

“Choosing the Right Words”

Nicole Koester
NCDJ, Program Manager
Walter Cronkite School of Journalism
and Mass Communication,
Arizona State University

“Until we learn to appreciate the power of language and the importance of using it responsibly, we will continue to produce negative social consequences for those victimized by dangerous language habits.”

J. Dan Rothwell, *Telling It Like It Isn't: Language Misuse and Malpractice/What We Can Do About It*

Our responsibility

Use **relevant** disability terms that are:

- Accurate
- Objective
- Fair
- Neutral
- Respectful & Inclusive

“Are we ‘handicapped’ or ‘disabled,’
‘disabled people’ or ‘people with
disabilities,’ ‘differently abled’ or
‘special needs?’”

My Journey with Disability Language and Identity

Andrew Pulrang, disability blogger, co-coordinator of #CripTheVote

Monday, April 10, 2017

The disability community is not monolithic



How has the disability
language conversation
evolved in the
United States?



Prior to 1960's acceptable terms: idiot, imbecile, moron, crippled, lame, handicap

1970's-1980's disability advocacy expands along with the civil rights movement

“People with disabilities” starts replacing “handicap”

Source: <http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/>

1990 - The “Capitol Crawl” and Americans with Disabilities Act



Disability activists participating in the “Capitol Crawl” on March 12, 1990. Photo Credit: [Tom Olin/Disability History Museum](#)

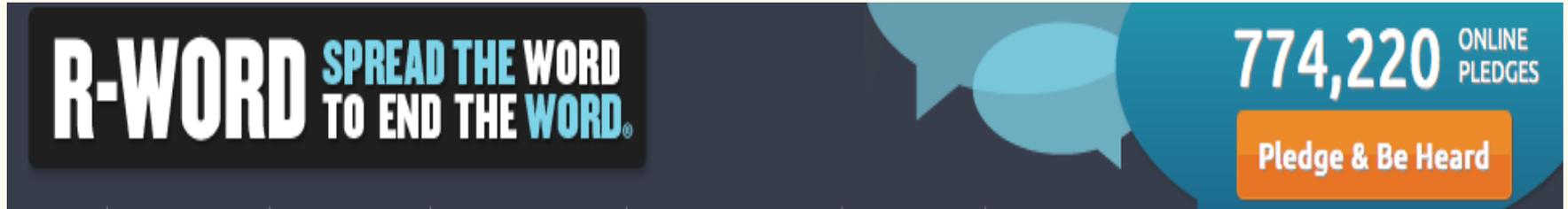


Yoshiko and Justin Dart (right) lead a rights march. Photo by Tom Olin.

On July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush.

“Spread the Word to End the Word”

2009 Disability Advocacy Campaign encouraging people to stop using the R-word – retard(ed)



Rosa's Law

- President Obama signs October, 5 2010
- U.S. law that replaces several instances of “**mental retardation**” with “**intellectual disability**” in federal health, labor and education statutes.



Courtesy Marcellino family

People-first language

vs.

Identity-first language

People-first language

Puts the emphasis on the person first; followed by a description of the disability.

EXAMPLES:

A person who lives with a disability vs. a disabled person

A person with an intellectual disability vs. mentally disabled

A person diagnosed with epilepsy vs. epileptic

Suffering In Secret

SUFFERING IN SECRET | N. O.V. 21, 2010

Part 1: Illinois hides abuse and neglect of adults with disabilities

In the first comprehensive accounting of mistreatment inside Illinois' taxpayer-funded group homes and their day programs, the Tribune uncovered a system where caregivers often failed to provide basic care while regulators cloaked harm and death with secrecy and silence. [MORE](#)



To ensure INCLUSION, FREEDOM, AND RESPECT for all, it's time to embrace

People First Language

by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

Did you know that people with disabilities constitute our nation's largest minority group (one in five Americans has a disability)? It's also the most inclusive and most diverse group: all ages, genders, religions, and socioeconomic

wisdom, individuals

of *birth defects*.

to become *normal* again.

their *challenges*.

ed, autistic, blind, deaf, seam!

