

PRONOUNS 101

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR A
MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY



snəwəyət leləm.

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What this workshop is and what it isn't

- This workshop is an educational opportunity about the practical use of pronouns.
- This workshop is not a training on gender identity or gender diversity. This may be a future offering. Please visit the resource hub for links for self-directed learning on gender diversity.



Territorial Acknowledgement



**Musqueam
First Nation**

snəwəyətʰ leləm

house of teachings





LANGUAGE reflects what is valued in a culture including relationships with place, land, and human and non-human beings.



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Learning Outcomes

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand what pronouns are and why they're important
- understand how and when to use pronouns, how to share them, and how to ask about them
- have explored how to handle making mistakes with pronouns

What are pronouns?

pronouns (plural noun):

any of a small set of words (such as *I, she, he, you, they*) in a language that are used as substitutes for nouns or noun phrases, and whose referents are named or understood in the context

the third person personal pronouns

(such as *he/him/his, she/her/hers, and they/them/theirs*) that a person goes by

What are pronouns?

There are numerous pronouns. Today, we will be focusing on the top three below:
he/she/they

he	him	his	himself
she	her	hers	herself
they	them	theirs	themselves
ze/zie	hir	hirs	hirsself
xe	xem	xyrs	xemself
per	per	pers	perself
fae	faer	faers	faerself

Jay is picking up **Samantha** at **her** work in **his** car.

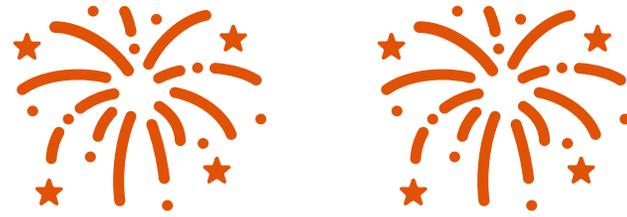
They are going to **their** favourite restaurant.

Nadia is tired. **She** was up late studying for **her** upcoming exam.

They're a bit worried about **their new puppy** at home alone. **He**'s only been **theirs** for a few days.

Keenan is running late because **their** car broke down. Can you save a seat for **them**?

THEY/THEM
as a singular
pronoun



GREAT NEWS!

We already use they/them as a singular third person pronoun and have since the 14th century!

It's perfectly grammatically correct.

We conjugate singular they/them singular the same way as they/them plural.

They **are coming** to dinner.

They **made** the best spaghetti last night!

They **have had** that same haircut for years.

They **do** the best impression of my boss!

They **are** from Coquitlam and their favourite food **is** cake.

If the context is confusing, ask for clarification!

If there is potential for confusion, use people's names instead.

A: Is the new hire starting tomorrow?

B: I'm not sure, I don't know anything about **them**.

Maybe **they**'ll start after the winter break.

We don't know
what pronouns
someone uses

We are referring
to *anyone* in a
broad context

Someone left **their** umbrella in the office;
I hope **they** come and pick it up.

A journalist should not be forced to reveal **their** sources.

The student needs to finish **their** reading assignment before **they** can
start **their** group project.

The complaint came from someone who doesn't want to be named. I can
confirm **they** are an employee and that **they** have worked here for 7 years.

We don't want to
reveal who we're
talking about.

To Note

**THEY/THEM SHOULD
NOT BE USED AS
A BLANKET PRONOUN
FOR EVERYONE.**

**USING THEY/THEM
IS FINE UNTIL WE
KNOW WHICH
PRONOUNS
SOMEONE ACTUALLY
USES**

Why are pronouns important?

They are a functional aspect of the English language.

They are a way to show respect, inclusion, and support through our communication.

Sharing pronouns automatically creates space where assumptions can be paused. It also allows for gender-diverse people to not always be the only ones having to share their pronouns.

We can't assume someone's pronouns based on their name or appearance alone.



Who uses pronouns?

Most people use pronouns in the English language

Third person pronouns are relevant to most of us, not only gender diverse people

Some people choose not to use any pronouns at all



What if someone...

