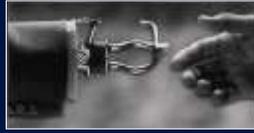


# Disability Language and Etiquette



ADAOnline2020

Mell Toy &  
Linda Clemon-Karp  
Northwest ADA Center



800-949-4232  
[www.nwadacenter.org](http://www.nwadacenter.org)  
[nwadactr@uw.edu](mailto:nwadactr@uw.edu)

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## Disclaimer

The Northwest ADA Center is funded under a grant from the Administration for Community Living (ACL), NIDILRR grant #90DP0095. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the ACL, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



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## Today's Presenters

**Mell Toy**, Assistant Director, Northwest ADA Center



Mell is a certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and certified Low Vision Therapist. She provides leadership in ADA education, outreach, and technical assistance to individuals, businesses, state and local government and others throughout the Northwest. Prior to joining Northwest ADA Center, Mell worked for over 10 years in blind rehab, including at the Veterans Administration, Sight Connection, and Washington State Department of Services for the Blind.

**Linda Clemon-Karp**, Continuing Education Coordinator, Northwest ADA Center



Linda provides outreach, technical assistance, and training for individuals, businesses, state and local governments and others to increase awareness of ADA requirements, guidelines, and protections. Prior to joining Northwest ADA Center, Linda managed production and delivery of alternative formats and technologies for students with disabilities at the University of Washington. She is a trained paralegal with a background in social justice and performing arts.

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## Chatbox Question #1

Type the letter that most closely reflects your answer –

I am attending this webinar because:

- a. It is important to help me do my job better
- b. I need continuing education or certification credit
- c. My employer is making me, or having everyone take it
- d. I am personally interested in it

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## Content Warning

This presentation includes images, language, societal attitudes, and recollections of historical events that contain violence, mistreatment, and degradation of people with disabilities. This may be disturbing to some participants.

Exploration of these challenging topics can give us a greater level of sensitivity, and an appreciation of the importance of disability language and etiquette today.

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April 6, 2005

Dear Mr. Ebert,

I have absolutely no objection to you trashing a film or lauding it. I do object to the use of the word "midgets"... The use of the word midget is, for Little People, equated with any other hate word someone might use to describe a minority group.

Sincerely, Danny Woodburn

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## Chatbox Question #2

Type a brief answer in the chatbox –

What does disability history have to do with current disability language?

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## Why Is Disability History Important?

"In days gone by, short-statured people were not only labelled as ugly, stupid and freakish, they were often owned by aristocrats and treated, at best, as entertainment and, at worst, as pets."

– Stella Young, comedian, writer, and activist



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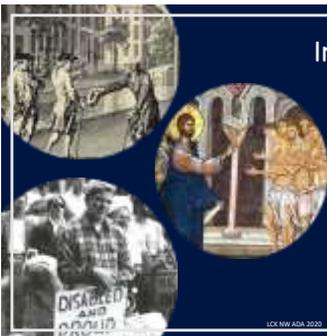
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## Increasing Sensitivity through Historical Context

Disability Language and Societal Perceptions



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## Medieval Perceptions of Disability:

400's to 1700's



The Healing of the Man Born Blind  
by Duccio di Buoninsegna (c. 1308-1311)

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## Medieval Language about Disability

- Affliction, curse, wretched, purgatory
- Fool, clown, dotard, idiot
- Deaf and dumb, mute
- Epileptic
- Blind
- Lunatic
- Leprechaun
- Cripple, lame, maimed, deformed, diseased, impaired, Billy in a bucket



The Luttrell Psalter manuscript (c. 1330)

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## Dwarves and Fools: Fortunate to Serve at Court



Portrait of Sebastián de Morra  
by Diego Velázquez (c. 1645)



A Dancing Fool by Hans Sebald  
Beham (c. 1549)



Engraving of Will Sommers by  
Francis Delaram (c. 1615-24)

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## Medieval Depictions of Disability in Manuscripts and Art



