



In a 2018 position statement, the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) supports the use of the gender neutral pronoun *they*. The singular *they* has a long history in spoken and written English.¹ Consequently, IWCA asserts that *they* “permits writers to avoid specifying a gender when doing so may be irrelevant, inappropriate, or needlessly restrictive. In a written text, it also has the important advantage of accurately representing people who use *they* as their gender pronoun.”² Singular *they* in academic writing acknowledges and affirms the lived realities of writers who themselves use singular *they*, as well as for writers who wish to affirm the reality of transgender and gender non-conforming people.³ Along with [other gender neutral pronouns](#), the singular *they* helps validate the identities and stories of people who identify beyond the gender binary”. In a similar vein, Chicago Manual of Style, The Associated Press, and The Purdue OWL have endorsed the use of *they* for both clarity and sensitivity.⁴

¹ The singular *they* has been employed by writers as early as a French romance poem translated into Old English dating from 1375 and The Wycliffe Bible Eccus.38.35 (1382). Chaucer also utilized the non-gendered *they* in Canterbury Tales in both the “General Prologue” and the “Wife of Bath’s Tale.” The [Oxford English Dictionary](#) offers a profuse historical overview of the singular *they* in literature spanning over 700 years: “they, pron., adj., adv., and n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/200700. Accessed 2 May 2018.

² See The American Psychological Association’s [Gender Identity Fact Sheet](#) which advocates the use of inclusive pronouns in both speech and writing.

³ While many college and university writing centers advocate *they*, The University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center offers a useful model of an [academic footnote citation](#) to help clarify usage.

⁴ [The Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) offers a thoughtful discussion of the singular *they*; [The Chicago Manual of Style](#) discusses the pronoun in regards to flexibility of language. Additionally, [The Associated Press](#) has guidance on the use of *they* as a singular pronoun.