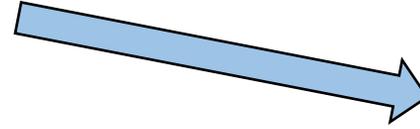
doesn't use
pronouns at
all?

Using the person's name instead of a pronoun is the best way forward.

I'm putting you in a group with **Malik** who is not here today. Please reach out so **Malik** knows what's going on.

I emailed **Sana** about 3 days ago but have yet to hear back. I'll try again if I don't hear back from **Sana** at the end of the week.

When to use pronouns?



When is group sharing appropriate?

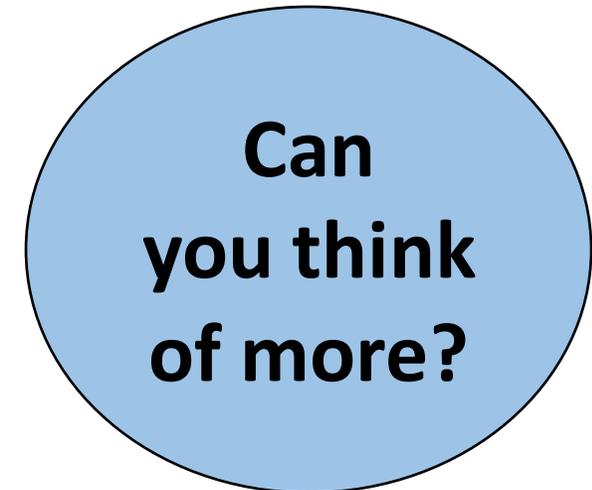
- Upon being first introduced
- When introducing your role or what you do at Langara
- Class introductions
- When the culture of a large group pronoun share has been established

When is one-on-one sharing appropriate?

- Upon being first introduced
- When introducing your role or what you do at Langara
- Class introductions
- When connecting 1:1 and/or when the culture of a large group pronoun share has **not** been established

Pronouns are also used in the following instances

- Email signatures
- Virtual meetings
- Phone calls
- Name tags
- Documentation/forms
- Systems & Software (Banner, Workday)



To Note

**IT IS NOT RECOMMENDED
TO MAKE SHARING OF
PRONOUNS MANDATORY
OR FORCED.**

What if...

someone
doesn't share
their pronouns?

If you don't know someone's pronouns, here are some things to consider.

How does this impact your communication with this person?

Do you really need to know?

Or does your curiosity need to know?

What meaning are you attributing to why someone doesn't want to share?

Reasons why someone might not want to share their pronouns.

They might be on their own journey of discovering who they are and just don't know yet.

They might be using different sets of pronouns in different settings.

Someone's first language may not use pronouns at all, or it might use only one, non-gendered pronoun.

Therefore, using pronouns in English at all might be challenging for this person.

They might come from a culture/community/family background where the conversation around pronouns isn't happening.

This might be the first time they've encountered someone asking about their pronouns.

Sharing/Asking

Offer your pronouns first and then invite others to share

Practice a script or a phrase that feels natural to you

My pronouns are she/her, which do you use?

Hi I'm Erin, I go by she/her. How should I refer to you? / And you? / May I ask your pronouns?

What if...

someone takes
offense at being
asked about their
pronouns?

**Folks can have their
own reactions to the
question. That's okay.**

**It doesn't make it
wrong to ask.**

**Think about a
script for how you
might respond in
this instance?**

What does it mean when....

I hear someone
say "**preferred**"
pronouns?

"Preferred" used to
be a part of how we
spoke about
pronouns, but it's not
something we say any
longer.

Saying “preferred” makes it seem like using someone's pronouns are optional when, in reality, using a person's pronouns is the most basic need we have to feel safe and to exist in public spaces.

What does it mean when....

Someone uses
she/they or
he/they
pronouns?

Generally, this means that they
are comfortable with using
either or both.