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## Sport and Entertainment



Early depiction of the game of The Blind and The Pig

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## Chatbox Question #3

Type the letter that most closely reflects your answer –

When I meet someone with a disability that I'm not familiar with

- a. I often feel uncomfortable and/or ignorant
- b. I am usually curious and/or sometimes stare
- c. I often feel bad for them
- d. Some combination of the above
- e. Other

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Science: late  
1700's through 1800's



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Language of the Era: Medical Model

- Affliction, handicap, pathology, abnormality
- Medical oddities, freaks of nature, incurables, human curiosities, crippled, lame, monsters
- Idiot, cretin
- Midget, dwarf
- Mentally deranged, lunatic, maniac, hysterical, insane, mad, delirious, melancholic
- Deaf-mute, dunny
- Lunatic asylum, madhouse



The Maniac, Charles Bell 1806

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1800's: Sideshows  
Scientific and Medical Curiosity



Charles Sherwood Stratton  
"General Tom Thumb", 1844



Charles S. Stratton in costume as a  
Highlander, 1860



Joseph Carey Merrick,  
"The Elephant Man", ca 1885

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## From Medical Model to Moral Viewpoint to Eugenics

Early to mid 1900's



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## Language of Eugenics/Darwinism



- Handicapped, impaired, gimp, cripple, deformed
- Undesirable, deviant, degenerate, defective, irregular
- Idiot, imbecile, moron, feeble-minded,
- Mongol, Mongoloid, Mongolism
- Mentally unfit, lunatic
- Needy blind, subnormal vision, partially sighted
- Dumb



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## American States Legalize Forced Sterilization

1907

Indiana is first of 32 states to pass Eugenic Sterilization laws

1927

Buck v. Bell finds compulsory sterilization constitutional

1953

Radiation experiments conducted without consent

2020

Buck v. Bell ruling still stands



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## World War I



### 1918: Funding for Rehabilitation

Following WWI, Congress passes first major rehabilitation program for soldiers

It would be a mistake to think that the crippled men can be secured of profitable employment. These men are placed in good jobs, without preliminary training, by the employment bureau of the Red Cross headquarters for Crippled and Disabled Men.

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## World War 2: Eugenics, Sterilization, Euthanasia

"Sterilization is liberation, not punishment"

- Undesirables
- Defective
- Worthless ballast
- Degenerate
- Useless eaters
- Feeble-minded
- Unfit
- Morons
- Lunatics
- Idiots
- Life unworthy of life



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## Chatbox Question #4

Type YES or NO

When it comes to disability language, have you ever made a "mistake," or said something you regretted?

YES

NO

OPTIONAL:

If you are comfortable sharing an experience with the group, please type a brief account into the chat box.

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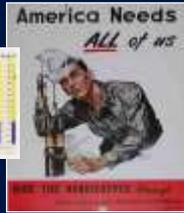
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## Advocacy & Social Justice: Mid-1900s to 2000s

- Mentally-retarded
- Wheelchair-bound
- Shell-shocked
- Mentally limited
- Visually limited
- Down Syndrome
- Differently-abled
- Vegetable



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## 1950s to Present: TV Fundraisers

### Jerry Lewis Telethon: 1966 - 2010

- Plight
- Crippled
- Handicapped
- Curse
- Half a person
- Steel imprisonment



Lewis: "You know that I love you? Huh? Answer me."

Child: "Yes."

Lewis: "Now let's see if we can get the people out there to answer you, too."



- They're sitting in chairs I bought them.
- Pity? You don't want to be pitied because you're a cripple in a wheelchair? Stay in your house!

— To disability rights activists, 2007

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## A Shock to the American Conscience: 1965

### America's Treatment of People with Mental Illness and Intellectual Disabilities

"What can one do with those patients who do not conform? We must lock them up, or restrain them, or sedate them, or put fear into them."

