

Graeae Theatre Company

A Guide on the 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:

1. Is this reference relevant to the article?
2. Is the language appropriate?

Models of Language

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.

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 rooted in the disability rights movement, the radical model is rooted in the disability justice movement.

This model has also led to the reclaiming of terms such as “crip” and “mad”. Many disabled artists will use these terms in the creation of their work; however, the 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.

Disabled, disabled: Many individuals 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.

Wheelchair user: When referencing someone who uses a mobility device, it is best to shift 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.

Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing: Some individuals prefer for the term “Deaf” to be capitalized as it is a cultural identity.

The term “deaf” in lowercase may refer to someone who does not culturally identify with the Deaf community but has some level of hearing loss.

Deaf sign language user, BSL user: Not all BSL users are Deaf; this is important to keep in mind when referencing sign language users, or interpreters.

Blind, partially sighted, or visually impaired people (VIP):

Blindness and visual impairments can be experienced in vastly different ways. Never jump to a conclusion about if someone is or is blind, partially sighted, or visually impaired based on how they look.

Learning Disabled: As always, it is vital to check with an individual in how they would like to be identified.

At Graeae, we prefer to use the term learning disabled; however, some individuals still use person-first language. This would read as “person with a learning disability”.

Individuals who prefer the person-first model may be coming from a place of not wanting to be judged on a perceived impairment.

Neurodivergent: Emerging in the late 1990s, the term neurodivergent is an umbrella term that is often used interchangeably with neurodiversity, but they are different. Neurodiversity describes the natural diversity of the brain. Whereas Neurodivergency specifically refers to brain processing.

Neurodivergence can specifically reference individuals who have ADHD, are autistic, dyslexic, dyspraxic, have a protected mental health status, or are experiencing dementia.

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

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: Everyone has a lived experience of mental health, but for some people, their relationship with their mental health informs their work.

There is no singular agreed-upon term. Medicalised or emotive terms dominate language in this area such as ill health, poor health; or institutionalised words such as mental health service user, or, someone in the mental health system.

Some people prefer radical language, such as mad for example.

We avoid describing the person and instead focus on how mental health inspires their work, using their preferred language as the clue.

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.

“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.

“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.”

“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*.