At the start of a semester, it's very common for classes to begin with introductions, sometimes along with an icebreaker question or exercise. The participants in the class will be discussing ideas, practicing and working together over many weeks, so this is natural. Introductions can be more stressful for some than for others, especially when it comes to using names or pronouns that differ from others' expectations, past usage, or what's listed in an official class roster. Introductions are a moment where we'd like everyone to feel open, but not pressured, to tell each other how they want to be addressed in the classroom.

Some Basic Principles and Background

- The name that a student uses might be different from what's listed in the class roster, for various reasons: they've changed their name, they have a nickname they like to use, they've found that English speakers mispronounce their name so they've chosen an English nickname, and so forth.
- Students can change their "preferred name" in the Albert system, which will update class rosters for ease of use -- but no student is required to in order to request a form of address in a particular classroom!
- The pronouns students prefer to be addressed with (for example he/him/his, she/her hers, they/them/their) might be different from what others expect, or from what they've used in the past.
- Not all students are thoroughly familiar with how pronouns work and represent genders in English; it's beneficial to explain the social meaning of pronouns.
- All of the above can be true of instructors and teaching assistants as well!
- It's great to let each other know what name and pronouns we'd like people to use for us in the classroom, but it's also up to each individual to decide when and in what context to use a particular name or pronouns. Nobody should feel pressured to "disclose" something personal about their name, gender etc that they don't want to share in the semi-public space of the classroom. Opportunities to share or disclose information about names, pronouns etc before the start of the semester are valuable.
- Nobody should be put on the spot or singled out; a moment for introductions lets everyone participate in the same process (even if it's experienced quite differently).
- For many students and instructors, names and pronouns might be a simple or easy enough matter that putting a little extra focus on these things might seem strange or silly. This is especially true if students haven't ever been in a situation where preferred pronouns are discussed. It may be helpful to tell students that using each other's names and pronouns is a matter of respect, and should be taken seriously.
- Refusing to use the name and pronouns of a student, faculty member, staff or admin employee, etc. is in many circumstances likely to be a violation of NYU's Anti-Discrimination and Bias Policy. Furthermore, it may be a violation of the New York City Human Rights Law. When you're informed of someone's name and pronouns, please respect and use them!
Sample Introduction Format

*Give students a chance to communicate with you before the first class.* [more tk]

*Don’t take attendance directly off the official roster.* Although ideally this roster would be updated by students with their own names, in practice this frequently does not happen because students are unaware, forgetful, or uncertain. During the first class, do introductions in lieu of calling attendance, and in doing so create your own updated version of the roster with accurate names.

*Explain what the class is about to do.* A written list on a board or slide can be helpful.  
Ex. "For the next few months we'll be meeting every week to work and learn together, so let's start off by introducing ourselves so we can begin to get to know each other. I'd like us to some pieces of information:

1. **Your Name.** This is whatever name you'd like to be called in this classroom! It can be a nickname or any other name of your choice as long as that's what you want us to use for you; don't worry about whether it's on the class roster or not, we'll figure it out.
2. **Your Pronouns.** If you would like to, and only if you feel like it, let us know what pronouns to use for you in this classroom. These are the third-person pronouns that we use to refer to each other, like "he" and "his" or "she" and "hers" or "they" and "theirs."
3. **Anything else that you’d like us all to know.** For instance, if there's something about you that you want to share which would help us communicate with each other better, now's a great time.
4. [An Icebreaker Question, if you want]

*Model an introduction for the class yourself.* If you have a teaching assistant, they can go second to help reinforce the example.

Ex. "My name is Professor Bob Ross, and I use the pronouns he and him. I'm a little hard of hearing in my left ear, so I might not hear you right away if you're talking to me from that side. The thing I like to make to express my happiness is... happy little trees!"

*Have students go around and follow the example.* If they have questions, reiterate the above. If a student makes a joke out of it, ask them to take the introduction seriously as a matter of respect.

Ex.
Student: "Oh... am I supposed to say my pronouns too?"
Instructor: "That's up to you! You don't have to if you don't feel like it."

Student: "My name is Cameron, and I use the pronouns Your Highness and Attack Helicopter."
Instructor: "Hold up, start over. Cameron, could you tell us the actual pronouns you’d like us to use, please? I get the joke, but knowing how to address your potential collaborators and friends is a basic foundation of respect, so let's take this seriously."

*Take notes and check the roster.* It's hard enough to remember a whole classroom's names, so be sure to record any names and pronouns that you don't expect or which are not on the official class roster. A printed roster can be useful for this, especially one that includes photos of students. If you can't figure out which student corresponds to a name on the roster, you may have to check with individual students after class. Again, don't single out a student in front of the whole class; taking an individual aside before or after class and asking them to help you find them on the roster is preferable. You might ask a student for their last name, or to point out their entry on the roster.
Alternatives
As an alternative to the introduction script shown above, you could also have students fill out a form that includes name and pronouns, or write this information on a nametag, or both. Private means of communication between students and instructors can help students feel less vulnerable, but may necessitate a conversation about what information and forms of address are all right to use openly in a classroom setting.

Questions

How do students change their name in Albert?
In the "Personal Info" section of the Albert Student Center there's an option to "Add a New Name." If students ask about this, you should let them know that preferred names appear on most communications from the university (e-mails, documents, websites) so should be considered public information. Even if a student doesn't enter a preferred name into this system, everyone is still allowed to request a particular name be used in a classroom setting!

What if I make a mistake with a student's name or pronoun?
It's not the end of the world: this is something that happens! Apologize, correct yourself by using the correct name or pronoun, and move on. Don't make a huge deal about it or take up class time, as this may embarrass the student further; prioritize their feelings and reactions. You may want to apologize to the student privately after class, but there's no need to go overboard with guilt or requests for absolution. Finally, try to update your memory and habits with repetition and reinforcement over time so that it won't happen again.

What if I hear another student making a mistake with a student's name or pronoun?
Correct the student's mistake just as you would anything else that you wouldn't want other students remembering incorrectly: promptly and in context, without unnecessary scolding or humiliation, etc. This can often just involve saying the correct pronoun or name after the mistake is made, and many students will then correct themselves. If a student repeats the mistake, doesn't seem to get the idea or seems to be deliberately using the wrong name or pronouns, you should discuss respectful classroom behavior with them after class.