



RESOURCE

A basic guide to accessible communications

Our grateful thanks to the authoring organisation for providing this guidance



Inclusive Futures
Promoting disability inclusion



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A basic guide to accessible communications



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**Inclusive
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Work



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The **disability-confident employers' toolkit** is a portfolio of practical guides, checklists, case studies and resources designed and produced by the Inclusive Futures consortium.

We've developed this guide for leaders, HR executives and property managers to become confident to take the next step towards fostering inclusive workspaces and practices.

As an open source toolkit, you can tailor it to fit your industry, workplace and country. Please follow guidance below.

If you have any feedback, please get in touch. To share your thoughts on using or adapting the toolkit, or to explore collaboration opportunities, please contact Simon Brown (sbrown@sightsavers.org). Together we can build more inclusive societies for all.

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Disclaimer

Nothing contained in this pack shall be considered as rendering of legal advice. It is recommended that the user of this pack ensures that they have informed themselves with any and all updates of standards, law or regulation as may be applicable in their country.

Introduction

This guidance is part of the **disability-confident employers' toolkit**: a unique portfolio of practical guides, checklists, case studies and resources that make it easier for any business to be disability confident.

These resources are grounded in the reality of business and best corporate practice, and in the principles that underpin the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - a UN convention which promotes the full inclusion and fundamental human rights of persons with disabilities through legislative reform and societal and attitudinal change, in 181 countries.

With this portfolio of business-relevant resources, we aim:

- To make it easier to employ people with disabilities fairly, on the basis of individual capability, talent and potential.
- To help engineer more effective, efficient and equitable labour markets, which – because employers are positioned as valued service users and potential allies – enable significantly more people with disabilities to gain meaningful employment at all levels.
- To enable business improvement which benefits both the business and people with disabilities.
- To create opportunities for businesses to become leaders in the transition to accessible and inclusive workplaces.
- To facilitate innovative solutions and focused collaboration between business leaders and leaders with disabilities.

The **disability confident employers' toolkit** is produced by Inclusion Works, a consortium of leading international organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), led by Sightsavers who are working in partnership with business leaders in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda. Inclusion Works forms part of the **Inclusive Futures** initiative.

We are grateful to our funder UK aid for supporting this pioneering work. We would also like to thank the International Labour Organisation's Global Business Disability Network and the national business disability networks in Bangladesh and Kenya for their invaluable contribution. In addition, we extend our thanks to Jose Viera, Ruth Warick, and Kimber Bialik, members of the International Disability Alliance Inclusive Livelihoods Task Team, for their overview of the documents with a disability lens, and to staff members of Sightsavers for their very practical assistance.

For further information about this open-source employers' toolkit, contact your national business disability networks or email Sightsavers at inclusionworks@sightsavers.org

A basic guide to accessible communications

If you communicate with people, you obviously want to ensure that what you communicate is easy for everyone to access, to understand and to interact with. Excellent communicators are well aware of the diverse needs of their various audiences, be they customers, colleagues, potential colleagues or other key stakeholder groups.

You don't need to be an expert in digital accessibility – the basic principles are easy to understand and apply. Remember that well designed communications that work effectively for people with disabilities will be welcomed by everyone, including those working in a second language.

2011 research by Pew Research Centre found that there were as many blind and visually impaired people accessing the internet in America as the population of Canada – and there were more internet users in America who were deaf or hard of hearing than the population of Spain. These numbers have only continued to grow.

While accessibility techniques are often designed specifically for persons with disabilities, they have far reaching benefits for every audience related to general readability, comprehension, and findability.

Disability confidence matters: understanding and communicating how customers access goods, services, and information



Using UK data to illustrate in general and approximate terms the impact of disability on how consumers access goods and services.

