

5.8 Proper Terminology



Words Do Matter

Language is critical in shaping and reflecting our thoughts, beliefs and feelings. Some words degrade and diminish people with disabilities. Always try to avoid stereotypical depictions of people with disabilities. Promote “people first!”

Put the Person First

Still, individuals have their own preferences. If you are not sure what words to use, simply ask the person!

Say	Avoid saying
Person with a disability	Disabled person; invalid person; handicapped
Person with multiple disabilities	The disabled; the challenged; crippled
Person with Tourette Syndrome	That person has Tourette Syndrome
Person who has Cerebral Palsy	He suffers from Cerebral Palsy

Many people with disabilities dislike terms such as “physically challenged” and “differently abled”. If you are not sure what words to use, A-T-P: Ask The Person!

Say	Avoid saying
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound
Person who has a physical or mobility disability	Cripple

The wheelchair is what enables the person to get around and participate in society; it's liberating, not confining.

Say	Avoid saying
Person with a disability since birth	Birth defect; deformity; congenital defect
Has Down syndrome	Mongol; mental
Person who is blind	The blind person
Person with a visual impairment	Visually impaired
Short-statured person	Dwarf; midget
Person who is hard of hearing or person who is deaf (Lack of speech usually results from impaired hearing)	Deaf and dumb; deaf and mute

People with disabilities are generally comfortable with the terminology used to describe daily activities. For example, people who use wheelchairs go for “walks,” and people with visual impairments “see” what you mean.

Take the Challenge!

Which is proper to say? “A person with a visual impairment,” or “a visually impaired person?” Words do matter. **Put the person first.** It is proper to say: “a person with a visual impairment.”

Source:

¹ *A Way with Words and Images: Suggestions for the Portrayal of People with Disabilities.* Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. 2006. Retrieved from the Government of Canada Accessibility Resource Centre. https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/migration/documents/eng/disability/arc/way_with_words.pdf

Disclaimer:

Hire for Talent has made every effort to use the most respectful words possible while writing these materials. We realize, however, that the most appropriate terminology may change over time. We developed these materials with the intent to respect the dignity and inherent rights of all individuals.