

2026 SPECIAL OLYMPICS STYLE GUIDE





Preface

Using a consistent writing style and form in all Special Olympics communications enhances the clarity and professionalism of our materials. It's easy to do – and this guide makes it easier!

In general, Special Olympics follows the Associated Press Stylebook, one of the most widely used guides, along with Webster's New World College Dictionary (the dictionary recommended by AP).

NOTE: The 2026 Special Olympics Style Guide is designed as a quick reference; it is not meant to be a glossary of every term or program. Instead, the Style Guide focuses on the most commonly asked questions on correct usage; it also points out where Special Olympics style diverges from AP style.

For handy reference, a one-page snapshot of the Most Common Errors is featured on the next page.

If you have questions or suggestions, please feel free to ask a member of the Marketing Department or email kmckenna@specialolympics.org.

Style -- Most Common Errors



CORRECT

INCORRECT

General Terms



Special Olympics

~~the Special Olympics~~



Special Olympics athletes

~~Special Olympians~~



Special Olympics event
or athlete, supporter, etc. Always add an "s"

~~Special Olympic event~~
or athlete, supporter, etc.

Capitalization



the Special Olympics movement

~~the Special Olympics Movement~~



athlete
athlete is lowercase

~~Athlete~~



partner
partner is lowercase

~~Partner~~

Program -- P or p?

Capital P when referring to accredited Programs (Special Olympics Australia, Special Olympics Zambia, etc.)
Lower case in all other uses (Healthy Athletes program)

Other

Special Olympics always comes first (on first reference)

Correct: Special Olympics Healthy Communities® | **Incorrect:** ~~Healthy Communities®~~

Calendar dates are written in order of date-month-year (no comma needed)

Correct: 28 November 2020 | **Incorrect:** ~~November 28, 2020; 28 November, 2020~~



A Very Special Christmas®

Title of ongoing series of holiday music compilation albums and CDs benefiting the Christmas Records Trust, which funds grants and programmatic development. Spelled out on first reference; may be abbreviated as AVSC thereafter.

NOTE: Records is plural. See also Christmas Records Trust.

academic degrees

Use only if requested or pertinent. Spell out degrees in text: use bachelor's degree, master's degree, etc. After someone's full name, use abbreviations: Ph.D., M.D. NOTE: It is also correct to use certain academic degrees as titles.

Examples: Dr. John Dow; Dr. Elisabeth Dykens.

ages

Always use numbers. Examples: Special Olympics athletes can range in age from 8 to over 80. Young Athletes are 2 to 7 years old.

a.m., p.m.

Lowercase with periods.

among, between

Use among for more than two items, between for two items. Examples: The funds were divided among Tom, Dick and Harry. The argument was between Romulus and Remus.

articles (newspapers, magazines, etc.)

Place the headlines/titles of newspaper, magazine and other published print or online articles in quotes. Do not italicize.

athlete

Lowercase in all uses. Example: Special Olympics athletes are children and adults with intellectual disabilities in 200 countries around the world.

athlete leader

lowercase.

athlete oath

"Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." On first mention, call it the Special Olympics athlete oath; thereafter, the oath. NOTE: Do not call this "the Special Olympics oath."

Athlete Leadership

Special Olympics Athlete Leadership on first reference, Athlete Leadership thereafter. Athlete leaders are those who participate in Athlete Leadership activities and/or hold leadership roles. NOTE: As above, use lowercase when referring to individuals, e.g., athlete leaders.

ADDED NOTE: We no longer use the term Athlete Leadership Programs or ALPs. Please simply refer to Athlete Leadership; no abbreviation needed.

Athlete Leadership Council

Athlete Leadership Councils give athletes the opportunity to share ideas and opinions as well as implement projects and contribute to programmatic areas. This can happen at the local, state, national or international level.

NOTE: This replaces the term Athlete Input Council.



autism

Lowercase. Also known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD). When possible refer to an athlete with this diagnosis as a person with autism (using people-first language). Use of the term autistic is acceptable, but not preferred. See also people-first language.

Board of Directors, Special Olympics International Board of Directors

Always capitalize. We refer to our Board as the Special Olympics International Board of Directors; on second reference, we may say Board of Directors or International Board of Directors. Someone can be called a Member or Director of the International Board of Directors, a Board Member, or a Member of the Board. Please do not say "Board Director." Examples: Vanessa Williams, Director, Special Olympics International Board of Directors. Or: Shi Derong, Member of the Special Olympics International Board of Directors. (This is Special Olympics style, contrary to AP Style.)

Bharat (India)

The official title is Bharat (India). Do not say 'Bharat' or 'India' on their own.

book titles

Place in quotes.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Do not hyphenate. Do not use an ampersand.

capital, capitol

A capital is the city where a seat of government is located. A capitol is a government building, i.e., the U.S. Capitol.

NOTE: The U.S. Capitol is on Capitol Hill; this is where U.S. Programs hold Capitol Hill Day each year.

capitalization

- Always capitalize Program when referring to Special Olympics Programs.
Example: The Program held its first-ever Unified competition in October 2015.
- When referring to activities and initiatives, only capitalize "program" when it is part of an official name.
Example: Motor Activity Training Program.
- Capitalize an official title, whether it comes before or after the individual's name. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style.) Examples: David Evangelista, Chief Executive Officer, addressed the conference. Chairman Timothy Shriver delivered a video message.

