

## Why Include Pronouns in Email Signatures?

By Prof. Tobias B.D. Wiggins

Many of our colleagues choose to [include their pronouns](#) as part of their e-mail signature. Examples of pronouns are he/him, she/her, they/them, and ze/hir. [Gender-neutral pronouns](#), like they/them or ze/hir, provide a way to refer to an individual with a nonbinary, genderqueer or gender fluid identity, or to refer to an individual without gendering them. The use of singular gender-neutral pronouns such as they/them is [already common practice](#) in the English language, and gender-neutral pronouns have [gained widespread acceptance](#) in North America.

The correct use of a person's pronouns is not only respectful, but also essential to our goals for [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at Athabasca University](#) (AU). In 2017, the Canadian Human Rights code was [amended to include gender expression and gender identity](#) as protected grounds against discrimination and harassment. By providing pronouns in email signatures, faculty and staff contribute to an environment where each individual's pronouns, gender identity and expression are [not assumed to be known in advance](#). This small gesture helps facilitate a workspace that strives to be more equitable and inclusive to everyone, including transgender, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming (TNGNC) people.

Many TNGNC people carry a painful history of having their names and pronouns called into question or misidentified. In this way, their identity has been denied, ignored, or overtly and systemically challenged. By offering pronouns in email signatures, social media, and [as a part of personal introductions](#), TNGNC communities have advocated for recognition and challenged social erasure. However, if transgender people are the only ones offering their pronouns in email signatures, this act can make them visible as gender-different – a unintentional or nonconsensual form of disclosure that is also called being “outed.” [For cisgender people](#), or those who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, there is often little to no risk or discomfort involved in stating pronouns. By normalizing this practice and establishing an institutional convention at AU, cisgender staff, administration, and faculty may become better allies to all TNGNC people, including students.

As a cisgender ally, including pronouns in your email signature is a small step that can have a big impact. This is especially true if it is only one part of the overall advocacy you do for TNGNC people. It is well-known that the TNGNC community faces severe and disproportionate [amounts of violence, systemic prejudices, and social marginalization](#). Be sure to keep yourself educated on contemporary issues pertaining to TNGNC people and consider how you can actively contribute to challenging transphobia – in both its subtle and more explicit forms. But most importantly in this context, ensure that you and your colleagues are knowledgeable and competent in facilitating a workplace that is welcoming and free from gendered discrimination.

While inclusion of pronouns is not required for AU e-mail signatures, it is strongly recommended.



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