Contents

User testing is important	8
The free accessibility checker tool	8
Links	8
Images	9
Graphs	10
Layout	10
The use of colour	11
Text	12
Try navigating your site using a keyboard	14
A note on web accessibility standards	14
Maximising the reach and impact of social media	15
Using videos on social media	16
Respectful communications	17

There are more than 1.3 billion persons with disabilities worldwide and the number is growing as we age and with medical advances.

1 in 5 women worldwide will have a disability.

15-18% of the population of any country will have a disability.

1-3 people aged 50-64 will have a disability.

1 in 3 customers either have a disability or have someone with a disability in their immediate circle.

Communications that deliver for this highly diverse population will work better for everyone.

User testing is important

Budget time and money for user testing and involve a wide range of users with disabilities early, to avoid the costs of retrofitting. You may well have colleagues with disabilities who could advise.

Don't just rely on computerised accessibility testing though it can be very helpful.

The free accessibility checker tool

To help ensure that your Office files are accessible, use the Accessibility Checker, a free tool available in Word, Excel, OneNote and PowerPoint on Windows, Office Online, or Mac, and Visio on Windows. It finds most accessibility issues, explains why each might be a potential problem for someone with a disability and offers suggestions on how to remove these obstacles.

Although the Checker catches most types of accessibility barriers, there are some issues it cannot detect. Always review your work visually as well.

[Click here to see the Accessibility Checker information on the Microsoft website.](#)¹

Links

Make links easy to understand – imagine not being able to quickly scan a document

It can be annoying for anyone reading a document, web page or tweet to be referred to an ambiguous link – and have no idea where it leads. This is even more frustrating for people who are blind or have low vision and rely on screen reader software to access content and are told only: 'read more' 'click here' 'further information' but have no way of knowing if it is worth their while to do so.

All links should be clearly labelled with descriptive anchor text. People who use a screen reader can choose to hear all links on a page read out in a list, which isn't much use if all links are labelled 'Read more' or 'Click here'. Instead, try 'Read more about our organisation' or 'Visit our blog'. Links that point to the same destination should have the same description.

A screen reader is a software application that enables people with severe visual impairments to use a computer. Screen readers work closely with a computer's Operating System (OS) to provide information about icons, menus, dialogue board, files and folders. They provide feedback to the user in speech, which can be heard through earphones or speakers – or in braille using a refreshable braille display. Braille output is commonly used together with speech output.

¹ <https://news.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2020/08/07/accessibility-abc/>

Tips for writing link text

- Concisely describe where the link will take the reader.
- Make sure the link makes sense when you read it out loud.
- Front load key words: rather than say 'information about barriers in workplace', use 'barriers in workplace'.
- If you are linking to a download – provide details regarding the size and nature of what will be downloaded.

Images

Provide text alternatives for non-text content

All images, graphs and tables should feature alt text – a simple text description of what the content depicts. This is read aloud by screen reading software, so people with visual impairments can understand the content. You should also ensure the content can be changed into other formats people may need, such as large print, braille, or simpler language.

People who are blind or partially sighted cannot access the information the graphic image is meant to convey unless alt text is provided. Use alt text on all logos, photographs, graphs, diagrams, icons and illustrations.

Note: if you place text in a text box with a background colour this becomes a 'graphic' and will need alt text.

Alt text can be added easily within most platforms. In newer versions of Microsoft, you can simply right click the inserted image, select 'Edit alt text' and add a description.

Tips for writing image descriptions

- Accurately and succinctly describe the content or function of the image.
- Replicate any text in the image.
- If image is used as a link, describe the link's destination.
- If image is purely decorative – it can be described as 'decorative' or be given a 'null alt' text which is a cue to screen readers to ignore it.

Graphs

Keep charts and graphs as simple as possible, using contrasting colours so different data sets are easy to distinguish. Don't use tiny fonts for graph labels.

Layout

Use text styles

When designing layouts, always use style sheets or paragraph styles for headlines, standfirsts, body text and captions. This helps with legibility and will also tag the headings (see below), enabling screen readers to navigate from headline to headline, instead of reading the whole document word by word.