Celsius

Use this term rather than centigrade for the temperature scale based on the metric system. When giving a Celsius temperature, use these forms: 40 C or 40 degrees Celsius.

In Special Olympics documents, we generally express temperature using the Fahrenheit scale and provide the Celsius equivalent in parentheses.

Example: 77 F (25 C).

center, centre

Both spellings are fine. This extends to other differences in American/British English, including behavior/behaviour, programs/programmes, honor/honour, etc.

Christmas Records Grants (CRG) or Christmas Records Trust (CRT)

Capitalize Christmas Records Grants or Christmas Records Trust. In subsequent mentions, use CRG or CRT. NOTE: Records is plural. Also see A Very Special Christmas.



Closing Ceremony

Capitalize. Treat as singular. Examples: The Closing Ceremony starts at 5 p.m. BUT: Thousands of athletes plan to attend both Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

Choose to Include

This is our ongoing awareness and fund-raising campaign, based upon Three Pillars: 1/Sport and Health; 2/Youth Engagement; 3/Inclusion and Athlete Leadership. NOTE: Both hashtags #choosetoinclude and #ChooseToInclude are acceptable. See also Three Pillars.

commas

Use commas to separate elements in a complex series; do not use in a simple series.

Examples: The flag is red, white and blue. BUT: "... encourage relationships between schools and Programs, engage youth with and without disabilities, and build communities."

NOTE: Commas always go inside quotation marks. As in: "This is how it should look," she said. "Even if it's an incomplete sentence," he added.

company

Spell out when used as part of a company name. (This is Special Olympics style, contrary to AP style.) Example: Otis Elevator Company.

Cops on Doughnut Shops®

For more than a decade, this partnership between Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics organizers and Krispy Kreme stores has raised funds and awareness for Special Olympics.

currency

For the benefit of our international audience, use US\$ when referring to American currency.

Example: Special Olympics received a grant of US\$250,000.

dates

Whenever possible, please follow the world's most widely used construction for dates – date-month-year: 19 September 2026. Months are spelled out; no comma needed.

NOTE: Please avoid using a conversational form, such as June 17th through June 25th. Correct form is: The World Games were held 17-25 June 2023. (This is Special Olympics global style, contrary to AP style.)

developmental disabilities

A general term for a range of conditions related to impairment in physical, learning or behavioral areas; abbreviated as DD. These conditions include intellectual disabilities (ID). NOTE: Special Olympics uses the more specific term: intellectual disabilities (See intellectual disabilities.)

ADDED NOTE: In certain instances, specifically related to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or early childhood programming, Special Olympics may use the general term intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), which encompasses both categories of DD and ID.

directions

In general, lowercase north, south, northwest, northern, southern, etc., when they indicate compass direction.

Capitalize when they designate regions, especially in the United States.

Examples: He drove west, then along the southern coast. A storm system that developed in the Midwest is heading toward the East Coast.

**disabilities**

Use people-first language: refer to the person first — and any disability thereafter. If applicable to the context, refer to a person with a disability, not a disabled person; someone who uses a wheelchair, not someone “confined” to a wheelchair or wheelchair-bound; or a person with autism, not “suffering” from autism.

NOTE: Also pay attention to singular/plural usage. Examples: a person with an intellectual disability; people with intellectual disabilities.

divisioning

Lowercase. Special Olympics competitions are structured so that athletes compete with other athletes of similar ability in equitable divisions. This practice marks one of the fundamental differences between Special Olympics competitions and those of most other sports organizations.

Down syndrome

Not Downs syndrome or Downs Syndrome. The word syndrome is lowercase.

email

No hyphen.

exams

Do NOT use this word to describe what takes place at Special Olympics Healthy Athletes events or clinics. Screenings is the preferred term.

eyeglasses

One word.

Fahrenheit

The temperature scale commonly used in the United States. When giving a Fahrenheit temperature, use these forms: 70 F or 70 degrees Fahrenheit. In Special Olympics documents, we generally express temperature using the Fahrenheit scale and provide the Celsius equivalent in parentheses. Example: 77 F (25 C).

fewer, less

In general, use fewer for individual items, less for bulk or quantity. Examples: Fewer than 10 applicants called about the position. He has less than US\$10 in his pocket.

Final Leg

Capitalize, do not use quotes. A Final Leg consists of the last miles of a Law Enforcement Torch Run® in the days leading up to the Opening Ceremony of a Special Olympics competitive event. See Law Enforcement Torch Run.

Flame of Hope

No quotes, no italics. The torch carried in the Law Enforcement Torch Run® and used to light the cauldron at Special Olympics Games. There is no registered trademark for Flame of Hope.

fundraiser, fundraising

Do not hyphenate.



Games

Capitalize in all instances when referring to Special Olympics Games. (This is Special Olympics style, contrary to AP style.) Treat as a collective plural rather than a collective singular expression. Example: The World Games were held in Abu Dhabi. NOT “was held.”

When naming Games, put Special Olympics first whenever possible. The idea is for Special Olympics to stand out, rather than the year or location. Preferred: Special Olympics World Winter Games Switzerland 2029. Not: 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games, Nagano, Japan.

