



RECOVER ALASKA

The AP Stylebook changes

Addiction is a treatable disease that affects a person's brain and behavior. Drug and alcohol use can cause changes in the brain that lead to compulsive use, despite damage incurred to a person's health and relationships. Genetics, mental illness and other factors make certain people susceptible to addiction.

Addiction is the preferred term. The term *substance use disorder* is preferred by some health professionals and is acceptable in some uses, such as in quotations or scientific contexts. *Alcoholism* is acceptable for addiction to alcohol.

Avoid words like *abuse* or *problem* in favor of the word *use* with an appropriate modifier such as *risky*, *unhealthy*, *excessive* or *heavy*. *Misuse* is also acceptable. Don't assume all people who engage in risky use of drugs or alcohol have an addiction.

Avoid *alcoholic*, *addict*, *user* and *abuser* unless individuals prefer those terms for themselves or if they occur in quotations or names of organizations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Avoid derogatory terminology such as *junkie*, *drunk* or *crackhead* unless in quotations.

Many researchers and organizations, including the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the International Society of Addiction Journal Editors, agree that stigmatizing or punitive-sounding language can be inaccurate by emphasizing the person, not the disease; can be a barrier to seeking treatment; and can prejudice even doctors. Instead, choose phrasing like *he was addicted*, *people with heroin addiction* or *he used drugs*.

Examples: *Keene had trouble keeping his job because of alcoholism*, not *Keene had trouble keeping his job because he was an alcoholic*. *Yang joined other people with*



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heroin addictions at the conference, not Yang joined other heroin addicts at the conference.

Avoid describing *sobriety* as *clean* unless in quotations, since it implies a previous state of dirtiness instead of disease.

Not all compulsive behaviors, including shopping, eating and sex, are considered addictions. Gambling is the only one classified as an addiction in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual. The World Health Organization says excessive video gaming can be an addiction.

Do not use the terms *addiction* and *dependence* interchangeably. *Addiction* usually refers to a disease or disorder; *dependence* may not involve one, such as some babies born to mothers who use drugs or cancer patients who take prescribed painkillers.

The term *misuse* can be helpful in cases of legally prescribed medications, such as if a person with a painkiller prescription purposely takes too many to get high, or excessively uses medical marijuana. Such actions do not necessarily entail an addiction but can progress into one.

Also supported by:

American Medical Association

American Society of Addiction Medicine

Faces & Voices of Recovery

International Society of Addiction Journal Editors

Why does it really matter?

“Substance use disorder (the most severe form of which is referred to as “addiction”) is a chronic brain disorder from which people can and do recover. Nonetheless, sometimes the terminology used in the discussion of substance use



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can suggest that problematic use of substances and substance use disorders are the result of a personal failing; that people choose the disorder, or they lack the willpower or character to control their substance use.

Research also has shown that people with substance use disorders are viewed more negatively than people with physical or psychiatric disabilities. Researchers found that even highly trained substance use disorder and mental health clinicians were significantly more likely to assign blame and believe that an individual should be subjected to more punitive (e.g., jail sentence) rather than therapeutic measures, when the subject of a case vignette was referred to as a “substance abuser” rather than as a “person with a substance use disorder.” In a public perception study the term “abuse” was found to have a high association with negative judgments and punishment. Negative attitudes among health professionals have been found to adversely affect quality of care and subsequent treatment outcomes. Shame and concerns about social, economic, and legal consequences of disclosing a substance use disorder may deter help seeking among those with substance use disorders and their families.

Excerpts from “Office of National Drug Control Policy – Changing the Language of Addiction”

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2017/01/13/changing-language-addiction>

What should you say instead?

Person-first language

- Person with substance use disorder
- Person with a disability
- Person experiencing homelessness
- Person with a mental health condition



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The AP recommends "person with addiction." However, addiction is the square of the rectangle of substance use disorders – a person may have a substance use disorder without being considered to have an addiction or dependence.

Relapse → return to use

Tips for discussing alcohol responsibly in the media

When writing an article that is showcasing a recipe for an alcoholic beverage, or around an activity that includes alcohol, acknowledge that alcohol is a drug and should be enjoyed in moderation, there are risks involved with consuming alcohol. Consider including a similar non-alcoholic recipe.

Keep ideas and concepts clear and precise when reporting on research that includes alcohol-related content. Be clear who the general audience of the research is intended for, and what the final perspective is.

Avoid stereotyping by keeping in mind that alcohol is an equal opportunity drug. Its impacts have no bounds on one specific group of people.

To be consistent with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), use the term "alcohol use disorder (AUD)" in place of the term "alcoholic." Put the person first by using specific language that is not stigmatizing or limiting to the individual(s) or group.

Some examples include:

- Problem drinking, drinking in excess, or alcohol misuse, rather than alcoholism.
- Stopped drinking, rather than giving up drinking.

Be mindful and objective when reporting on personal narratives about alcohol related experiences. No two personal narratives will be identical. Consider that each



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individual is in their own place on a broad spectrum, covering a wide range of opinions and feelings.

Sobriety can include great healing and renewal. Find where new life is being breathed into the story when reporting on a personal narrative. Ask how this person's story can positively influence others who are in a similar situation.

Excerpts from "*8 tips on how to cover drinking responsibly*"

<https://journalistsresource.org/tip-sheets/8-tips-reporting-alcohol-drinking/>

Addictionary

<https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/>

ALCOHOLIC- change to → person with an alcohol use disorder

(stigma alert) A person who exhibits impaired control over engaging in alcohol use despite suffering often severe harms caused by such activity. While commonly used, to help decrease stigma associated with these conditions it has been [recommended to use "person first" language](#); instead of describing someone as an "addict" to describe them as "a person with, or suffering from, addiction or substance use disorder."

Additional Resources

Recover Alaska, www.RecoverAlaska.org, has the Addictionary listed, as well as other resources, facts, and data about alcohol.

Recovery Dialects

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30998055>

<https://www.livsrecoverykitchen.com/articles/2018/7/10/language-matters-a-recovery-scientist-explains-the-impact-of-our-words>