



DSW GUIDANCE
ON APPROPRIATE
USE OF LANGUAGE

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING TEXT

Phrases marked green are correct terms to use when talking about disability.

The words / phrases marked grey are contentious and to be used carefully, and those marked red to be avoided so as not to cause offense.

The following pages explain why these should be avoided, and how best to replace them.

 Person with a Disability	 Disabled Person	 Wheelchair User	 Physical Disability
 Impairment	 Visually impaired	 Partially Sighted	 Mental Health Difficulty
 Intellectual Impairment	 Learning Disability	 Hard of Hearing	 Non-Disabled
 Dwarf	 Blind	 Deaf	 Deaf & Dumb
 Retard/ Retarded	 Handicapped	 Invalid	 Cripple
 Mute	 Suffers from...	 Spastic	 Wheelchair bound
 Normal	 Able-Bodied		



DO NOT USE

“Deaf & Dumb”

“Mute”

The term dumb is used within the context of stupidity, but may be intended to refer to a person who has communication difficulties.

Historically it was used in the in conjunction with Deaf (i.e. deaf and dumb), but is considered unacceptable now whether used alone or in conjunction with other words regarding disability.

This applies to the term mute as well.



USE INSTEAD

“Disabled person”

“Person with a disability”



PERHAPS

“Speech and Language difficulty”



DO NOT USE

“Retard / Retarded”

All of these terms are considered offensive and outdated within the UK when used in the context of disability.



USE INSTEAD

“Disabled person”

“Person with a disability”



PERHAPS

“Learning disability”

“Person with a learning disability”



DO NOT USE

“Handicapped”

It's meaning links to a disadvantage being imposed on some one, and suggests helplessness.



USE INSTEAD

“Disabled person”

“Person with a disability”



PERHAPS

“Wheelchair user”



DO NOT USE

“Invalid”

This is possibly one of the most contentious of the ‘inappropriate’ terms, because it is interpreted as being invalid. Clearly people with and without disability are equally valid, and therefore referring to one group as ‘invalid’ is not appropriate.



USE INSTEAD

“Disabled person”

“Person with a disability”



DO NOT USE

“Cripple”

Dictionaries tend to define this term as one which means ‘causing damage to someone or something, making them weak or ineffective’



USE INSTEAD

“Disabled person”

“Person with a disability”

or potentially if there is a need for further detail: “Wheelchair user”, “physical disability”, “Cerebral Palsy”, “Spina Bifida”, (whatever the impairment is) etc.



DO NOT USE

“Suffers from...”

This is an assumption generally made by nondisabled people about disabled people that by having a disability they will be suffering from it, have been stricken (or punished) by it, or are a victim of it. It infers and reinforces notions of pity, rather than autonomy, independence and power.



USE INSTEAD

If there is a need to identify or discuss an individual’s disability with a third party or with the disabled person then remove the ‘suffers from...’ (etc), i.e. ‘Bill has Downs Syndrome’, rather than ‘Bill suffers from / is a victim of / was stricken by Downs Syndrome’.



“Spastic”

Inappropriate when used in reference to a person – i.e. ‘that person is a ...’, in this case it is considered derogatory.

However, it is important for coaches to know if an athlete who has cerebral palsy has spasticity, athetosis or ataxia. An athlete who has a hemiplegia will have an arm and leg on the same side that is spastic. This is important information for the coach, and in this case the term is used appropriately.



“Wheelchair Bound”

This infers that the individual is reluctantly dependent upon the wheelchair, where in fact the majority of people who use wheelchairs consider them to be associated with freedom and independence.



“Wheelchair user”



“Normal”

Refers to a lack of deviation from average – but it becomes very difficult to identify what constitutes ‘normal’. Often used within the context of disability in the following ways ‘normal people and disabled people’ therefore inferring that disabled people are not ‘normal’.



“Non-disabled”



DO NOT USE

“Able-bodied”

Not necessarily as contentious or offensive, but it is inaccurate if all people with disabilities (learning, sensory and physical) are associated with not being able-bodied. In using the terms able-bodied and disabled, there is a presumption that all disabled people have a physical disability (therefore making them ‘not able-bodied’). People with a learning disability or sensory disability may not have an associated physical disability, and therefore are able-bodied.



USE INSTEAD

“Non-disabled”



USE CAUTION

“Deaf”

To use the term Deaf to refer to anyone who has a loss of hearing is incorrect. Individuals who have no or some hearing and communicate using sign language way **will consider themselves** to be Deaf; others who use other forms of communication, or who have hearing should not necessarily be referred to as deaf.



IF NOT APPROPRIATE, USE:

“Hard of hearing”

“Hearing impairment”



USE CAUTION

“Blind...”

As with Deaf, whilst not in itself a word to be avoided, it should be used correctly - it may be that some individuals are blind, i.e. they have no sight, but using this term to apply to anyone with a visual impairment is incorrect.



IF NOT APPROPRIATE, USE:

“Partially sighted”

“Visual impairment”



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