See below for specific guidance.

- **World Games**

Capitalize. Designate the season only in title of World Winter Games, as in: Special Olympics World Games CITY/LOCATION YEAR (for summer competition) or Special Olympics World Winter Games CITY/LOCATION YEAR (for winter).

Examples: Special Olympics World Winter Games Austria 2017; Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023.

NOTE: On second reference, events may be abbreviated to World Games, the 2023 (or whichever year) Games, or the Games, if the meaning is clear within the context. See below list of past and upcoming World Games for full titles.

- **Single Sport events**

State the full name of the event on first reference. Use abbreviated name thereafter.

Examples: Special Olympics Unified Football World Cup Paris 2026 on first reference. Thereafter: Unified Football World Cup, Paris 2026; Unified Football World Cup; or Paris 2026.

NOTE: Never use ‘Unified Cup’ or ‘World Cup’ on their own.

- **Regional and National Games**

Capitalize the R and N. Example: Special Olympics Asia-Pacific Regional Games, as well as the season for Programs that hold Games in both summer and winter sports (Special Olympics Canada Summer Games; Special Olympics Canada Winter Games).

- **U.S. State Games**

Capitalize. Identify the season for Programs that hold Games for both summer and winter sports (e.g., Special Olympics Maryland Summer Games).

- **local Games**

Capitalize Games, lowercase local.

- **Other**

Capitalize multinational or multistate events. Examples: Special Olympics Middle East/North Africa Regional Games; Mid-Atlantic Invitational Golf Tournament.



Special Olympics World Games and World Winter Games

(Note the change from “International” to “World” in 1991. Also note that, as of 2019, Special Olympics no longer numbers Games in official titles.)

1968

1st International Special Olympics Summer Games
Soldier Field, Chicago, Illinois, USA

1970

2nd International Special Olympics Summer Games
Soldier Field, Chicago, Illinois, USA

1972

3rd International Special Olympics Summer Games
University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, USA

1975

4th International Special Olympics Summer Games
Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan, USA

1977

1st International Special Olympics Winter Games
Steamboat Springs, Colorado, USA

1979

5th International Special Olympics Summer Games
State University of New York at Brockport, Brockport, New York, USA

1981

2nd International Special Olympics Winter Games
Stowe and the Village of Smugglers’ Notch, Vermont, USA

1983

6th International Special Olympics Summer Games
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

1985

3rd International Special Olympics Winter Games
Park City, Utah, USA

1987

7th International Special Olympics Summer Games
University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary’s College, South Bend, Indiana, USA

1989

4th International Special Olympics Winter Games
Reno, Nevada, and Lake Tahoe, California, USA

1991

8th Special Olympics World Summer Games
Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

1993

5th Special Olympics World Winter Games
Salzburg and Schladming, Austria

1995

9th Special Olympics World Summer Games
New Haven, Connecticut, USA

1997

6th Special Olympics World Winter Games



1999

10th Special Olympics World Summer Games
Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

2001

7th Special Olympics World Winter Games
Anchorage, Alaska, USA

2003

11th Special Olympics World Summer Games
Dublin, Ireland

2005

8th Special Olympics World Winter Games
Nagano, Japan
or
Special Olympics World Winter Games, Nagano, Japan 2005

2007

12th Special Olympics World Summer Games
Shanghai, China
or
Special Olympics World Summer Games, Shanghai 2007

2009

9th Special Olympics World Winter Games
Idaho, USA
or
Special Olympics World Winter Games, Idaho USA 2009

2011

13th Special Olympics World Summer Games
Athens, Greece
or
Special Olympics World Summer Games, Athens 2011

2013

10th Special Olympics World Winter Games
PyeongChang, Republic of Korea
or
Special Olympics World Winter Games PyeongChang 2013

2015

14th Special Olympics World Summer Games
Los Angeles, USA
or
Special Olympics World Games Los Angeles 2015

2017

11th Special Olympics World Winter Games
Styria, Austria
or
Special Olympics World Winter Games Austria 2017

2019

Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2019

2023

Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023



2025

Special Olympics World Winter Games Turin 2025

2027

Special Olympics World Games Santiago 2027

2029

Special Olympics World Winter Games Switzerland 2029

Games Organizing Committee

Do not use. This phrase has been replaced by Local Organizing Committee, abbreviated as LOC on second reference.

geographic names

Whenever possible, spell out names of countries, states and cities. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style.)

Exception: For U.S. state names, add USA afterwards. Example: Special Olympics Rhode Island (USA) hosted a competition in the fall.

Get Into It

A K-12 school curriculum developed by Special Olympics and distributed to educational institutions to encourage students to respect and embrace the differences and similarities in people with and without intellectual disabilities. Formerly known as SO Get Into It.

Global Athlete Leadership Council

Capitalized. Group of athlete leaders representing their Regions for a four-year term. They provide feedback and global perspective to Special Olympics departments on topics that would significantly affect athletes; present ideas to the Special Olympics Board of Directors and Global Leadership Team; and promote athlete leadership throughout their Regions. Abbreviation is GALC.

Global Youth Leadership Council

Capitalized. This council was established to evolve Special Olympics youth work from being for the youth to by the youth. The council will position young leaders to play an active role in Special Olympics programming at the global, Regional, national, and local levels. Abbreviation is GYLC.

