



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

discovering voices

ESU Pronoun Introductions

Information for Schools

Here at the English-Speaking Union, we pride ourselves on creating a comfortable and welcoming environment for all our participating students, teachers and ESU Staff. By enabling a small amount of time for people to express their preferred pronouns before taking part in one of our programs or competitions, we are ensuring an inclusive environment for everyone involved, whatever their gender identity.

Misgendering (i.e. being referred to as a gender other than the one you identify with) can affect anyone and cause stress in what can already be a taxing environment. To mitigate any chance of upset or discomfort amongst participants, here at the ESU we therefore use pronoun introductions as an option for any individual at every ESU event.

Please note that there is no requirement to give a preferred pronoun, and it is perfectly acceptable to say 'I don't mind' or 'I decline to answer', or indeed to give no preferred pronoun statement at all. However, it is important that all participants are given the chance to introduce their preferred pronouns, whether they identify as cisgender (gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth), transgender, or non-binary. This is to create an environment of respect where everyone feels equally included. Please see your relevant competition handbook for guidance.



Schools Mace and ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition

At the beginning of each debate/, the chair judge will invite participants to introduce themselves and their preferred pronouns. For example:

‘My name is John Smith, and I prefer “he/him”.’

Or

‘My name is Cynthia, and I prefer “he/they”.’

Or

‘I’m Anita, and I don’t mind what pronouns you use.’

At this point, everyone participating in the debate makes a mental or physical note of these preferences and uses the requisite pronoun to the best of their ability throughout the debate. Formal debating can include a lot of gendered language (e.g. ‘The previous speaker mentioned X. She is wrong because...’, or use of ‘sir’, ‘madam’, ‘the honourable gentleman’ etc.), and so it is important that all participants remain mindful of which pronouns to use.

Performing Shakespeare Competition

After the MC has opened the competition, they will welcome to the stage each participant. The performer will then take the stage, introduce themselves, their preferred pronouns, and then begin with the oracy element of their performance. For example:

‘My name is Grace and my pronouns are she/her’

Or

‘My name is Jo and my pronouns are they/them’

It is up to the judges to write this information down on their judging sheet, as this information may not always be provided beforehand.



Potential Issues

If you misgender a student or other individual, the ESU practice is to acknowledge and apologise in the moment or as soon as you realise your mistake, and then move forward using the correct pronouns and without dwelling on the incident. This ensures that no further harm or upset is caused to the individual. If the individual is unhappy with this, a further apology may be required depending on the situation and language used. Please ensure this is dealt with promptly with another adult present and inform the ESU Competition Lead of the situation.

It is possible that schools will receive questions and/or concerns about this from students or parents. It is important to remind participants and their parents of the necessity for inclusivity in debates, and if they would like more information, ask them to contact the ESU Education Team directly. If you yourself have any further questions, feel free to get in touch with us at competition@esu.org.



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