Disability Deep Dive Language Guide

Language matters. This is not unique to disabled people. In civil rights movements around race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, language has been a cornerstone of achieving equity and inclusion.

Because language is fluid and changes over time and disability culture is not homogeneous, this or *any* language document is not meant to be a definitive guide. As society continues to evolve in its thinking about disability, so does the terminology used to describe those who inhabit it. For a more comprehensive list of terms, visit the National Center on Disability and Journalism https://ncdj.org/style-guide/.

Note: Some language in this guide may differ from the language adopted by your organization. When in doubt, follow your organization's established preferred language guidelines.

Important points to remember:

• Most widely used terms to describe disabled people have been coined by nondisabled people.

• When in doubt, ask. If you don't know the preference of the person and can't ask, go with the majority opinion of the community. And if you're referring to a group of people who have different preferences, use the language of the majority of the group."

• Many phrases that might be thought of as inappropriate are perfectly acceptable. People who use wheelchairs do "go for walks." It is perfectly acceptable to say to a person with a visual disability, "See you later," or to a Deaf person, "Did you hear about…" Common, everyday phrases of this kind are unlikely to cause offense.

• Assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs, service animals, hearing aids, eyeglasses, etc.) are tools for ***independence.*** Avoid terms such as wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair.

• An employer cannot make any pre-employment inquiry about a disability or the nature or severity of a disability or ask or require a job applicant to take a medical examination before making a job offer. An employer may, however, ask questions about the ability to perform specific job functions and may, with certain limitations, ask a disabled individual to describe or demonstrate how they would perform these functions.

Definitions

Able-bodied "Able-bodied" should be avoided (although you will still hear it used). Preferred by the disability community: ***nondisabled***

Ableism Ableism is a system of oppression based on perceived ability. Ableism is any attitude, action, or institutional practice backed by institutional power which subordinates people because of their perceived ability. It is any social relations, practice, or idea that presumes that all people are "able-bodied." The mere presumption that everyone is "able-bodied" is effectively discriminatory in and of itself, often creating environments that are hostile to people with disabilities. (Source: LDIR)

Accessible, accessibility Use "accessible" when describing a space, location or event that is modified to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Accessible modifications allow unrestricted admittance to accommodate individuals who may or may not use a wheelchair, individuals who may have sensory disabilities, modifications for individuals who communicate in different languages, are Deaf/hard of hearing, blind/low vision or have cognitive or learning disabilities. (Source: National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

ADA Definition of Disability A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. The ADA also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on that person's association with a person with a disability. It is important to remember that in the context of the ADA, "disability" is a legal term rather than a medical one. Because it has a legal definition, the ADA's definition of disability is different from how disability is defined under some other laws. (Source: ADA.gov) *Important note: This definition of disability is not necessarily preferred by the disability community.*

Assistive devices and assistive technology Any piece of equipment or device used to maintain, promote, increase function in someone with a disability. Examples include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, crutches, hearing aids, prosthetic limbs, screen readers, communication boards

Crip-face or Disability Drag: The practice of using nondisabled actors to play disabled characters.

Deaf culture Deaf culture describes the social beliefs, behaviors, art, literary traditions, history, values, and shared institutions of communities that are affected by deafness and which use sign languages as the main means of communication. Some people are born deaf, while others lose their hearing later in life because of illness or injury. People who have been deaf their whole lives and are actively involved with the Deaf community consider deafness a "difference in experience rather than a disability. *Important note:* Big "D" Deaf refers to a person who is culturally Deaf and a member of the Deaf community and uses American Sign Language (ASL). Little "d" deaf refers to a person who has a hearing loss.

Disability This definition of disability is a compilation of several resources, which focuses on and promotes the concept of disability from the perspective of the *social model* rather than the traditional, antiquated *medical model,* which emphasizes impairments and limitations and puts the onus on disabled people to be "fixed" or adapt to societal barriers. Developed by disabled people, the social model regards disability as a socially constructed experience that identifies systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) as contributory factors in disabling people. The social model promotes the notion that while physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological variations may cause individual functional limitation or impairments, these lead to disability only if society fails to take account of and include people regardless of their individual differences. The social model further recognizes disability as a community and a culture.

Disability Discrimination Discrimination against people with physical, intellectual or invisible disabilities. An "ableist" society is said to be one that assumes able-bodied individuals to be the "norm". Continued discrimination results in public and private architectural structures, places, services, including education and social work that are built to serve nondisabled people, thereby excluding those with disabilities. It is also a system by which mainstream society denigrates, devalues, and thus oppresses those with disabilities, while privileging those without disabilities. (Source: LDIR)

The law also protects people from discrimination based on their relationship with a person with a disability (even if they do not themselves have a disability). For example, it is illegal to discriminate against an employee because his/her spouse has a disability. (Source: EEOC.gov)

Identity-first language As increasing numbers of disabled people view disability as an identity, a culture and a community.

Invisible disability (also known as hidden disability or nonvisible disability) defined as a disability that is not immediately apparent and primarily neurological in nature. Examples include, but are not limited to ADHD, learning disabilities, chronic pain, brain injuries, and anxiety disorders. (Source: disabled-world.com)

Intellectual disability (also known as cognitive disability) Examples include autism, Down syndrome. It is estimated that 10% of people in the U.S. have a medical condition considered a type of invisible disability. Preferred by the disability community: intellectual disability (Source: disabilityinaction.com)

Neurodiversity / Neurodivergent A movement in the autistic community to embrace our differences. The Neurodiversity community believes autism does not need a cure, and that a community benefits from having many neurotypes thinking in different way

People-first language Putting the person before the disability—and eliminating old, prejudicial, and potentially offensive descriptors (e.g., person with a disability, not "handicapped", "physically challenged" or "the disabled") (DIN) *Important note*: As increasing numbers of disabled people view disability as an identity, a culture and a community, people first language has fallen out of favor with many in the disability community. Preferred: ***disabled person, disabled people***

Physical disability (also known as mobility disability) a condition that affects a person's mobility. Examples include, but are not limited to, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis. Preferred by the community: ***mobility disability***

Reasonable accommodation Any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodation also includes adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities. (Source: ADA.gov)

Sensory disability A condition that affects a person's sight, hearing or both. Sensory disabilities include blind, low vision, deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind.

Spectrum Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. ASD is a developmental disability that affects many parts of the brain including difficulty understanding social interactions, sensory processing disorder, and affects the language/communication centers of the brain, as well as obsessive special interests. While many people with other conditions may have some of these symptoms, a doctor only diagnoses ASD if all of these and other symptoms are present. ASD is a condition that is present from birth until death. Those with ASD excel in spatial, visual, and logical thinking.