



POSITIVE LANGUAGE EMPOWERS



Examples of Person-First Language

“People-first” language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and that their abilities or disabilities are only part of who they are. When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first. Group designations such as "the blind," "the retarded," or "the disabled" are inappropriate because they do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities. Further, words like "normal person" imply that the person with a disability is not normal, whereas "person without a disability" is descriptive, but not negative. The accompanying chart shows examples of suggested alternative language to negative phrases.

Negative Phrases	Suggested Alternative Language
Retarded, mentally retarded, mentally defective	Person with an intellectual or developmental disability
Mentally ill, defective, nuts, crazy	Person with a mental health condition; Person living with a mental health condition or illness
The blind, partially blind, vision impaired	Person who is blind; Person who has low vision; Person who has a vision impairment; Person whose vision is impaired
The disabled, handicapped, physically challenged	Person with a disability
The Deaf, Deaf and dumb, Deaf-mute	Person who is Deaf
Suffers a hearing loss, hearing impaired, partially Deaf	Person who is hard of hearing
Deaf and dumb, blind and mute	Deaf-Blind Person; Deafblind
Afflicted by MS	Person who has multiple sclerosis

Negative Phrases	Suggested Alternative Language
CP victim, CP person	Person with cerebral palsy
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy; Person with seizure disorder
Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, Wheelchair-bound person	Person who uses a wheelchair; Wheelchair user; Person in a wheelchair
Stricken by MD	Person who has muscular dystrophy
Brain-damaged	Person with a traumatic brain injury; Person who has sustained a brain injury
Downs person, mentally retarded, mongol	Person with Down Syndrome
The autistic, autistic	Person who has autism; Person on the autism spectrum
Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, challenged	Person with a physical disability; Person who is physically disabled
Dumb, mute	Unable to speak; Uses synthetic speech; Person who uses a communication device
Normal, healthy, whole people	People without disabilities

Other Empowering Language:

If you are on a panel, be sure to ask which pronouns someone goes by. Don't make any assumptions about a person's pronouns.

Examples of Pronouns:

- She/her/hers
- He/him/his
- They/Them/Theirs
- Zim/Zir/Zirs (Zim rhymes with them, Zir rhymes with their)