

Inclusive Language: Respecting Disability Through Words

Language Is Personal

For people with vision, hearing, and mobility disabilities, language is:

Spoken or signed

Heard or seen

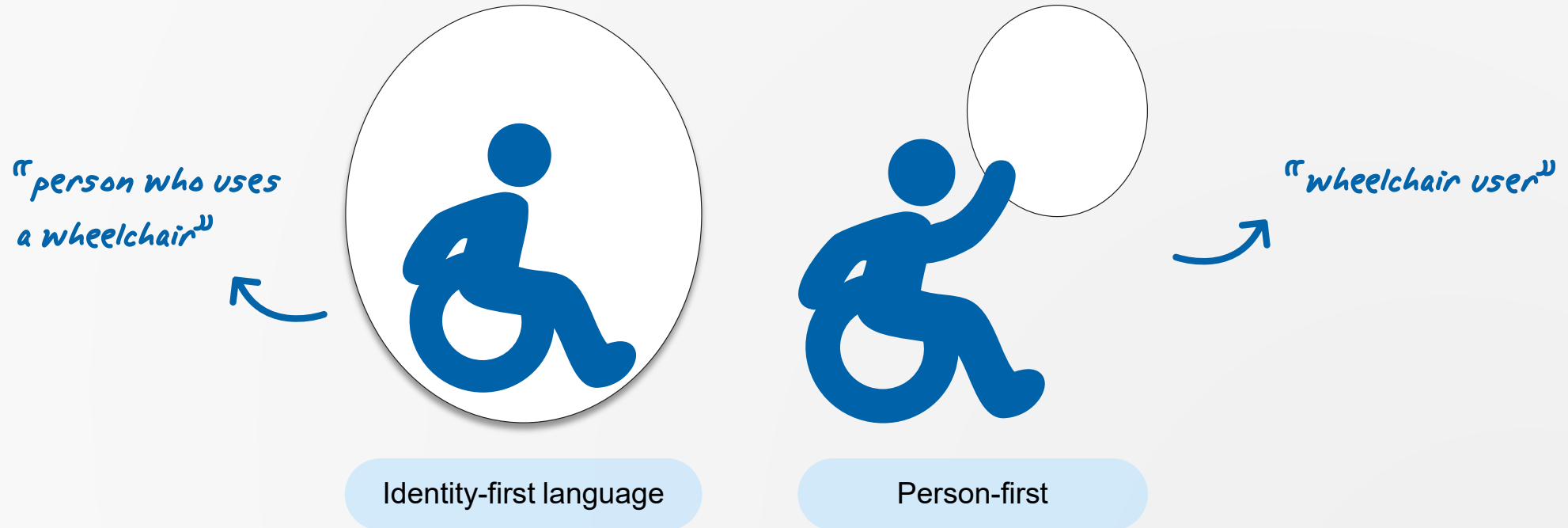
Read as print

Felt as Braille

Heard as audio

Nuanced and deeply personal

Language Shapes Identity



Respect individual preferences. **There's no one-size-fits-all.**

Euphemisms

Common euphemisms:

- “Differently abled”
- “Handi-capable”

Why they’re hurtful:

- Obscure the reality of disability
- Often used to avoid discomfort rather than promote respect



A **euphemism** refers to a softened or indirect term used in place of “disability.”

While often intended to be respectful or inclusive, such language can reinforce stigma or ableist attitudes.

What Is Ableism?

Ableism is discrimination that devalues people with disabilities through attitudes, actions, and language.

Examples:

Assuming someone's life is tragic because of disability

Using disability as a metaphor: "blind to the truth"

Using terms like "crazy," "lame," or "crippled by debt"



Language reflects values. It can empower or isolate, reinforce stereotypes or challenge them.

Recognizing Ableist Language

Some phrases may seem harmless but can stigmatize real experiences.

“She’s wheelchair-bound”, “He suffers from autism”, “That idea is crazy”

“Crazy idea”



“Blind to the issue”

“Confined to a wheelchair”

“Suffers from...”

“Unusual idea”



“Unaware of the issue”

“Uses a wheelchair”

“Lives with...” or “Has...”

*Context is important

Some expressions are fine in
everyday use:

“Let’s go for a walk”



“Nice to see you”

“I haven’t heard from you”

Avoid using disability terms in a
negative or mocking way:

“Are you blind?”



“What, are you deaf?”



If unsure, ask!

Common Questions to Avoid

Insensitive comments are often rooted in lack of awareness.

Examples:

“What happened to you?”

“Were you born like this?”

“Do you need help?”



Treat people with disabilities like you would anyone else, **with respect.**

Tips for Inclusive Communication

Avoid metaphors that misuse disability

Use specific, respectful terms

Don't use disability as slang

Listen and learn: let people define their own identities

Avoid assumptions

Questions?

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