Global Youth Leadership Summit

Capitalized. Since 2001, our Youth Leadership Summits have brought together young people with and without intellectual disabilities to develop the tools they need to become leaders for change in their communities. These summits take place at the global, Regional, national, and local school levels, creating a worldwide network of young people committed to a more inclusive future. Abbreviation is GYLS.

Global Strategic Plan, 2021-2030

Special Olympics Global Strategic Plan, 2021-2030 on first reference to our vision and strategy for the coming years.

good will, goodwill

The noun is two words. The adjective is one word.

grass roots, grass-roots

Two words; hyphenate when used as an adjective.



Guardians of the Flame®

Capitalize, no quotes. Describes law enforcement officers who take part in a Torch Run, including a Final Leg. See Final Leg and Law Enforcement Torch Run®.

Heads of Delegations

Capitalize. After first reference, can be abbreviated as HOD. This refers to the leaders of the delegations that will be competing at a World Games.

Heads of Delegation Seminar

Formerly called the Heads of Delegation Conference. Generally held several months prior to a World Games (at the World Games location), these meetings offer an overview of World Games for Heads of Delegations.

Health

Special Olympics Health is ever-expanding. On first reference, when referring to our health work, please refer to the overarching program as: Special Olympics Health, made possible by the Golisano Foundation, and in the United States in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This can include Healthy Athletes activities, fitness and wellness initiatives, and Healthy Communities programming. On second reference and thereafter, refer simply to Special Olympics Health or the Special Olympics Health program. (See also: Special Olympics Health).

Examples: Special Olympics Health, made possible by the Golisano Foundation, and in the United States in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is breaking new ground in Florida. Or (outside the USA): Our Special Olympics Health program, made possible by the Golisano Foundation, is making a huge difference around the world.

health care (noun); healthcare (adjective)

As a noun, health care is two words, no hyphen. The adjective is one word, no hyphen. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style). Examples: People with ID face challenges in accessing quality health care; Special Olympics is working toward full healthcare inclusion for all.

Health Messenger

Capitalize. A Health Messenger is a Special Olympics athlete trained to serve as a leader in health and/or fitness within their Special Olympics community or the community at large.

Healthy Athletes®

On first reference, when referring to Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® outside the United States, say: Special Olympics Healthy Athletes®, made possible by the Golisano Foundation; thereafter, simply refer to Healthy Athletes. When referring to Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® in the United States, first reference is: Special Olympics Healthy Athletes®, made possible by the Golisano Foundation, and in the United States in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Healthy Athletes thereafter.

At Healthy Athletes events, Special Olympics athletes are offered free health screenings and education. The Healthy Athletes name covers nine disciplines:

- Special Olympics Fit Feet (podiatry)
- Special Olympics FUNfitness (physiotherapy)
- Special Olympics Health Promotion (preventative medicine)
- Special Olympics Healthy Hearing (audiology)



- Special Olympics Healthy Young Athletes (pediatrics)
- Special Olympics Lions Clubs International Foundation Opening Eyes® (vision care)*
- Special Olympics MedFest® (general medicine)
- Special Olympics Special Smiles® (dentistry)
- Special Olympics Strong Minds (mental health)

*This is a partnership between Special Olympics and Lions Clubs International. Always use the full name, including the trademark, as shown above on first reference; use Opening Eyes thereafter.

NOTE: When mentioning any of the Healthy Athletes disciplines, please include Special Olympics on first reference, as in: Special Olympics Special Smiles®.

Additional note: some computer software programs automatically use a superscript for the registered mark, while others do not. Whenever possible, the superscript is preferred.

Healthy Communities®

Healthy Communities is a portfolio of health work that a Special Olympics Program implements to improve health outcomes for people with ID. Healthy Communities focuses on the P.A.T.H. to health equity: **P**revention: Ongoing programs in health promotion, fitness, child development, social-emotional health, and prevention for all ages; **A**ssessment: Health screenings and coordinated follow up care for Special Olympics athletes; **T**raining: Training to equip the healthcare workforce to better serve, and be more inclusive of, people with ID; **H**ealth Systems: Innovative, targeted partnerships and policy changes at the local, national, regional, and global levels to elevate the voices and health needs of people with ID.

Host Town program

This involves cities and towns around a World Games location that volunteer to host Special Olympics athlete delegations for several days prior to a World Games competition. The Host Town – or Host Towns – program allows athletes to rest, acclimate and train prior to competing at World Games.

inclusive health

To Special Olympics, inclusive health means that people with intellectual disabilities have equitable access to health services. The health services should be of good quality. It also means that people with IDD are empowered to take an active role in deciding their health and life choices. To make inclusive health a reality, we must ensure that people with ID have easier access to health services that are adapted to meet their needs.

intellectual disabilities

This is the official term used to refer to our focus population. Use the singular when referring to one person, e.g., a child with an intellectual disability, or a child with intellectual disability. Use plural when referring to more than one person, e.g., “adults and children with intellectual disabilities.” May be abbreviated as ID on second reference.

NOTE: In certain instances, specifically related to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or early childhood programming, Special Olympics may use the general term intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), which encompasses both categories of developmental disabilities and intellectual disabilities.

