



The following guidelines are suggestions for using language in a more sensitive manner that avoids reducing individuals to a series of labels, symptoms, or medical terms. Advocating for media representatives to be aware of how they use language regarding individuals with disabilities and their families does not suppress freedom of speech. Rather, these suggestions are intended to guide media representatives about how words really do make a difference.

## The Importance of Putting People First

Media representatives know how important it is to use language carefully. When communicating about individuals, it is good practice to avoid putting a label or condition prior to an individual's name or title. Many subjects that are reported about already use person-first language. Think of all the times you have read or heard something similar to the following examples:

Susan, who was diagnosed with cancer two years ago, is now in remission.

Jim experiences memory problems as a result of brain damage caused by a car accident.

Jenny has fibromyalgia, a condition that causes symptoms such as muscle spasms, pain, weakness and fatigue.

When it comes to reporting about individuals with disabilities and their families, however, it is still far too common to place the disability before the person. Phrases such as 'Jim is a retarded 48-year-old,' is an example of how some communicators still place a disability prior to an individual. Stated simply, person-first language places an individual prior to her or his disability. For example, if Judy has a visual impairment or is blind, you would place Judy first in the sentence even if the story directly deals with her impairment: "Kate and Will's daughter, Judy, is an 18-year-old soccer player who experiences visual impairment."

The following list depicts phrases and terms that are appropriate, given our understanding of person-first language as well as terms and phrases to avoid using:

### Preferred

accessible parking  
children with disabilities  
nondisabled  
individual with a disability  
individual with epilepsy  
individual with a learning disability  
individual with multiple sclerosis (MS)  
individual who is blind or visually impaired  
individual who is deaf or hearing impaired  
individual who uses a wheelchair  
individual of short stature  
stroke survivor  
Individual with dyslexia

### Avoid

accommodations handicapped accessible  
special children  
able-bodied  
crippled, physically challenged, handicapped  
epileptic  
slow learner  
person who suffers from MS  
the blind  
the deaf  
wheelchair-bound/confined to a wheelchair  
dwarf or midget  
suffered from a stroke  
dyslexic