You can use she/her/hers
OR
they/them in your
communication with this person.

If Cal goes by he/they:

A: Cal is coming to dinner tomorrow night.
He's bringing dessert.

B: Oh great! Do **they** know our address?

**KEEP IN
MIND...**

Some people's pronouns are fluid and can always be changing.

Navigate how you might best approach respectful communication with them individually.

If you've heard someone's pronouns have changed, it's appropriate to check in with that person.

Maybe ask them when might be a good time for them to chat about it.

Existing Policies

BC Human Rights Code

**Langara Respectful
Workplace Policy**

**Langara Human Rights
Policy**



MAKING MISTAKES

What to do when you use the wrong
pronouns for someone

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1. Apologize but
make it brief.

2. Fix your
mistake.

"SHE SUBMITTED HER...OH, SORRY, HE SUBMITTED HIS ASSIGNMENT LATE.
HE SAID HE HAD A PROBLEM WITH HIS WIFI AT HOME."

3. Move on.

What we don't want to do...

Rationalizing our mistake is not helpful and may end up with the person you've harmed having to comfort you.

Which is not an ideal way to apologize.

OMG I'M SO SORRY! I'M REALLY TRYING. OH I FEEL SO HORRIBLE.

IT'S JUST THAT I HAVE A FRIEND NAMED * AND SHE USES DIFFERENT PRONOUNS AND IT JUST REALLY CONFUSES ME.**

IT'S SO HARD TO GET IT STRAIGHT.

To Note

It's just as important to apologize and fix the mistake in spaces where the person you've used the wrong pronouns for is not present, otherwise our respect ultimately is conditional and performative.

Making mistakes is a part of being human and we need to accept that we won't be perfect and not use it as an excuse to not try.

However, continually apologizing for making the same mistake over and over again, especially with the same person, is not a best practice.

It's a sign we need some time to self-reflect on why we aren't getting someone's pronouns correct.

It's also an opportunity to commit to making time to practice and build our comfort around using correct pronouns.



Noticing someone is making a mistake around pronouns is an opportunity for a conversation.

It does not need to be a confrontation or a conflict.

It's about calling each other in and creating accountability in our relationships.

MOVING FORWARD

Practicing third-person pronouns

Notice where pronouns show up in your daily life including social settings, at work, in documents, etc.

Engage in self-directed learning and education by exploring any questions or curiosities you may have; reach out to others to engage in dialogue and collaboration

Continue to practice sharing and asking in your introductions

Commit to building a culture at Langara that fosters inclusivity through sharing pronouns as a common practice

Be curious and self-reflective

Continue to practice using they/them pronouns

PRONOUN PRACTICE

Find a partner/group and assign each of you a person.

Practice asking and answering questions about each person using only they/them pronouns.

Practice correcting and calling in mistakes.

Build those muscles!

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Practice Activity

PERSON #1

Age: 53

Job: General Contractor

Marital Status: Married for 17 years. 1 child (12 years old)

Hobbies: Searching for old records on the weekend. Visiting local art galleries and exhibitions.

Goals for 2023: Be more organized. Try baking bread.

Likes: Watching reality TV shows. Etc.

Misc. Make up your own answers!

PERSON #2

Age: 31

Job: Nurse

Marital Status: Single

Hobbies: Snowboarding in winter. Stand-up paddling in the summer.

Goals for 2023: Reading more. Meal prep.

Likes: Listening to True Crime podcasts. Trying new local restaurants. Etc.

Misc.: Make up your own answers!

