



Media Reference Guide: Writing About Transgender/Nonbinary Stories & Artists

This is an introductory primer with best practices and tips for writing about our production and transgender/nonbinary people in theatre. Learning is an ongoing process, and language is continually evolving. Please see the list at the end for more resources.

Transgender/nonbinary people come from every region of the United States and around the world, from every racial and ethnic background, and from every faith community. We are your fellow writers, readers, actors, theatre artists, neighbors, and friends. We are changing the landscape and pushing the boundaries of theatre for a world that is bolder, more inclusive, and free of oppressive binaries and limitations.

Celebration Theatre's mission is to "entertain, empower, and inspire" with the work we do; we cannot achieve this without creating belonging, safety, and respect for our artists. Your words in media have a profound impact on trans/nonbinary lives and can hold long-lasting effects, both positive and negative. With this guide, we aim to ensure more just representation of our artists and stories, both in the larger theatre community and among the readers whose minds and views you influence.

Thank you for amplifying trans/nonbinary theatre artists and stories!

Terminology & Affirming Language

- **Gender Identity** – a person's internal, deeply held knowledge of their own gender. Everyone has a gender identity.
- **Transgender ("trans" as shorthand)** – an adjective and broad term used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender should always be used as an adjective. Trans people have varied, unique experiences and should never be treated as a monolith.
- **Nonbinary** – an adjective and umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity falls outside the binary gender categories of "man"

and "woman." Many nonbinary people also call themselves trans, while others do not.

It is important to use respectful terminology and treat trans/nonbinary people as you would treat any other person. Use the name, pronouns, and language the actor or creative team member uses to describe themselves.

- If you're unsure how to describe a character, note how the character talks about themselves or how other characters refer to them. For actors, you can also refer to the program or ask our press agent.

Forms of Address that Show Respect

Do not put quotation marks around someone's name or pronouns.

Names

Honor the names folks choose (regardless of whether their name has been legally changed). When writing about a chosen name, do not say "she wants to be called," "she calls herself," or other phrases that cast doubt on one's gender or the validity of one's name.

Pronouns

Respect people's pronouns and use them as requested, just as you would strive to pronounce a person's name correctly. Some folks may list multiple pronouns (e.g. they/she, he/they, she/he/they), and using any pronoun listed in the set is appropriate.

- Singular they pronouns are conjugated the same as plural they pronouns (e.g. "they are"). With singular they, many use "themselves" rather than "themselves," but both are typically acceptable.
 - *Example: They play the role of Gordon in A New Brain.*

Asking for pronouns and how a person would like to be talked about helps ensure respect, dignity, and accurate representation. If you are unsure which pronoun to use, you might say, "My pronouns are he/him. What are your pronouns?"

Honorifics

An honorific is a title or form of address. Mx. is a gender-neutral honorific that can be used regardless of gender, age, or marital status. When using honorifics, confirm with which one the person would like to be referred.

No Assumptions

Do not make assumptions about identities from a character's or actor's appearance, or make gendered comments or judgments about anyone's body, voice, mannerisms, etc.

- There is no one way to “look” or “be” trans or nonbinary. Being trans is not about physical appearance.

Do not assume that someone's identity is static. Just as language is fluid, gender identity and sexuality can also be.

An actor may use different pronouns from their character.

Practices To Avoid

- Avoid saying that trans/nonbinary people "identify as" their gender. Trans people are their gender the same way cisgender people are their gender.
- Avoid focusing on medical transition. It is inappropriate and invasive to ask questions about a trans person's body, genitalia, or other surgeries they may/may not have had. Doing this reduces people to their bodies and prevents readers from seeing trans people as full humans.
 - Trans/nonbinary people experience transitioning differently. Some medically transition and some do not.
- Avoid sensationalized images or headlines. In most cases, they do not add anything substantive to the story and are included to satisfy the invasive curiosity of readers or viewers.

Making Mistakes

What if you make a mistake? Learn from it. Listen, be accountable, and commit to improving. Take being corrected as a learning opportunity, continue to educate yourself, and inform your readers that you are committed to doing better.

Resources & References

[Queer Eye for Theatre Critics: 4 Writing Tips](#) - American Theatre

[GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#)

[About Transgender People](#) - National Center for Transgender Equality

[Developing Trans Roles for the Theatre](#) - American Theatre

[Creating Space for Gender Diverse Theatre](#) - Gender Explosion

[Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Young People](#) - The Trevor Project