

A Word About Language

As greater numbers of persons with disabilities take advantage of the opportunities open to them in higher education, it becomes increasingly important that colleges and universities promote an environment that is positive for persons with disabilities. One of the strongest and easiest ways is appropriate language usage.

The recommended manner is known as “**person first**” language. This means that the person is emphasized first, the disability second.

Examples of Person First Language

Use...

Person with a disability
Individual without speech
Woman who is blind or visually impaired
Student who is deaf or hearing impaired
Man with paraplegia
Woman who is paralyzed
Individual with epilepsy
Student who has a learning disability
Person with a mental disability or cognitive impairment
Man with a developmental disability
Congenital disability

Not...

Disabled or handicapped
Mute, dumb
Blind woman or “the blind”
Deaf student or “the deaf”
Paraplegic
Paralyzed woman
Epileptic
Slow learner, retarded, learning disabled
Crazy, demented, insane
Mentally retarded man
Birth defect

It is important to describe the person, not the disability. Persons without disabilities should be referred to as “non-disabled”, not “normal” or “able-bodied.”

Rather than using words such as “confined,” “bound,” “restricted,” or “dependent”, the most appropriate phrasing is “a person who uses a wheelchair” or “a person who walks with crutches.”

The word, “handicap” should only be used in reference to a condition or a physical barrier. Reference should not be made to the person as being handicapped. Example: “Those stairs are a handicap for her.”

It is important to avoid labeling or group categorizations that begin with “the” (i.e., “the disabled,” “the deaf,” “the blind”). Avoid euphemisms such as “physically challenged” or “special.” **Remember Person first!**