Unlocking Accessibility:
Practical Tips for Inclusive Presentations

Whether your presentation is a stand-alone presentation or part of a larger event, it is important to plan ahead for accessibility. There are many things you can do to be proactive about making your presentation accessible to all those who attend. This guide will help you keep accessibility in mind from the early stages of planning to things to do during the presentation. (The focus of this handout is on in-person presentations. See our other resources for information on virtual presentations.)

Quick Take

- Plan ahead to make your presentation accessible.
- It is important to consider these things when planning your presentation:
  - Location
  - Registration
  - Announcement
  - Slide deck
  - Handouts and other materials
  - Videos
- During the presentation, continue to think about accessibility by making sure everyone has access to your information and can participate in your activities.

Common Barriers

The typical design of presentations may present a variety of barriers to people with disabilities. Some of those include videos that are not captions, presenters assuming that everyone can see their slides, inaccessible handouts, too much text on slides, and lack of amplification. Careful planning and designing can reduce or eliminate many of these barriers.

Early Planning Considerations

When you prepare a presentation, you will not always be the one determining the location, advertising it or setting up the registration, but when you are there are accessibility considerations to consider with those aspects of your planning.

Select an accessible location for your presentation. The location of your presentations should be one that meets the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. Check out the resources at the end of this document for a link to a checklist you can use to assess the facility. It is also important to set up the room so that those using mobility devices can get around easily in the room.

Make sure your registration process is accessible. Assuming you have an online registration process, it is ideal to check the registration form to ensure it is accessible to those who use assistive technology. If you are using an online application to create your registration form, check the documentation to see if it meets accessibility guidelines. Even better, have the form assessed by someone who has expertise in digital accessibility.

Advertise your presentation in accessible ways. If you are sending an email blast or advertising on your website, make sure the information is accessible. Fliers advertising your event should also be accessible.

Provide a way for those registering to request accommodations. On your flier and registration form, provide a way for attendees to request accommodations. Attendees may need speech-to-text services, digital or large print handouts, ASL-English interpreters, or other accommodations. Inviting participants to request accommodations sends a message about your commitment to access and allows you to plan for those requests.

Be prepared to respond to accommodation requests. Make sure to budget for these accommodations have contact information available for ASL-English interpreters and speech-to-text providers, so that there are no delays in responding to requests. If you will have interpreters or speech-to-text providers, share a copy of your handouts and presentation materials with them in advance to help them prepare.

Preparing Handouts and Materials

Before beginning the preparation of your materials, think through what you will provide attendees and how your materials will be used.

- Will you only have a slide deck?
- Will you be providing print handouts?
- Will there be materials that participants need to engage with during the presentation?
- Will you be showing any videos?

The following sections will help you consider accessibility for each of these types of materials.

Slide Decks

There are many applications you can use to create slide decks. Any of these can be used to produce slides that meet the standards for visual accessibility. However, you will also need to create a version that can be shared digitally with participants that cannot access the slides visually. In this respect, not all presentation software is created equal. As of this writing, Microsoft PowerPoint® offers the most advanced options for creating fully accessible slides. Before using other options for creating your slides, you may want to explore what barriers this may create for you and the extra work required to produce an accessible version. The following tips are divided into those that apply to any presentation software and those that apply specifically to working in Microsoft PowerPoint®.

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General guidance:

- Use a template with good contrast—dark text on a light background or light text on a dark background.
- Avoid overlaying text on images.
- Use a unique heading for each slide.
- Do not put too much text on your slide.
- Keep font sizes at 28-point or larger.
- Select a simple, easy to read font. Sans serif fonts are usually more readable.
- Add alternative text to images, graphs and charts.
- For complex items, such as charts or graphs, the alt text should provide all of the information that a sighted person has access to visually.
- If images are purely decorative, mark them as decorative.

Guidance Specific to Microsoft PowerPoint®:

- Use pre-set slide layouts rather than manually adding text boxes.
- Confirm that all text is visible in "Outline View."
- Be aware that when you crowd your slide with text, Microsoft PowerPoint® will begin shrinking the text to fit. The font size will shrink and the space between text will also be reduced, making slides more difficult to read. To resolve this issue, select the Autofit Options symbol that appears. Then select "Stop fitting text into this placeholder."
- Run the accessibility checker that is available on the Review Ribbon. This will help you identify any accessibility issues you may have missed.
- To share an accessible digital version of your slides, you can share the PowerPoint file or create an accessible PDF version of your slide deck.
- To create accessible digital versions of your slides, select Save As PDF, rather than Print to PDF.
- Have a plan for sharing the accessible digital versions of your handouts prior to your session. Options include emailing them to participants or uploading them to a website and providing a link.

