

Everyday Terminology

“Customer” refers to a person seeking or receiving a service

Persons with disabilities are comfortable with terminology used to describe daily living activities. Do not be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as “See you later” or “Got to be running along” that seem to relate to the person’s disability.

Persons who use wheelchairs go for “walks,” people with visual impairments “see” what you mean, etc. A disability may just mean that some things must be done in a different manner; however, that does not mean the words used to describe the activity must be different.

Refer to the University of Windsor’s Language Equity Guide for more information regarding inclusive language

Terminology Guide Concerning Persons with Disabilities

INSTEAD OF birth defect, congenital defect, deformity,

USE “Person born with a disability” or “Person who has a congenital disability”

INSTEAD OF the blind or the visually impaired,

USE “Person who is blind”, or “Person with a visual impairment”

INSTEAD OF confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair-bound,

USE “Person who uses a wheelchair”

INSTEAD OF cripple, crippled, lame,

USE “Person with a disability”, “Person with a mobility impairment”, “Person who has a spinal cord injury, arthritis, etc.”

INSTEAD OF the hard of hearing or hearing impaired,

USE “Person who is hard of hearing”

INSTEAD OF deaf-mute, deaf and dumb,

USE “Person who is deaf”. While culturally-linguistically deaf people (that is, sign language users) are properly identified as “the Deaf” (upper case “D”), people who do not use sign language are properly referred to as “the deaf” (lower-case “d”) or “people who are deaf”

INSTEAD OF handicapped parking, bathrooms,

USE “Accessible parking, bathrooms”

INSTEAD OF epileptic,

USE “Person who has epilepsy”

INSTEAD OF fit, attack, spell, seizure, the Handicapped,

USE “Person with a disability, unless referring to an environmental attitudinal barrier. In such instances “person who is handicapped by” is appropriate.

INSTEAD OF insane (unsound mind), lunatic, maniac, mental patient, mentally diseased, neurotic, psycho, psychotic, crazy, demented, deviant, loony, mad, or nuts

USE “Persons with a mental health disability, person who has schizophrenia, person who has depression”

INSTEAD OF invalid,

USE “Person with a disability”

INSTEAD OF learning disabled, learning disordered, or dyslexic.

USE “A person with a learning disability or persons with learning disabilities”

INSTEAD OF mentally retarded, defective, feeble minded, idiot, imbecile, moron, retarded, simple, or mongoloid,

USE “Person with an intellectual disability”. One can say a person with Down’s syndrome only if relevant to the situation.

INSTEAD OF Normal,

USE “Person without a disability”. Normal is only acceptable in reference to statistics (i.e. the norm)

INSTEAD OF patient,

USE “Person with a disability”, unless the relationship is between a doctor and client

INSTEAD OF physically challenged,

USE “Person with a disability”

INSTEAD OF spastic,

USE “Person who has spasms”. Do not use the word spastic as a noun.

INSTEAD OF suffers from, afflicted by, or stricken with,

USE “Person with a disability, person who has cerebral palsy, etc.”

Having a disability is not synonymous with suffering

INSTEAD OF victim of cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc

USE “Person who has cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.”

Continued on reverse.