

Pronouns: What, Why, and How

By Morningstar's LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group

Morningstar is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion – not just as principles, but as active practices in our day-to-day work. Part of that practice is to share ways that we can support everyone in the Morningstar community.

This document is intended as a guide to gender pronouns: what they are, why people might use them, and how using them can support your transgender and non-binary colleagues.

First things first: what is gender? How is it different from biological sex?

Sex is the classification of a person as male, female, or intersex based on biological characteristics, including chromosomes, hormones, external genitalia, and reproductive organs. Inclusion here of the recognized category of “intersex,” frequently overlooked in discussions of sex, serves as a reminder that even at the level of biology, sex is not a binary system.

Gender is based on the expectations and stereotypes about behaviors, actions, and roles linked to roles. Gender interacts with but is different from biological sex. The social norms related to gender can vary depending on the culture and can change over time.

Someone who is transgender is a person who does not identify with the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth. Someone who is non-binary is a person who does not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth. People who are non-binary may or may not identify as trans. Someone who is cisgender is a person whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex they were assigned at birth.

What are pronouns?

In the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion context, “pronouns” refer to the gender pronouns with which a person identifies. Everyone uses these pronouns every single day!

Why are pronouns important?

When someone asks you to use their pronouns, they're asking for you to respect their identity. When someone refers to another person using the wrong pronouns, either by accident or on purpose, that can lead to the person feeling disrespected and can lead to dysphoria, exclusion, and alienation.

Studies show that by using gender-affirming pronouns, positive mental health outcomes increase significantly. For example, 70% of trans youth with parents strongly supportive of their gender identity and expression report positive mental health, compared to 15% of those whose parents were not strongly supportive.

What's more, many governments are changing their approach to the use of pronouns in government operations and in legal documents. In Germany, they're enabling non-binary gender selection for government documents, with options of M, F, D (diverse). In Canada, citizens have had a third, non-specific gender option for passports and federal documents since 2019. This is an important change happening in many of the regions in which Morningstar operates.

Here's a helpful analogy: on LinkedIn, you can add instructions about how to pronounce your name. This helps prevent names from being mispronounced and clearly identifies how to correctly refer to someone. Sharing pronouns on profiles, in videoconferencing applications, and email signatures can serve the same function.

Why would everyone share their pronouns? Aren't pronouns just for transgender people?

Everyone uses pronouns every day. That said, it can sometimes be uncomfortable or even scary for transgender or non-binary people to share their pronouns – they may not be sure that the environment they're in will accept their gender identity or their wish to be addressed by their pronouns.

Cisgender people can act as allies and normalize the sharing of pronouns by also adding them into their bios or screen names. This makes it more comfortable for transgender or non-binary people to share their pronouns, creating a more inclusive environment for everyone.

Do I have to use pronouns?

No, it's not mandatory. You can choose if you want to share your pronouns, or not, and nobody is going to judge you either way.

How do I learn what someone's pronouns are? What if I make a mistake?

The easiest way to learn is to ask! You could say, "Can you remind me what your pronouns are?". If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun when referring to someone, simply correct yourself and commit to getting it right next time. Remember: everyone makes mistakes. Once you've apologized, focus on what you'll do next time.

Where can I go to learn more?

Here is a list of resources:

[Forbes: Should you put Pronouns in Email Signatures and Social Media Bios?](#)

[Goldman Sachs: Bringing Your Authentic Self to Work: Pronouns](#)

[HRC: Talking about Pronouns in the Workplace](#)

[Charles Schwab: Gender Identity](#)

[Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services: Language and definitions of terms connected to sexual orientation and gender identity](#)