

A guide for use of language

Graeae is a force for change in world-class theatre, breaking down barriers, challenging preconceptions and boldly placing Deaf and disabled artists centre stage. As the UK's foremost disabled-led theatre company our audiences at events include Deaf, disabled and non-disabled people. Use of and understanding of appropriate language can do wonders for audience relationships.

Disability can be defined under two models, the social and the medical model. Graeae operates under the **social model of disability**. Having an understanding of this is the first step to ensuring good customer service for disabled patrons.

The medical model of disability locates the “problem” within the disabled person and sees the solution in “fixing” the disabled person. So, for example, if Suzy can't get into the theatre because she's a wheelchair user, the medical model of disability would diagnose the problem as being Suzy's impairment, and solutions would revolve around trying to fix Suzy's body, through medical treatment, operations, etc.

The social model of disability locates the “problem” within society, and looks for solutions in the environment or the society. For example, the problem with Suzy not being able to get into the theatre is that there is no access (i.e., ramps, lifts) into the building, and the solution would be to fix this by creating an accessible environment.

By adapting the social model when dealing with audiences and customers you are asking: what can we do to make the experience of visiting our theatre more accessible.

Use of language in the building

Being confident with using language around disability provides an excellent public facing persona and shows that the organisation is committed to providing a welcoming environment.

Here are some basic guidelines for use of language. Please do remember that, as with everything, not everyone will agree with these suggestions and language is always evolving and changing. However, under the social model these terms would be considered appropriate and a very positive place to start.

Basic language guide	
	
disabled	handicapped, cripple, invalid
disabled people	the disabled, people with disabilities
has ... (an impairment)	suffers from..., victim of ...
non-disabled	able bodied, normal, healthy
learning disabled	mentally disabled, retarded, backward
wheelchair user	wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, in a wheelchair
Deaf	the deaf
Deaf sign language user, BSL user	deaf and dumb, deaf mute
blind or partially sighted people, visually impaired people (VIP)	the blind
mental health service user / survivor	mentally ill, insane, mad, crazy
has cerebral palsy	spastic
person of short stature	dwarf, midget

It is also very important that staff members are briefed clearly and feel confident discussing how people can access a performance. For example do they know the best seats in the house for accessing the captioning? Do they know where the audio description equipment is and how to use it? Making sure that box office and front of house staff have a solid knowledge of these tools shows that the organisation is committed to diversity and providing excellent customer service.

Similarly when box office staff are dealing with customers on the phone, make it a habit to ask customers if they have any access requirements and then be in a position to advise on how they can get the best experience. You would be surprised how many people would actually benefit from accessing captions but may not think to ask about it.

Use of language with the press

As Graeae is a disabled-led theatre company, many articles or interviews about us refer to disability in some way, shape or form. There are two basic things that we believe are good to bear in mind: is the reference to disability relevant to the article? Is the language appropriate?

As a member of the press team you can help increase public awareness by using the correct language, and approaching your story from the social model perspective. Although we know we cannot control what the press eventually write, the more we have done to prepare for this the better.

Check out this guide for more information: [The NUJ and Disability Now guide, Hacked Off:](#)