

Guide for TAS Leadership About the Use of Gender-Inclusive Language and Pronouns Within the Society



Background

The use of gender-inclusive language, including a person's correct name and pronouns, is fundamentally about respect, human dignity, and equality.

Everyone has the right to determine how they wish to express their gender and be identified. Using language that conveys assumptions about the gender of an individual or the members of a group can be unwelcoming and hurtful. For example, misgendering someone can have a significant adverse effect on that person, particularly in light of the harassment and discrimination that transgender and gender-diverse people face on a daily basis. In short, the way we use language impacts people.

Human rights legislation in every jurisdiction in Canada prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. Gender identity and gender expression are also analogous to the grounds enumerated in section 15 of the Charter. Therefore, as the authoritative voice of advocates within the justice system, it is particularly important for TAS to take active steps to ensure that the use of language within the Society is not discriminatory, but is inclusive and welcoming to individuals of all gender identities and expressions.



Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to TAS leadership, committee members, and staff about the use of gender-inclusive language, including pronouns, within the day-to-day work of the Society. We understand that many people want to be respectful of others by using gender-inclusive language but are not sure how to do so and fear making a mistake. This guidance is intended to help alleviate that uncertainty and fear.

This document is the product of extensive discussions within the Society's Inclusive Language Task Force and the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee ("DISC"). The Task Force canvassed best practices in the legal profession and consulted with members of transgender and gender-diverse communities.

Questions?

If you have any questions or feedback about the guidance provided in this document, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at mail@advocates.ca.

Governing Principles

The Advocates' Society (TAS) commits to fostering an environment in which those of all gender identities and expressions feel welcomed and supported within the Society.

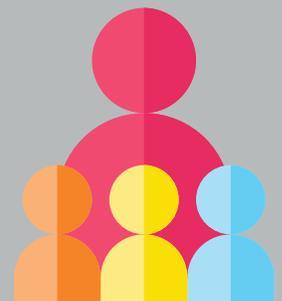


USE OF PRONOUNS

TAS encourages all TAS leadership, members, and faculty to incorporate their pronouns, if they feel comfortable doing so, into their introductions and day-to-day work with TAS.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

When it comes to the use of pronouns, TAS generally adopts a "lead by example" or "encouragement" approach, rather than a "mandatory" or "overly prescriptive" approach.

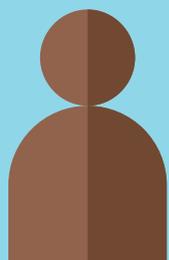


COMMUNICATE

TAS takes active steps to bring awareness to leadership, members, and faculty of the Society about the importance of inclusive language and to explain the steps the Society is taking to foster a more welcoming environment for transgender and gender-diverse folks.

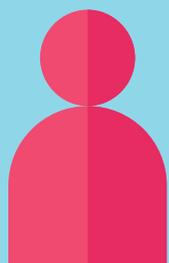
General Guidance

Our understanding of gender is constantly evolving. As a result, it is important to periodically revisit the manner in which we use language to foster an inclusive environment for all gender identities and expressions. Having said that, the Inclusive Language Task Force offers the following guidance.



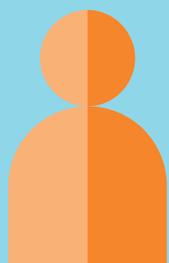
NO ASSUMPTIONS

We cannot know someone's gender based on their name or on how they look or sound. Therefore, we should not assume someone's gender. By facilitating an environment in which people feel comfortable indicating their pronouns, there will be no need for such assumptions.



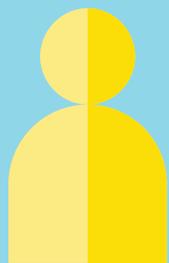
GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Use gender-neutral language at every opportunity. Doing so enhances inclusivity and avoids making assumptions about gender. Words like "ladies", "gentlemen", and "mesdames et messieurs" simultaneously assume gender and fail to recognize and affirm non-binary individuals. Instead, use gender-neutral language like an individual's name or words such as "everyone", "friends", "members of the committee", "folks", "collègues", or "tout le monde".



NAMES ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

For individuals who have changed their name, the name they were assigned at birth is private information. In transgender and gender-diverse communities, these birth names are often referred to as "dead names". It is important not to use someone's dead name and to respect their chosen name, whether or not it results from a legal name change. Some will find a reference to their birth name to be quite jarring and upsetting.



RESPECT PRONOUNS

If someone offers their pronouns, we should respect and use them. A growing number of people, including non-binary individuals, use gender-neutral pronouns like "they/them"; "she/they"; "he/they" in English, or "iel" or "ille" in French.



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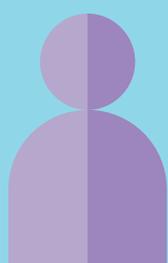
KEEP LEARNING

Everyone is different and language is evolving. Stay open and keep learning. We all make mistakes. If you do make a mistake, we recommend that you (1) apologize, briefly and succinctly, (2) correct yourself, (3) move on with what you are doing, and (4) take steps to avoid repeating the mistake.



SUPPORTING COLLEAGUES

If a colleague inadvertently misgenders someone, TAS representatives should demonstrate the correct use of the proper pronouns. As well, thanking someone for the correction can be helpful and encouraging.



OFFER YOUR PRONOUNS

If you are comfortable offering your own pronouns, doing so in a manner that is comfortable for you will empower others to do the same. For some, this may seem unnecessary. However, it can send a powerful message of inclusion. To do this in a meeting, you can simply state, "My pronouns are...", or include them in your video conferencing name. Additionally or alternatively, you could also offer your pronouns in written communications such as in your email signature, letterhead, or in a written biography. You can also make different choices about whether and how to share your pronouns depending on factors such as the nature of the meeting or event.

Forum-Specific Guidance

The use of gender-inclusive language, including a person's correct name and pronouns, is fundamentally about respect, human dignity, and equality.

SPEAKING AT EVENTS

TAS leadership, committee members, and staff are encouraged to offer their pronouns as part of formal remarks at TAS events and programming. If someone is being misgendered at an event, TAS representatives should demonstrate the correct use of the proper pronouns. As well, the host of the meeting could provide a correction immediately or later when the opportunity arose.

MEETINGS

When TAS leadership, committee members, and staff are introducing themselves to a new group of people, they are encouraged to offer their own pronouns. However, avoid asking everyone at the meeting to share their pronouns in an 'around-the-table' introduction, as that may unduly place people on the spot. Simply offering your own pronouns is enough to empower others to do the same should they wish.



INFORMAL GATHERINGS

While the above was prepared to provide education and guidance for particular circumstances, these principles apply to all of our interactions with each other, including informal gatherings and our day-to-day interactions.

ZOOM OR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

TAS leadership, committee members, and staff are encouraged to offer their pronouns as part of their Zoom name, in whichever format is most comfortable.



This document was written and edited by the following members of the Inclusive Language Guide Subcommittee:

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If you are interested in further resources, many Law Societies across Canada now publish similar guidance, all of which can be found online.

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