

# Don't Leave Compliance and Civility to Chance

Growing numbers of businesspeople identify as gender-nonbinary and assume gender identities that are not exclusively male or female. Nonbinary individuals may describe themselves as bigender, agender, transgender, or another term reflecting a gender that is not solely masculine or feminine. Some (but not all) who identify as nonbinary prefer to use and be addressed by gender-neutral pronouns (alternatives to he, she, and he/she) in written and verbal communications.



## Be proactive.

The wholesale switchover from traditional (typically masculine) pronouns to inclusive (gender-neutral) constructions will not happen automatically, and ignoring or dismissing employees' pronoun preferences can cause emotional pain and may increase the risk of workplace lawsuits alleging discrimination or harassment.

You can support diversity and stave off discrimination with the three Es.

**Establish** a formal editorial policy that governs employees' use of gender-specific pronouns and other offensive or unlawful language. Provide specific rules for the use of gender-neutral pronouns in email, social media posts, text messages, formal business documents, and other forms of electronic and traditional writing.

Doing this will show your organization's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and civility. It will help demonstrate legal compliance should you operate in a jurisdiction (New York City or Canada, for example) in which nonbinary employees are legally protected and discrimination based on gender identity or expression is prohibited. Formal writing guidelines also may help reduce the need to discipline or dismiss otherwise valuable at-will employees who (left unrestrained by policy) may engage in disrespectful conduct or write discriminatory content.

**Educate** everyone who writes for or on behalf of your organization—from interns to the C-suite. Mandatory writers' training provides a platform to discuss the overall concerns and legal rights of gender-nonbinary employees as well as demonstrates your organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

- Provide specific gender-neutral pronoun alternatives.
- Distribute your new or updated editorial policy.
- Discuss the use of gender-neutral and preferred pronouns in written documents and email signature blocks.
- Clarify that your organization's editorial policy and gender-neutral rules are mandatory.
- Let training participants know there is no place for incivility in the workplace.

**Enforce** your organization's editorial policy and discrimination guidelines by imposing disciplinary action, up to and including employment termination, against policy violators.

Adherence to the three Es will help demonstrate to important constituencies—employees, job applicants, customers, suppliers, business partners, investors, regulatory bodies, courts, community members, the media, and government officials, among others—that your organization is inclusive, embraces diversity, and rejects discrimination.

### Supportive Email Practices

One easy way to demonstrate your commitment to the gender-nonbinary community is to insist all employees include pronouns in their email signatures, thereby normalizing the practice. Provide clear guidelines and invite employees to incorporate their pronouns of choice into a standard, authorized format.

Two formats to consider:

Name, Title  
Organization  
Email  
Web URL  
My pronouns are "she/her"

Name, Title  
Pronouns: "they/their"  
Organization  
Email  
Web URL

This job aid has been adapted from the ATD *Links* article "[Address Pronoun Use to Support Diversity](#)" by Nancy Flynn, founder of the [ePolicy Institute](#).