

UNHANDICAPPING OUR LANGUAGE

(excerpted from)
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Language reflects and reinforces our perceptions and misperceptions of others. All too frequently the terms used for people with disabilities perpetuate stereotypes and false ideas. This guide is offered as one means to “unhandicap” our language and thinking. It is selective, not exhaustive. It is intended as a suggestion, not censorship.

Objectionable

Preferable

(the) disabled (the) mentally retarded	<i>Sees people only in terms of their disabilities. Robs us of individuality by lumping people into one undifferentiated category. Humanizing nouns emphasize the person.</i>	people with disabilities persons with mental retardation
(the) deaf (the) blind, etc.		deaf citizens blind people
abnormal	<i>Sees people with disabilities as less human than others</i>	none is needed
(birth) defected defective	<i>Describes an object, dehumanizes a person</i>	congenital disability
Mrs. Kelly is an Arthritic patient	<i>Sees someone as an object of medical care</i>	Mrs. Kelly has arthritis
Bill Cullen was: afflicted with, stricken with, or suffers from polio	<i>Connotes helplessness, dependency, defect. Denies other aspects of the person</i>	Bill Cullen had polio
victim FDR was a polio victim	<i>Connotes pitiful helplessness</i>	state the facts FDR had polio
Invalid	<i>(From the same root as inVALID) Inaccurate, most people with Disabilities are not sickly</i>	none is needed
deaf and dumb deaf-mute	<i>Implies mental incapacitation occurs with hearing loss and / or</i>	deaf hearing impaired

dummy
sightless,
four eyes,
blind as a bat

speech impaired
Inaccurate, demeaning

speech impaired
blind
partially sighted
vision impaired

cripple
crippled
crip

*No epithet is more offensive to
people with physical disabilities
(from Old English "to creep")
A second meaning of this
Adjective is "inferior"*

FDR had a physical
disability
(or) FDR had polio

confined to a
wheelchair
wheelchair bound
wheel-chaired

*Creates a false impression:
wheelchairs liberate, not confine
or bind; they are mobility tools
from which people transfer to
sleep, sit in chairs, drive cars, etc.*

wheelchair user
uses a wheelchair
wheelchair using

Handel was epileptic
Renoir was arthritic
Geri Jewell is cerebral
palsied

*These usages see people as
their disabilities. Inaccurate
references, a person is not a
condition*

Handel had epilepsy
Renoir had arthritis
Geri Jewell has cerebral
palsy

midget, dwarf

*Mythical, denies reality
Infantilizing, patronizing*

short-statured person

*The debate over the use of short-statured people
verses little people has not been settled.*

deformed
Connoted repulsive oddity
misshapen

has a physical disability

Hunchbacked

Demeaning

has a spinal curvature

lame
paralytic
gimp, gimp
withered

Demeaning

walks with a cane
uses crutches
Senator Dole has a
disabled hand

monster
vegetable
creature
freak

*Robs people with severe
disabilities of their humanity*

the child has multiple or
severe disability

mentally ill
crazy, insane
psycho, nut, maniac

Outdated and stigmatizing

mental disability
behavior disorder
emotional disability

former mental patient retard, slow, simple-minded, idiot, Mongoloid	<i>Demeaning</i>	mentally restored people with mental retardation
spastic, spazz has fits	<i>Demeaning</i>	has seizures has cerebral palsy has epilepsy
“special”	<i>Distancing and inappropriate patronizing. Describes that which is different about any person</i>	none is needed
physically challenged handi-capable inconvenienced differently-abled	<i>Euphemisms avoid reality and rob people of dignity</i>	a person has a physical, sensory, or mental disability

*Cutesy-pie labels are uninformative and trivialize
an important part of a person's identity.*

Inspirational courageous	<i>People with disabilities are not acknowledge the collectively inspirational or courageous</i>	person's abilities and individuality
isn't it wonderful how he has overcome his disability?	<i>Inaccurate: People live with a disability, they have to overcome attitudinal, social, architectural, educational, transportation and employment barriers</i>	accept people for who they are, including that they have a disability

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