

Shifting Attitudes, Shifting Styles: Codifying Gender-Inclusive Language Use in Style Manuals

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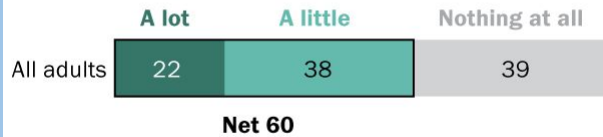
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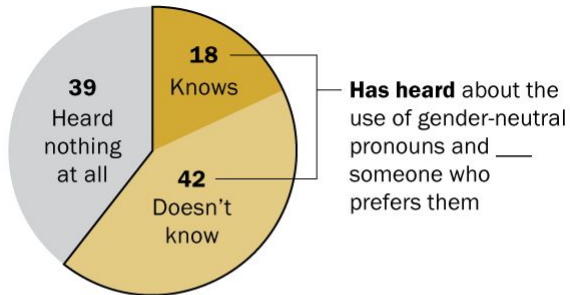
Attitudes towards gender-inclusive language: A multinational perspective
September 9, 2022

About one-in-five Americans say they personally know someone who prefers a pronoun other than 'he' or 'she'

% of U.S. adults saying they have heard ____ about the use of gender-neutral pronouns



% of U.S. adults saying they personally know someone who prefers that others use a gender-neutral pronoun when referring to them

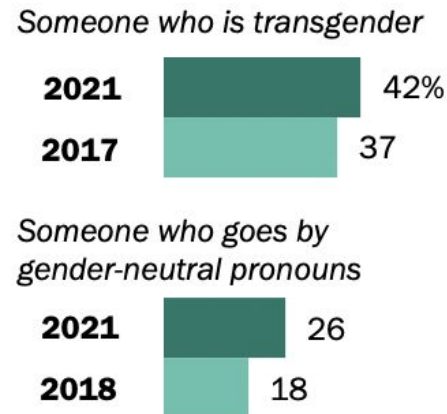


Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 24-Oct. 7, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Growing shares in U.S. know someone who is transgender or goes by gender-neutral pronouns

% saying they personally know ...



Note: The term transgender was defined for respondents as someone who identifies as a gender that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 14-27, 2021.

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LGBTQ rights rally at Washington Square Park on October 21st, 2018, in New York City in response to leaked memo about the Trump administration's move to redefine gender as a "biological, immutable condition determined by genitalia at birth," which activists say would subject transgender and gender non-conforming people to discrimination, harassment, and violence.

New York Times - (Photo: Yana Paskova/Getty Images)

Singular *they*

A User's Guide

<https://esl.uchicago.edu/2021/06/29/singular-they-a-users-guide/>



Mignon Fogarty @GrammarGirl · Mar 24

The AP Stylebook now allows the singular "they."
[shar.es/1QmgmM](https://www.shar.es/1QmgmM) What do you think? #ACES2017

58% Yay!

31% Boo!

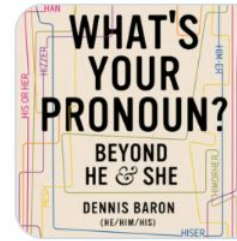
11% Don't care. _(ツ)_/

581 votes • Final results



Dennis Roy Baron
@DrGrammar

The American Dialect Society just voted singular 'they' the Word of the Decade. ICYMI, here's a brief history of singular they: bit.ly/2LKuPbP You can read the full story in my book, "What's Your Pronoun?", out later this month:



wwnorton.com

What's Your Pronoun?

