

# Person First Language: A Quick Glance

Person first language or PFL is a method of language use that identifies people before a disability or characteristic. PFL is a language method that emphasizes the importance of empowerment, strengths, and potential. This language method uses words that describe what a person “has” instead of what a person “is” (Snow,2001).

Remove “disabled” or “handicapped” from your language. People with disabilities are not “broken down”, or inoperable. Society uses words associated with having a disability to describe things that are broken, ineffective, or inoperable. A disability simply means having a body part that works differently.

Disability is one small part of a spectrum of human characteristics.

**A person is not their disability. They are a person first.**

## The Basics of PFL:

- Always put the person first.
  - First and foremost, we are all individuals and deserve the dignity and respect that should come with the human experience.

- The use of euphemisms like “physically/mentally challenged” puts the “problem” of the disability in the responsibility of the individual to “fix”.
  - The use of these phrases assumes a disability is something to be overcome with enough effort instead of an organic difference in functioning.
- PFL emphasizes the opportunity for the individual to identify themselves first, not how society has deemed them.
- PFL uses words as definers for characteristics, not the individual themselves.
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You can find some language suggestions on this [PFL Chart](#).

PFL provides a vehicle to improve our language and our attitudes to be free of demeaning, stereotypical views about people who have a disability.

*\*Snow, K. (2001). People First Language: New Ways of Thinking and Talking. In K. Snow, Disability is Natural (pp.233-266). Woodland Park: BraveHeart Press.\**