

reporting on **disability**



words
that work

a guide for **media**

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1 in **5** people

**in Western Australia
has a disability.**

It's a significant sector of the community and it's growing. An ageing population and other factors mean that within 15 years, one quarter of all Western Australians will have a disability.

The influence of the media is wide-reaching. The way people with disability are portrayed can shape perceptions.

People with disability want – and sometimes need – to be able to listen to, watch or read the news.

'Words that work, reporting on disability; a guide for media' provides guidelines on how to write about and interview people with disability.

Access the guide and checklists online at



www.count-me-in.com.au



putting people first

**Emphasising the person, not the disability, may seem a subtle difference but it's important to people with disability. It takes just two extra two words or less than half a second to say 'person with a disability' rather than 'disabled person'.
People with disability are people first!**

- **avoid collective terms** like 'the disabled', 'the blind', 'the deaf' – instead, use 'people with disability'; 'people who are blind'; 'people who are deaf'
- **don't describe people by their disability;** eg 'an epileptic', say 'a person who has epilepsy', or 'people who use a wheelchair', rather than 'wheelchair users'
- **refer to the person first:** 'Mrs Smith has cerebral palsy', rather than 'cerebral palsy sufferer Mrs Smith'. The use of Mr/Mrs/Ms at the beginning of the sentence highlights the fact that people with disability are people first

rules of thumb

In addition to getting your facts right, you can also get the perception right by taking small but simple steps to **ensure people with disability are portrayed accurately.**

- **focus on what people can do;** not what they can't
- **respect a person's individuality** and rights
- **adults with an intellectual disability are not children;** don't portray them as such, eg 'Mike, pictured with work mate Mr Smith...'
- **keep it informational** and use standard human empathy and interest when reporting
- if a story is **not about a person's disability, then don't mention it.** It isn't relevant
- **avoid using excessively emotive language.** People with disability are often portrayed at either extreme – as victims who have been dealt a cruel blow or else depicted as super humanly courageous in overcoming the odds and put on a pedestal
- **include people with disability in everyday stories.** People with disability shouldn't just be in stories about disability; use them in vox pops – they make up almost a quarter of our population



terms to avoid

- normal and/or abnormal
- victim of..., suffering from the tragedy of..., afflicted with...
- handicapped, retarded, spastic, mental, imbecile
- birth defect/deformity
- brave or special
- deaf mute, deaf and dumb or dumb
- physically challenged, differently abled and handi-capable
- retarded, deficient, people with deficits, slow or slow learner, mongoloid
- confined to, restricted to or bound by a wheelchair. Wheelchairs are liberating, providing mobility to a person who cannot walk. Never use crippled or physically challenged
- medical terms such as patient or invalid
- ... has the mental age of a three-year-old (or any age); there is no such thing as a mental age

say what?

Language is a powerful tool that can change stereotypes and attitudes. You can use it to make a positive difference for people with disability in our community.

vision

use **'person with a vision impairment'** for people who have partial sight, or **'blind'** for people with no, or very limited sight

hearing

use **'person who is hard of hearing'** for people with partial hearing and **'person who is deaf'** for those people with profound to complete hearing loss

physical

use **'person who uses a wheelchair'** not 'wheelchair user'. Refer to a **'person with a physical disability'** or **'mobility impairment'**

developmental

developmental disability refers to cognitive or physical disabilities that occur during the early years before the age of 18. Refer to a **'person or child with a developmental disability'**, or where appropriate refer to the condition eg **'person with autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, Down syndrome, or spina bifida'**

congenital

say **'person with a disability since birth'**; **'person with a congenital disability'**

don't box me in

When reporting,
consider whether you
are **stereotyping** a
person with disability.

Don't assume	Do consider
people with disability should be pitied and treated differently	everyone deserves to be valued regardless of ability
people with disability who do everyday things like getting married or having children are extraordinary	people with disability can do many things, including everyday tasks such as paying bills, going to work, raising families
people with disability are asexual	people with disability have relationships just like everyone else
people with disability are a burden	people with disability contribute to the community
people with disability are superheroes	they are high achievers, who happen to have a disability
people who don't speak can't communicate	there are ways to communicate that don't use words

A close-up profile of a man's face with a full, light brown beard and mustache. He is looking towards the right. In the bottom right corner, a portion of a silver, mesh-covered microphone is visible. The background is plain white.

up-close and personal -interviewing

Interviewing a person with disability **may require a bit more forethought**. Here are some ways to ensure your interviewee is comfortable and relaxed and you get what you need.

Don't	Do
stand over your interviewee	sit at the same level
shoot down on people, when filming or taking photos	shoot the person with disability at their level; consider microphone height
cut away to equipment or focus on aids, such as wheelchairs when filming	always focus on the person , not their disability
assist a person with disability without asking first	ask if you can assist in any way
assume every location is accessible	agree with the person being interviewed on a suitable location or check if they have any access needs ie parking or access to a lift
rush the questions	give people time to answer; writing questions down, or providing them in advance, can be useful
address questions to a carer or friend	direct your questions to the person with disability not their carer
ignore what they say just because it might be hard to understand	rephrase the question or ask them to repeat the answer — they are probably used to people asking for clarification and won't be offended
be afraid to ask the person how they cope with certain things, such as everyday tasks, if relevant to the topic	be mindful of intrusive questions , such as intimate aspects of their lives which may be offensive
shout at someone with a disability	if someone is hard of hearing , seek their guidance on the best approach to communicate. Ask if one side is better than the other to hear, or if they require an interpreter. If the person lip reads, look directly at them and speak clearly at a normal pace and keep your hands clear of your face
assume a blind person doesn't know where you are looking	if the person has a vision impairment , identify yourself and introduce any other people also present; maintain eye contact

assistance/guide dogs aren't sniffer dogs



They are **assistance animals** trained to perform many tasks that **enable people to be more independent** at home, at work and in the community.

Guiding, signalling, performing physical tasks, alerting to seizures, alerting to psychological/psychiatric disabilities and providing therapeutic companionship are typically some of those tasks.

A **guide dog** is specifically trained to serve as a guide for a person with a **vision impairment**.

If someone has an assistance dog; don't pat or feed the dog – it is working.

making headlines

It's understood that headlines need to be snappy but that shouldn't mean they are disrespectful – try to use the 'person first' principle.

captions

People who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on captions to follow the soundtrack on television or dvds.

There are approximately **3.5 million** people who are hard of hearing or deaf in Australia.

Captions can be closed (need to be activated) or open and **visible to all viewers**.

Captions are not like language subtitles – they translate dialogue, are coloured and positioned to indicate who

is speaking, and provide information on music and sound effects. Captions add context, tone and ease of understanding.

Currently, all broadcasters caption 75 per cent of all programming from 6am to midnight and all news and current affairs programs.

For more comprehensive information on captioning and media legislation go to:

www.mediaaccess.org.au



Useful links

Disability Services Commission
www.dsc.wa.gov.au

Equal Opportunity Commission
www.eoc.wa.gov.au

UN Convention
www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/index.html

Disability Discrimination Act
www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/dda_guide/dda_guide.htm

Disability Information and Resource Centre
www.dircsa.org.au/factsheets/media-guidelines/

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) - accessible web sites
www.w3.org



words
that work



www.count-me-in.com.au



Disability Services Commission

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