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.

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

Ze wrote a carefully-researched article. ("zee")
I cited zir. ("zeer")
Zir carefully-researched article won an award.
That research is zirs. ("zeers")
Ze cited zirself. ("zeerself")

co/co/co’s

Co wrote a carefully-researched article.
I cited co.
Co’s carefully-researched article won an award.
That research is co’s.
Co cited coself.


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/their” 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