— Institution Attendant, 1965



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## The Capitol Crawl and the ADA: 1990



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## 1980s – early 2000s: Differently-abled

- Originated in the early 1980s
- Avoid perceived negative connotations of the prefix 'dis' in disabled
- Create a more acceptable, positive term than "handicapped"



Toys Currently Available for Purchase

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Album Released in 2010

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## Chatbox Question #5

Type YES or NO

Have you ever decided not to speak to someone with a disability because you were afraid of saying the wrong thing?

YES

NO

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## Disability Language Today



Expanding  
Understanding  
and Awareness of  
Current Models

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“The way people deal with me – they’ll go overboard in trying to be politically correct and make a mess of it. Everyone’s so worried about what they’re saying to everyone else, that they don’t talk very much.”

— Warwick Davis, actor



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## Today’s Language Models



People-First

*“Person with a disability”*



Identity-First

*“Disabled person”*

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## People-First: "Person with a Disability"

- Personhood is mentioned first
  - Disability is a secondary aspect of a person
    - Affirms that a person has value and worth, and that their disability is separate from their self-worth
- Use in professional writing and speaking, and if not informed of individual's preference



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## Why Some Prefer People-First Language

"Using a diagnosis as a defining characteristic reflects prejudice, and also robs the person of the opportunity to define him [or] herself."  
— Trudy Jacobson, *The Arc*

"If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism."  
— Dr. Stephen Shore



Person who uses a wheelchair or Wheelchair bound person?

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## An Individual's People-First Language Choice

Disability Is a Secondary Aspect of a Person

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## Chatbox Question #6

Type the letter that most closely reflects your answer –

When considering what words to use to describe a disability, the best approach is usually:

- a. Use a very general term
- b. Find out what word a disability group recommends
- c. Use the medical term
- d. Ask the person with the disability

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"At some point we have to stop and say, 'There's Marlee,' not, 'There's the deaf actress.'"  
– Marlee Matlin

"My longterm disability claims consultant asked, 'Are you wheelchair bound? How do I answer that question? My response... 'What do you mean by wheelchair bound?' What does anyone mean by 'wheelchair bound?' No, I am not bound to my wheelchair by some medieval torture device."  
– Marie Harman, writer and activist

"I don't want to be lumped in just as some disabled guy. I'm an actor."  
– Robert David Hall

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## Identity-First: "Disabled Person"

- Disability is mentioned first
- Disability is an inherent aspect of a person's identity
- Recognizes, validates, and affirms the individual's identity as a disabled person



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## Why Some Prefer Identity-First Language

"Do you use identity first language for things you consider positive?"  
— Amy Sequenzia, *Activist*



Ballerina or Person who does ballet?  
Females or People who are female?

"Autistic" is another marker of identity. It is not inherently good, nor is it inherently bad... I am Autistic. I am also East Asian, Chinese, U.S. American, a person of faith, leftist, and genderqueer."  
— Lydia X.Z. Brown, *writer, educator, organizer, speaker*

"I often call myself a crip when I'm among other crips, and I use it comfortably. ... I'll be performing at a cabaret event we're calling "the criptastic event of the year!" In the process, we'll subvert every word, label and stereotype we can."  
— Penny Pepper, *writer, poet, performer*

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## Examples of Identify-First Language



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"I do not identify as a person with a disability. I'm a disabled person. And I'll be a monkey's disabled uncle if I'm going to apologize for that."

"People get all up in arms when I describe myself as a crip because what they hear is the word 'cripple,' and they hear a word you're not allowed to say anymore."

— Stella Young, *comedian and writer*



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## Writing about People with Disabilities

- Relevance?
- Use a person's name
- A person first: a person is not a disability
- Honor individuals' language preferences
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations

### Disability IS the term

- ~~Education~~
- ~~Slurs~~ stereotypes & antiquated language
- ~~Inspiration porn~~
- ~~Hero~~ stories
- ~~Tea~~ party



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## Moving Forward: Chosen Language

It's not necessary to assume – ask people what they choose



"Ultimately, the key is to ask, whenever possible, how a person chooses to identify, rather than making assumptions or imposing your own beliefs."

"Each person's relationship to language and identity are deeply personal, and everyone's identity choices are worthy of respect."

