



LANGUAGE FOR ALL: CREATING LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE ELE CLASSROOMS

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They/Them Singular Pronoun Guide

Introduction:

They/Them as a singular pronoun is often used by those in the community who identify as Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, or similar. It is simply a personal choice based off what the individual feels best suits them, as they do not identify with either “she/her” or “he/him” pronouns. While the use of They/Them as a singular pronoun is not new, its usage has been around since the 14th century in the English language, many people struggle to both understand and correctly use it. This worksheet will help explain the way to teach its use, as well as give examples.

Introducing the concept:

If you or students find the use of They/Them as a singular pronoun confusing, there is an easy way to help explain it. Think of a scenario where you are out for a walk and find a set of keys on the ground. You would probably say, ‘Oh! Someone dropped their keys!’ as you do not know who dropped their keys, and therefore do not know the gender of the person who the keys belong to. Similarly, if you’re at a cafe with a friend and they go to the bathroom, someone just arriving might ask if the seat next to you is free. You wouldn’t say “Sorry, no, my friend Sarah is sitting there. She’s in the bathroom.” You’d most likely say, “Sorry no, someone is sitting there. They’ll be right back.” THAT is using They/Them as a singular pronoun. We use They/Them as a singular pronoun all the time, especially when we do not know the gender of the person we are referencing, or when it is not important. The confusion often comes when it becomes a matter of preferred pronoun. As a teacher, introducing it as a normal part of everyday life helps LGBTQIA+ students feel seen and included, and helps prepare non-LGBTQIA+ students for the modern-day world.



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Grammar Rules and Tips:

Grammatically, the rules stay the same regardless if you use They/Them to refer to a singular person, or to a group of people. As such, there is nothing new to learn grammatically.

- *Subject Pronoun: They*
- *Object Pronoun: Them*
- *Possessive Pronoun: Their*

The use of They/Them as a singular pronoun does not change the rules of verb conjugation either, example: be remains conjugated to are. The only difference is you would introduce They/Them in not only your Present Simple plural tenses, but also in the singular tenses alongside I, He, She, It, and You. If you can, it would be relevant to briefly explain to students how some use They/Them as their pronouns instead of ‘he/him’ or ‘she/her’. But please make sure to do so only in an environment where it is safe for you and the other students. If students still struggle to grasp how it can be both used to refer to a group of people, as well as used as a singular pronoun, direct them towards the understanding and use of the pronoun “you”. We use ‘you’ to refer to both a group (ex., “You are all being very loud right now.”) as well as a singular person (ex., “You are being very loud.”).

Examples: The best way to introduce the concept to students is to not OVERLY draw attention to it. Simply introduce it as you teach the grammar, as well as through examples.

- Just as you would say: **Sam and Pam** have a dog.
 - **THEY** have a dog.
- You could also say: **My friend** is a great artist.
 - **THEY** are a great artist.
- Or even: **Jax** likes to go running in the morning.
 - **THEY** like to go running in the morning.
- Lastly, if you were wanting to make it even clearer: **Jax** is a friend of mine who likes to read.
 - **Jax** is a friend of mine. **THEY** like to read.

None of these sentences are difficult to understand, and the grammar is rather straightforward. These are some examples of how we, as teachers, can implement the use of They/Them as a singular pronoun into our example sentences.

Friendly Reminders:

- It’s about progress towards inclusion, not perfection from the start.
- Being inclusive in our teaching helps not only create a sense of acceptance for LGBTQIA+ identifying students, but also helps prepare students for the real world.
- It can be a bit awkward when you first begin implementing it in your lessons as it is new for your students (and maybe for you as well!). But the more we use it, and the more we normalise it, the easier and more second-nature it becomes