

People-First Language

People with disabilities share two unique distinctions: being the nation's largest minority group and the most diverse group. Regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation, everyone at some point in his or her lifetime can be affected directly or indirectly by a disability. With this in mind, it is very important that people work toward inclusiveness in all aspects of their lives, including speech.

The power of language is immeasurable. Through our language we can assign meaning to things, create barriers for people, and foster an epidemic of ignorance in society. We can also create opportunities, inspire generosity, and celebrate differences through our words. People-first language considers the way we refer to people with disabilities in our writing and speaking. Use this resource to begin the dialogue in your workplace about how you speak about people with disabilities.

Does your business focus on the disability or the person first?

Many businesses publish written materials for their staff, board members, or stakeholders in a bulletin, newsletter or some other format. When evaluating your business's written material, consider how you refer to an individual with a disability.

Keep in mind that when writing about people with disabilities, it is not necessary to always mention their disability. In fact, unless the person's disability is critical to the story, there is no need to mention it at all.

The fact is that you always want to put the person before the disability. A person's disability comprises only one facet of who they are.

How does your business refer to a person with and without a disability?

When referring to a person without a disability, it is common mistake to use the term "normal" especially when doing a comparison. Using the word "normal" to describe a non-disabled person implies that a person with a disability is abnormal.

Does your business use people-first language?

Words can be powerful tools and when used properly can have great, far-reaching implications. Words with dignity are more than politically correct ways of referring to others. Words with dignity can also create an environment that encourages inclusiveness. Below are common people-first terms:

- Person with a disability
- Non-disabled
- Developmental disability
- Person with mental illness

- Person who is visually impaired
- Person who has multiple sclerosis