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The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

Mark Twain

They do not represent the stereotypical perception: a homogenous sub-species called "the handicapped" or "the disabled." Each person is a unique individual.

The only thing they may have in common with one another is being on the receiving end of societal ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination. Furthermore, this largest minority group is the only one that *any person can join at any time*: at birth or later—through an accident, illness, or the aging process. When it happens to *you*, will you have more in common with others who have disability diagnoses or with family, friends, and co-workers? How will you want to be described and how will you want to be treated?

WHAT IS A DISABILITY?

early intervention is different from early childhood, which is different from special education, which is different from vocational-rehabilitation, which is different from worker's compensation, which is different from the military, and so on. Thus, "disability" is a governmental *sociopolitical construct*, created to identify those entitled to specific services or legal protections.

—THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND LABELS—

Words are powerful. Old, inaccurate descriptors and the inappropriate use of medical diagnoses perpetuate negative stereotypes and reinforce a significant and incredibly powerful attitudinal barrier. And this invisible, but potent, force—not the diagnosis itself—is the *greatest obstacle* facing individuals who have conditions we call disabilities.

When we see the diagnosis as the most important characteristic of a person, we devalue her as an individual. Do *you* want to be

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can actually cause harm—and can ruin people's lives—for

Like gender, ethnicity, and other traits, a disability is simply one of many natural characteristics of being human. Are *you* defined by your gender, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, or other trait? No! So how can we define others by a characteristic that is known as a "disability"?

The greatest

Organizations that recommend and use people-first language

- National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ)
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- National Council on Independent Living
- The Arc
- American Medical Association
- American Psychological Association
- Governmental norm for federal and state institutions
 - Center for Disease Control
 - Office of Disability Rights

Identity-first language

Puts the emphasis on the disability.

EXAMPLES: Autistic, deaf, blind, disabled

An autistic woman vs. woman with autism

Several U.S. disability groups have always used identity-first terms, specifically the culturally Deaf community and the autistic rights community.

DATA

Thousands of disabled workers in PA paid far below minimum wage

 [Halle Stockton](#)  | July 18, 2014



DISABLED.

#SayTheWord



Lawrence Carter-Long

Follow · January 13, 2016 · Edited ·

LCL Style Guide (Post-State of the Union Edition): It's 2016. "Disabled." Go ahead. Say the word. It's way past time to dump the silly euphemisms and not be shy about getting good and righteously pissed off about being omitted. Until we're recognized as a community, as a constituency -- both within our community and outside of it -- how the hell are we supposed to organize? Change things. Come tog... [See More](#)

197

40 Comments 223 Shares



Like



Comment



Share

View 34 more comments



Lawrence Carter-Long I hear ya. It is confusing. That's one compelling to simplify things a bit. One word. RE:



Write a comment...



AnnMarie Peavey Duchon Loved and sharing!

Like · Reply · 2y



   **Your Dreams**   

@PastelVolcano



Replying to @sashalewis_

Hi Sasha, I understand that you're trying to be on our side, but most of us do prefer Autistic Person, because "with Autism" makes it sound like Autism is a disease or a tumour or a bad thing.

And when it's compared to a bad thing, that makes us feel sad and frightened and hurt,

12:55 PM - May 16, 2018



See



Your Dreams



's other Tweets





“I personally am not ‘bound’ by my wheelchair. It is a very liberating device that allows me to work, play, maintain a household, connect with family and friends, and ‘have a life.’”

- Dot Nary, Ph.D.

The case of Stephen Hawking



“A scientist who overcame debilitating disease to become the world’s most renowned living physicist...” The Washington Post

“The world-famous physicist who deepened our understanding of the universe while proving that any disability could be overcome .. CBS

“The scientist who overcame a debilitating disease ...” CNN

“It’s most famous sufferer was Stephen Hawking ... Hawking lived a long time for an ALS sufferer...” WFMZ-TV, Penn.

