

Disability Inclusive Language

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In the realm of language, nuances matter greatly, especially when it comes to how we refer to individuals with various identities and experiences.

There are two approaches when speaking about disability: Person First language and Identity First language. Person-First Language, as the name suggests, prioritizes the individual over any specific identity or condition. It aims to emphasize the personhood of an individual before addressing any aspects of their identity or disability. For instance, instead of saying "disabled person," Person First Language would use "person with a disability." The primary goal of PFL is to humanize individuals by placing emphasis on their inherent worth and dignity beyond any labels they may carry.

Identity-First Language prioritizes the identity or condition, considering it an integral aspect of an individual's identity. Advocates of Identify First language argues that identities and experiences shape individuals' perspectives and should be acknowledged without euphemisms or separations. For instance, saying "disabled person" rather than "person with a disability."

However, in general, person first language would be the preferred default when speaking about disability. It is not always possible to know what an individual prefers, so it is preferable to begin with person-first language and then adjust according to the individual's preferences.

Other examples of inclusive language:

- **If relevant, say that a person “uses” a wheelchair, rather than is “confined to” or “restricted to” a wheelchair, or "wheelchair bound."**
- **Do not use the adjective “unfortunate” when talking about people with an intellectual disability. Disabling conditions do not have to be life-defining in a negative way.**
- **Speak directly to the individual: When interacting with someone who has a disability, address them directly rather than speaking to their companion or caregiver, or interpreter.**
- **Use “Accessible parking” vs “handicapped parking.”**
- **Ponder this: Who is an ASL interpreter for? The person who is deaf? Or, is it the hearing person? Use language like “Do *WE* need an interpreter?” not “Do *YOU* need an interpreter?”**

Additional Resources:

- ADA National Network [Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities | ADA National Network \(adata.org\)](#)
- National Education Association [Words Matter! Disability Language Etiquette | NEA](#)

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