



# Inclusive Terminology Guide

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## Overview

Our words matter. How we choose to write and speak about people has the power to help or hinder efforts to create inclusive experiences and a culture respectful of all.

Many commonly used words hold negative connotations that the speaker may not even be aware of. Becoming familiar with these words — and their appropriate alternatives — is important for everyone, but especially those creating content for a public as diverse as New York City.

Below you'll find a list of words to avoid, which to use instead, and some short rationale for each. More comprehensive guidance can be found in the [Conscious Style Guide](#).

Offensive Term	Appropriate term	Comments
Handicapped	Accessible or disabled	Use the appropriate alternatives in place of “handicapped.” For example, “accessible bathrooms,” “accessible parking spots,” “disabled athletes,” or “athletes with disabilities.”
Crippled	Person with disabilities, or person with physical disabilities	Using “cripple” to refer to a person, or as a metaphor, is offensive. For example, Donald Trump wrote a book called <i>Crippled America</i> .
Retarded	Person with intellectual disabilities or person with developmental disabilities	It is extremely offensive to call someone or something “retarded.”  Just say what you mean instead.
Midget	Little Person, Dwarf, or person of short stature	“Midget” comes from a time when LPs were a source of entertainment. “Dwarf” is a medically acceptable term. “Little Person” is socially acceptable.

Lame	Not cool, disappointing	Very few people know that the slang word “lame” means someone who cannot walk. Try saying what you really mean. For example, “That’s disappointing.”
Special	Person with disabilities	This term is patronizing. Everyone can have needs, no one’s should be “special.”
Wheelchair bound	Person with physical disabilities, person who uses a wheelchair, person with an ambulatory disability	People are not bound to their wheelchairs. They transfer out of them all the time.
Invalid	Person with a disability	Another degrading term.
Non-native speaker	Person with limited English proficiency, speakers of a language (or languages) other than English	The U.S. is multilingual country — we don't want to stigmatize levels of English proficiency.
Illegal or illegal immigrant	Undocumented immigrant	Lack of immigration documentation does not make a person "illegal."
Alien	Undocumented immigrant	This term shouldn't be used except when quoting a federal immigration law.