Make sure all elements are tagged

Tagging will tell a screen reader what kind of element it's looking at – a headline, text, a picture, or something that doesn't need to be read at all. All styles can be linked to a certain tag, so the only manual step is to define 'figures' (pictures) and 'artifacts' (elements that don't need to be read out).

Reading order

Be careful when creating dynamic layouts. Layouts with too many column variations or too many call-out boxes can break up the reading order. Check the finished reading order to ensure screen readers will read your content in the order you intended.²

Don't use tables to structure content

When using tables to structure content in a grid layout, even if the table is invisible to readers, screen readers will still recognise this as a table and will read it out as such.

Use real text not images of text

Use 'true headings'

If a document or webpage provides only visual cues to identify headings – perhaps making them bigger or in bold, or a different colour – the screen reader will be unable to distinguish between the heading and the rest of the text.

True headings provide the layout structure that people using screen reader software require if they are to distinguish between headings and the rest of the text. The top heading becomes H1, followed by H2, H3 and so on.

Even though you won't see this numbered hierarchy in the content, the screen reader will pick it up.

True headings can be found in the Home ribbon of Microsoft Word, the Format Text ribbon in Microsoft Outlook, the editing section of your website's content management system, or the structure tree within a PDF authoring tool.

² Test the reading order of Word tables by placing your cursor in the first cell of the table, then continuously pressing the Tab key to navigate through the table. Pay attention to the order in which the cursor moves through the cells, as this will be the reading order that a screen reader would follow.

Imagine how hard it would be to scan and read a 200-page document without headings!

Add captions, transcripts and other alternatives for multimedia

Captions, text transcripts, sign language and audio-only formats all provide an alternative way to convey the information and are essential for many people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Imagine not being able to see or hear your CEO's COVID mitigation video.

Captions are an equivalent synchronised textual version of what is spoken through a video, usually showing at the bottom of the screen, similar to subtitles. Closed captions can be turned on or off: open captions are always visible.

Captions benefit people who are deaf or hard of hearing. They are also valued by people who have a different first language, and those who can't have the volume turned on, perhaps because they are working from home with family members nearby.

Transcripts are important for those who can't or don't want to access the audio or video. They contain a text version of what was said but may also include descriptions, additional information or comments.

Audio description

Audio description is a form of narration that provides information surrounding key visual elements in a media work, such as a film, television programme or theatrical performance. It describes body language, expressions, movements and background music, making the programme clear through sound for people who are blind or partially sighted.

The use of colour

Use clearly contrasting colours

Avoid orange with red, for example: people with some types of colour blindness may not be able to tell the difference, and the colours will be hard to differentiate in low light. You can check the colour contrast of your work using a plugin (see Tools for colour choice) or view your work in greyscale. This is particularly important in graphs and tables.

Don't rely on colour alone to convey a message

People with certain types of colour blindness may not be able to see a red error message, for example. If in doubt, use contrasting patterns and clear labels to differentiate your content.

Check your text colour

Choose the colour of text carefully to ensure there is sufficient contrast between the text and the background, ensuring it is legible and easy to read. Black on white is usually the first choice for maximum legibility.

Tools for colour choice

The following tools will help you to see how your designs look to people with colour blindness, visual impairments and more.

Sim Daltonism³

A simulator for Mac and iPhone that uses a coloured filter window to recreate different types of colour blindness.

Colour Contrast Analyser⁴

A programme that helps you determine the legibility of text and the contrast of visual elements, such as graphical controls and visual indicators.

Accessible PDFs⁵

These Adobe resources outline a number of ways to help make your PDFs more accessible.

Text

Use large, clear fonts

All text for all publications must be at least 12pt in size. Use sans serif fonts such as Arial or Verdana. Large print font is usually 16-18pt.

