



# ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NAMES

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## INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR NAMES

Our names are an incredibly important part of our identity. They carry deep personal, cultural, familial, and historical connections. They also give us a sense of who we are, the communities in which we belong, and our place in the world. This is why mispronunciations, misuse of our preferred/common names, or misgendering can negatively affect and possibly hurt and impact a sense of belonging on campus.

The undeniable truth, however, is that these things will happen. Many times individuals whose names and pronouns are used in the wrong manner are put in the difficult position of approaching, correcting, and [calling in](#) folks. Instances of mispronunciation and misuse of preferred names and pronouns can be experienced as [microaggressions](#). (ouch!)

Microaggressions are daily derogatory actions or statements directed at for example racialized and or other marginalized groups. Our role as members of the UBC community is to learn about and practice navigating those sometimes difficult conversations with as much respect, compassion and grace as possible so that we can build a more [inclusive and welcoming environment](#).

## HOW TO NAVIGATE NAMES AND PRONOUNS WITH RESPECT

Our names tell a larger story. So how do we navigate them with kindness and respect? Here are three things to be mindful of:

### Pronunciation

The correct pronunciation of your name is whatever you decide it is! It is a means of self-identification, so it goes both ways:

- Inform others of the correct pronunciation of your name, and
- Respect someone's own pronunciation of their name.

Oftentimes, people with non-Anglicized names will encounter mispronunciations of their names. Be aware of these discrepancies and be proactive. Check out these online videos and websites that provide pronunciations of non-Anglicized names that you can check out (see the last page of this guide). They'll give you the edge on being smooth in social situations.



## Preferred or Common Names

A preferred or common name is a name that you want to be known by, which maybe different from your legal name. Some international students might choose to use an English/Western name while at UBC, so it's a good idea to ask them which name they'd like you to use. UBC recognizes that trans, two-spirit, and gender diverse students may have legal names that don't match their gender identity or expression. These students may prefer to be known by their chosen names that reflect their identities. Which is awesome!

UBC has a preferred name use policy that allows students to list their preferred names on their student card and class lists. For more information, visit:

- [Preferred name use at UBC](#)
- [Change your personal information](#)

## Pronouns

Pronouns are how we refer to ourselves or each other in lieu of our names. Did you know, some people may want to be referred to as [They/Them/Theirs or Ze/Zie/Hir](#) instead of pronouns that generally refer to the gender binary (He/Him/His and She/Her/Hers). Trans and gender nonconforming people will use the pronouns that fit them best. A key tip is to never assume an individual's gender - if they don't tell you what pronouns they want to be referred by, make sure to ask..."what pronoun do you like to be known by?"

## HOW TO RESPOND TO MISNAMING, MISPRONUNCIATIONS, OR MISGENDERING

What do you do when someone mispronounces your name or doesn't refer to you by your preferred name and pronouns? And, what can YOU do to make sure you avoid these mistakes when engaging with others in our communities?

Below are 5 tips to help you navigate these (sometimes difficult) interactions.

### 1) Ask the person.

When meeting someone for the first time, it is helpful to just ask how they pronounce their name, and which pronouns they use. When each of us takes the time to pronounce someone's name correctly and to use the right pronouns, people feel respected, valued, and part of the community. Your efforts and acknowledgement will be appreciated.

Another option is for you to start the conversation by introducing yourself, how your name is pronounced, and your preferred pronouns. Sharing your pronouns is important because it creates a more welcoming space, and allows others to introduce themselves and specify their pronouns comfortably.

Here's a short script to help you get started:

*Iman: Hi, my name is Iman. It's pronounced ee-man and I use she, her, and hers pronouns.*

*Rachael: Hi Iman, I'm Rachael - it's spelled like Michael. I also use she, her, and hers pronouns.*

*Ido: Cool. Hey, I'm Ido - and I use they, them and their pronouns.*

### 2) Repeat their name!

At times, people might mispronounce your name, or you might mispronounce their name. A great tip is to repeat your name a couple of times until they get it right. If you're trying to pronounce someone else's name correctly, be respectful and kindly ask them how to correctly pronounce it; then practice on your own. Double check with them by asking, "Am I saying your name correctly?"

You might also encounter folks who are mispronouncing, misnaming, or misgendering someone you know. In these circumstances, you can try this echoing technique by repeating the correct name and pronoun. If they don't catch on to your attempts, try pulling them aside for a quick chat to inform them the individual's preferred name, pronoun, and pronunciation are. This is called "Calling In". It's a skill to learn.

### 3) Calling In

Sometimes an individual might continually mispronounce, misname, or misgender you. This can be especially awkward to navigate if this individual is a close friend, coworker, or acquaintance. If you feel comfortable, call them in for a private chat to let them know how you feel and what you prefer.

Talking to someone one-on-one allows you to talk to the person about the impact of their statements and actions. *Calling in* means opening up space for reflection and active listening: hear them out, ask them why they think they're acting this way, and give them room to clarify. More importantly, let them know how constant mispronunciation, misnaming, and/or misgendering makes you feel. This will hopefully allow them to understand the impact of their actions and words.

If you don't feel safe or comfortable engaging in this conversation, don't pressure yourself to do so! This is a good opportunity to ask someone else to support you and have that conversation on your behalf.

If you yourself, as an ally, notice that someone keeps mispronouncing, misgendering, or misnaming someone you know, call them in for a short conversation. Sometimes people just need a reminder, and our role as allies is to pro-actively support our community members to make sure they're being respected and feel included.

When someone approaches you to let you know that you've been mispronouncing their name, misnaming, or misgendering them, listen up! You may have been acting unintentionally however, your actions may still have had a negative impact. Make sure to listen, ask questions, apologize for what you got wrong, and reassure them that you'll be more attentive of your statements and actions. Practice active listening (it's a skill) and give them the space to share their feelings. Dialogue can be a very effective way to bring challenging topics to the surface.

Want to know more? Here are some resources for more information:

- [You Know Those Common Objections to 'They' Pronouns? Here Are 9 Simple Facts to Shut Them Down](#)

- [You Don't Always Need An Audience](#)
- [A Practical Guide to Calling In](#)
- [Calling In Vs. Calling Out](#)

## 4) Calling Out

Sometimes *Calling In* doesn't work and or may not be the most appropriate tactic. An individual might be repeatedly and intentionally mispronouncing, misnaming, or misgendering you - that's where calling out comes in!

*Calling out* is often done more publicly and allows us to hold someone accountable for their actions and repeated microaggressions. It's important to note that the point behind calling out someone isn't to shame them, but to allow them to reflect on the impact of their behavior and to communicate community expectations.

As allies, it's also important for us to call people out when we witnessed a repeatedly mispronounced, misgendered, or misnaming of someone we know. Firmly but respectfully let them know their actions are hurtful to others, and inform them of the correct ways to refer to people. This is an important part of supporting our community inclusive, and making people feel welcome and included at UBC. It doesn't just happen. We all need to take steps as members of this awesome community of people to welcome and make sure we all feel included.

## 5) Practice, coz you're gonna make some mistakes! (psst...that's OK).

Lastly, there are great online resources to practice pronouncing someone's name and getting pronouns right. Check out the following:

Name Pronunciations:

- [Pronounce Names](#)
- [NameCoach](#)
- [Namez](#)
- [Vame](#)

Youtube:

- [Chinese Names](#)
- [South African Names](#)
- [General Names](#)

Pronouns:

- [Practice with Pronouns](#)
- [Pronoun Dressing Room](#)