

The Special Olympics Unified Sports® Language Guidelines, created Fall of 2019, are to accompany the SONA Special Olympics Unified Sports uniform guidelines. This document serves to further educate and reinforce the importance of connecting Special Olympics with Unified Sports to build on brand equity and recognition. It is essential to not only visually represent the Special Olympics Unified Sports brand, but also when communicating about Unified Sports through verbal and/or written communications (articles, social posts, collateral, etc).

These guidelines are adapted from the [2018 Special Olympics Style Guide](#) and previous versions of Special Olympics Unified Sports and Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® language guidelines.

QUICK TIPS

1. When referring to Special Olympics programs or activities verbally and/or in written communications, **always include Special Olympics with the first reference.**
 - Example: Special Olympics Unified Sports® combines people with and without intellectual disabilities on sports teams for training and competition.
2. When referring to Special Olympics Unified Sports®, **always include the registered trademark ® on first reference.** Any references thereafter can utilize Unified Sports.
3. When possible, **include a line defining Special Olympics Unified Sports.**
 - Example: Special Olympics Unified Sports® combines people with intellectual disabilities (Special Olympics athletes) and without intellectual disabilities (Unified partners) on the same sports team for training and competition.
4. **Unified Sports should always be capitalized.** When referring to a specific sport, capitalize the U in Unified and lowercase the sport.
 - Example: Unified Sports will be offered at this year's Summer Games, including Unified bocce, Unified soccer and Unified tennis.
5. The people who participate on a Unified Sports team are people with intellectual disabilities (Special Olympics athletes) and people without intellectual disabilities (Unified partners). **Unified should always be capitalized when included with partner, but athlete and partner should always be lowercase.**
 - Athlete(s) should never be referred to as Special Olympic (singular) athlete(s), Special Olympian(s), or Olympian(s). Example: Johnny is a Special Olympics athlete.
 - Unified partners should NOT be referred to as volunteers, helpers or mentors. Example: Jenna is a Unified partner.
 - When referring to athletes and partners, the term teammates is preferred. Example: Johnny and Jenna are teammates on a Unified volleyball team.
6. **Do not use "the" before Special Olympics when referring to the organization or program solely by name.**
 - Example: Special Olympics is an organization that utilizes sports as the gateway to inclusion.
 - Example: My child is part of a Special Olympics Unified Sports team.
7. **Use "the" before Special Olympics** when referring to the 3 models/styles of play within Special Olympics Unified Sports (competitive, player development, recreational).
 - Example: The Special Olympics Unified Sports competitive model/style combines equal numbers of Special Olympics athletes and Unified partners of similar playing ability on the same team.

FREQUENTLY USED TERMS (listed in alphabetical order)

athlete Not capitalized. Example: Special Olympics athletes are children and adults with intellectual disabilities in more than 170 countries around the world.

competitive model/style Not capitalized. Approximately equal numbers of athletes and partners. Athletes and partners are of similar age and ability (if any member of the team is between 8-13, the difference between the oldest and youngest member of the team should be no more than 3 years; if any member of the team is between 14-18, the difference between the oldest and youngest member of the team should be no more than 5 years; if all members are

Special Olympics

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Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation for the benefit of persons with intellectual disabilities

19+, there cannot be more than a 20 year age difference between oldest/youngest team members). Teams compete without any modifications to the Special Olympics Official Sports Rules. Teams are eligible for advancement to Regional and World Games.



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

intellectual disabilities As of 2004, this is the official term used by Special Olympics 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: Special Olympics does not use the term intellectual and developmental disabilities, which is a broader category. As background, see developmental disabilities.

mental retardation Do not use. This outdated wording was eliminated from U.S. federal health, education and labor policy by the passage of Rosa’s Law in 2010. It has been replaced with the term “intellectual disability.” In descriptions, please use “people-first” language, as in: a “person with an intellectual disability” or “children and adults with intellectual disabilities.” **Other terms to avoid:** handicapped, challenged, disabled, “suffering” from a disability, “special” athletes, “kids”.

Olympic-type or Olympic-style sports Used to describe the 30+ sports offered to Special Olympics athletes.

Hyphenate. [Click here for the official titles of sports offered through Special Olympics.](#) [Click here and scroll down to sport icons for summer and winter sport iconography.](#)

partner Not capitalized. Unified partner refers to people without intellectual disabilities. Example: The Unified Sports tennis match featured an athlete from Costa Rica and a partner from Turkey.

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

Play Unified A marketing campaign started in 2017 to encourage people to participate in Special Olympics Unified Sports.

player development model/style Not capitalized. Approximately equal numbers of athletes and partners. Same age requirements as competitive model (see above), not required to be of similar abilities; players of higher abilities can serve as mentors. Rules modifications are allowed. Minimum of 8-week training period before competition. Teams are not eligible to compete at Regional and World Games.

Project UNIFY This term is no longer in use.

recreational model/style Not capitalized. Not required to meet the minimum training, competition and team composition requirements of competitive or player development models (see above), but they must be implemented by a Special Olympics Program or implemented in direct partnership with a Special Olympics Program. Approximately 25% of the team should be composed of players with intellectual disabilities; 25% of players without any disability. Teams are not eligible to compete at Regional and World Games. Focus is on having fun together.

Special Olympics The preferred name of the organization 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. – not Special Olympics International. You do not need to use the official name, except in documents. Also: The abbreviations SOI or SO are acceptable in informal use only.

sports Individual sports are not capitalized. Athletes can compete in 30+ sports, including summer and winter sports, as well as local and demonstration 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. [Click here for the official titles of sports offered through Special Olympics.](#)

teammate Not capitalized. Refers to people with and without intellectual disabilities who participate in Unified Sports. Example: More than 1.2 million teammates take part in Special Olympics Unified Sports. NOTE: When appropriate, the term teammate is preferred over partner.

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 Sports Capitalized. NOTE: On first reference, please say Unified Sports – on second reference, it is acceptable to refer to a Unified game or teammate. 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 and are not competition for official Special Olympics Unified Sports medals/ribbons.

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.