



## **Inclusive Terminology Guide for People with Disabilities**

Our words matter. How we choose to write and speak about people has the power to help or hinder efforts to create inclusive experiences and a culture respectful of all.

Many commonly used words hold negative connotations that the speaker may not even be aware of. Becoming familiar with these words — and their appropriate alternatives — is important for everyone, but especially those creating content for a public as diverse as New York City.

For people with disabilities, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities recommends "Person-first language" which is putting the person first. Examples include: *People with Disabilities* or *Person with a Disability*. For specific disabilities you can substitute out the word disability like *Person with Cerebral Palsy*.

It's important to note that there is a large movement within the disability community to use what's called, "Identity-first language." Examples of identity first include, *Deaf person*, *blind person* and so on.

Everyone has their preferred terms and it's not possible to capture everyone's preferred terms in written language. However, it is important to have understand why these words matter and which to avoid when writing about people with disabilities.

Below you will find a list of words to avoid, which to use instead and some short rationale for each.

<b>Offensive Term</b>	<b>Appropriate term</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Handicapped	Accessible or disabled	Use the appropriate alternatives in place of "accessible bathrooms," "accessible parking spots," "disabled athletes," or "athletes with disabilities."
Differently-abled	Person with a disability or people with disabilities.	Differently-abled is used to avoid using the term disability. People with disabilities have pride and are empowered through their identity.

Crippled	Person with a disability, or people with physical disabilities.	Using “cripple” to refer to a person, or as a metaphor, is offensive..
Midget	Little Person, Dwarf, or person of short stature.	“Midget” comes from a time when LPs were a source of entertainment. “Dwarf” is a medically acceptable term. “Little Person” is socially acceptable.
Lame	Not cool, disappointing	Very few people know that the slang word “lame” means someone who cannot walk. Try saying what you really mean. For example, “That’s disappointing.”
Special	Person with disabilities	This term is patronizing. Everyone can have needs, no one’s should be “special.”
Wheelchair bound	Person with physical disabilities, person who uses a wheelchair, person with an ambulatory disability	People are not bound to their wheelchairs. They transfer out of them all the time.
Invalid	Person with a disability	Another degrading term.
Non-native speaker	Person with limited English proficiency, speakers of a language (or languages) other than English	The U.S. is multilingual country — we don't want to stigmatize levels of English proficiency.
Illegal or illegal immigrant	Undocumented immigrant	Lack of immigration documentation does not make a person "illegal."
Alien	Undocumented immigrant	This term shouldn't be used except when quoting a federal immigration law.

## Additional Resources for Language

[Disability Language Style Guide](#)

[Disability Writing and Journalism Guidelines](#)

[Conscious Style Guide](#)