

THE WORDS WE USE MATTER



Language will not solve every barrier in golf, but it can change what people see first.

This article asks why clear words matter, and why G4D is a useful way to describe golf for the disabled without placing golfers outside the game.

Golf likes tradition.

It likes familiar phrases.

It likes things that have been passed down.

Some of those traditions are part of the charm of the game.

Others need to be looked at again.

The language we use around disability sits firmly in that second group.

For years, golf has used different words to describe players with a disability and the part of the game that seeks to create better access for them.

Disabled golf.

Para golf.

Adaptive golf.

All abilities golf.

Inclusive golf.

All of these phrases are well meant.

Most are used by people trying to be respectful.

But good intention does not always create clear meaning.

And in this area of the game, clarity matters.

The Words We Use Do More Than Describe Something.

They shape how we see it.

They shape how we talk about it.

They shape how we build it.

If the language is confused, the thinking can become confused too.

That is a problem.

Especially in a part of golf that is still trying to grow, explain itself and find a more permanent place within the game.

For me, the starting point is simple.

Golf is not disabled.

The game is not disabled.

The player may have a disability.

The player may live with an impairment.

They play golf, not a different version.

Its the same game.

The same course.

The same ball.

The same strange mix of hope, frustration, rhythm and occasional joy.

This is why I prefer the term G4D.

Golf for the disabled.

In 2014, I coined the phrase G4D as an attempt to simplify a confused narrative. I knew then, as I know now, that it was not a perfect term.

No term in this space is.

But it felt fit for purpose.

Clear enough to be understood.

Short enough to be remembered.

Broad enough to carry the subject.

And practical enough to help golf speak with a little more consistency.

G4D does not suggest that the player is taking part in a different sport.

It does not place them outside golf.

It does not make the game sound like a side version of itself.

G4D is not another game.

It is golf.

Played by golfers who may need different forms of access, support, equipment, understanding or opportunity.

That distinction is important.

A Golfer With A Disability Is A Golfer First.

That does not mean their disability should be ignored.

It does not mean their impairment does not matter.

It means the game should see the whole person before it sees the label.

Too often, disability is treated as though it sits only within the individual.

But that is not the full picture.

A person may live with an impairment.

They may also be disabled by the world around them.

By a clubhouse they cannot enter.

By a course they cannot move around.

By a booking system that assumes everyone communicates in the same way.

By a coach who has not been given the confidence or training to adapt.

By a competition pathway that was not designed with them in mind.

By a welcome that is polite, but uncertain.

By a culture that quietly says, this may not be for you.

This is where golf has work to do.

Not by changing the game beyond recognition.

Not by creating a separate version of the sport.

But by making the environments around golf more enabling.

The clubhouse.

The practice ground.

The first tee.

The coaching session.

The competition structure.

The conversation.

Each of these can either open the door or close it.

Sometimes loudly.

More often quietly.

That is why language matters.

Language Often Reveals What We Really Believe.

If we speak about G4D as something separate, we may start to treat it as separate.

If we describe golfers only through the lens of disability, we may forget to see the golfer.

But if we speak clearly, we are more likely to act clearly.

G4D is part of golf.

Golfers with a disability are part of golf.

Individuals with a disability who want to try the game should be able to find a route into golf that feels welcoming, practical and real.

This does not mean G4D is a perfect term.

No language around disability is perfect.

People have different preferences, and those preferences should be respected.

But golf still needs a clear working language if it wants to build understanding, improve communication and create better pathways into the game.

For me, G4D does that job better than most.

It is simple enough to be understood.

It is broad enough to carry the subject.

It is clear enough to help people know what we are talking about.

And it keeps the game where it belongs.

At the centre.

The language we use will not solve everything.

Words alone do not improve access.

Words alone do not train coaches.

Words alone do not change attitudes.

But words can start the process.

They can point the game in the right direction.

They can remind us that G4D is not about creating another sport.

It is about opening golf more fully to people who should already be able to call it their own.

Perhaps that is the real test.

Not whether we have found the perfect phrase.

But whether the words we use help more people feel that golf has a place for them.

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(Based on my PhD Thesis)