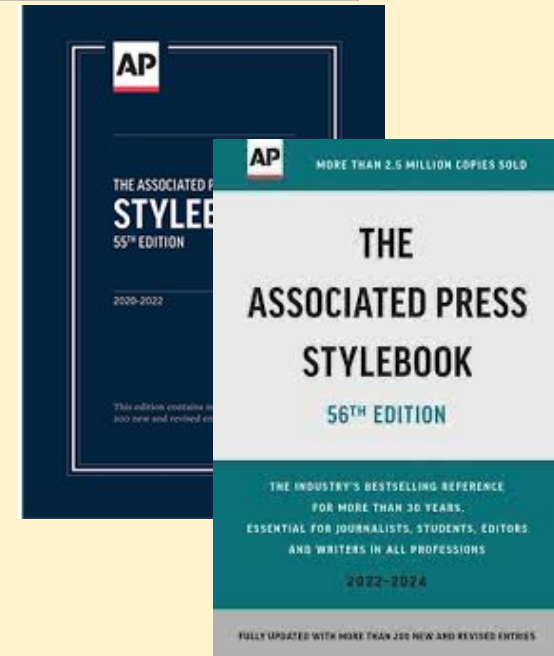
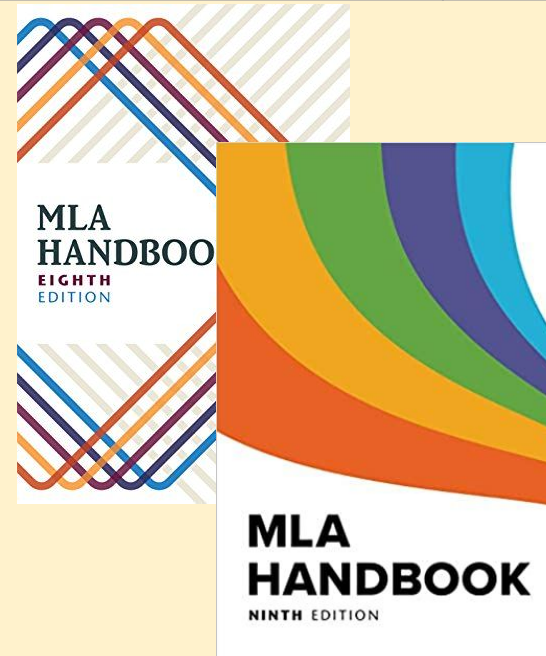
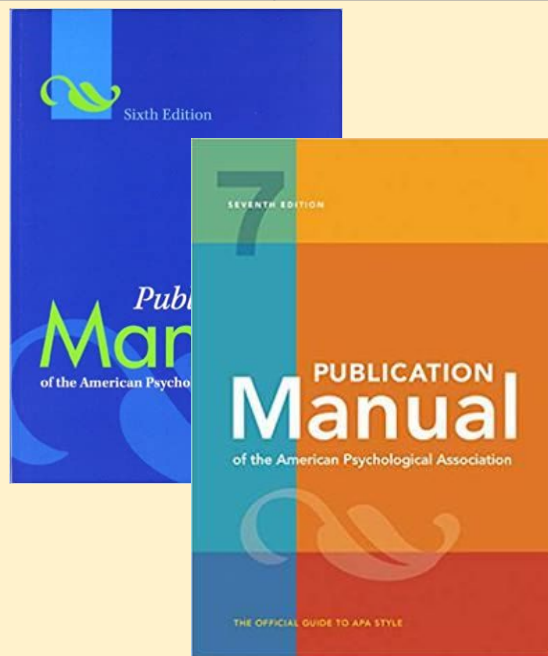
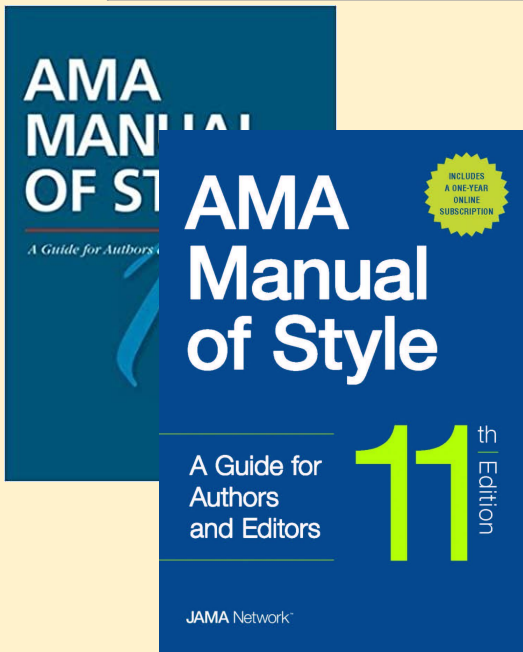
"If you want to know why more people are asking 'what's your pronoun?' then you (singular or plural) should read this..."

