

Example of People- First Language



Positive language empowers. 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 positive and negative phrases:

Affirmative Phrases	Negative Phrases
Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability	Retarded; mentally defective
Person who is blind; person who is visually-impaired	The blind
Person with a disability	The disabled; handicapped
Person who is deaf, The Deaf	deaf and dumb, hearing impaired
Person who is hard of hearing	Suffers a hearing loss
Person who has multiple sclerosis	Afflicted by MS

Person with cerebral palsy	CP victim
Person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder	Epileptic, spaz
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair
Person who has muscular dystrophy	Stricken by MD
Person with a physical disability; person who is physically disabled	Crippled; lame; deformed
Unable to speak; uses synthetic speech	Dumb; mute

Language for Speaking and Writing About Disabilities

Correct each of the following sentences using disability language guidelines, including (and especially) people-first language.

1. Her daughter is autistic.
2. The ARC is an organization that helps the intellectually handicapped.
3. I took a class about learning-disabled children.
4. Gallaudet is a college for the deaf.
5. A learning disabilities teacher has many opportunities to help the mentally challenged.

6. After a car crash, he became a paraplegic and was confined to a wheelchair.

7. We saw a video about a schizophrenic woman.

8. She is afflicted with multiple sclerosis and is bedridden.

9. He was crippled from birth.

10. There was a blind girl in my calculus class.