

Using Diverse Pronouns in Amtgard

Hello friends, my name is Dash. I am a nonbinary Amtgarder located in the Empire of the Iron Mountains and I use they/them/their pronouns. My pronouns, and being gendered correctly, are a large part of my experience in Amtgard, and I am not alone in this. Gender neutral pronouns are something not many people are super familiar with, so I have made myself a teacher of sorts within my kingdom. Amtgard is a place where so many of us come to truly be ourselves through dressing up and hitting each other with foam sticks. This can be doubly true for our trans players. Many players like me would love more knowledge spread across the game on how to approach these topics. I want to give those in our society the resources needed to make our game welcoming to players of all kinds.

To start, what do “transgender” and “nonbinary” mean? A *transgender* or *trans* person is someone whose gender assigned to them at birth does not match their actual gender. Many, but not all, of these people physically, medically or aesthetically transition to have their appearance match their gender. A *nonbinary* person is someone whose gender does not fall under the binary of “man” or “woman”. These people can identify as both, neither, or something in between. The correct use of their pronouns is something that is **huge** for trans people. It is a way to affirm them, demonstrate respect for them, and create an inclusive environment for players of all genders. You can never really tell what pronouns someone uses by looking at them, in the same way you couldn’t guess their name from their appearance. As hurtful and frustrating as it can be to have someone constantly call you by the wrong name, it is even more harmful to be misgendered. Misgendering invalidates someone’s identity. It causes a lot of stress and anxiety for the trans person, and at times can put them at risk for violence.

What are pronouns and how do we use them correctly? A pronoun is a word we use to substitute a noun, in this case when referring to a person. The pronouns we are most accustomed to using to refer to people are either “she/her” or “he/him” pronouns, but these are not the only pronoun options out there. There are many people, like myself, who use gender neutral pronouns instead of these gendered ones. People tend to be less familiar with them, but gender neutral pronouns have been around for a long time and are quite simple to use with some practice. The use of singular “they” goes back as far as the 14th century, even being used in the works of Shakespeare. Gender neutral pronouns like ze/hir, xe/xem and many others were coined and popularized in the 1970s and 1980s within genderqueer and other gender variant communities. Language is something that is fluid, with new words being coined and popularized all the time. Many of these language changes we don’t even notice as we start to use them more frequently. Pronouns are the same thing. Over the years, people have found better language to describe and explain their identities, so naturally more pronouns have become popular to help people reinforce these identities.

Listed in the table below are some examples of how to use various pronouns in the context of Amtgard. You can see the grammar doesn’t change that much. Singular “they” especially can be difficult for a lot of people, but once you start making the conscious shift to use more inclusive language, it will be a lot easier for you in the future.

she	her	hers	herself
She plays bard well.	I cast lost on her.	That sword is hers.	She made it herself.
he	him	his	himself
He plays bard well.	I cast lost on him.	That sword is his.	He made it himself.
they	them	theirs	themselves
They play bard well.	I cast lost on them.	That sword is theirs.	They made it themselves.
ze (like “zhee”)	zir/hir (like “zheer” or “here”)	zirs/hirs	zirselves/hirselves
Ze plays bard well.	I cast lost on zir. I cast lost on hir.	That sword is zirs. That sword is hirs.	Ze made it zirselves. Ze made it hirselves.
xe (like “zhee”)	xem (like “zhem”)	xyrs (like “zheers”)	xyrselves
Xe plays bard well.	I cast lost on xem.	That sword is xyrs.	Xe made it xyrselves.

Keep in mind this list is not exhaustive. Sometimes people have other pronouns they use, or they don't use any pronouns at all. I have included a relatively complete list of gender neutral pronouns in the resources at the end of this article, but when in doubt, **ask**.

With a basic understanding of pronouns and their use, we can move on to the big picture. How do we normalize awareness of differing pronouns, especially in the game of Amtgard? There are three simple steps: ask, include, and practice.

The first step is to get used to asking people what pronouns they use. Never assume someone's pronouns or gender from looking at them because someone's appearance isn't a great indicator of their pronouns or how they identify. When introducing yourself, give your pronouns along with your name to set a precedent. For example: "Hi, my name is Dash and I use they/them/their pronouns. Nice to meet you!" After that you can ask for someone's pronouns in return by simply asking them, "What pronouns do you use?" Remember, it is important to ask what pronouns they use and not what pronouns they prefer. It is more than just a preference. Don't forget to ask everyone. It helps normalize this process and leaves no room for guessing.

