

Toolkit on the Go: Representing Disabilities in Film and Television

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This 1-page toolkit points to suggestions/recommendations for representing disabilities on screen. Many of the points raised here were co-produced with disabled people, filmmakers, disability advocates/allies, researchers and academics in disability studies and film studies. The more in-depth *Toolkit* can be found here: [Representing Disabilities and People with Disabilities in Films: Working Toolkit for filmmakers and industry stakeholders](#). The objective of this *Toolkit* is to promote anti-ableist representations in film and television that can contribute to positive disability identity and inclusion.

Casting:

- Disabled people, disabled actors, and disabled crew members should be part of the process for filmmaking and productions about disability issues and disabilities.
- Disabled actors should be used to play disabled roles to avoid disability mimicry and inauthentic representation. If for some reason the production cannot hire a disabled actor, a disability consultant should be employed to be on set at all times.
- Disabled characters should be a regular part of mainstream film and television content and not an occasional feature.
- Put disabled actors in leading and supporting roles across all genres.

Scripting/Character Creation

- Writing rooms should include people with disabilities, particularly when a character with a disability is being scripted.
- If nobody in the writing room has the disability being depicted, a disability consultant should be employed.

Costuming:

- Wheelchairs are not props or an aesthetic. Use them only when a character or storyline calls for it.
- Depict accurate mobility canes for blind characters on screen; they should not be led by hand.
- Costumes should be appropriate for the character and not uncomfortable for disabled actors and used only when a character or storyline calls for it.
- Discuss the character's clothing and accessories with the disabled actor or an on-set disability consultant, e.g. not all blind people wear dark glasses.

Film scores/soundtracks/music on screen:

- Accompanying sounds/music should not be emotional, tragic, or sad simply because a character has a disability.
- Do not change sounds/music for scenes where a disabled person is featured to invoke sadness/tragedy.
- Use sounds/music intentionally to illustrate an empowered disabled character.
- Include disabled crew members in the sounds/music production.

Language of disabilities on screen:

- Do not identify disabled characters on screen by their disabilities in a way that is unnecessary, for example, saying blind CEO when you can simply say CEO.
- Do not use stigmatizing or antiquated terms about mental health disabilities.
- Depict disabled characters as part of the community. More than 1 billion people across the world have some form of disability (16% of the world's population).
- Represent the diversity of disabled characters. Some disabled people have multiple disabilities and/or are neurodiverse. Do not assign disabled characters disabilities that the actors do not have. Do not use disability terms in a negative way.

Accessibility:

- With 1.3 billion disabled people worldwide, film and television content should have captions for deaf people, and if possible, audio descriptions for blind people.
- The audition process for film and television productions should be accessible, such as being in a building with wheelchair ramps and elevators for an in-person audition.
- Film and TV productions should meet the accessibility needs of all disabled members of the production team and have barrier-free sets.

Best Practices:

- Represent disabilities in an inclusive way, without implying some disabilities are "better" than others.
- Increase the frequency of film and TV productions about disabilities and/or with disabled characters.
- Disabled actors/performers should be given equal pay to their nondisabled colleagues.
- Avoid negative stereotypes or themes of pity or charity when representing disabilities on screen.