International Association of Chiefs of Police

Abbreviate as IACP after first mention. The founding law enforcement organization of the Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics.



Korea

The Special Olympics Program is located in Korea. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style.) However, when necessary, use Republic of Korea or South Korea to identify the country that hosted the 2013 World Winter Games. Example: The 2013 Special Olympics World Winter Games were held in PyeongChang, South Korea.

Kosovo

The official name is Kosovo and its abbreviation is KOS. NOTE: We no longer need to add the statement: “under UNSCR 1244/99.”

Law Enforcement Torch Run®

Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics on first reference; use Law Enforcement Torch Run, Torch Run or LETR thereafter. The first use of the full title should include the registration symbol ® after the word “Run.” Law enforcement officers carry the Flame of Hope (torch) prior to a Special Olympics competition to raise funds for and awareness of the Special Olympics movement worldwide. Officers involved in the Law Enforcement Torch Run are also called Guardians of the Flame. NOTE: law enforcement officer is lowercase, no hyphens. See also Final Leg, Flame of Hope.

Leadership & Skills Curriculum

The Leadership & Skills Curriculum for Athlete Leadership is designed to provide athletes with leadership training as well as personal and professional development that they can apply to leadership roles in their Program, community, and workplace. Abbreviation is L&S Curriculum.

Local Organizing Committee

Organization that plans, organizes, finances and conducts Special Olympics World or Regional Games, as well as International Single Sport Events. On first mention, spell out and capitalize; also include a reference to the specific event (eg the Local Organizing Committee for the Special Olympics World Winter Games Turin 2025). Abbreviate as LOC thereafter. NOTE: This term replaces Games Organizing Committee.

long-distance

Hyphenate as a compound modifier. Examples: She has been training to be a long-distance runner. BUT: It’s a long distance to the airport.

long jump

As a noun, two words. As an adjective, hyphenate. Examples: He competed in the long jump. She won a medal in the long-jump event.

longtime

One word as a compound modifier. Examples: They are longtime supporters of Special Olympics. BUT: They’ve been friends a long time.

measurements

All Special Olympics documents should include both metric and U.S. measuring systems.

- foot—the basic unit of length in the U.S. measuring system. The metric equivalent is exactly 30.48 centimeters.
- kilometer—the metric term for 1,000 meters. A kilometer is equal to approximately 3,281 feet or five-eighths (0.62) of a mile. NOTE: Abbreviate as km.
- knot—one nautical mile.
- meter—the basic unit of length in the metric system. It is defined as being equal to approximately 39.37 inches. NOTE: Abbreviate as m.

**mental retardation**

Do not use. This outdated wording has been replaced with the term “intellectual disability.” In descriptions, please use people-first language, as in: a person with an intellectual disability; children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

mid

No hyphen unless followed by a number or a capital letter. Examples: midterm exam, mid-April, mid-1990s.

millions, billions

Use figures with million or billion. Example: More than 6 million athletes and Unified partners participate in Special Olympics.

Minister

Capitalize before or after a person’s name. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style.)

Example: Dr. Rafael Sánchez Cárdenas, Minister of Health, Dominican Republic

Ministry

As a government entity, capitalize. NOTE: Do not capitalize when referring to government ministries in general.

Examples: the Ministry of Sports; sports ministries around the world.

Motor Activity Training Program

Activity is singular. Abbreviate as MATP after first mention. A program specially designed for athletes who are unable to participate in official Special Olympics sports competitions due to functional abilities. NOTE: Be careful not to use the redundant phrase “MATP program.”

movement

Lowercase. Example: Her inspiring speech marked a turning point in the Special Olympics movement.

movies, television shows

Place in quotes.

multi

In general, no hyphen. Examples: multinational, multiregional, multistate.

National Director

Capitalize. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style.)

the Netherlands

The word “the” is lowercase. Example: Athlete leaders gathered in Groningen, the Netherlands.

nonprofit

One word, no hyphen.

North Macedonia

Refer to this country as North Macedonia. Do NOT use outdated terms Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or FYR Macedonia. Do not use Macedonia alone.



numerals

Spell out numbers one through nine, except for ages and before millions or billions. Use figures for 10 and above. Examples: Special Olympics has seven Regional offices. A delegation of 23 athletes is expected.

NOTE: Follow the same rule for most ordinals (first, second, third, etc.) UNLESS they're used to form a name/title. Example: The 8th Special Olympics World Winter Games were held in Nagano, Japan.

open water swimming

Lowercase. No hyphen.

OSEP

This abbreviation may be used on second reference for the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs at the Department of Education (OSEP). Referring to the U.S. Department of Education alone is not acceptable.

Opening Ceremony

Capitalize. Treat as singular. The Opening Ceremony was held at the University of Nebraska. Also note: Many volunteers worked at both the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

Palestinian Authority

Not Palestine Authority. However, the Special Olympics Program in the MENA Region is referred to as Special Olympics Palestine.

Pan American Health Organization

On first mention, use Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization (WHO). PAHO is fine on subsequent use. Please refer to PAHO as a partner.