4:34 AM · Jan 4, 2020 · Twitter Web App

12 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 75 Likes

Queering Style Guides

Book	Edition	Current Publishing Year	Previous Publishing Year
AMA (American Medical Association)	11th	2020	2007
APA (American Psychological Association)	7th	2020	2010
MLA (Modern Language Association)	9th	2021	2016
AP (Associated Press)	56th	2022	2020



Research Process

Level 1

- Pronouns & Gender

Level 2

- Inclusivity, Sexism, & Bias

Level 3

- Genderqueer identity

Level 4

- Descriptivism & They

Level 5

- Prescriptivism & They

Singular *They* Statement

AMA

Stylistic

Like *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *AP Stylebook*, the *AMA Manual of Style* now permits the use of *they* as a singular pronoun when rewriting the sentence as plural would be awkward or unclear. (430)

APA

Ontological & Epistemological

The use of singular *they* is inclusive of all people, helps writers avoid making assumptions about gender, and is part of APA style. (121)

MLA

Instrumental

The use of singular *they* has been considered a less desirable option than revising to plural constructions or rephrasing without pronouns. But, it has emerged as a tool for making language more inclusive because it helps writers avoid making or enabling assumptions about gender. (92)

AP

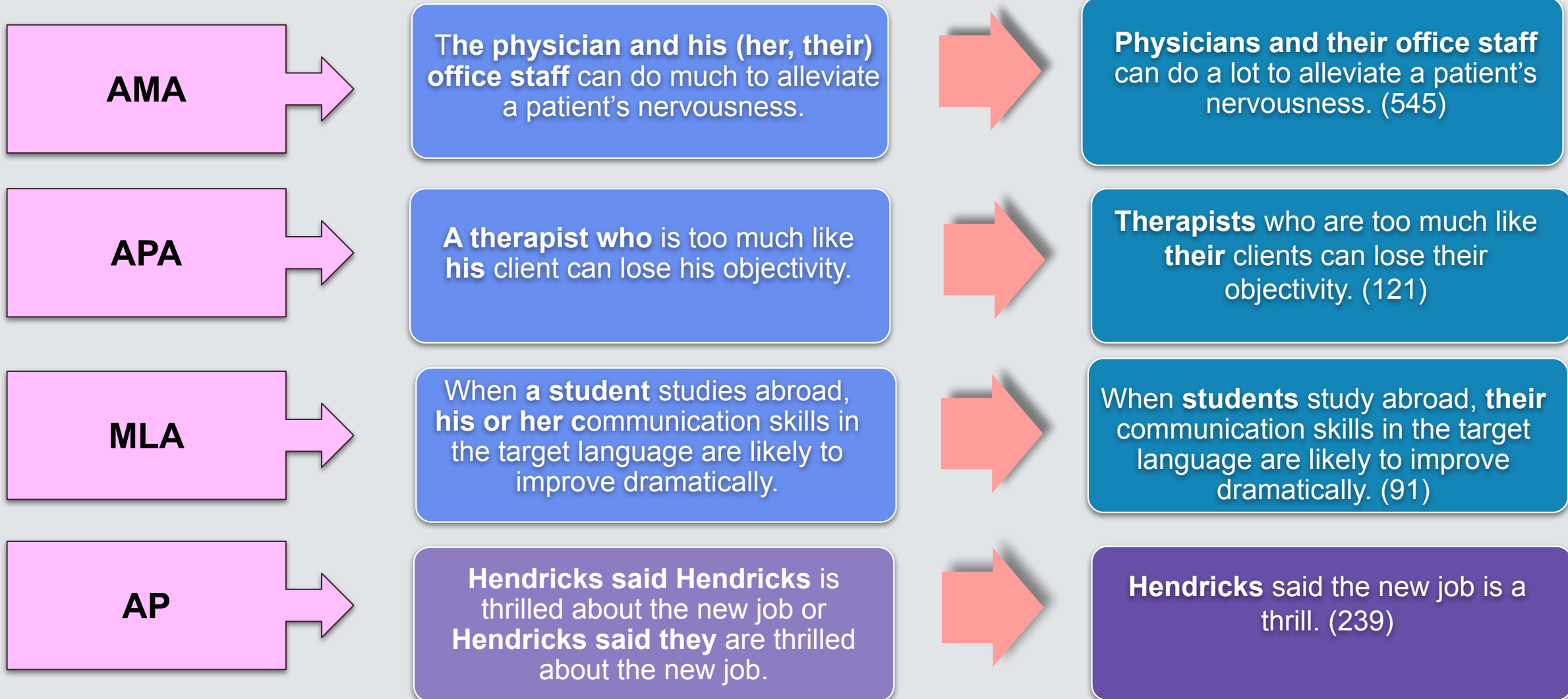
Mechanical, Accessible, & Educational

They as a singular pronoun may be confusing to some readers and amount to a roadblock that stops them from reading further. At the same time, though, efforts to write without pronouns to avoid confusion may make people feel censored or invisible. Try to honor both your readers and your story subjects. As in all news writing, clarity is paramount. (238-239)

Avoiding Gender Bias Strategies

- Replace with a more concrete noun
- Replace pronoun with an article
- Change the verb to the imperative mood
- Rewrite the sentence
- Drop the pronoun
- Rephrase the sentence
- Conditional use of singular *they*
- Rewrite sentence as plural

Avoidance Strategies



AMA

N/A

APA

1. Every participant turned off their questionnaire. (121)
2. Jamie shared their experiences as a genderqueer person. (121)
3. A child should learn to play by themselves (or themselves). (121)
4. Rowan, a transgender person, helped themselves or themselves to the free coffee. (121)

Correct Usage When Using Singular *They*

MLA

