

# HOW TO USE GENDER PRONOUNS AS A LEGAL PROFESSIONAL

Your guide to making everyone feel included and accepted in the workplace





# IT STARTS WITH OUR WORDS

As legal professionals, it's important we create a space where both colleagues and clients feel safe and accepted as their true, authentic selves.

Where's a simple – yet powerful – place to begin? Our word choice.

In this guide, you'll find the information you need to confidently use gender-inclusive language in practice and beyond.

Remember though, everyone's lived experiences are different, so this guide merely aims to provide a starting point for creating an inclusive workplace.



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# WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY?

**Gender makes up a large part of our identity. And our identity shapes our day-to-day life – and the world around us.**

**Whether we identify as the sex we're assigned at birth, or a different gender entirely, we all need to understand and respect the gender diversity around us.**

## **Gender comes from within, not our biology**

There's a common misunderstanding that sex and gender are the same thing.

Sex refers to our biological make-up and depends on whether we have male or female reproductive organs.

However, sex isn't binary. Intersex people can present biologically in a myriad of different ways.

Gender refers to how we identify within ourselves and how we want to present to the world. Gender identity is deeply rooted in culture and varies across the world. For example, there are cultures in the world where multiple genders or sexes are normalised – such as the Warias of Indonesia and the Bugis of Sulawesi.



## Gender norms are a barrier to individuality

In Western cultures, it's commonly believed that women wear dresses, men wear suits and so on. But gender norms such as these can be damaging. They enforce gender standards on a binary scale – telling certain people they should only like, do or wear what is predetermined by the society around them, otherwise, they are considered abnormal.

However, these norms aren't an innate part of our being.

A two-year old child doesn't care if they wear a dress or not, unless someone imposes gender standards upon them – dictating what is 'right' and 'wrong'.

The beauty of gender is that, once we let go of the binary, it can be incredibly flexible.

The way one woman presents may be entirely different to the way another woman presents. This doesn't mean anyone's less of a woman. Everyone's experience is unique and individual.

## Gender cannot be assumed

Gender has nothing to do with our bodies. For this reason, we mustn't make assumptions about other people's genders, nor assume others know our gender.

So, when introducing yourself, consider leading with your own pronouns. It's important to remember that not everyone is 'out', so the best approach is to make people as comfortable as possible so they can just be themselves (if they want to) in a particular environment.

This practice quickly removes uncertainty and offers a safe space for someone to give you their preferred pronouns. It also helps avoid uncomfortable situations such as the topic coming up out of context or the person needing to correct you.

Asking someone for their pronouns doesn't mean you're flagging them as queer. It means you're coming from a place of genuine respect and understanding, which will help reinforce the idea that we can't assume gender.

# DIVERSITY OF THE PRIDE COMMUNITY

Pride in Law embraces and celebrates different identities. Our differences are what unite us as part of the greater pride community.

However, it's worth reminding those new to the LGBTQI+ community – members, allies or otherwise – of the boundless diversity found under our rainbow banner.

For clarity, here's a quick list of some gender identities, sexual orientations and pronouns.

COMMON IDENTITIES	
<b>Lesbian</b>	Women who love and/or are sexually attracted to women.
<b>Gay</b>	Often used as a blanket term for same-sex attraction. However, more commonly used to refer to men who love and/or are sexually attracted to men.
<b>Bisexual</b>	Those who love two genders – doesn't have to be men and women.
<b>Pansexual</b>	Those who love multiple genders.
<b>Transgender (trans)</b>	People who identify as a different gender identity or gender expression than the sex they were assigned at birth.
<b>Nonbinary</b>	An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary. That <i>might</i> mean they identify as neither male nor female, or they may identify as both.
<b>Questioning or queer</b>	Umbrella terms for people who are unsure what they are, are seeking to find something that suits them or don't need a label attached to their identity.
<b>Intersex</b>	A general term used for a variety of situations in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit medical norms for male or female bodies. That person may be assigned a particular sex at birth and may go on to identify with the sex assigned at birth, as intersex, as both sexes, or as an alternative sex (or both).
<b>Cis</b>	Often used in a sentence as cis-women, cis-man or cis-gender. Refers to someone who identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth.

