



## Guidance for Writing and Speaking about People with Disabilities and Older Adults

One should always remember to speak or write about others in a way that supports our commonality. When describing a person with a disability, **refer to the person first—not the disability**. This approach emphasizes the full dignity of the person.

Terminology changes constantly, but the following rules will always apply:

- **NEVER USE the word “handicapped”**. The word is disability.
- **NEVER USE a disability as an adjective**. One is not a “blind writer,” but a “writer who is blind”.
- **NEVER USE the term “special”**. This alienates the individual from others. Tours are not “special tours,” but “tours that are accessible to people with and without disabilities.”
- **NEVER USE euphemisms** such as “physically challenged” or “handi-capable.” These are condescending terms. The person has a disability.
- **NEVER USE labels** such as “the disabled”, “the blind”, “the deaf”, “the elderly”, “A.B.s” (able-bodied), “T.A.B.s” (temporarily able-bodied), or “normal”. “Able-bodied” is a relative and judgmental term. “Normal” insinuates that people with disabilities are somehow abnormal. When describing a person without disabilities, it is acceptable to say “non-disabled person” or “person without disabilities”.

<b>Affirmative</b>	<b>Negative</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with disabilities</li> <li>• A disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ The handicapped</li> <li>∅ The impaired</li> <li>∅ The disabled</li> <li>∅ The unfortunate</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person without disabilities</li> <li>• Non-disabled person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ Able-bodied</li> <li>∅ Normal person</li> </ul> <p><i>This implies a person with a disability is not normal</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who is blind</li> <li>• Person who is partially sighted or has low vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ The blind</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who is deaf or hard-of-hearing</li> <li>• Person with hearing or speech disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ The deaf or deaf mute</li> <li>∅ Suffers a hearing loss</li> </ul> <p><i>"Suffers" dramatizes a disability</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who uses a wheelchair</li> <li>• Person with limited mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ Wheelchair bound</li> <li>∅ Confined or restricted to a wheelchair</li> <li>∅ Cripple</li> </ul> <p><i>People use wheelchairs for mobility and freedom</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who has muscular dystrophy</li> <li>• Person who has multiple sclerosis</li> <li>• Person who had polio</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ Stricken by MD</li> <li>∅ Afflicted by MS</li> <li>∅ Polio victim</li> </ul> <p><i>"Stricken," "afflicted," and "victim," all imply helplessness, and emotionalize and sensationalize a person's disability</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who does not speak</li> <li>• Non-Verbal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ Dumb</li> <li>∅ Mute</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person with epilepsy</li> <li>• Person with a seizure disorder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ Epileptic</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person with learning disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ The learning disabled</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older person</li> <li>• Older adult</li> <li>• Mature adult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ The aged</li> <li>∅ The elderly</li> <li>∅ Senior citizen</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person of short stature</li> <li>• Little people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ Dwarf</li> <li>∅ Diminutive person</li> <li>∅ Midget</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who lives in a nursing home or long-term care institution</li> <li>• Person who stays at home because of limited mobility, fragile health, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ The infirmed</li> <li>∅ The institutionalized</li> <li>∅ The homebound</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful</li> <li>• Productive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ Courageous, inspiring</li> </ul> <p><i>This implies a person is a hero or martyr</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person with mental retardation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∅ The retarded</li> </ul>