



UNIT 1. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY

ELEMENT 1. HUMAN DIVERSITY

LANGUAGE ON DISABILITY

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is unit 1, Media accessibility; element 1, Human diversity; video lecture Language on disability. I am Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

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And in this lecture I will be discussing the terms used to talk about disability.

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The National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ) at Arizona State University in the United States of America has produced a Disability Language Style Guide, which provides some relevant advice.



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The basic guidelines include the following advice, and I quote:

“Refer to disability only when it’s relevant to the story and when the diagnosis comes from a reputable source, such as a medical professional or other licensed professional.

When possible, use people-first language unless otherwise indicated by the source.

When possible, ask the source how he or she would like to be described. If the source is not available or unable, ask a trusted family member or relevant organization that represents people with disabilities.

Avoid made-up words such as *diversability* and *handicapable*, unless using them in direct quotes or to refer to a movement and organisation.” End of quote.

The style guide includes a glossary. Let’s have a look at some of those terms.

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Identity-first language versus people-first language.

With identity-first language, the disability is mentioned first. With people-first language, people are mentioned first. For instance, “Down syndrome girl” versus “girl with Down syndrome”.

With people-first language, the focus is put on the person. This is the approach taken in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD for short. The idea behind this choice is that a person’s disability should not be focused on, that people should not be

reduced to their disability. However, some persons with disabilities prefer identity-first language. Disability is seen as an identity category that they embrace. The same way someone is a Chinese woman or a bisexual woman, she may also be a disabled woman. She belongs to a wider cultural group. This is often the choice of Autistic and Deaf communities, who will mainly use identify-first language and may prefer not to refer to themselves as disabled.

Taking into account the two different approaches, it is good to ask people how they want to be referred to. If this is not possible, NCDJ recommendation suggests using people-first language.

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Blind, legally blind, limited vision, low vision, partially sighted, visually impaired.

“Blind” or “legally blind” are terms used for people with almost complete vision loss. To refer to other people with sight loss, the recommendation is to ask about their preferences. “Limited vision” or “low vision” may be used. “Partially sighted” has the same meaning but is mostly used in British publications. Sometimes “visually impaired” is also used, but some may object to it as it describes the condition in terms of a deficiency.

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The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) in the UK often uses the term “sight loss” as it is a concise way to describe a wide range of sight conditions, followed by alternatives such as “sight or eye conditions”, “blind and partially sighted people”, “people affected by sight loss”, “blind/blindness”, “partial sight”, “low vision”, and “people living

with little or no sight". They consider that the term "visually impaired" is more commonly used by professionals in the health, social care and education sectors.

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Deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, hearing impairment.

"Deaf" and "hard of hearing" are the official terms recognised by both the International Federation of Hard of Hearing and the World Federation of the Deaf since 1991.

"Deaf" is often written with a capital d to refer to the culture and community of Deaf people. "Deaf" people with a capital d have generally been deaf all their lives, or since before they started to learn to talk, and generally communicate in sign language as their first language.

A lowercase "d" is used to refer to the audiological status. Some people prefer to write down "D/deaf" to include both approaches.

"Hard of hearing" may refer to people who have a mild to moderate hearing loss, which may or may not be corrected with amplification. These people usually use speech to communicate. Sometimes people who are deaf and do not feel a cultural affiliation to the Deaf community prefer the term "hard of hearing" and, similarly, people with mild or moderate hearing loss may prefer the term "deaf".

"Hearing impaired" or "hearing impairment" are terms that are sometimes also used, but many people dislike them because the focus is put on what the person can or cannot do. The World Federation of the Deaf does not support their use.



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In parallel to “person with sight loss”, a possibility would be to refer to “people with hearing loss”. NCDJ recommends using “deaf” for those with total hearing loss. For others, “partial hearing loss” or “partially deaf” is preferred.

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Down syndrome.

NCDJ recommends using people-first language: someone is “a person with Down syndrome”, “is living with Down syndrome” or “has Down syndrome”. Terms such as “suffers from” or “is afflicted with” should be avoided. Other terms such as “cognitive disability” or “intellectual disability” are acceptable if they are used in a people-first context, for instance, “the person has an intellectual disability”. However, it is more accurate to refer specifically to “Down syndrome” if it has been medically diagnosed.

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Dyslexia/dyslexic.

It is recommended to refer to someone as “having dyslexia” rather than referring to him or her as a “dyslexic person”. The use of “dyslexic” as a noun - for instance, “She is dyslexic” - should also be avoided.



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The NCDJ guide contains many more terms that we invite you to check. Language is important, and you should be aware of the implications of the choice you make.

Language is also evolving, so I recommend that you check on any further developments in the terminology, on the specificities of each language and, most importantly, on the preferences of the people involved.

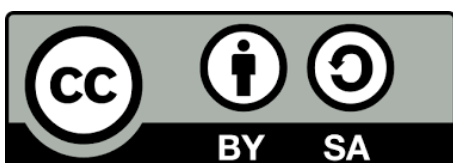
I would like to mention that sometimes the term “diverse users” is used in standards as an overarching term including, and I quote the definition, “individuals with differing abilities and characteristics or accessibility needs”. Please notice that the focus is not put on the specific disability but on the diverse abilities and the user needs.

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This video lecture has been prepared by Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. You can reach me at anna.matamala@uab.cat.

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