## COMMON PRONOUNS

<b>She/Her/Hers or He/Him/His</b>	Often referred to as 'feminine' and 'masculine' pronouns. However, people who use these pronouns can still be flexible in how they define their identity.
<b>He/They or She/They or They/He or They/She</b>	Generally, people who don't identify fully as male or female, but not always. They may feel more fluid and flexible, or maybe they just feel comfortable with both. Often, if one pronoun is listed first, it means that the person wants that pronoun used predominantly over the other one, but they aren't opposed to both being used. It's always a good idea to ask what their preferences are though.
<b>They/Them/Theirs</b>	A gender-neutral solution. Although these pronouns can be used as plurals, they can also be used as a singular pronoun. We use these pronouns all the time unknowingly. For example: Louis ate their sandwich because they were hungry.
<b>Ze/hir/hir</b>	These pronouns can replace any of the above. For example: Louis ate hir sandwich because ze is hungry. Ze is pronounced "zee" and hir is pronounced "here".
<b>My name</b>	Sometimes people want their name to be used as a replacement for their pronouns. For example: Louis ate Louis' food because Louis was hungry.
<b>Many more!</b>	If you're interested in learning more, please research neopronouns. Google will provide you with many resources.

### PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL OF ALL PRONOUNS

Even if you are unfamiliar with them, it's easy to respect pronouns. Doing so makes people feel safe, comfortable, happy and respected.

Never refer to someone as "it". Historically, this has been used as a slur against queer people.

### Adding your pronouns to your social media profiles

Even if your pronouns align with your sex, consider adding them to your social media profiles. This helps to normalise gender differences and diversity – creating a safer, more understanding, online space for gender-diverse people.

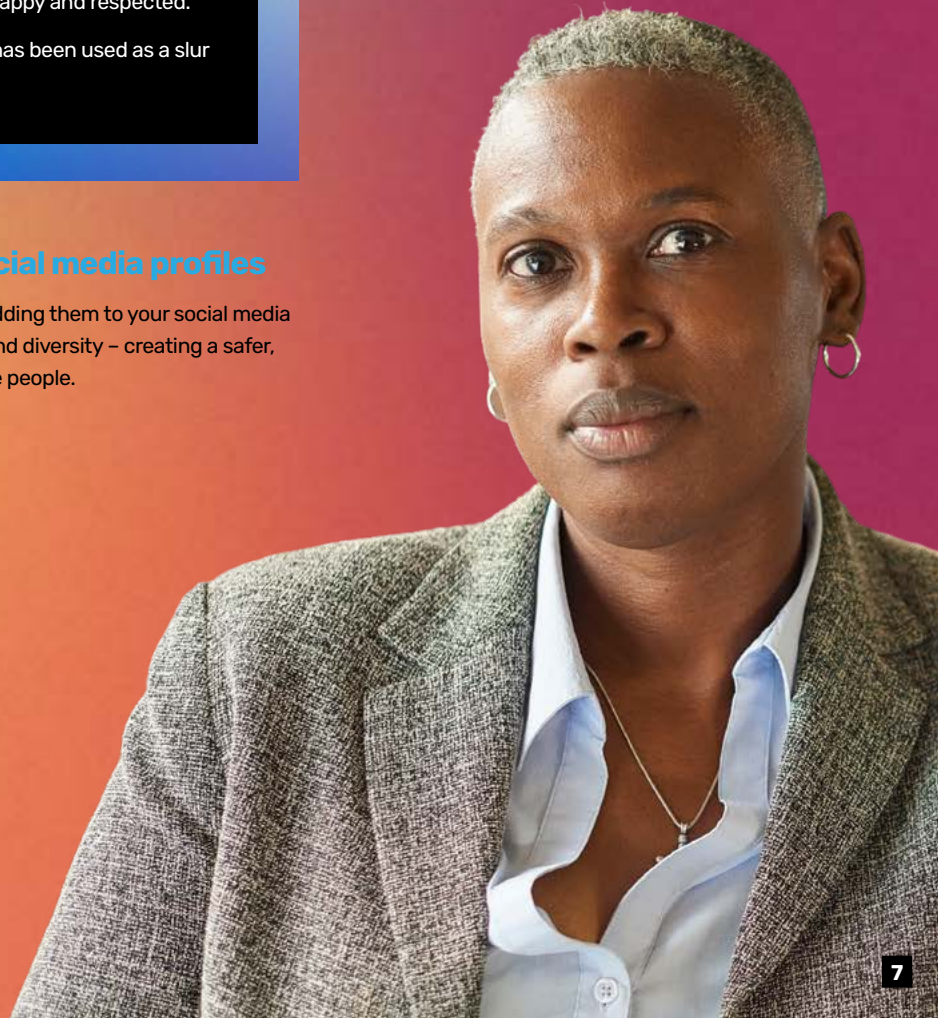
Here's how to do it.

#### LinkedIn

1. Go to "Settings"
2. Go to "Account Preferences"
3. Go to "Name, Location, Industry"
4. Beneath your name you will see a field to choose your pronouns

#### Instagram

1. Go to your Profile
2. Go to "Edit Profile"
3. Beneath your username you will see a field to add your pronouns



# TIPS TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE LEGAL WORKPLACE

We can all do our bit to create a workplace that includes – and celebrates – the diversity that exists in our profession. Here are some ways you can help everyone feel comfortable in the legal workplace.

