

Tips for Writing about People with Disabilities

Although people with disabilities may refer to themselves in many different ways, we as an agency must use terminology recommended by the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA recommends person first language when referring to people with disabilities, and the term accessible when referring to wheelchair accessible elements such as parking or elevators.

When writing about people with disabilities, remember:

- Always write in people first format. Most people with disabilities prefer being called "people with disabilities." It would be wrong to say "the disabled man." It is more appropriate to say "the man who has a disability." Person first terminology is used to put the focus on the person and not the disability. Examples of using people first format:
 - "**person** with a disability"
 - "**she** has a vision impairment"
- Emphasize the person's abilities rather than their disabilities.
- Do not focus on a person's disability if it is not relevant to the story.

The "H" Word

- NEVER use the word, "handicap" or "handicapped." It has negative connotation and is disrespectful by some people with disabilities. Many believe that the word comes from a reference of a person with a disability begging with a "hat in hand."

Grouping People with Disabilities

Below are examples of words to use when writing about people with disabilities and words to not use when writing about people with disabilities:

Don't Use:	Instead Use:
"disabled group"	"a group of people with disabilities"
"disabled campers"	"a group of campers with disabilities"
"disabled transportation"	"transportation for people with disabilities"
"the disabled" or "the handicapped"	"people with disabilities"
"the blind"	"people with a visual impairment"
"handicap parking"	"accessible parking"
"handicap seating"	"accessible seating"

When describing a person's disability, avoid using phrases such as:

- "Afflicted with..."
- "Bound"
- "Confined"
- "Sentenced to..."
- "Suffers from..."
- "Victim"
- "Crippled"
- "Gimp"
- "Poor"
- "Retard"
- "Spastic"
- "Suffering"
- "Unfortunate"
- "Prisoner"
- "Wheelchair bound"
- "Deaf and dumb"

Correct words to describe a person's disability are:

- Blind/ Visual Impairment/ Blindness
- Cerebral Palsy
- Communication Disorder/ Speech Impairment
- Deaf/Hearing Impaired
- Developmental Disability
- Disability
- Epilepsy
- Hearing Impairment
- Paraplegia
- Psychiatric Disability
- Seizure Disorder
- Inability to speak
- Wheelchair-User
- Person with autism

People without Disabilities

Do not use "normal or healthy people" to describe people without disabilities. Instead use "people without disabilities."

Avoid Catchy Phrases

Many incorrect and disrespectful terms used to refer to people with disabilities today have been created by people without disabilities. Many people with disabilities do not like these terms, and prefer to be called "people with disabilities."

Example: "Differently-abled" or "physically challenged" are catchy phrases that should be avoided

Do Not Use the Word "special"

When writing about recommendations or wheelchair accessible facilities: Do not use the word "special." Instead, replace it with a word such as: "separate," "specific" or "accessible."

Example: "special buses for the disabled" instead use: "accessible buses for people with disabilities"

"special handicap bathroom" instead use: "accessible bathroom"

If possible, avoid specific reference to disabilities and embrace the concept of "universal access."

Example: "Many new facilities are designed to be universally accessible which opens them to people of all abilities."

The use of respectful language is something everyone can do to help increase awareness that people with disabilities should be considered people first and not defined by their disability.