1. "Person's chosen pronoun": *Jules is writing their research paper on Jane Austen's Persuasion.* (92)
2. Hypothetical or anonymous people: *Each taxpayer must file their return by 15 April.* (92)
3. Unknown or gender is irrelevant to the context: *I am impressed by...T.C. Blake...and will schedule an interview with them.* (92)

AP

1. Explain if it isn't clear in context: *Morales, who uses the pronoun they, said they will retire in June.* (239)
2. A singular they may also be used when an anonymous source's gender must be shielded: *The person feared for their own safety and spoke on condition of anonymity.* (239)

Language Change and Style Guide Ambiguity

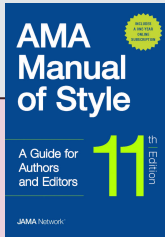
AMA offers gender neutral language strategies, but fails to mention singular *they* in the pronoun agreement section and use only his/her pronoun structures throughout the guide.

APA endorses singular *they*, but language around LGBTQIA+ is still largely label focused.

MLA offers gender neutral examples, but still suggests that singular *they* is only a tool to be utilized and that it's not preferred.

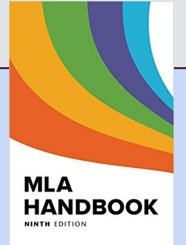
AP has an extensive section on gender, pronoun usage, and words related to homophobia, transgender, nonbinary, etc. but still discourages the use of singular *they*, encouraging rephrasing and rewording strategies that avoid using pronouns altogether.

Big Picture Trends



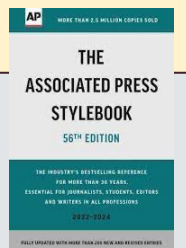
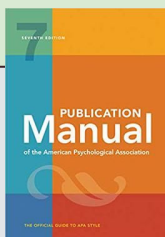
Patient identifiability
Eliminate sex & gender bias
Biological accuracy & clarity
Clinical, Technical, & Other Common Terms

Prioritizes subject identity
Precision & relevance
Clear grammatical structures
Principles of inclusive language



Research participants' self-identifiability
Analytical writing & language awareness
Endorsing singular *they* & bias-free language
Gender, Sexual Orientation, Intersectionality

Global journalist news & pop culture
Mainstream common knowledge
Writer sensitivity to subjects & social context
Gender



Conclusions

- Grammar and formal writing styles are being queered
- Major changes have been made to all updated editions of AMA, AP, APA, and MLA style guides
- Singular *they* is now accepted in all guides even if usage is discouraged and ambiguity is largely present
- Editors are struggling with how to manage this language change in process

Thank you!

Questions?



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