Avoid using too many typefaces

Designs that use only one or two typefaces, weights and styles are usually easier on the eye – too many can create a confusing visual layout.

³ <https://michelf.ca/projects/sim-daltonism/>

⁴ <https://developer.paciellogroup.com/resources/contrastanalyser/>

⁵ <https://helpx.adobe.com/uk/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html>

Align text to the left

This makes it easier to see where each line begins. Avoid justifying text, as this creates uneven gaps between words, and try to keep lines to a maximum of 60-70 characters so they're easier to read.

Avoid multiple line breaks

Any extra spacing or paragraph breaks will be read out by screen readers as 'space' or 'return', which can be annoying for listeners. Instead, use the paragraph settings to change the spacing.

Avoid using soft returns ⁶to force text to the next line

Magnifying or zooming text can make it easier for some readers to see information better. These options will reflow the content on the screen. Forcing text to the next line with a soft return will cause problems when reflowing⁷.

Use sentence case

Capitalising just the first letter of a sentence is much easier to read. Capitalisation can be problematic for people with dyslexia and visual impairments, particularly if whole words or sections are all in capitals. It can also prove tricky for screen readers, which may interpret consecutive upper case letters as acronyms (reading CONTACT US as 'Contact U.S.', for example).

Take care with symbols

Certain symbols won't be recognised by every screen reader, so use 'per cent' instead of %, 'and' instead of '&', and 'number' instead of '#'. The exception is currencies (£, \$, €), which always use a symbol.

Avoid underlining and italics

These can be hard to read, as they can make words appear to run into each other.

Everyone – and we do mean everyone – prefers clear, simple, straightforward language.

Keep paragraphs and sentences short, use familiar words, and avoid jargon and fill-in words like 'currently'. Organise your writing into a logical order, then stick to the point.

⁶ Soft returns are line breaks (either made automatically by the word processor, or by using Shift+Enter). Instead, if you are starting a new paragraph, use the Enter key only.

⁷ Reflowing is a technique used in word processing and web browsing that shifts the text to fit into the page, screen, or window. This makes it much easier for people using the zoom feature to ensure that the lines and paragraphs flow correctly.

Structure your content in a logical, meaningful way

This enables people to adapt the content according to their needs and still understand it. Always use the appropriate HTML header tags ([see page 9](#)) for headings and subheads and use the correct HTML for all structural elements – these will be picked up by screen readers, for example. All pages should have clear, unique titles.

Avoid using breaks
 to force text to the next line

As well as affecting overflow for magnifying or zooming users, screens vary in sizes so using breaks to force text to the next line may not look the same on every screen.

Use more than one sense to convey information

Don't rely solely on shape, sound, position or size. For example, 'Click the button on the right' is no use to someone who cannot see. Instead, use clear writing to clarify all instructions. This will benefit everyone, not just people with disabilities.

Don't rely solely on colour

Instructions such as 'Click the green button' may be meaningless to people with colour blindness, so back this up with some clarifying information. Also, watch out for graphics such as pie charts. Never rely on colour to differentiate the segments. Instead, add clear labels or patterns.

Try navigating your site using a keyboard

All parts of your site should work using keyboard commands, including forms, menus and the shopping cart. Try unplugging your mouse to see if you can still navigate the site, for example by using the tab or arrow keys.

A note on web accessibility standards

The complete global standard for web content accessibility is [WCAG2.1](#)⁸. This technical standard is particularly useful to web developers and those maintaining online content.

Ensure that web teams and anyone permitted to upload content to your websites is required to apply these Web Content Accessibility Guidelines – enabling access and usability for every colleague, potential colleague, customer, and stakeholder.

Easy Read

Easy Read is a way of making written information easier to understand, using simple language illustrated with pictures. Its aim is to help people, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, to understand information more easily. There are various ways of making

⁸ <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

information accessible including videos, drama, murals and posters; when working with individuals, find out what works for them.