"Being who you choose to be — who you are — is something no language rule should ever take away."

— Emily Ladau, writer, blogger, activist

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## Resources



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## Disability Language & History

National Center on Disability and Journalism Disability Language Style Guide  
<https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

Guidelines for Writing about People with Disabilities  
<https://adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing>

How to Write and Report About People with Disabilities  
<http://rtcll.org/products/media/guidelines>

A History of Disability from 1050 to the Present Day  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/disability-history/>

Disability History Museum  
<https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/index.html>

Smithsonian National Museum of American History  
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/topics/disability-history>

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## Examples of Disability Language in Writing

Use	Don't Use
Person with a disability	Disabled person, the disabled
People without disabilities	Normal, healthy, able-bodied
Woman with paraplegia	Paraplegic
Person who has had a stroke	Stroke victim
Person with an intellectual disability	Slow, differently-abled, special, retarded, delayed
Man of short stature or little person	Dwarf, midget
Person with schizophrenia	Schizophrenic, schizo, insane, crazy
Person with a speech disability	Stutterer, stammered, mute, dumb
Person with epilepsy	Epileptic, epilepsy sufferer
Woman who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair
Accessible parking	Handicapped parking

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## Free ADA Information & Technical Assistance



800-949-4232



nwadactr@uw.edu



425-233-8913  
for ASL



nwadacenter.org

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## Part 2: Disability Etiquette

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### Video 1: Assess the interaction

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### Observations from Video 1

- Address the person directly
- Respect the person's autonomy and privacy
- Don't interrupt or rush the person
- Use plain language
- Be ready to communicate with the person in a variety of ways
- Check for understanding



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## What's wrong with saying...?

"You don't look disabled."

"She's so independent for someone who has Down Syndrome."

"You're an inspiration."

(To someone who's blind) "I'm so glad that you can't see how messy my place is."

(To someone who uses a wheelchair) "I totally understand where you're coming from. I got to try out a wheelchair for an hour when we were studying AT, and it was so hard to get around."

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## Service animal etiquette

Don't interact with the animal unless you have permission

Discreetly let the handler know if the animal is in the way or may be misbehaving



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## People with Visual Disabilities

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## Stereotypes about being blind



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## Interacting with a person who is blind

- Identify yourself when in range, both entering and exiting
- Identify yourself in large meetings
- Okay to say "See ya later" and "Did you watch that movie last night?"
- Get permission before touching
- Discretely point out a stain, etc.



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## Descriptive language for people who are blind

- Handshake
- Giving directions for routes of travel, location of items, open seats
- Location of food on plate
- How would you use clock-face when describing things in a room?
- Counting money



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Workplace safety is for everyone



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### Human guide technique

- Get permission before touching
- Usually, person with visual disability holds on the guide's arm, and travels behind the guide
- Other skills of this technique include narrow passage, taking stairs, and closed doorways



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### Dog guide etiquette

- Never interact with the dog, unless you have permission from the handler
- Travel alongside the handler, not the dog
- Ask the handler how best to travel with them



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## People with hearing disabilities

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### Stereotypes about being deaf



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### Interacting with a person who is deaf

- Ok to lightly touch the person or wave your hand to get their attention
- Speak directly to the person who is deaf, even if they use an interpreter
- For lip-reading, make sure you have good lighting on your lips, do not exaggerate your lip movements, keep your hands and other objects away from your mouth when speaking
- Repeat things, if asked



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Meeting with a person who uses an ASL Interpreter



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ASL interpreters and CART at large meetings



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People who use wheelchairs

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## Video 2: Wheelchair etiquette

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## Interacting with a person who uses a wheelchair

- Okay to say “Wanna go for walk?”
- For face-to-face communication, you can kneel, be seated, or stand back a few feet
- Don't ask about the wheelchair\* or what caused them to use a wheelchair



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## Questions



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**Additional Sessions are scheduled for the  
ADAOnline2020 Program through July 2020**

**View/register on-line at:  
[www.adaonline2020.org](http://www.adaonline2020.org)**

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