



LANGUAGE GUIDELINES (GENERAL, USA & GAMES SPECIFIC)

The following language guidelines have been developed for use by anyone writing or speaking about people with intellectual disabilities to ensure that all people are portrayed with individuality and dignity.

General Terminology Guidelines

- Use the words "Special Olympics" when referring to the worldwide Special Olympics movement.
- **Refer to participants in Special Olympics as Special Olympics athletes** rather than "Special Olympians" or "Special Olympic athletes." In no case should the word athletes appear in quotation marks.
- **Refer to individuals, persons or people with intellectual disabilities**, rather than "intellectually disabled people" or "the intellectually disabled."
- Distinguish between adults and children with intellectual disabilities. Use adults or children, or older or younger athletes.
- A person has intellectual disabilities, rather than is "suffering from," is "afflicted with" or is "a victim of" intellectual disabilities.
- A person "uses" a wheelchair, rather than is "confined" or "restricted to" a wheelchair.
- "Down syndrome" has replaced "Down's Syndrome" and "mongoloid."
- When writing, refer to persons with a disability in the same style as persons without a disability: full name on first reference and last name on subsequent references.
- A person has a physical disability rather than is "crippled."

General Terminology to Avoid

- **Do not use the word "the" in front of Special Olympics unless describing a specific Special Olympics event.** Correct example: "We are proud to support Special Olympics USA." Correct example: "We are proud to be a part of the Special Olympics USA training camp."
- **Do not place an "of" between "Special Olympics" and the Program affiliation.** Correct example: "We are proud to support Special Olympics STATE NAME." Incorrect example: "We are proud to support the Special Olympics of STATE NAME."
- **Do not use the label "kids"** when referring to Special Olympics athletes. Adult athletes are an integral part of the movement.

- Do not use the adjective "unfortunate" when talking about persons with an intellectual disability. Disabling conditions do not have to be life-defining in a negative way.
- Do not sensationalize the accomplishments of persons with disabilities. While these accomplishments should be recognized and applauded, people in the disability rights movement have tried to make the public aware of the negative impact of referring to the achievements of people with physical or intellectual disabilities with excessive hyperbole.
- Use the word "special" with extreme care when talking about persons with intellectual disabilities. The term, if used excessively in references to Special Olympics athletes and activities, can become a cliché.

Special Olympics USA Guidelines

- **The proper name of the team that represents the United States at Special Olympics World Games is "Special Olympics USA."** After using the full name first, you may subsequently refer to them as "the team."
- You may also refer to the team as "the Special Olympics USA National Team," so as to clarify that Special Olympics USA is the US team assembled for World Games, and not an accredited Special Olympics Program.
- **Never refer to the team as "Special Olympics Team USA" or "Team USA";** this nomenclature is reserved for the United States Olympic Committee's delegation to the Olympics.
- The International Olympic Committee's allowance for Special Olympics to use the word "Olympics" does not include the ability to use the term "Olympian," so **do not refer to our athletes as "Special Olympians."**

Special Olympics World Games Guidelines

- Capitalize. Designate the season only in title of World Winter Games, as in: **Special Olympics World Games Abu Dhabi 2019** (for summer) or Special Olympics World Winter Games Austria 2017 (for winter).
- The idea is for Special Olympics to stand out, rather than the year or location.
- On second reference, events may be abbreviated to World Games, the 2019 (or whichever year) Games, or the Games, if the meaning is clear within the context.
- As of 2018, Special Olympics no longer numbers Games in official titles.