Readers generally welcome written communications which use short, clear sentences that are as free as possible of jargon, acronyms, and technical terms.

Some top tips for 'easy read' which is designed specifically for those with intellectual disabilities, include:

- Concise documents – ideally no more than 10 pages per document.
- Short sentences.
- Simple and clear language and grammar.
- No jargon or acronyms.
- One idea per sentence.
- Clear, simple, respectful images that explain each idea.
- Important information and headings in bold.
- Page numbers.
- A way for people to access more information, like a website or an email address.

Many guides on how to create Easy Read or Easy-to-Read documents are available (for example, this [Inclusion Europe checklist](#) or this [Change UK guide](#)).

Maximising the reach and impact of social media

- Use emoji and emoticons sparingly.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms and idioms.
- Use CamelCase⁹ for hashtags with multiple words. Capitalising each word is easier to read than 'alllowercase'.
- Insert hashtags at the end of the post, rather than interrupt the reading flow which affects readability.
- Create short links and/or remove redundant links.
- Tell users when you are linking to an image, video or audio file.
- Thread related Twitter posts on the same topic.
- If you use images in your post, make sure all the information in the image is also part of your post.

⁹ CamelCase is the practice of writing phrases without spaces or punctuation, indicating the separation of words with a single capitalised letter. ForExampleThisIsCamelCase.

- Check your colour contrast between text and background, using the Paciello Groups Contrast Analyser or Contrast Ratio ([see page 9, Tools for colour choice](#)). Enter in the colour reference for your text and background, and they will provide the contrast – aim for above 4.5:1.

Twitter¹⁰ allows you to add alt text for images – but requires you to first turn on the feature.

Facebook¹¹ and **Instagram**¹²

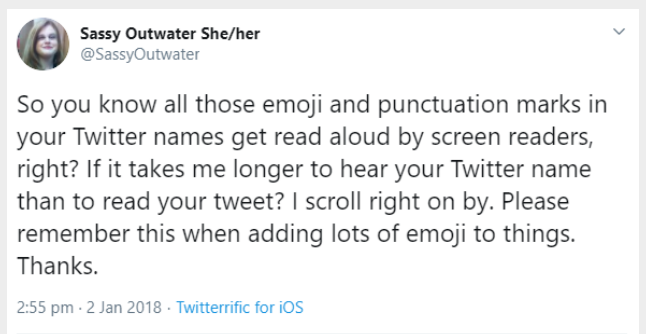
Both use automatic alt text which uses artificial intelligence to recognise objects within images and generate the description.

Note:

- Auto-generated alt text cannot be turned off. Every image you upload will have this alt text, so it is extremely important that you check the accuracy of the alt text and edit to correct as needed. You don't add alt text on Facebook, you edit auto-generated alt text.
- You can only edit alt text on a desktop computer or iOS device. If you're on an Android device, you are out of luck (as of May 2019).

A tweet from Sassy Outwater-Wright – the frustrations of a screen reader user when emojis are overused:

“So you know all those emoji and punctuation marks in your Twitter names get read about by screen readers, right ? If it takes me longer to hear your Twitter name than to read your tweet – I scroll right on by...”



Remember emojis are a primitive communications tool that can mean different things to different people – for example, a waving hand emoji often means hello or goodbye – however on WeChat in China it can mean you don't want to be friends anymore!

¹⁰ <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/picture-descriptions>

¹¹ https://www.facebook.com/help/214124458607871?helpref=uf_permalink

¹² https://help.instagram.com/503708446705527?helpref=uf_permalink

Using videos on social media

LinkedIn and Instagram

There is no way to add closed captions to a video uploaded to LinkedIn or Instagram. The suggested workaround involves:

- Adding open captions that are always visible to your video and then upload the video to LinkedIn or Twitter.
- Uploading your video to another platform that supports closed captions such as YouTube or Vimeo and link the video to your post.