The next step is including opportunities for people to disclose pronouns in an organic way. When possible at meetups, workshops, or events, include pronouns in the introduction process as to normalize the discussion of pronouns and to help nonbinary people not feel different when they give their pronouns. For me, it is extremely comforting to not be the only person who has to give pronouns when in a group setting; if everyone else is doing it as well, it doesn't make me feel like an outlier. This is also a good time to work on using more gender-inclusive language when addressing groups of people. Referring to a group as something neutral as possible allows everyone to feel covered when spoken to, and prevents any unintentional bias. Below is a table outlining some gendered language, and how you can shift it to be more gender neutral.

Gendered Language	Gender-Inclusive Language
“ladies and gentleman”	“Amtgardsers” or “players” or “everybody”
“hey guys”	“hey friends” or “hey folks” or “hey everyone”
“you guys”	“y’all” or “you folks” or “everyone”
“he or she” or “his or hers”	“they” or “their”
“Duke/Dutchess” or “Baron/Baroness” etc.	Finding or creating gender neutral titles

The final step is just training your brain (easier said than done, I know.) Practice, practice, practice. Many people have to start with accepting the change in grammar. It has been drilled into our heads that “they” cannot be used as a singular pronoun, but this is simply not the case. Once you have made the conscious shift to start accepting the change in language, diverse pronouns can come a lot more naturally in practice. Start by referring to the person with their pronouns when you are alone. You can either write them down or say them out loud to get accustomed to pairing the thought of this person with the new pronouns. Then you can move to practicing with mutual friends by telling stories about this person and using their correct pronouns. Most importantly, correct yourself throughout the process. If you slip up, pause and see why. Notice what phrases or situations make it more difficult for you and be mindful of how to catch yourself in the future. I have linked at the end of this article a couple of places online to practice using varying pronouns. It may feel weird at first, but the more practice you put in the more natural it is going to feel. Believe me, people will be grateful for your work.

Okay, so what happens when you mess up? It is common when people are learning. No matter how hard you try, you are going to slip up sometimes and it isn’t the end of the world when you do. If you slip up on someone’s pronoun all you need to do is apologize and correct yourself. It’s not necessary to make a big deal about it as that can cause additional stress and awkwardness for both you and the person who was misgendered. If you are concerned, talk with the person a little later, apologize and ask if there is anything further you can do in the future to correct it. This isn’t a topic you have to linger on if the other person doesn’t want to talk about it further, just be sure to do your best in the future to correct your mistakes and use the proper pronouns. Correcting someone else can be a little trickier, and depends on the misgendered individual’s preference. I am someone who is entirely out and encourages everyone to correct others on my pronoun use when they catch it, but others may not be as open or comfortable having others discuss this topic for them. When in doubt, ask the person what you can best do for them. It is a safe bet to use the pronouns the person asked you to use, regardless of what others are using around you for that person. It is a gentle affirmation and reminder for those who know, and is subtle enough that those who don’t will likely miss it.

How do we make Amtgard a safer space for transgender and nonbinary players, at least as far as pronouns are concerned? As mentioned earlier, we can all work towards normalizing the discussion around pronouns by sharing our own during introductions, and asking others for theirs. This process also includes working more gender neutral language into our vocabulary

when referring to groups of people within the game. It allows players to feel included no matter what labels they use. You can also wear badges or belt favors listing your pronouns, so people will be able to tell at a glance which words to use when referring to you. This doesn't negate the conversation, but is a helpful tool. We can work towards adding more gender neutral noble titles into the game as well. Most of these changes are pretty small, but can make a world of difference. Amtgard as a whole will benefit from awareness and knowledge on topics of diversity as it makes the game safer and more accessible for players of all kinds. In the future, we can look at adding additional Amtgard Leadership University courses on LGBTQ topics and diversity and ways of increasing knowledge and acceptance game-wide. We can all hope for grand sweeping changes within this game we all love, but it starts with the individual. Individual players like you making the change at the park level is a huge step in the right direction. People will follow that example.

From myself, and many players like me, we thank you for making Amtgard a better, safer place.

xoxo Dashell - Northern Holdfast, The Empire of Iron Mountains.

Resources:

<https://www.mypronouns.org/>

- Very helpful resource that covers in greater detail the information discussed above.

<https://www.genderbread.org/>

- Breaking down the concept of gender identity further with a helpful diagram

<https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/what-youre-really-saying-when-you-misgender/>

- Article on the harm of misgendering

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genderqueer>

- Further information on the umbrella term "genderqueer"

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third-person_pronoun#Transgender_pronouns

- Rather complete gender neutral pronoun list.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/singular-nonbinary-they>

- Explanation of "they" as a singular pronoun.

<https://www.practicewithpronouns.com/>

- Online tool for practicing pronouns.

<https://www.minus18.org.au/pronouns-app/>

- Another online tool for practicing pronouns