Parade of Athletes

Capitalize. The procession of athletes during an Opening Ceremony.

partner

Lowercase. Unified partners refers to people without intellectual disabilities. Example: The Unified Sports tennis match featured an athlete from Costa Rica and a partner from Turkey.

people-first language

Lowercase. People-first language puts the person first, not a diagnosis. People-first language signals that a person is not defined by a disability; disability may just be one characteristic – and comes last. Examples: child with an intellectual disability; adult with autism; athlete with cerebral palsy.

percent

One word. Use figures only, as in: 3 percent, 50 percent.

personal best

Lowercase. Special Olympics athletes are always trying to exceed their personal best in every sport. NOTE: An athlete's personal best is defined as the best result (highest score, fastest time or other individual stat) that he or she has ever achieved.

Plane Pull®

A Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics fundraiser. Capitalize.



Polar Plunge®

Capitalize. A Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics fundraiser. Polar Plunge is a registered trademark of Special Olympics and is recommended over “Polar Bear Plunge” and other similar names not registered by Special Olympics.

prefixes

In general, do not hyphenate when using a prefix with a word starting with a consonant.

- Use a hyphen if the prefix ends in a vowel and the word that follows begins with the same vowel (e.g., pre-existing)
- Use a hyphen if the word that follows is capitalized (pre-Colombian).
- Use a hyphen to join doubled prefixes (e.g., sub-subparagraph).

Preliminary Games

Capitalized. This term is preferred over Test Games, but either one is acceptable. May be shortened to Pre-Games.

NOTE: Invitational Games may also be used.

President, the President

Capitalize when used as a title. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style.)

Prime Minister, the Prime Minister

Capitalize when used as a title. (This is Special Olympics style, not AP style.)

Principle of Meaningful Involvement

Term used to describe the monitoring of the meaningful involvement of all teammates participating in Unified Sports. POMI on second reference.

Program

The word Program is always capitalized when referring to a Special Olympics Program to differentiate it from initiatives and activities. Example: Special Olympics Australia’s National Games were one of the Program’s most successful ever.

- **National Programs**

Capitalize.

Example: Representatives of nine National Programs attended the seminar.

- In National Program names, “Special Olympics” precedes the country name (Special Olympics Malawi, NOT Malawi Special Olympics).

- **State, Provincial and City Programs**

In state, provincial and city Program names, Special Olympics always comes first.

Examples: Special Olympics Massachusetts, Special Olympics District of Columbia, Special Olympics Ontario, Special Olympics Toronto.

quotation marks

Please note that commas and periods always go inside quotation marks, even with sentence fragments. Example: We call this “an easy rule.” NOT: We call this “an easy rule”.

®Registered trademark symbol is used only on first reference. NOTE: Please also see the Trademarks entry for a list of Special Olympics’ registered trademarks.



R-word

Note hyphen and capital "R." Refers to the words "retard" or "retarded." Derogatory use of these words can hurt millions of people with intellectual disabilities, their families and friends.

Regions (Special Olympics)

With a capital "R." Always use the full Special Olympics Region name on first reference, as in: Special Olympics Europe Eurasia, not SOEE. Special Olympics is organized into seven Regions. The Regional offices provide training and support to their area Programs.

- Special Olympics Africa
- Special Olympics Asia Pacific
- Special Olympics East Asia
- Special Olympics Europe Eurasia
- Special Olympics Latin America
- Special Olympics Middle East/North Africa
- Special Olympics North America

Sargent Shriver Global Messengers

The term refers to Special Olympics athlete leaders chosen from Programs around the world to serve four-year terms as spokespersons for the Special Olympics movement. They are engaged at the Regional level and at World Games that take place during their term. Abbreviate as SSGMs on second reference. Note: Do not use the outdated term "Sargent Shriver International Global Messengers."

screenings

This is the preferred term to describe what takes place at Special Olympics Healthy Athletes events or clinics. Please note that we no longer use the word "exams."

semicolon

Use to separate complex information or lists beyond what a comma can convey; also to link independent clauses. If these clauses get too unwieldy, however, consider writing separate sentences.

Shriver family members

Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Founder (Mrs. Shriver or EKS on second reference)

Sargent Shriver, former President and Chairman of the Board Emeritus

Timothy P. Shriver, Chairman, Special Olympics International*

Anthony K. Shriver, Founder, Chairman & CEO, Best Buddies International

Bobby Shriver, Member, Special Olympics International Board of Directors, producer of "A Very Special Christmas" music series

Maria Shriver, former Member, Special Olympics International Board of Directors; author, activist

Mark Shriver, Member, Special Olympics International Board of Directors; CEO, Save the Children Action Network

*NOTE: When mentioning the Special Olympics Chairman in introductions, please use Dr. Timothy P. Shriver. For documents and formal correspondence, his signature is Timothy P. Shriver, Ph.D. For all else, including press releases and anything on our website, use Tim Shriver (plus his title on first reference).

Soldier Field

In Chicago, this was the site of the 1st International Special Olympics Summer Games in 1968 and the 2nd International Special Olympics Summer Games in 1970, as well as 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2018.



Special Olympics

The preferred name is Special Olympics. Please do not refer to “the Special Olympics” or a Special Olympic (singular) competition. If possible, avoid the possessive (Special Olympics’); never refer to Special Olympics’s.

NOTE: The legal name is Special Olympics, Inc. You do not need to use the official name, except in documents. The abbreviations SOI or SO are acceptable in informal use.

