



- **Guidelines - Reporting on Persons with a Disability**

When speaking, interviewing or socializing with a person or an athlete with a disability, here are a few general rules to remember:

- Always identify the person first and then the disability. Sometimes it may not be necessary or relevant to the article to mention the disability, so don't feel obliged to do so. When it is relevant, just mention what the disability is and then move on.
- Act naturally and don't monitor every word and action. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions like "see you later" (to a person with a visual impairment) or "I'd better run along" (to someone who uses a wheelchair).
- Avoid using emotional wording like "tragic", "afflicted", "victim", or "confined to a wheelchair". Emphasize the ability and not the limitation, ie, by saying that someone "uses a wheelchair" rather than "is confined" or "is wheelchair-bound".
- Avoid portraying people with a disability who succeed as "extraordinary" or "superhuman". For example, overstating the achievements of athletes with a disability inadvertently suggests the original expectations were not high.
- Portray the person as he/she is in real life. For example, a person with a disability might be an athlete but he/she may also be a parent, a civil engineer, a doctor, a business manager or a journalist.
- People do not want to be recipients of charity or pity. Remember that a person with a disability isn't necessarily chronically sick or unhealthy.
- Always ask a person with a disability if he/she would like assistance before rushing in. Your help may not be needed. However, it is quite all right to offer help. If your assistance is needed then listen or ask for instructions.
- When talking with a person who has a disability, speak directly to that person rather than a companion or interpreter.
- Don't forget that people with a disability may need your patience and sufficient time to act independently. Give the person extra time to speak if they are using a communication aid or have a learning disability.
- Ask persons with a disability to repeat themselves if you do not understand them.
- Respect the person's personal space and remember that a wheelchair is part of a person's personal space.

This document has been provided courtesy of the International Paralympic Committee

www.paralympic.org



- **Appropriate words and phrases**

Words can project images that are inaccurate and may hurt a person. In the following you can find a list of preferred terminology and appropriate wording to use when referring to athletes or people with a disability in general.

Avoid:	Use:
Disabled athlete/person Handicapped athlete/person Athlete/person with disabilities	Athlete/person with a disability or Paralympian Place the athlete or person first rather than referring to his or her disability.
The handicapped or The physically handicapped	People with a physical disability
Normal athletes	Able bodied athletes
A paraplegic, paraplegics	A person with paraplegia
A quadriplegic, quadriplegics	A person with quadriplegia
The blind	Persons with a visual impairment or blindness
A retard/the retarded	A person with an intellectual disability
Spastic	A person with cerebral palsy
Abnormal, subnormal, defective, deformed These are negative terms which imply failure to reach personal perfection	Specify the disability
Afflicted with Most people with a disability don't see themselves as afflicted	Say the person has... (the disability)
Confined to a wheelchair A wheelchair provides mobility and is not confining	Say uses a wheelchair
Cripple or crippled These words convey a negative image of a twisted ugly body	Say with a physical disability
Disease (when used as equal to disability) Many disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and spinal injuries, are not caused by any illness or disease	Say disability
Stumps This has the connotations that the person's limbs were cut off like a tree	Say amputation
Suffers from, sufferer People with a disability do not necessarily suffer	Say is/has... (the disability)
Victim People with a disability are not necessarily victims and usually prefer not to be perceived as such	Say is/has... (the disability)

In general, it is helpful to remember that disability is a characteristic or a situation of life but does not replace life itself. Life very often proves to be stronger than any kind of disability.

This document has been provided courtesy of the International Paralympic Committee

www.paralympic.org