PERSON #3

Age: 19

Job: Student

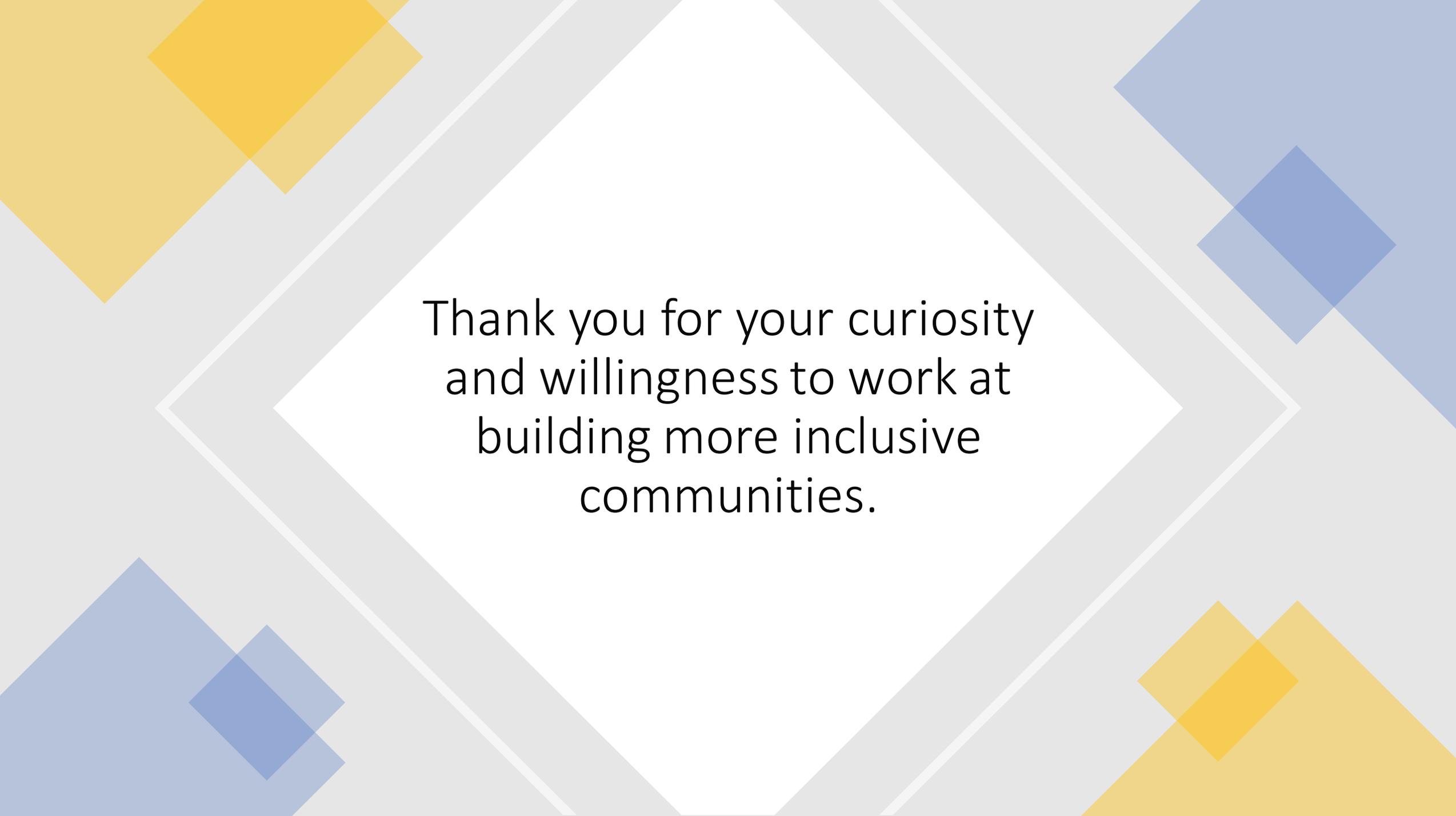
Marital Status: In a long-term relationship for 3 years.

Hobbies: Gaming. Volunteering at Vancouver Aquarium. Checking out stand-up comedy venues.

Goals for 2023: Not procrastinating their class assignments. Chatting with their grandmother more regularly.

Likes: Ramen. Recreating Tik Tok dances. Getting a seat on the 49.

Misc.: Make up your own answers!



Thank you for your curiosity
and willingness to work at
building more inclusive
communities.