

A way with words

Guidelines for the portrayal of people with a disability

Put the person before the disability.

Words to avoid	Acceptable alternatives
abnormal, subnormal (These are negative terms that imply failure to reach perfection.)	Specify the disability.
afflicted with (Most people with a disability do not see themselves as afflicted.)	person has (name of disability)
birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	person with a disability since birth, person with a congenital disability
the blind, the visually impaired	person who is blind, person with a vision impairment
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound (A wheelchair provides mobility, not restriction.)	uses a wheelchair
cripple, crippled (These terms convey a negative image of a twisted ugly body.)	has a physical disability, has a mobility disability
the deaf	person is deaf (This refers to people who cannot hear but do not necessarily identify with the Deaf community.) or the Deaf (This refers people who identify themselves as part of the Deaf community and who use sign language. The Deaf community is only appropriate when referring to this particular community.)
deaf and dumb (This is sometimes used to describe an inability to hear and speak, which does not imply any intellectual disability.)	person who is deaf and non-verbal or Deaf people (This refers to people who identify themselves as part of the Deaf community and who use sign language.)
defective, deformed (These are degrading terms.)	Specify the disability.
the disabled	people with a disability
dwarf (Has negative connotations.)	short-statured person
epileptic	person with epilepsy
fit, attack, spell	seizure
the handicapped	person with a disability (If referring to an environmental or attitudinal barrier then 'person who is handicapped by a disability' is appropriate.)

Words to avoid	Acceptable alternatives
insane, lunatic, maniac, mental patient, mentally diseased, neurotic, psycho, schizophrenic, unsound mind (These are derogatory terms.)	person with a psychiatric disability (or specify condition)
invalid (The literal sense of the word is 'not valid'.)	person with a disability
mentally retarded, defective, feeble minded, imbecile, moron, retarded (These are offensive, inaccurate terms.)	person with an intellectual disability
mongol (This term is outdated and derogatory.)	has Down syndrome
patient (Only use in context of doctor-patient relationship.)	person with a disability
physically challenged, intellectually challenged, vertically challenged, differently abled (These are ridiculous euphemisms for disability.)	person with a disability
people with disabilities (Refers to people who have multiple disabilities.)	person with multiple disabilities, people with a disability
spastic (Usually refers to a person with cerebral palsy or who has uncontrollable spasms. This is a derogatory term and often used as a term of abuse. It should never be used as a noun.)	person with a disability
special (This term is overused, e.g. 'special' person.)	Describe the person, event or achievement as you would normally.
suffers from, sufferer, stricken with (Not all people with a disability actually suffer. These terms should not be used indiscriminately.)	person with a disability
vegetative (This is an offensive and degrading term.)	in a coma, comatose, unconscious
victim (People with a disability are not necessarily victims and prefer not to be seen as such.)	has a disability



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* Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.
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