



THE MISSING PAGES IN YOUR STYLE BOOK

People First Language

A GUIDE FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING
ABOUT PEOPLE WHO LIVE
WITH DISABILITIES

People First Language is a way of communicating that reflects respect for people with disabilities by choosing words that portray them accurately. Emphasis is placed on the person ***first***, rather than the disability. The focus/subject is the ***person***.

Example: "John is the writer who has a disability" rather than "John is a disabled writer."

**The Missing Page in your Stylebook:
People-First Language**
A project of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

Distinction between Disability and Handicap⁺⁺

A **Disability** is a condition caused by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease, which may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function. Some people with disabilities have more than one disability.

A **Handicap** is a physical or attitudinal constraint that is imposed upon a person, regardless of whether that person has a disability. Webster's defines handicap as "to put at a disadvantage."

Example: Some people with disabilities use wheelchairs. Stairs, narrow doorways and curbs are handicaps imposed upon people who use wheelchairs.

⁺⁺ *Disability Handbook*, City of San Antonio, TX. www.sanantonio.gov/planning/disability_handbook/deh1.asp

Tips for reporting on people with disabilities^{}**

Do not focus on disability unless it is crucial to a story. Focus instead on issues that affect the quality of life of those same individuals, such as accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, employment opportunities, or discrimination.

Do not portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman. This raises false expectations that all people with disabilities should be high achievers.

Do not sensationalize a disability by using such language as "afflicted with," "crippled," "suffers from," "confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound" etc.

Do not use generic labels for disability groups such as "the retarded" or "the deaf."

Do not define individuals by their disability. Put People First, not their disability.

Emphasize abilities, not limitations. Show people as active participants in society.

After the first *People First Language* reference, it's alright to use "disabled person" as a secondary reference.

Do not use euphemisms to describe a disability.

^{**} *University of Kansas, Publications, Research and Training Center on Independent Living*

People-First Language Preferred Expressions:

Say/Write...

Child with a disability
Individual with cerebral palsy
Person who has....
Nonverbal (with speech)
Child(ren) with autism
Developmental delay
Emotional disorder/mental illness
Deaf or has a hearing impairment
Communicates with sign language
Uses a wheelchair
Has a cognitive; with disabilities
He has epilepsy
Adult with Down syndrome
Has a learning disability
Has a physical disability
Non-disabled
Congenital disability
Condition
Seizures
Cleft lip
Has mobility impairment
Paralyzed
Has quadriplegia
Has paraplegia

Instead of...

handicapped or disabled
palsied, CP or spastic
Afflicted, suffers from, victim of
mute or dumb
autistic
slow or retarded
crazy or insane
deaf and dumb
signer
confined to a wheelchair
retarded
epileptic
mongoloid, suffers from Down syndrome
is learning disabled
is physically disabled/crippled
normal, healthy
birth defect
disease (unless it IS)
fits
hare lip
lame or crippled
invalid or paralytic
quadriplegic
paraplegic

Thank you for your time and willingness to hear about creating true inclusion and diversity. We hope that you will help *make a difference for family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers who live with disabilities* by using *People First Language* and encourage others to do the same. Our goal is to change public perception and create more welcoming attitudes through the words we choose. By placing emphasis on the person first, we enhance our communities because everyone knows they count!



People First Language:

These words and expressions are currently preferred and reflect a positive attitude. Some language is “trendy” and meanings may vary depending on the context. The ideal is to incorporate these words into our language in a way that first and foremost, expresses the dignity of the person.

Blind; blindness

Low vision; person with low vision

Vision impaired

Disabled (secondary reference)

Person with cerebral palsy

Person with a disability

Person with developmental disabilities; developmentally disabled

Person with paraplegia

Psychological/emotional disability

Wheelchair-user or uses a wheelchair

Not all people with disabilities agree on which language or terminology is preferred like any other large, yet identifiable group of people. Individuals will vary as to how they refer to themselves and how they would like you to refer to them.



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