See adding captions to [YouTube](#)¹³ and [Vimeo](#)¹⁴.

Twitter

Twitter's [media studio](#)¹⁵ allows you to upload a caption file (SRT subtitle file) for your videos.

Readability

Avoid jargon acronyms and idioms – idioms such as “we’re over the moon about...” can be difficult for some people to interpret, including people from different cultural backgrounds.

¹³ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2734796?hl=en>

¹⁴ <https://help.vimeo.com/hc/en-us/articles/224968828-Captions-and-subtitles>

¹⁵ https://media.twitter.com/en_us/articles/products/2018/media-studio.html

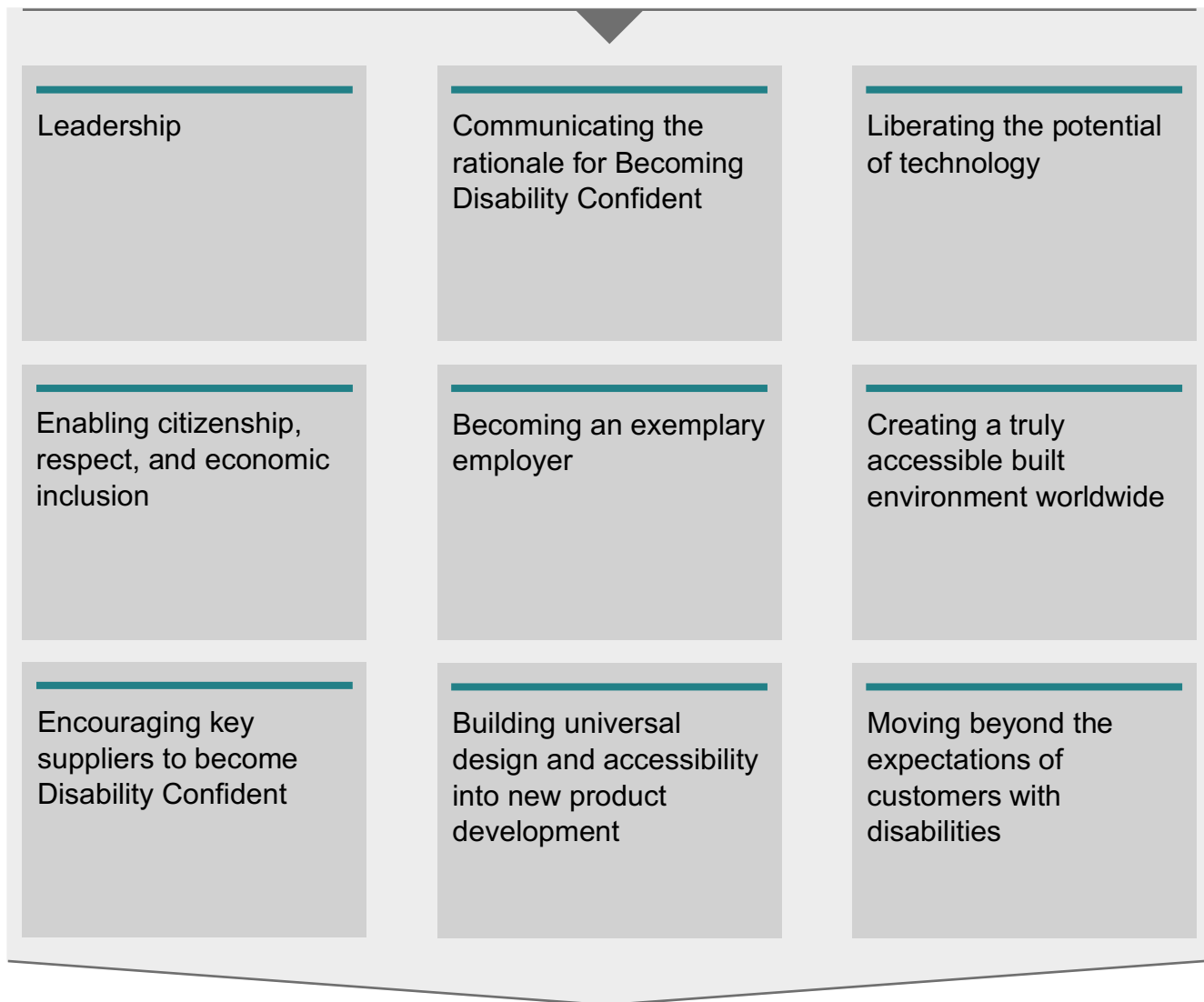
Respectful communications

The best name to call people is the name they tell you to use!

Instead of...	Use
Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user – remember that the chair liberates the user’s mobility.
Abled bodied, normal	Non-disabled – ‘able bodied’ implicitly equates disability with physical impairment. Diversity is normal, and disability is intrinsic to that diversity.
Hidden disabilities	Non-visible disabilities
Cripple, invalid, handicapped, special, challenged, handicapable, diF-abled, spastic, differently abled, victim, crip	<p>Person with a disability or person with a named impairment e.g. person with cerebral palsy.</p> <p>Some individuals feel empowered by ‘identity first’ language and choose to be called ‘disabled persons’ - if an individual asks that you use identity first language to refer to them, respect their wishes, but when speaking broadly about the disability community use “persons with disabilities” in line with the global standard outlined in the CRPD.</p> <p>Do not assume that the language a person uses to describe themselves is necessarily the language you should use to describe them - ask individuals how they would like others to refer to them.</p>
The deaf, the blind, the disabled	<p>Avoid collective nouns that imply millions of diverse individuals belong to a uniform group. When referring to the disability community as a whole, use ‘persons with disabilities’.</p> <p>The exception being ‘the Deaf’ with a capital D. This is the preferred term for many pre-lingually deaf people who use sign language and see themselves as a cultural minority that is distinct from a ‘disability’ community.</p>

