an important first step because gender cannot be assumed or detected based on visual appearance, sound of voice, or name.
- The practice assists people who may not be familiar with the culture your name is from. We can be more inclusive of diversity and respectful to everyone by identifying how you, and those you work with should be addressed and referred to.
- Our communications are not only internal to one another, but also go out to the public. Including pronouns in your signature demonstrates to everyone the City's commitment to gender equity in our communications with the communities we serve, our governmental and agency partners, as well as consultants and contractors. It can help clearly show the breadth of individuals who work for the City of Portland at all levels of all bureaus and in city hall.
- Sharing your pronouns helps to normalize the practice among all employees. When we offer our pronouns at introductions and in emails, it reduces accidental misgendering.
- It can be an empowering way to publicly confirm your gender identity.
- Gender is fluid for some people. Just because someone used a specific pronoun the first time you met them does not mean they will always use that same pronoun. When we all provide pronouns in signatures, we help one another get it right no matter how someone may identify at the time.

## **Why is this a common practice at the City?**

- Unity is an essential part of normalization, and a citywide practice is much more impactful than individual action.
- 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 people are treated with greater respect because the other party believes they are a man. A 2012 Yale study (Handelsman, Moss-Racusin) 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.
  - Sharing our pronouns helps combat this bias by stating openly that one can occupy a position of power without passing as a man.

### **What do I say if someone asks why I have pronouns in my email signature or online profile?**

- “It is an optional part of a City employee’s signature block or profile 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>
- “I want to make sure people know how to address me or refer to me correctly.”

### **What are some reasons that someone might not include pronouns in their signature?**

- The employee may not be “out” at work but may not want to use incorrect or non-representative pronouns for themselves.
- The employee may be exploring their identity and deciding what pronoun(s) they wish to use.
- The employee might not be comfortable sharing their identity for some other reason.
- The employee might not use pronouns at all, and instead would like their name repeated each time.
- The employee might not yet know the benefits of sharing pronouns or what their pronoun options are.

### **Where can I go if I have more questions?**

- For questions or concerns, please contact your supervisor, HR representative, or your bureau’s Equity & Inclusion team. Depending on your comfort level or question, you may want to reach out to a combination of these contacts.
- If you’d like to learn more about the City’s DEEP Queer Alliance employee resource group (ERG), please visit their webpage: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/deep/LGBTQ>.
- For official policy questions, you can also refer to the latest version of HRAR 2.04, Gender Identity Non-Discrimination, found here: <https://www.portland.gov/policies/human-resources-administrative-rules/equal-employment>