Special Olympics athlete oath

See athlete oath.

Special Olympics athletes

Lowercase. NOTE: Our athletes are not Olympians or Special Olympians. And please don’t forget the ‘s’ in Olympics. See also section under **sports-athlete descriptions**.

Special Olympics Health

See Health.

Special Olympics USA

Always use Special Olympics USA to refer to athletes and coaches representing the United States of America at a World Games competition. Do not say Special Olympics Team USA or Team USA. Do not use periods in USA.

Special Olympics Unified Schools

See Unified Schools.

sports

Sports are not capitalized—with the exception of DanceSport and MATP. Athletes can compete in 30+ sports, including summer and winter sports.

NOTE: Special Olympics prefers to refer to sports offered, rather than official sports. Example: Special Olympics offers more than 30 sports around the world.

ADDITIONAL NOTE: In addition to being described as Special Olympics athletes, athletes should also be referred to by their sport (eg, “gymnast” instead of “gymnastics athlete”; “swimmer” instead of “swimming athlete”). More examples are below.

- **Summer sports offered as part of the movement’s sports training and competition:**

- athletics (track and field)

- badminton

- basketball

- beach volleyball

- bocce

- boccia

- bowling

- competitive cheer

- cricket

- cycling

- equestrian

- football (soccer)

NOTE: Soccer, in parentheses, appears after “football” at the first mention in locations where readers/viewers might confuse the sport with American football.



golf

gymnastics (artistic)

gymnastics (rhythmic)

handball

hockey (field hockey)

NOTE: Field hockey, in parentheses, appears after “hockey” at the first mention in locations where readers/viewers might confuse the sport with ice hockey.

judo

kayaking

MATP (Motor Activity Training Program)

netball

open water swimming

pickleball

powerlifting

roller skating

sailing

softball

swimming

table tennis

tennis

triathlon

volleyball

- **Winter sports offered as part of the movement’s sports training and competition.**

alpine skiing

cross-country skiing

DanceSport

figure skating (Hyphenate when a compound adjective, e.g., figure-skating venue)

floorball

floor hockey (Hyphenate when a compound adjective, e.g., floor-hockey stick)

MATP (Motor Activity Training Program)

short track speedskating (Hyphenate only when used as a compound adjective, e.g., the short-track speedskating competition)

snowboarding

snowshoeing

- **Demonstration sports:** These are sports that take place only at a specific Games event. An example includes rowing.

Summer Sports-athlete descriptions

athletics (track & field) → athlete; runner (event-specific: sprinter, distance runner, etc.)

badminton → badminton player

basketball → basketball player

beach volleyball – beach volleyball player

bocce → bocce player

boccia → boccia player

bowling → bowler



competitive cheer → cheerleader (roles include base, flyer, spotter, etc.)
 cricket → cricketer (roles include batter, bowler, wicketkeeper, etc.)
 cycling → cyclist
 equestrian → rider (also: equestrian)
 football (soccer) → footballer, football player, soccer player
 golf → golfer
 gymnastics (artistic) → gymnast
 gymnastics (rhythmic) → gymnast
 handball → handball player
 hockey (field hockey) → hockey player
 judo → judoka
 kayaking → kayaker
 MATP (Motor Activity Training Program) → MATP athlete (can be further specified by activity, e.g., MATP skier, swimmer, etc.)
 netball → netballer, netball player
 open water swimming → swimmer
 pickleball → pickleball player
 powerlifting → powerlifter
 roller skating → roller skater
 sailing → sailor
 softball → softball player
 swimming → swimmer
 table tennis → table tennis player
 tennis → tennis player
 triathlon → triathlete
 volleyball → volleyball player (positions: setter, middle blocker, outside hitter, libero, etc.)

Winter Sports-athlete descriptions

alpine skiing → skier
 cross-country skiing → skier
 DanceSport → DanceSport athlete, dancer
 figure skating → figure skater
 floorball → floorball player
 floor hockey → floor hockey player
 MATP (Motor Activity Training Program) → MATP athlete (can be further specified by activity, e.g., MATP skier, swimmer, etc.)
 short track speedskating → short track speedskater, speedskater
 snowboarding → snowboarder
 snowshoeing → snowshoer

Spread the Word

Capitalized. Spread the Word is the campaign for mutual respect and dignity that has spread across the United States and around the globe, involving people of all ages – from high schools to college campuses and corporate offices. The goal of Spread the Word is to focus not just on elimination of the R-word, but on creating a new reality: inclusion for all people with intellectual disabilities.

NOTE: The name Spread the Word replaces Spread the Word to End the Word.



Strategic Plan

This is an informal way to refer to our Global Strategic Plan. On first reference, please say: Special Olympics Global Strategic Plan, 2021-2030. See also Global Strategic Plan.

teammate

Not capitalized. Refers to people with and without intellectual disabilities who participate in traditional or Unified Sports. Example: More than 1 million teammates take part in Special Olympics Unified Sports.

Technical Delegates

May be abbreviated as TDs on second reference

Tip-A-Cop®

Capitalize (including the “A”) and use hyphens. A Law Enforcement Torch Run® fundraising event in which officers assist with waiting tables at a restaurant and collect “tip” donations for Special Olympics.

