# "She", "he"… and "they" – using pronouns in articles and other texts

## "She", "he"/"her", "his", etc. should only be used for people!
Never use these pronouns for objects, or animals, although it is possible to "humanise" a pet.

Otherwise, **you must refer to all objects and animals as "it"!**

## "She" and "he" as generic pronouns
It is now no longer acceptable really to use "he" as a generic pronoun for all people. For example, if you want to describe the behaviour of a voter, a worker/employee, a consumer or an economic agent etc., it would now be considered very old-fashioned (and perhaps reactionary) to use "he". For example:

*In this model, it is assumed that the consumer will only change his supplier if there is a significant change in price, when he then has a strong incentive to switch.* (This is passé now!!!)

Sometimes, authors use "he or she"/"his or her". For example:

*In this model, it is assumed that the consumer will only change his or her supplier if there is a significant change in price, when he or she then has a strong incentive to switch.*

Increasingly, authors may only use "she"/"her" as the generic single person pronoun. For example:

*In this model, it is assumed that the consumer will only change her supplier if there is a significant change in price, when she then has a strong incentive to switch.*

This form is perhaps still a little partial.

## Judith Butler and "They"
Judith Butler goes beyond gender and uses "they"/"their": e.g. Judith Butler's Wikipedia entry states that:

*"…They [i.e., Judith Butler] are also the Hannah Arendt Chair at the European Graduate School.*

*Butler (who uses the pronouns "she/they") is best known for their books* Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity *(1990) and* Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex *(1993), in which they challenge conventional notions of gender and develop their theory of gender performativity…"*

Personally, I feel this is not very easy or clear, and I use "she and he" or "her and his" (this is more conventional, and is used, for instance, by the sociologist Anthony Giddens).[1] For example:

*In this model, it is assumed that the consumer will only change her or his supplier if there is a significant change in price. She or he then has a strong incentive to switch.*

## The generic use of "they" (pointed out by Robert Ivermee)

"They" can also be used generically after a single noun, and is the rule with indefinite pronouns (e.g. everyone):

*If anyone has ideas for improving these information sheets, could they please write to me.*
Here, the indefinite pronoun (anyone) takes a singular verb, but is then followed by a plural pronoun (they).

In the example above, the plural pronoun can be used like this:

*In this model, it is assumed that the consumer will only change their supplier if there is a significant change in price. They then have a strong incentive to switch.*

Here, the consumer is singular but their is are used as generic pronoun.

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[1] See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Polity Press, 1991

Nicholas Sowels, latest version, 19 December 2022.