Tweet: “May you be free of your wheelchair and fly through the cosmos.”

NCDJ Disability Language Style Guide

<http://ncdj.org/style-guide/>



Cripple

Background: Merriam-Webster defines “cripple” as a noun (“a lame or partly disabled person or animal or “something flawed or imperfect”). It is also used as a verb. The word dates back to Old English, when it was used to indicate creeping or bending over. According to the blog grammarphobia.com, it became viewed as offensive in the early 20th century and was replaced by “handicapped” and then by “disabled.”

Recently, some disability activists have reclaimed the word. A new online publication, [Cripple Magazine](#), bills itself as “run by and run for young disabled creatives.” In a tweet, the magazine wrote, “Why choose the term, ‘Cripple’? We chose the term as a way to reclaim the history of the word, & use it as a method to empower the disability community! In a way, we wanted to take back the negative association around Cripple and turn it into a better comeback - a positive one.” But even Cripple Magazine spells cripple with an asterik – “Cr*pple.”

And while other activists have embraced the word, adopting hashtags such as #criplit and #cripthevote, some are very much against its use. [Keah Brown](#), a writer and disability activist, tweeted in 2018: “I just really can’t stand the word cripple so whenever I see it, I block it out. I legit ignore every notification with the word in it. Idc.”

NCDJ Recommendation: Ask the person how they’d like to be described; otherwise, avoid using the word “cripple” as a noun or verb.

AP style: Considered offensive when used to describe a person who is disabled.

Differently-abled

Background: This is a term that came into vogue in the 1990s as a politically correct alternative to disabled, handicapped or mentally retarded. Currently, it is not considered appropriate (and for many, never was). Some consider it condescending and offensive, a "borderline cutesy" way of avoiding talking about disability. Others prefer it because "dis" means "not," which means that "disabled" means "not able." But particularly when it comes to referring to individuals, "differently abled" is problematic. As some advocates observe, we are all differently abled.

NCDJ: Use the term “person with a disability” instead of “differently-abled.”

AP Style: Not addressed

Survivor/battle

Background: The word “survivor” is used by some people to affirm their recovery from or conquest of an adverse health condition. It is commonly used to refer to a cancer survivor, burn survivor, brain injury survivor or stroke survivor. However, there is not universal agreement about the appropriateness of its use. For example, after U.S. Senator John McCain died in the summer of 2018, some disability advocates argued with the description of McCain losing a battle with cancer.

The war rhetoric is seen by many as inappropriate and demeaning. One is not a better person for "surviving" cancer or worse for having "battled it," whether the person has won or lost.

NCDJ Recommendation: Terms such as “battle” and “survivor” are still widely accepted and understood, but the user should be aware that they could offend some people.

AP style: Not addressed

Special/special needs/functional needs

Background: The term “special needs” was popularized in the U.S. in the early 20th century during a push for special needs education to serve people with all kinds of disabilities. The word “special” in relationship to those with disabilities is now widely considered offensive because it euphemistically stigmatizes that which is different.

The term “special education” is still widely used when referring to public school programs, although some government entities use titles like “exceptional student services.”

NCDJ Recommendation: Avoid using the terms “special,” “special needs” or “functional needs” when describing a person with a disability or the programs designed to serve them, with the exception of government references or formal names of organizations and programs. It is more accurate to cite the specific disability or disabilities in question. The term “functional needs” is preferred when a term is required. For example, “addressing the functional needs of people with disabilities” could be used when referring to a facility or program.

AP style: Not addressed

When in doubt, ask the person involved.



Make it relevant

People living with disabilities often complain that their disability is mentioned even when the story has nothing to do with their disability.

Q1. Should a story about residents complaining about noisy airplanes flying over their houses note that one of the residents who is complaining uses a wheelchair?

Q2. Should someone who is blind be identified as such in a story about people who have been stranded while hiking and had to be rescued?

Quiz

Prompts