

Words with Dignity

Stress ability rather than disability. A person has the disability. It's not the other way around. If a disability isn't relevant, don't mention it.

AVOID

The deaf accountant spotted the error
An epileptic, John has no trouble doing his job
He does a fine job, for a blind man
Article on a blind person who performs a job
Usually done by a sighted person

TRY

The accountant spotted the error
John's performance is satisfactory
He does a fine job
Article on a technological aid that
assists an employee with visual impairment

Don't take on condescending or patronizing tone in articles or stories about people with disabilities. Making those who succeed "super human" says that people with disabilities usually have no outstanding talents.

AVOID

Mary has such courage
Isn't it amazing how she manages to do a good
Job even though she's handicapped

TRY

Mary does a good job

Watch Your Language

Remember that handicap and disability don't mean the same thing. A disability is a specific impairment that causes a lack of function, e.g. visual impairment. A handicap is a disadvantage that results from impairment, e.g. lack of employment and no access to buildings

Handicap is often used to mean disability. This practice is becoming less acceptable. (one origin of the word handicap implies begging – the phrase "cap in hand")

AVOID

A handicapped person
We need to recognize on-the-job barriers for
handicapped workers

The handicapped child cannot use the stairs

TRY

A person with a disability
We need to recognize barriers for
workers with disabilities that can
handicap them on the job
The stairs are a handicap for the child

Refer to the person first, not the person's disability. Don't use adjectives as nouns.

AVOID

The disabled; the handicapped; disabled people
The blind
The deaf

The retarded

An epileptic
Autistics
MS person
Stutter

TRY

People with disabilities
People with visual impairments
People with hearing impairments; People who are
hard of hearing
People with mental disabilities; people
with developmental disabilities
Person who has epilepsy
People with autism
Person with multiple sclerosis
Person with a speech impairment

Be careful with words and phrases that set people with disabilities apart from others

AVOID

Coping with a disability
Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound
Crippled

Crazy, Insane
Mentally retarded
Deaf and dumb

Homebound

TRY

Has a disability
Uses a wheelchair
Disabled; or be more specific about the disability
(walks with a crutch or leg braces)
Mentally ill
Developmentally disabled
Hearing disability or impairment, unable to hear,
unable to speak, partial or total hearing loss
Hard for the person to get out

Lose emotion words and phrases.

They often show people with disabilities as needing to be cared for or pitied.

AVOID

The less fortunate
Afflicted; cripple/crippled; suffers from a disability
Wheelchair victim; wheelchair patient; wheelchair
case

Victim of a mental illness
Patient in a group home
Lupus sufferer
Birth defect

Brain-damaged
Defective, deformed, vegetable

Moron, imbecile, idiot

Blind as a bat

Disease

TRY

People with disabilities
Has a disability
Uses a wheelchair

Person with a mental illness
Person who lives in a group home
Person with lupus
Congenital disability; blind from birth;
deaf from birth
Brain-injury
Disabled, has the condition of (Spina
Bifida, etc.)
Person has a mental disability or is
mentally disabled mildly, severely
has a visual disability, or limited or partial
Vision or total or severe loss of vision
Because many disabilities are not caused
By disease, leave out the word if you
aren't referring to an actual disease

Be careful with words and phrases that set people with disabilities apart from others

AVOID

We...They...those people
Healthy or normal vs. disabled

Special Needs (use sparingly)
Aids for the handicapped

TRY

Makes less of differences
Able-bodied, able to walk, see
people who aren't disabled

Aids for Independent Living