T-shirt

Capitalize the “T.”

Three Pillars

Capitalized. Special Olympics’ awareness and fundraising campaign – known as “Choose to Include” – is based on Three Pillars. They are: Pillar 1= Sport and Health; Pillar 2=Youth Engagement; Pillar 3=Inclusion and Athlete Leadership. See also Choose to Include.

titles

Special Olympics titles are capitalized when used before or after a name. No commas are needed if the name goes first.

Examples: Mary Davis, Chief Executive Officer, will deliver remarks at Opening Ceremony. Special Olympics Chairman Tim Shriver is the featured speaker. NOT: Special Olympics Chairman, Tim Shriver, is the featured speaker.

Torch Lighting Ceremony

Always capitalize.

Torch Run®

Use Law Enforcement Torch Run® for Special Olympics on first reference. The term Torch Run® may be used on second reference.

Trademarks

The registered trademark symbol (®) is used only on first reference. Trademarks registered by Special Olympics include:

- A Very Special Christmas®
- Breakfast with Champions®
- Cities of Inclusion*
- Cops on Doughnut Shops®
- Cops on Top®
- Gaming for Inclusion*
- Guardians of the Flame®



Healthy Athletes®
Healthy Communities®
Jack in the Park*
Law Enforcement Torch Run®
Medfest®
Opening Eyes®
Partner's Club®
Plane Pull®
Play Unified®
Polar Plunge®
Special Smiles®
Spread the Word to End the Word®
The Champion's Society®
Tip-A-Cop®
Torch Run®
Truck Convoy®
Unified Champion Schools®
Unified Sports®
World's Largest Truck Convoy®

NOTE: Special Olympics International, through its Legal Department, is the only organization permitted to register Special Olympics trademarks. Do not add a trademark (™) symbol for trademarks that are not registered.

Train-the-Trainer

Hyphenated and capitalized.

Unified

Capitalized when used as an adjective. Examples: John is a Unified partner at his school. This is Sheila's first year as a Unified athlete. Keith coaches Unified floor hockey. See also Unified Sports.

Unified Champion Schools®

Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® on first reference. This is a program for schools Pre-K through university level that promotes meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities to create accepting school environments by utilizing three interconnected components: Special Olympics Unified Sports®, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement.

Unified Leadership

Co-developed and co-delivered by people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities, Special Olympics Unified Leadership is a two-part educational series that helps people without ID grow their inclusive mindsets and behaviors toward people with ID.



Unified Schools

Special Olympics Unified Schools on first reference. This is our global program for schools offering Special Olympics Unified Sports at least two times within a school year. Unified Sports may be implemented using any of three models of Unified play: competitive; player development; and recreation, which includes Unified Physical Education (PE), Young Athletes, and Unified Fitness.

NOTE: All Unified Champion Schools fall under this umbrella definition. Also note that the term Unified Schools is not widely used in the United States, as all U.S. schools are encouraged to fully implement Unified Champion Schools: the education-based strategy that uses inclusive sports, youth leadership and whole-school engagement to develop school communities where all youth — with and without intellectual disabilities — work together toward greater respect and dignity for people with intellectual disabilities.

Unified Sports®

Capitalized. On first reference, Special Olympics Unified Sports®. See also Unified.

Unified Sports Experience

Formerly known as Unity Sports. These are exhibition games that team people with and without intellectual disabilities on the field of play. These games often involve celebrities or other high-profile supporters. USE is acceptable on second reference.

Unified Sports Rivalry Series

A Unified Sports Rivalry game or series is a Special Olympics Unified Sports competition in which teams represent traditional college rivals (i.e., Alabama vs. Auburn). The teams are comprised of university students and local Special Olympics athletes. These games are typically held around the same time as a larger game between the two schools.

United States, U.S., USA

Spell out when used as a noun. Use U.S. only as an adjective. Use USA (no periods) after U.S. State Program names on first reference.

Examples: Canada, the Caribbean and the United States make up Special Olympics North America. Special Olympics Connecticut is a U.S. Program. Special Olympics Texas (USA) is planning its Fall Classic.

Washington, D.C.

Include comma and periods (except in mailing addresses).

website

One word, lowercase.

World Health Organization

When abbreviating, use WHO; do not put “the” in front of WHO. If necessary, please refer to WHO as a collaborative organization, not a partner.

World Games

Use this term to describe Special Olympics World Games competitions involving summer sports. This replaces the term “World Summer Games.” NOTE: We continue to use the phrase World Winter Games.

Examples: Two tours are planned to potential hosts of the World Winter Games. Athletes competed in 26 sports at the Special Olympics World Games Berlin 2023. (See also Games).



year-end

Hyphenated for both noun and adjective.

year-round

Hyphenated.

Young Athletes

Athletes is plural. Young Athletes is an inclusive program created to reach out to children with intellectual disabilities ages 2 to 7 and introduce them to the world of sport. Do not say Young Athletes program or abbreviate as YAP. Do not add a trademark (® or ™) symbol.

Youth Leadership

Provides young people of all abilities the opportunities to be agents of change in their classrooms, schools and communities. By developing their leadership skills help students find their voices and teach them to become change agents in their communities by promoting equity and acceptance.