

Crash Coverage Quick Reference Guide

The language we use to talk about crashes shapes our communities’ sense of ownership, power, and efficacy to prevent these tragedies from occurring.

Click/tap the **highlighted** text in the table below for more information.

Objective	The Old Way...	A Better Way...	Why?
Use the term “crash” not “accident.”	“A Raleigh driver was killed in an alcohol impaired driving accident last night.”	“A Raleigh driver was killed in an alcohol impaired driving crash last night.”	The word “accident” implies that crashes are inevitable. Instead, we invite you to use language that recognizes that crashes are preventable and predictable.
Ascribe agency to motorists.	“Bicyclist killed by truck in crash yesterday...”	“A driver hit and killed a bicyclist yesterday...”	Vehicles do not act on their own. Removing driver descriptive information is impersonal and assigns action/agency to an inanimate object. People drive, cars don’t drive themselves.
Avoid victim blaming.	“The pedestrian that was hit was not in a crosswalk and was wearing dark clothing.”	“Five people have been hit while crossing the street in this area. The closest crosswalk is half a mile away.”	Blaming victims creates a narrative that makes it harder to prevent future tragedies. By framing these crashes as isolated incidents, and deaths or injuries caused by clothing choice instead of a sign of a failure in infrastructure, we perpetuate the systematic problem in our communities.
	“The man who was hit on his bicycle was not wearing a helmet.”	“A driver hit a bicyclist.”	Depending on the type of crash, helmets may or may not protect riders when they are hit by a vehicle and bright clothing doesn’t protect people from two ton machines. The best protection for people walking or rolling is to keep them physically separated from vehicles with protected bike lanes and sidewalks” (CSCRS). Instead, by focusing on the broader picture , including the surrounding environment and the patterns of harm in this area, we can help create a sense of urgency for systematic change.

<p>Focus on the broader context.</p>	<p>“A crash on I-85N caused a major delay this morning.”</p>	<p>Two families are mourning tragic loss after a preventable crash took two lives this morning on I-85N. This is the tenth fatal crash on this stretch of road this year. Each one leaves a rippling impact through our community.</p>	<p>No crash is an isolated incident. Focusing solely on the traffic disruptions caused by a crash, rather than acknowledging its life-altering impact on affected families, only deepens the emotional and moral distance from this pressing public health crisis. Instead, the harms caused to loved ones and the larger community (HSRC).</p>
	<p>“According to police, the driver was not speeding and stayed on the scene.”</p>	<p>“The speed limit where the pedestrian was hit is 45 mph. Given all the people crossing in the area to get to the shopping center, that speed limit is too high for pedestrian safety.” (Example used)</p>	<p>Even if a driver is not exceeding the speed limit, vehicle speed is almost always a factor determining whether victims of a crash survive (HSRC).</p>

Roadway deaths and injuries are both predictable and preventable. We can design roadways, sidewalks, and bikeways and set policies that ensure that everyone can get to their destination safely. Media organizations play an important role in framing public opinion about traffic crash prevention.



Thank you for your support!

