

quicktips

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NONBINARY GENDER PRONOUNS

Problem

Many people understand the existence of gender pronouns beyond the binary (she/her/hers or he/him/his). However, they may not be familiar with how to use those pronouns in sentences. As a result, even when they know the pronouns of reference for a person, they can struggle to incorporate those pronouns in their writing.

Solutions

LEARN THE TYPICAL FORMS THAT NONBINARY GENDER PRONOUNS CAN TAKE.

The following chart provides examples of some nonbinary gender pronouns in a variety of forms.

Pronouns of reference	Nominative (subject)	Objective (object)	Possessive determiner	Possessive pronoun	Reflexive
they/them/theirs	<i>They</i> wrote a carefully-researched article.	I cited <i>them</i> .	<i>Their</i> carefully-researched article won an award.	That research is <i>theirs</i> .	They cited <i>themselves</i> .
ey/em/eirs	<i>Ey</i> wrote a carefully-researched article. (“ay”)	I cited <i>em</i> .	<i>Eir</i> carefully-researched article won an award. (“air”)	That research is <i>eirs</i> . (“airs”)	Ey cited <i>emself</i> .
ze/hir/hirs	<i>Ze</i> wrote a carefully-researched article. (“zee”)	I cited <i>hir</i> . (“heer”)	<i>Hir</i> carefully-researched article won an award.	That research is <i>hirs</i> . (“heers”)	Ze cited <i>hirsself</i> . (“heerself”)

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ze/zir/zirs	<i>Ze</i> wrote a carefully-researched article. (“zee”)	I cited <i>zir</i> . (“zeer”)	<i>Zir</i> carefully-researched article won an award.	That research is <i>zirs</i> . (“zeers”)	<i>Ze</i> cited <i>zirs</i> self. (“zeerself”)
co/co/co’s	<i>Co</i> wrote a carefully-researched article.	I cited <i>co</i> .	<i>Co’s</i> carefully-researched article won an award.	That research is <i>co’s</i> .	<i>Co</i> cited <i>cos</i> elf.

Chart adapted from “Gender Pronouns,” LGBT Resource Center, University of Wisconsin, 23 March 2018.
<http://bit.ly/UWPronouns>

PROOFREAD YOUR WRITING

No matter what pronouns appear in your sentences, it’s important that you are consistent in the pronouns you use to cite or refer to people. One way to check for consistency is to use Word’s Find feature (in the “Edit” menu) to search for the pronouns you’ve written in. For example, if you’re citing a writer who uses “they/them/theirs” pronouns and you’re concerned that you might have written a different one to refer to them, go to the Edit menu and select Find. Type in the author’s name in order to find all the sentences where you’ve cited them; that way, you can be sure to proofread each sentence that refers to the author. Or, you could use Edit>Find to search for any instances of, say, “she” that need to be changed to the appropriate pronoun.

PRACTICE USING NONBINARY GENDER PRONOUNS SO THAT THEY BECOME MORE AUTOMATIC

If you will be citing or referring to a person who uses nonbinary gender pronouns, practice reading and writing texts with those pronouns. At the *Gender Neutral Pronoun Blog* (<https://genderneutralpronoun.wordpress.com/tag/ze-and-zir/>), each entry on a specific pronoun links to a passage from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* using that pronoun in place of “she/her/hers.” Reading these excerpts can familiarize you with how nonbinary pronouns appear in context. Another place to learn and practice using a variety of gender pronouns is the web-based Pronouns App (<https://minus18.org.au/pronouns-app/>) developed by the Australian youth-led LGBTI organization Minus 18.

CONSIDER ADDING AN EXPLANATORY FOOTNOTE

If your audience is not familiar with nonbinary pronouns, consider adding an explanatory footnote after your first use of a nonbinary pronoun. An example might be, “In this paper, I use the nonbinary gender pronouns [*name them*] because the people I am citing and/or to whom I am referring use these pronouns to describe themselves. It is important to me that I respect their identities in my writing by using the appropriate gender pronouns.”

For more information

Airton, L. (2017.) They is my pronoun. Retrieved from <http://theyismypronoun.com/>

University of Wisconsin Writing Center. (2017.) Using gender-neutral pronouns in academic writing. In UW–Madison Writer’s Handbook. Retrieved from <https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/GenderNeutralPronouns.html>