



Designing Forms for Gender Diversity and Inclusion



In 2017, The J. Walter Thompson Innovation Group discovered that:

70 % of Gen Zs felt strongly that public spaces should provide access to gender-neutral bathrooms, compared to 57 percent of 21–34-year-olds.

56 % of Gen Z said they knew someone who went by gender-neutral pronouns such as "they" or "ze," compared to 43% of millennials.

The world is evolving towards inclusivity, and so should your forms. Here are six recommendations for you to design forms inclusively:



Give people a really good reason for asking

Are you creating new policies or figuring out what will benefit them by asking the gender questions, or is this for marketing and communication purposes? Be clear, explain to the user why you are asking them and how it will benefit them. If there isn't a clear benefit for the user, you probably shouldn't ask about it.

Make it private, safe, and anonymous

Always let the user know their information is safe and will not be shared or let the user decide who can see it. Check the privacy policy on your website or services, and be mindful of who will see the identifying information. Try to anonymize the information as much as possible, so there won't be any accidental leak (outed). For example, if you show the result from a small survey that there is a trans woman in a department, and that department only has one woman, she has been outed.



Always make it optional

If possible, make the gender field optional. This brings us back to the first point about having good reason to ask this question in the first place. The user may know better than you whether it's safe to disclose their information based on the context.

Female Male Other Prefer not to say

Ask for pronouns instead

Consider asking people about their pronouns instead of gender. Or including the gender-neutral term "they/their/theirs" as a singular pronoun. While some may think of the term as bad grammar, but up until the Victorian era, it was actually used this way. The word "They" was even adopted by the Washington Post style guide in 2015 and became the word of the year in 2016. If you still think this might confuse the cis audience, try explaining the question and include a sample sentence.

Female: "Wish her a happy birthday!"
Male: "Wish him a happy birthday!"
Neutral: "Wish them a happy birthday!"

Be ready for a complex answer

Depending on the context, having more or fewer labels is often the solution. But generally, you want to make it as simple as possible so you don't overwhelm and creep out the user. Having too many options may cause the user to feel insecure and easily identified if they are honest.

Female Male Prefer not to say Custom

Just don't ask

If there is no reason and you don't know why you are asking, you probably don't need to know the answer. Make your form more straightforward and easy to fill, and just skip the question. Consider again if you need gender data for marketing purposes, will the user's attitudes be different based on gender. Also consider if you need to reevaluate the option or the form for more than just the male/female binary.

