

# Suggested Guidelines for Language to Promote Positive Images of People with Disabilities

*For decades, persons with disabilities have been identified by their disability first, and as persons, second. Often, persons with disabilities are viewed as being afflicted with, or being victims of, a disability. Many words and phrases commonly used when discussing persons with disabilities reflect these biases.*

Removing Bias in Language: American Press Association Style

The communications industry and media have a significant influence on our daily lives and play a major role in shaping our perceptions and attitudes. The words and images that are used and the way information is presented can have a negative or a positive impact. The portrayal of persons with disabilities can promote equality, inclusion and full citizenship or it can contribute to society's negative stereotypes. The following guidelines for language are suggested.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Preferred</b>
Afflicted by multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, etc.	Person who has cerebral palsy, etc., Person with cerebral palsy, etc.
Attack, spell, fit	Seizure
Birth defects, deformity	Person born with a disability, Person with a disability from birth
Blind, the Visually impaired, the	Person who is blind, Person with a visual impairment
Brain damaged	Person with a brain injury, Person who has sustained a brain injury

## Avoid

## Preferred

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Confined to a wheelchair,  
wheelchair-bound

Person who uses a wheelchair,  
A wheelchair user

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Crazy, insane, mad, unsound mind,  
demented, maniac, neurotic, psychotic,  
lunatic, schizophrenic, deviant

Person with a mental health disability,  
Person who has schizophrenia, etc.

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Cripple/crippled

Person with a physical disability,  
Person with a mobility impairment,  
Person who walks with crutches,  
Person who uses a walker

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Deaf-mute, deaf and dumb

Person who is deaf (Sign-language users  
are properly identified as "the Deaf"  
[upper-case "D"]. People who do not use  
sign language are properly referred to as  
"the deaf" [lower case "d"] or "people who  
are deaf")

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Defect/deformity

Person who has a disability,  
Person born with a disability

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Differently abled

Person with a disability

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Disabled community

Disability community

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Disabled sport

Sport for athletes with a disability

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Disabled, the

Person with a disability, People with  
disabilities, A woman with a disability,  
A man with a disability

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Dwarf, midget

Person of short stature

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Epileptic, an

Person who has epilepsy

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Handicapped, the

Person with a disability

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## Avoid

Handicapped seating/  
parking/washrooms

Hearing impaired, hard of hearing, the

Invalid

Lame

Learning disabled, the dyslexics

Mentally retarded, idiot, imbecile, moron,  
retard, slow

Mongoloid, mongolism

Normal

Patient

Physically challenged

Spastic

Special, courageous, heroic, inspiring,  
brave

Stutterer

## Preferred

Accessible seating/parking/washrooms

Person who is hard of hearing

Person with a disability

Person with a mobility impairment

Person with a learning disability,  
Persons with learning disabilities

Person with an intellectual disability,  
Person who has a developmental disability

Person with Down Syndrome

Person without a disability

Person with a disability (unless the  
relationship being referred to is between  
a doctor and person)

Person with a disability

Person who has muscle spasms

(People who adapt to their disability do not  
necessarily acquire these traits)

Person with a speech impairment,  
Person who stutters

## Avoid

Suffers from, stricken with

## Preferred

Person with a disability, Person who has cerebral palsy, etc.  
(Disability is not synonymous with suffering)

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Tongue tied or mute

Person with a speech or communication disability

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Victim of multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.

Person with a disability,  
Person with a mobility impairment  
(People with disabilities are not victims)

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Numerous resource documents and guidelines for writing about persons with disabilities have been published, including the following:

*Word Choices: A Lexicon of Preferred Terms for Disability Issues* by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. Available from [www.mcass.gov.on.ca](http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca)

*A Way with Words and Images* published by Social Development Canada. Available from [www.canada.gc.ca](http://www.canada.gc.ca)



**TOGETHER WE ROCK!**  
Building Accessible and Inclusive Communities