Instead of...	Use
Neurodiversity – a term used to describe people with a wide range of neurological developmental conditions such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)	Person with dyslexia, person with ADHD, person with autism, etc. Some people prefer ‘identify first’ language and choose to describe themselves as ‘dyslexic’ or ‘Autistic’. Always ask individuals how they prefer to be described.
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures
‘Suffers from’ or ‘is afflicted by’ (e.g. asthma, hearing loss)	Has – for example ‘has asthma’, ‘has cerebral palsy’.
Deaf and dumb, deaf-mute	A ‘deaf person’. Or if appropriate, a ‘sign language user’.
Dwarf, midget	Someone of short stature. Some prefer ‘a Little Person’, others prefer ‘someone with restricted growth’ (some individuals prefer the word ‘dwarf’). Always ask individuals how they prefer to be described.
Facially deformed, ugly	Some campaigners for face equality prefer the term ‘facial disfigurement’, while others in the movement may prefer ‘facial difference’.
Hearing impaired	A deaf person, person who is deaf or person who is hard of hearing or who is deafened.
Learning disability, retarded, slow learner, mental disability, special, intellectually handicapped, mentally retarded, developmentally delayed, sub-normal	Person with an intellectual disability
Mental patient, psycho, crazy, insane, a psychiatric case, mental	Person who has a mental health condition
Speech disorder, speech difficulties	Person with a speech impairment or who has a speech disability. Person who stammers, person who stutters.
The blind	People with visual impairments, blind people, people who are blind or partially sighted. Remember many blind people have some residual vision.

Fundamentals of Disability Confidence



Learning directly from people with disabilities



October 2020

ADD International | BBC Media Action | Benetech | BRAC
Development Initiatives | Humanity & Inclusion | Inclusion International
The Institute of Development Studies | International Disability Alliance
Leonard Cheshire | Light for the World | Sense International | Sightsavers
Social Development Direct | Standard Chartered | Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

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