



ParalympicsGB



# British Paralympic Association Guide to Reporting on Paralympic Sport



## Dear media colleagues,

The London 2012 Paralympic Games present a fantastic opportunity to raise the profile of Paralympic sports and athletes.

We are conscious however, that for many journalists this may be your first time reporting on the Paralympic Games or disability sport. The BPA wants to support your engagement by helping to ensure that the correct terminology is used.

As a result, we have produced this reference guide which is designed to help media with the language of Paralympic sport.

This document matters. The Paralympic Games is already the world's second largest sporting event by athlete number, featuring elite performers who train just as hard as their Olympic counterparts.

We believe it is crucial that Paralympic athletes are therefore portrayed or referred to as elite athletes first and foremost, rather than seen primarily as people who have overcome great adversity.

While that is undoubtedly part of the story, nothing irritates world class Paralympic athletes more than being patronised or pitied, or made to feel that their disability is being utilised ultimately to define them or their achievements.

Performance, sporting ambition, training, competition and the emotions associated with winning and losing are all relevant subjects that our athletes and sports would expect to focus on. Anything specifically relating to, or focussing on, an elite athlete's impairment is generally considered unnecessary, and certainly secondary, and should really only be considered within a sporting context.

With this guide, our ambition is to provide an easy-to-use reference document which can be used by everyone in the media to report accurately and appropriately on the Paralympic Games and on wider disability subjects.

We hope it therefore proves valuable to you in the coming months. Only with your help and support in raising the profile of British Paralympic athletes and their phenomenal sporting achievements, can the BPA achieve its vision of positively affecting the way that British society thinks, feels and behaves towards disabled people in general.



**Tim Hollingsworth**

## LANGUAGE: Describing athletes

Description	Correct	Incorrect	Why not?
An athlete who has competed at a Paralympic Games.	Paralympian	Para-Olympian, Para-olympian, Para-athlete, Para-athlete Olympian etc	These are all misspellings or misunderstandings of Paralympian
A disabled athlete who is likely to be selected for a Paralympic Games	Paralympic hopeful	Paralympian	Paralympian should not be used to describe any, or all, other disabled people that compete in sport at any other level.
A disabled athlete	Disabled athlete, or just athlete	Paralympian, Paralympic hopeful	Paralympian, Paralympic hopeful should not be used to describe any, or all, other disabled people that compete in sport at any other level.
A Paralympian who has retired	Retired Paralympian	Former Paralympian, Ex-Paralympian	Paralympian is a title for life, it is not removed after retirement. If an athlete was not a Paralympian, simply say retired athlete.
An athlete who has been selected to compete at an Olympic Games	Olympian		In rare cases (for example: Natalie Du Toit of South Africa) athletes have competed in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Natalie is both an Olympian and a Paralympian.

The title Paralympian is a specific one and, just like other important titles such as Lord, Professor, Doctor and Baroness, should be used in its appropriate context.

# The Olympic and Paralympic Games

Both the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games are large international multi-sport events, held in the same city, often in the exact same sporting venues and held a few weeks apart.

However, they are not the same. Both Games have separate histories, separate identities and separate global governing bodies in the International Olympic Committee and International Paralympic Committee respectively.

**You should therefore refer to the Olympic and Paralympic Games by their respective names. Some media refer to the Olympic Games as the 'main Games', which is not acceptable and derogatory to all involved.**

Description	Correct	Incorrect	Why not?
The team name for the British Paralympic team	ParalympicsGB	Team GB	The British Paralympic team is different from the British Olympic team and so, unsurprisingly, has a different name.
The organisation responsible for the Paralympic movement in the UK	British Paralympic Association, BPA	British Olympic Association, BOA	The British Olympic Association and British Paralympic Association are different organisations, although we often collaborate.
The Paralympic Games	The Paralympic Games	Para Olympics, Para-Olympics, Paraplegic Olympics, Olympic Games	The term "Paralympics" derives from "Parallel Olympics".

The National Paralympic Committee for the UK is the British Paralympic Association, while the British team is called ParalympicsGB. Paralympic does not have an 'o' in it.

# Describing medical conditions

## The Ideal

Paralympic athletes want to be referred to as elite athletes first and foremost and as disabled people secondarily - if at all. Therefore the ideal way to refer to a Paralympian or Paralympic hopeful is as 'a Paralympian', 'a Paralympic hopeful' or 'an athlete'.

Often it is **not necessary** to refer to an athlete's impairment. Where you feel you need to refer to an athlete's impairment, a passing reference is always preferable to going into detail.