## Adopt genderless language in communications

You can help foster a safer, more inclusive space for queer people with these simple language swaps:

<b>Rather than...</b>	<b>Use...</b>
<b>Dear Sir/Madam</b>	Dear Colleagues Dear [Name] Dear [Job Title] (e.g. Dear Registrar)
<b>He/She</b>	They
<b>Ladies and Gentlemen</b> <b>Guys</b>	Everyone Folks Friends Team Or any other genderless term
<b>Husband</b> <b>Wife</b> <b>Boyfriend</b> <b>Girlfriend</b>	Partner Significant Other Spouse





## Share your pronouns

Proactively sharing your pronouns gives people a safe opportunity to share theirs with you, rather than bringing it up at a potentially uncomfortable time.

Here's how:

- Include your pronouns in your email signature
- Offer your pronouns with your name when you meet people (this invites the other person to share theirs too)

## Don't assume anyone's pronouns

No one's pronouns are obvious. An individual's physical appearance and clothing may not always match their gender identity according to 'culture' or 'society'. So be sure to:

- Use they/them pronouns if you don't know someone's pronouns.
- Respect neopronouns (or 'new' pronouns, such as ze/hir/hir). They are just as valid as any other pronoun. Take the time to learn how to use them

## Be an active ally

As an active ally, it's your responsibility to stand up for the queer community by calling out incorrect and disrespectful language and behaviour. This might include:

- Correcting people when they use incorrect pronouns for a friend or colleague. You should do this even when the person isn't there.
- Calling it out if you hear someone making a joke out of pronouns or gender-diverse people. It doesn't have to be confrontational. It can be as simple as: 'why do you say that?', 'what do you mean?' or 'can you explain the joke to me because I don't get why it's funny?'

# WORDS FROM THE LEGAL PRIDE COMMUNITY



“Coming out as trans and committing to being yourself is already a difficult undertaking. But having to enforce yourself and getting people to respect your new pronouns can be even harder. I feel that a lot of people, and Australians in particular, have an attitude where it’s expected that you should just brush off any injustices from your shoulder and move on. Dwelling on it just makes you bitter, and of course anyone causing you injustice didn’t mean to. Sometimes that’s true – I really believe that educating ignorance is important and can create meaningful and lasting change. But that doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t correct someone when they don’t use the right pronouns. In fact, that’s part of the education.

People often believe that correcting yourself when you use the wrong pronouns for someone else is a bad thing, but what it shows is that you care. It shows that you are willing to go through the discomfort of adjusting your use of pronouns to show respect for someone else and their comfort. It’s such a basic and easy way of telling a trans person that they matter. Using someone’s correct pronouns shows respect for them, their identity and their comfort.

Pronouns are important because it’s an acknowledgement of your own personhood and how you perceive it. It is incredibly validating to be perceived as you perceive yourself. The most important thing in being an ally, though, is to remember that everyone experiences the world differently. Making the effort to communicate with your friend or colleague or acquaintance or family member about how they experience being trans is by far the most supportive thing you can do.”



- **Louis Laing** (They/Them)  
Pride in Law – Queensland Enquiries Officer


Getting someone's pronouns right is as important as remembering their name. It's a sign of respect and is foundational to any relationship.

If you've ever been called by the wrong name, you'll know it's uncomfortable, and if the person keeps doing it, it can really impact your relationship with them.

The same applies to pronouns. Using the wrong ones can not only make people feel uncomfortable but for many gender-diverse people it can have negative impacts on their mental health, making them feel unsafe and invisible.

On the other hand, when my pronouns are used correctly, I feel seen and respected. I use they/she pronouns. This means that they/them pronouns should be used predominantly, which is why they are listed first, but I don't mind if people sprinkle in she/her pronouns. People with split pronouns use them differently so ask respectfully if you're unsure. I prefer they/them pronouns because it signals to me that the person I am talking to sees me for Renee, beyond any labels or societal expectations.

If you slip up, you should apologise briefly and then quickly correct yourself and try to get it right moving forward. Your language impacts the way you make people feel. Always think: Are you creating a safe and inclusive environment? "



- **Renee Shike** (they/them/she/her)  
Solicitor



# Want to learn more about gender and sexual diversity in the legal profession?

Visit [Pride in Law](#) to explore a wealth of resources from Australia's National LGBTIQ+ Law Association.

You can also get involved by sending us a message at [prideinlaw.org/contact-us](https://prideinlaw.org/contact-us)