

# Understanding Personal Pronouns and Why the American Humanist Association Proactively Discloses Them

## What is a personal pronoun?

A pronoun is any word that can replace a noun or noun phrase (**I, you, it, them**), and a personal pronoun refers to a human (**She is a humanist**).

## Why do you share pronouns on your email signature and on your website?

We disclose our third-person pronouns so that people who communicate with or talk about us can use pronouns that accurately describe us, and to help normalize the practice. We encourage people who engage with us to do the same.

## People use many different pronouns

Pronouns such as **she, he, and them** are most common, but some people use other pronouns. Here are some examples of third-person pronouns and how to use them:

SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVE	POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	REFLEXIVE
<b>She</b> is a humanist.	I spoke with <b>her</b> .	<b>Her</b> book is here.	It is <b>hers</b> .	She introduces <b>herself</b> .
He	Him	His	His	Himself
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves or Themselves
Xe ("zee")	Xem ("zem")	Xyr ("zere")	Xyrs ("zeres")	Xemself ("zemself")
Ze/Zie ("zee")	Hir ("here")	Hir	Hirs ("heres")	Hirself ("hereself")
Ze/Zie	Zir ("zere")	Zir	Zirs ("zeres")	Zirself ("zereself")

*I've heard people use preferred gender pronouns [PGPs]. Why doesn't AHA use this language?*

We are talking about the same concept, but we believe that someone's gender isn't a preference, it's more than that. Talking about our pronouns as "preferred" implies that using the correct pronoun is optional, which it shouldn't be.

## Pronoun Disclosure in Action

When we introduce ourselves to new people, it is helpful to proactively disclose our pronouns.

*My name is Cam and I use she/her pronouns.*

The best way to learn what pronouns someone uses is to ask. Be direct, but avoid making assumptions.

*What pronouns do you use?*

Some people don't use pronouns, and prefer that we use their names instead.

*That's Ari's book.*

We all make mistakes. It's how we deal with those mistakes that matters. If you misgender a person or forget which pronouns they use, apologize, correct yourself, and move on. **Avoid apologizing repeatedly, which makes the person feel like they need to ease your discomfort; that's not their responsibility.**

*I'm sorry, I meant to say zie.*

When other people use the wrong pronoun for a person, do not ignore it. Correct them.

*Actually, José goes by they/them pronouns.*

**When someone is referred to by the wrong pronoun, it can make the person feel disrespected and alienated. Proactive pronoun disclosure is one way humanists can live the progressive, inclusive, and affirming values to which we aspire.**

Sources: GLSEN; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee LGBT Resource Center; Michigan State University LGBT Resource Center.