

# Guideline for Respecting Student Identity, Pronouns, and Names in the Classroom

## Introduction

Creating an inclusive and respectful learning environment is essential for fostering a positive educational experience for all students, improving academic performance, building instructor-student rapport and increasing student satisfaction. Recognizing and respecting student identities, including their names and pronouns, is a crucial aspect of creating such an environment. This guideline provides practical suggestions for instructors at universities to ensure that they honour student identities and promote inclusivity in the classroom.

## Name Pronunciation

Recognizing the importance of correctly pronouncing students' names is fundamental for fostering respect and creating an inclusive classroom environment. Mispronouncing names can come across as dismissive, unintentionally erasing a student's identity and contributing to feelings of exclusion. Here's a section on understanding the significance of name pronunciation and practicing it effectively:

### 1. Importance of Name Pronunciation:

- a. **Identity affirmation:** Pronouncing a student's name correctly demonstrates respect for their cultural background, personal identity, and sense of self. It acknowledges their uniqueness and affirms their presence in the classroom.
- b. **Psychological well-being:** When students' names are mispronounced repeatedly, it can lead to feelings of embarrassment, frustration, and a sense of not belonging. On the other hand, correctly pronouncing their names helps establish a sense of belonging, fosters positive self-esteem, and contributes to overall psychological well-being.
- c. **Inclusive classroom environment:** Creating an inclusive space means valuing and embracing diversity, including linguistic diversity. Pronouncing names accurately enhances inclusivity and creates a welcoming atmosphere for all students.

## 2. Strategies for Practicing Pronunciation:

- a. **Ask for pronunciation guidance:** On the first day of class or during introductions, encourage students to provide the correct pronunciation of their names. If unsure, politely ask students to guide you on the pronunciation, ensuring you pronounce their names accurately.
- b. **Phonetic breakdown:** Break down names that are unfamiliar to you phonetically to understand the pronunciation better. Practice sounding out syllables and individual sounds to become more comfortable with the pronunciation.
- c. **Repetition and practice:** Practice pronouncing students' names both in and outside the classroom. Regularly repeat their names to reinforce correct pronunciation. Utilize opportunities during discussions or activities that involve student participation to practice using their names.
- d. **Seek clarification privately:** If you are unsure about the pronunciation of a student's name, approach them privately and ask for guidance. Respectfully express your commitment to getting it right and show appreciation for their assistance.
- e. **Share preferred pronunciation:** As an instructor, share your own preferred pronunciation of your name and encourage students to ask if they need clarification. Demonstrating your openness and willingness to engage in respectful dialogue sets a positive example for students.

## 3. Cultivating a Pronunciation-Friendly Environment:

- a. **Normalize asking for clarification:** Create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable correcting pronunciation and asking for clarification if their name is mispronounced. Emphasize that you value and appreciate their contributions in helping you pronounce their names correctly.

By recognizing the significance of name pronunciation, practicing it diligently, and cultivating an atmosphere where students feel comfortable correcting mispronunciations, instructors can demonstrate their commitment to honouring students' identities and fostering a sense of belonging for all.

## Pronouns

Sharing pronouns is a simple yet impactful way to create a more inclusive and respectful environment for everyone. It helps avoid assumptions about gender identity, promotes respectful communication, and validates the experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals. By taking a small, but meaningful step in respecting pronouns, we create a culture of respect, inclusivity, and acceptance.

### 1. Understand Gender Identity and Pronouns:

- a. **Educate yourself:** Familiarize yourself with gender identity concepts and terminology. Stay updated with current knowledge and research in this field. Academic resources like peer-reviewed journals, books, and online publications can provide valuable insights. Check out resources on the [Office of Equity Affairs website](#).
- b. **Pronoun awareness:** Understand the importance of using correct pronouns and the impact of misgendering. Recognize that gender-neutral pronouns, such as they/them, are valid options for individuals who do not identify within the gender binary.

### 2. Correct Pronoun and Name Usage:

- a. **Practice pronouns:** Make a conscious effort to use the correct pronouns for each student. If you make a mistake, apologize briefly and correct yourself without drawing undue attention. Avoid asking a student to justify or explain their pronouns.
- b. **Seek clarification privately:** If you are unsure about a student's pronouns or name, address the matter privately. Approach the student respectfully and ask for clarification, demonstrating your commitment to using the correct information.

### 3. Foster Dialogue and Encourage Inclusivity:

- a. **Provide pronoun introductions:** On the first day of class or during introductions, encourage students to share their pronouns. Lead by example and share your own pronouns. This practice normalizes pronoun usage and helps create a safer space for all students.

- b. **Respect chosen names:** Respect and use students' chosen names consistently, regardless of legal or birth names. Chosen names are an important part of a student's identity. Make sure to update your records accordingly and use their chosen name in all class-related correspondence, such as emails and rosters.
  - c. **Use inclusive language:** Be mindful of using inclusive language that does not assume gender identities or reinforce stereotypes. Encourage students to use inclusive language as well.
  - d. **Establish ground rules:** At the beginning of the semester, set ground rules that emphasize respectful communication and the importance of recognizing and honoring diverse identities. Encourage open dialogue and ask students to share their experiences and perspectives.
  - e. **Include inclusive content:** Incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences into course materials and discussions. Encourage students to share resources, readings, or examples that highlight various identities and lived experiences.
4. **Normalize repairing mistakes:** Even with the best intentions, mistakes can happen when it comes to respecting student identity, pronouns, and names. It is important to address and repair these mistakes promptly and sincerely. Recognize the mistake and take responsibility for it. Remember, repairing a mistake is not a one-time action but an ongoing commitment to creating an inclusive environment. Be open to learning, listen to student feedback, and strive to do better moving forward.
- a. **Acknowledge and apologize:** Apologize to the student privately, if possible, or address it in a manner that respects their privacy. Be genuine and sincere in your apology, conveying your commitment to creating an inclusive environment.
    - i. Example: "I want to apologize for using the wrong pronouns/name earlier. I recognize that it was disrespectful and not in line with creating an inclusive classroom. I am sorry for any harm or discomfort I may have caused. I will make sure to correct my mistakes and use the correct pronouns/name going forward."

- b. **Seek guidance if needed:** If you are uncertain about the best way to repair a mistake or handle a situation, reach out to resources available at your university. This may include LGBTQ+ student organizations, diversity and inclusion offices, or faculty members with expertise in these areas. Consult with them to gain insights and guidance on how to effectively address and repair mistakes.
- c. **Encourage open communication:** Foster an environment where students feel comfortable approaching you if they notice a mistake or if they have concerns about their identity being respected. Encourage them to share their thoughts and provide feedback. Open dialogue allows for continuous growth and improvement in creating an inclusive classroom.

*Whether or not to share or publicly display pronouns is always up to an individual. Pronouns should never be assigned to one person by another person. It should be up to the person using them to decide when, where, and which pronouns are used. Knowing someone's pronouns does not always equate to knowing their gender identity.*  
([source](#))

## Conclusion

Creating an inclusive classroom environment that respects student identity, pronouns, and names is essential for supporting the academic and personal growth of all students. By following these guidelines and utilizing academic resources, instructors can foster an inclusive educational experience that values diversity and promotes respect within the university setting.