# Disability-Related Language Standards

# in Written Assignments

GS 420 SDSU

Students are expected to submit well-thought-out and well-written assignments. **Failure to proofread and edit assignments, and failure to use appropriate language (relevant and respectful terminology related to disability)** **will result in points loss**. (Please seek help at the SDSU Writing Center if your English writing abilities are not yet proficient.)

In determining appropriate disability-related language, you will need to educate yourself about diverse perspectives when it comes to language use. At this point in time, it is standard disability etiquette to use person-first/people-first language. However, it is important to understand and respect identity-first language as well.

## Person-First Language

**For the purposes of this course, you will be expected to use person-first language and dignifying language as a way to demonstrate consciousness about respecting people with disabilities.** In general, person-first language is appropriate to use if you are not immersed in the field of disability (which is most GS 420 students) or if your audience consists of children, youth, and/or general lay people who do not know about the social model of disability. Person-first language is an educational tool that is widely embraced by a diverse array of people with disabilities, and allies and organizations that support them. It is encouraged in written publications. GS 420 students need to become intimately familiar with person-first language and language that promotes dignity and use it **for all assignments**.

## Identity-First Language

Identity-first language is appropriate if you are a person who experiences disability and prefers identity-first language. It is also appropriate if you are a person immersed in disability culture who understands the social model of disability. And out of respect, if you are referring to or speaking with someone who identifies with their disability first, you should feel comfortable in using identity-first language. If you can argue your case and satisfactorily justify your use of identity-first language in your assignments from a disability studies perspective, then we will excuse your use of non-person-first language. But, within each assignment, you must clearly identify yourself as a person who qualifies to use identify-first language, as described above. (You should do this in parentheses immediately following any sentence using identity-first language). Note: Many in the Deaf and autistic communities prefer identity-first language.

See some examples of person-first language and dignifying language choices on the next page.

# Promoting Respectful Language

## Person-First Language Suggestions

| *Don’t Say…* | *Instead Say…* |
| --- | --- |
| Down syndrome children | Children who have Down syndrome |
| The disabled  Disabled people (unless you can justify from disability studies perspective) | People with disabilities  People who have disabilities  People who experience disability |
| The mentally ill | People with mental health disabilities or People who experience mental illness or mental health disabilities |
| Wheelchair children | Children who use wheelchairs |
| Autistic boy | Boy who experiences or has autism  Boy who is autistic  (note: some self-advocates *do* prefer “autistic boy”/identity-first language) |
| Cerebral Palsy people | People who experience Cerebral Palsy  People who have Cerebral Palsy |

## Dignifying Language Suggestions

| *Don’t Say…* | *Instead Say…* |
| --- | --- |
| Dying of AIDS | Living with AIDS |
| “Suffers from” dyslexia  “Suffers from” autism  “Suffers from” anything | Experiences/ has dyslexia  Experiences/ has autism  Experiences/ has … |
| Wheelchair-bound/Confined to/Bound to a wheelchair | Uses a wheelchair  Wheelchair user |
| Is disabled *but* is very successful | Is successful *and* has a disability/is disabled (only point out disability if relevant) |
| Special needs kids | Kids with disabilities  Kids who have disabilities  Kids who experience disability |
| Handicapped restroom/stall, parking | Accessible restroom/stall, parking |

\*Terminology changes as society changes. These guidelines are fluid and will hopefully change in years to come as our society becomes more inclusive.

### Person-First & Identity-First Language Links

Here are some resources which further explain the distinctions between person-first and identity-first language, and inspiration porn.

Disability is Natural – People First Language by Kathie Snow

<https://www.disabilityisnatural.com/people-first-language.html>

Why person-first language doesn’t always put the person first

<https://www.thinkinclusive.us/why-person-first-language-doesnt-always-put-the-person-first/>

**GS 420 students are also expected to stay away from inspiration porn in all assignments.** See Stella Young TEDx Talk (link on the last page) for further explanation of inspiration porn.

**Inspiration Porn Links**

Stella Young TEDx Talk: Inspiration Porn and the Objectification of Disability

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxrS7-I_sMQ>

Wikipedia: Inspiration Porn

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inspiration_porn>