

GRAEae

T H E A T R E C O M P A N Y

A Guide on use of Language



This is a guide for anyone wishing to reference disability in public documents such as journalist's articles, publicist's copy, critics reviews or academic's papers.

When writing, we would advise you bear in mind two key questions when considering referencing disability: is this reference relevant to the article? Is the language appropriate?

Models of Disability

Graeae operates under the social model of disability.

Social Model of Disability: people are disabled by barriers within society, rather than being 'victims' of their conditions.

Established in the early 1980s, the social model pushed for greater legal rights and protections, and was fundamental in disability rights movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Over the last twenty-five years, the radical model of disability has also grown in prominence.

Models of Disability

Radical Model of Disability: The radical model shifts the social model to state, that disability should be seen as a protected identity and a vital part of a diverse society. While the social model is based within the disability rights movement, the radical model is based within the disability justice movement.

This model has also led to the rise of the reclamation of terms such as “crip” or “mad”. Many disabled artists will use these terms in the creation of their work, however general use of the term should be avoided unless it is a direct quote. One example of this is Graeae’s new writing programme, “Crips with Chips”.

Language Guide

Information

This is a guide to encourage best practice, from Graeae's perspective. How an individual identifies or how they would like to be described is deeply personal. How you write about a person should be informed by that person and/or the work they create. The description of an individual is separate to the overall language you should use when referencing the disabled community as a whole.

This is in no way an exhaustive guide, and it is important to remember that, language is always changing. This document will continue to be updated as these changes occur.

Language Guide

Information

Disabled, disabled: Many artists choose to capitalise the “D” in disabled as it is a core part of their identity. If this is the case, then it will generally be clear in their own branding and self-identification online. The capitalising of “D” is also a political statement for some artists.

Disabled people: It is worth noting that the term “disabled”, is a word that should be celebrated and used! We do not encourage the usage of any other terms to describe a group of disabled individuals.

Non-disabled: As opposed to able bodied, non-disabled is the preferred term. Using the term able bodied links an individual to an impairment, medicalising that individual.

Language Guide

Information

Wheelchair user: When referencing someone who uses a mobility device it is best to remove the commentary from terms such as confinement. Wheelchairs and other mobility aids can actually allow people greater freedom. It is also useful to keep in mind that some wheelchair users are ambulatory and may not use their wheelchair all the time.

Language Guide

Information

Deaf, deaf, Hard of Hearing: Some individuals prefer for the term “Deaf” to be capitalized as it is a cultural identity, others may not. This is an instance where you should ask an artist for their preference.

Deaf sign language user, BSL user: Not all BSL users are Deaf, this is important to keep in mind when referencing interpreters. BSL users can be anyone!

Blind, partially sighted, or visually impaired people (VIP): Blindness and visual impairments can be experienced in vastly different ways. Never jump to a conclusion on if someone is or is not blind, partially sighted, or visually impaired based on how they look.

Language Guide

Information

Learning disabled: While at Graeae, we prefer to use the term learning disabled, some individuals still use person first language. This would read as “person with a disability”. It is vital to check with an individual about which term they prefer, as individuals who prefer the person-first model may be coming from a place of not wanting to be judged on a perceived impairment.

It is also important to note that if you are mentioning someone with Downs Syndrome specifically they should be referred to as person with Downs Syndrome, not as a Downs Syndrome person or actor.

Language Guide

Information

Neurodivergent: This term was coined in 1998 by Judy Singer and grew from the term neurodiversity. Both terms are umbrella terms. Neurodiversity describes the natural diversity of the brain. Whereas Neurodivergency specifically refers to brain processing. Neurodivergence usually refers to individuals diagnosed with autism, dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia, Tourettes, and other similar conditions.

Generally, most learning disabled people don't identify as neurodivergent, but some people do. Similarly, some people with mental health experience also identify as neurodivergent, and some do not.

Language Guide

Information

Autistic:

Identity first use of autistic person over person with autism is used because of the social model. Again personal preference is the key, it is always best to ask. At Graeae we use the terms “autistic” or “autistic person” as this is the language our artists have told us they prefer, but each person is an individual and should be treated as such!

Lived experience of mental health:

When speaking or writing about mental health it is imperative that you avoid stigmatising language. If an artist is showcasing their experience with their mental health, it is best to ask how they would like to have that denoted in writing. It is often best to state that an artist is showcasing “their lived experience of...”.

Examples

The following quotes are entirely from reviews of Graeae shows throughout the company's history. You will be given examples of the language used in the review and then an explanation of how it could have been written in a way that adheres to the Social Model and the language considered acceptable by the disabled community.

Examples



This play revolves around Simon, the immigrant in the title, and charts his migration from the world of a rugby playing, queer-bashing, bigot to one where he is wheelchair bound and can accept his homosexuality.



In the quote above, referencing the production, *A Kind of Immigrant*, it would be best to state that the character of Simon is a wheelchair user instead of wheelchair bound. Bound or confined references a sense of restriction, where wheelchairs and other mobility aids actually enable a greater level of independence for many individuals.

Examples

“IMAGINE you are an actor suffering from cerebral palsy. Then imagine you hear of an audition for a character with the same dread [sic] disease.”

In this quote, referencing a production of *Casting Out*, it is important to question why a particular condition needed to be named. Additionally, referring to anyone's lived experience or condition as a “dreaded disease” is not appropriate. A better option would be to say, “Imagine you are a disabled actor. Then imagine you hear of an audition for a character with a similar disability.”

Examples

“Dramatically handicapped”

This headline is referencing the play, *peeling*. It should not have been used as it is never appropriate to use a protected identity such as disability to express your dislike of a production. Also, the term “handicapped” should not be used. If you are unsure, reach out to the company and ask.

“Beaty is four feet tall; Coral has tiny limbs and a torso about the same size as her head; Alfa is deaf.”

Again, in the previous quote, there is no need to describe the physicality of the performers, it is incredibly offensive and unnecessary. Instead you could state: Beaty and Coral are disabled and Alfa is Deaf. This quote is also referencing the play, *peeling*.