



Guidance on the use of gender neutral (or non-binary) pronouns and adjective agreements in Pearson speaking and writing assessments for languages qualifications

Pearson is committed to assessments that are appropriate, effective, and relevant for all learners. This is an overview of our approach for languages assessments. This guidance focuses on productive skills as it is in the speaking and writing papers that students are required to describe themselves or others.

Pronouns

We are inclusive and support learners' use of their preferred ways of referring to themselves within the confines of the target language. If native speakers of a language support gender neutrality in a particular way, through the use of new pronouns for example, then our examiners will accept these when used by a candidate correctly – even though this usage may not always be recognised by some of the languages 'Academies' in certain countries. There is, of course, no requirement for students to learn and use the new pronouns but a consistent approach in the use of pronouns is needed.

Agreements

The same approach that we take to pronouns also applies to agreements where appropriate, for example in relation to the student themselves or when used with other people who the student has identified as having a different gender or as non-gender specific. New adjectival endings may be used if the candidate wishes but there is no requirement for students to learn and use these. The key thing again would be to ensure a consistent approach in the use of adjectival agreement.

Inclusive language

There are new ways of referring to people using gender-neutral nouns, whether by adding punctuation, asterisks or using alternative spellings. It's also possible to opt for expressions which are inherently gender-neutral or to find synonyms which are more inclusive than traditional ways of referring to people.

Speaking exams

In terms of oral assessments, teachers may agree with the examiner in advance the pronouns that their students prefer to use. Where visiting examiners or external teacher-examiners are assessing speaking, the teacher should let them know their candidates' preferences in advance of the test.

If candidates would like their pronoun preference to be explicitly stated at the start of the recording, the person conducting the assessment can do this on their behalf when giving the candidate's name and candidate number. However, there is no requirement to do so - this should be agreed by teachers and candidates in advance of the test.

The previous advice regarding pronouns and agreements would then apply, with the emphasis on consistency. It would also be sensible to ensure that students who wish to use these forms are confident with their usual pronunciation – and this can be checked online.

Marking

Written scripts are anonymous. Examiners are not, therefore, aware of candidates' gender and are not able to make judgements about which pronouns are correct for a particular learner based on an assumption about their first name. They will be looking for clear, consistent and unambiguous communication.

Examiners marking speaking assessments are fully conversant with the use of inclusive language and will mark the assessments as heard, without making judgements based on a candidate's name or voice.

Consequently, if a learner has opted for either masculine, feminine or non-binary adjective agreements throughout the assessment when referring to themselves and has used them correctly and consistently, this approach will be marked as 'correct' in its approach to gender referencing. Equally, if a student chooses to use non-binary pronouns (the equivalent of 'they' instead of 'he/she' in English), this will also be marked 'correct' providing the approach is consistent throughout the written or spoken assessment.

Support

As an awarding organisation, we want to lead the way in removing any barriers to trans, non-binary and gender-fluid candidates. If you would like to find out more about [gender identity](#) and the use of language, [Stonewall](#) provides detailed guidance. You can also find more support, along with specific examples of gender-neutral language use in French, German and Spanish in our YouTube video [here](#). If you have any further queries on this, you are welcome to get in touch via teachinglanguages@pearson.com.