

Words Matter: Suggested Guidelines for People-First Language to Create Inclusive Communities

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 words and images that are used and the way information is presented can play a major role in shaping perceptions and attitudes. 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 people-first language are suggested.

Avoid

Preferred

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

Confined to a wheelchair,
wheelchair-bound

Person who uses a wheelchair,
A wheelchair user

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

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

Cripple/crippled

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

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")

Defect/deformity

Person who has a disability,
Person born with a disability

Differently abled

Person with a disability

Disabled community

Disability community

Disabled sport

Sport for athletes with a disability

Disabled, the

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

Dwarf, midget

Person of short stature

Epileptic, an

Person who has epilepsy



Avoid

Preferred

Handicapped, the

Person with a disability

Handicapped seating/
parking/washrooms

Accessible seating/parking/washrooms

Hearing impaired, hard of hearing, the

Person who is hard of hearing

Invalid

Person with a disability

Lame

Person with a mobility impairment

Learning disabled, the dyslexics

Person with a learning disability,
Persons with learning disabilities

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

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

Mongoloid, mongolism

Person with Down Syndrome

Normal

Person without a disability

Patient

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

Physically challenged

Person with a disability

Spastic

Person who has muscle spasms



Avoid

Preferred

Special, courageous, heroic, inspiring, brave

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

Stutterer

Person with a speech impairment,
Person who stutters

Suffers from, stricken with

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

Tongue tied or mute

Person with a speech or communication disability

Victim of multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.

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

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.mcscs.gov.on.ca

A Way with Words and Images published by Social Development Canada. Available from www.canada.gc.ca

For more information about Together We Rock!,
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