We believe information on impairment is irrelevant to an athlete's achievements. If you want to include it, try to make sure it is a reference rather than the focus of the article.

## Preferred terms

Description	Correct	Incorrect	Why not?
To describe a person who has an impairment	Disabled person	Person with a disability	This is in line with the Equality Act 2010
To describe a person who is not disabled	Non-disabled person	Able-bodied, normal	"Non-disabled" gives a clearer distinction as to what you are describing than "able bodied"
A phrase to describe an impairment	A person/athlete with a spinal cord injury, a person/athlete with paraplegia	A spinal injury athlete, a paraplegic	A person might have an impairment or medical condition but it does not actually define them as a person. Avoid describing the person as an impairment.
A phrase to describe someone who uses a wheelchair, either occasionally for additional mobility or independence, or for everyday living needs or independence.	Wheelchair user or a person who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair	Terms like 'bound' or 'confined' should be avoided as they infer entrapment. Instead a wheelchair is an aid or tool, which a person uses.

Language is important and can help shift perceptions of disabled people. Please support us by using the right language in your articles.

## Further phrases to avoid

Phrase / word	Why avoid?
Suffers from, afflicted with, victim of	These portray the individual as being in a weak, frail or tragic position. A lot of athletes would say that they do not 'suffer from' their impairment.
The disabled, the blind	Grouping disabled people by their disability in this way implies all disabled people in that group share the same characteristics, which stereotypes them
Abnormal, defective and deformed	These adjectives all have negative connotations in the English language and should not be used
Spastic, retard, handicap, invalid and cripple	These nouns all have negative connotations in the English language and should not be used
Normal	What is deemed normal is highly subjective. Using the word normal to draw a comparison between non-disabled and disabled people or between Olympians and Paralympians should be avoided. In a sporting context this is particularly unhelpful as the physiology of an elite sportsperson is unusual - would you describe Chris Hoy or Usain Bolt as "normal"?

Make sure that some words and phrases are totally avoided. In particular 'suffers from', 'sufferer', 'victim of' and 'normal' / 'abnormal' are still commonly used when they should not be.

## BEHAVIOUR: Being with and around disabled people

**Offer assistance, but remember it will not always be accepted:** You should always ask if an individual would like assistance before rushing in and imposing yourself on them. Your help may not be required. However, do not feel awkward about offering to help, it is perfectly polite and acceptable to do so. Also, if your assistance is declined on one occasion, do not be offended or put off asking in the future.

**Be direct:** Always speak directly with the person rather than their companion, carer or interpreter. Remember to use your usual manner and speak in your normal tone – a person with a physical impairment does not necessarily have a hearing impairment or learning disability so be aware that you could sound condescending.

**Learning disabilities:** If you are talking to someone with a learning disability, always use simple, plain language and give them time to answer your questions. Tell the person if you did not quite understand what was said and ask them to repeat what they have said, rather than letting them believe that you have understood them.

**Wheelchair users:** Be aware that a wheelchair is part of a person's personal space so do not lean on it or hold on to it unless of course offered permission to do so.

**Behave naturally:** For example, shake hands with a disabled person as you would any other person, even if they are wearing a prosthesis or have limited movement of their hand or arm. It is a universal sign of greeting.

**Everyday phrases:** There is no need to feel self-conscious about using everyday phrases. Some everyday phrases are perfectly acceptable; some people who use wheelchairs will state themselves 'I'm going for a walk'. It is also perfectly acceptable to say to a person with a visual impairment 'I will see you later'. Using common sense, everyday phrases of this kind are most unlikely to cause any offence.

**If in doubt, ask.** If you are unsure of what to do in a particular situation, ask.

# Being with and around disabled athletes

There is no need to treat Paralympic athletes any differently to how you would treat any other elite athlete. For example, you need to remain mindful of their training commitments, the fact that they need to stay rested, hydrated and get enough food and recovery in order to train.

Some medical conditions mean that athletes tire more quickly than non-disabled athletes. This means that sometimes interview times are limited. We ask for your understanding in these circumstances.

## To sum up

We feel that educating the general public about Paralympic athletes and the Paralympic Games is an integral part of our messaging around 2012 and we hope the media will help us in this challenging task.

Our success as ParalympicsGB in 2012 will be measured not just in gold medals and in our final position on the medal table, but also by the effect that the Paralympic Games has on the general public and by the shift in perceptions of disability sport and disability that we can and must affect.