



they

them

## What is “singular they”?

“Singular they” refers to the use of the pronoun *they*, *them*, or *their* to refer to a singular noun. Singular they has been used for centuries; its first known written use was in the 1300s. Singular they has also been used by Chaucer and Shakespeare.

### You already use singular they

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Singular they is already used nearly universally in any case where you need to refer to someone but don't know that person's gender. For example:

Oh no! someone left **their** phone on the table.

I'll keep it at the register in case **they** come back.

### Is singular they grammatically incorrect?

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While singular they has been in use since the 1300s, people didn't start arguing against its use until the mid 1800s, claiming that singular they was grammatically incorrect – the argument that is still most often used today. However, use of singular they is accepted by all of the major writing style guidelines, including MLA, APA, Chicago Manual of Style, and the Associated Press Stylebook.

Singular they was also named Word Of The Year in 2015 by the American Dialect Society and in 2020 by Merriam-Webster. In 2020, the ADS also named it Word of the Decade for the 2010s.

**Given the overwhelming consensus, arguments against the correctness of singular they are clearly nothing more than a disingenuous attempt to make transphobia sound reasonable.**

#### Sources:

[Oxford English Dictionary](#)

[Time.com](#)

[UK Civil Service](#)



HELLO  
MY PRONOUNS ARE

## Other arguments against singular they

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- **“He” can be used as a generic pronoun:** The use of “he” as a generic pronoun was first promoted by Ann Fisher in 1745 with *A New Grammar*. This convention was popularized in 1850 by a British Act of Parliament which decreed that “the masculine pronoun be understood to include all”. However, even at the time advocates of this convention recognized the problems in its use; by 1851 there were attempts to repeal the Act stemming from fears that it might lead to voting rights for women.
- **Singular they is clumsy:** The resurgence of singular they was a natural consequence of the cultural shift away from using “he” as a generic pronoun, because its alternatives are much clumsier. In 2015, when Washington Post copy editor Bill Walsh announced that his desk would start allowing usage of singular they, he explained that it’s the best option that lacks any other gender-neutral singular pronoun: “Using he seems sexist, using she seems patronizing and alternating he and she is silly ... as are he/she, (s)he and attempts at made-up pronouns”.
- **They is a plural pronoun and can’t be made singular:** This argument ignores the fact that “you” also originated as a plural pronoun and only later came to be applied singly. Use of singular “you” also faced much resistance, including from George Fox – the founder of Quakerism – who in 1660 wrote an entire book deriding users of singular you as idiots and fools. The fact that people who argue against singular they today are not using “thee, thou, and thy” in place of singular you puts the lie to this argument.
- **It’s stupid / silly to make a fuss about pronouns:** It is generally agreed that it is rude to misgender a cisgender person, such as saying “thank you ma’am” to a man with long hair. People will often get upset about the misgendering of pets (“Your dog is so cute, how old is she?” “He’s ten months.”) By that token, we should extend the same courtesy to trans and non-binary people that we do to cisgender people and animals.

## Usage Examples

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Still confused about proper use? Here are some examples:

- **Subjective:** “**They** are my teacher.”
- **Objective:** “I saw **them** outside.”
- **Possessive:** “What is **their** name?”  
or “That coat is **theirs**.”

### Sources:

[Oxford English Dictionary](#)

[Time.com](#)

[UK Civil Service](#)