Handouts

If you are providing print or digital handouts to participants, those will need to be designed to be accessible as well. Several options exist for creating accessible handouts. Microsoft Word® has the most options for creating accessible handouts. The following guidelines will assist you in creating accessible materials.

- Use a sans serif font of 12 point or larger.
- Use heading structure properly.
- Provide alternative text for graphic elements such as images, charts, or graphs.
- If you are providing print versions, it is ideal to have some large print versions available.
- Providing the handout in MS Word or RTF format is ideal.
- If you prefer to provide handouts in PDF, make sure you select Save As PDF, rather than Print to PDF in the conversion process.
- Have a plan for sharing the accessible digital versions of your handouts prior to your session. Options include emailing them to participants or uploading them to a webpage or cloud-based folder and providing a link.

Interactive Materials

Engagement is important for learning. Don't shy away from creating engaging activities for fear of creating barriers for people with disabilities. Simply be sure to think through your activities and have plans to adjust the activities as needed.

If your activities require participants to engage with handouts by answering or filling out forms, it is important that all participants have equal access to these materials. Whereas a PDF version may work fine for a static handout, it would not be adequate for engaging with the handout on a computer or other device. Be sure to provide those handouts in Microsoft Word® or Rich Text Format. If you have a participant who has asked for accessible handouts, it might be helpful to contact them and explain the activity so they can provide information about what format would be most helpful.

Videos

If you are showing videos during your presentation, it is important to think through the accessibility before your presentation.

- Is the video captioned?
    - If yes, check the captions for accuracy.
        - *A note about autogenerated captions:* These captions may present issues with accuracy and sometimes lack punctuation. Make sure they will really provide equivalent access for those who need captions.
    - If not, determine options for providing access.
        - If the video was created by you, see the resources at the end of this handout for captioning your video.
        - If the video was not created by you, you can reach out to the creator to see if they will caption it or ask if you can create a captioned version for your presentation.
- Is the video audio-described?
    - If so, check descriptions for accuracy.
    - If not, determine if there are visual elements that need descriptions.
        - You can create an accessible version.
        - Or if those elements are not too complex, you can describe them during the presentation as you show the video.

Before Your Session Begins

The following checklist will assist you in preparing for your session once you arrive at the location where you will be presenting.

- ❑ Does the microphone work?
- ❑ Is lighting adequate?
- ❑ Are the slides visible with the current level of lighting?
- ❑ If you are using sound, does the audio work and is the volume adequate?
- ❑ If you are playing videos, do you have the captions enabled?
- ❑ Is there space to navigate to their around the room?
- ❑ Are there accessible restrooms nearby?
- ❑ If participants have requested accommodations, are you prepared to respond to those requests?
- ❑ If accommodations include access services such as ASL-English interpreters or speech-to-text providers, are those professionals present, set up and ready to provide services?
- ❑ Do the access providers have the information they need to perform their role well?
- ❑ Are there seating considerations to ensure those using the interpreters or speech-to-text services can see them?

During Your Presentation

Setting the Stage

Spend a few minutes at the beginning of the session making sure that communication access is effective for everyone. Check that sight lines are good for anyone using speech-to-text or interpreting services. Ensure that you and the interpreters can be heard. Make sure those who need accessible digital versions of handouts have access to those. You may want to provide the link to those and a QR code on the first slide. Provide information about what to participants can expect in terms of breaks or activities. Inform them how you prefer questions to be handled and about flexibility with standing.

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Amplification

Amplification helps all participants maintain attention and avoid fatigue. It is especially beneficial to people who are hard of hearing. In some instances, the amplification system may be connected to an FM loop system and people with hearing aids may rely on sound coming through that system. If there is a microphone available, make sure to use it. Avoid asking the audience if you need to use it or not. This puts those who are hard of hearing in an awkward situation as the majority may say that it is not needed. Make sure that sound coming through the computer or speakers is also routed though the sound system. If someone in the audience provides you with a personal assistive listening device (ALD), make sure to use it with care. Be careful not to bump it. Turn the lapel mic off before removing it from or attaching it to your clothing. If you leave the room during a break, turn the microphone/transmitter off.

Questions from the Audience

Summarize or repeat audience questions and comments using the microphone. When audience members have long questions or comments, encourage them to use the microphone. People often say they don't need the mic. Be prepared to remind them that they need to use it for access purposes.

Sharing Your Slide Deck

Give the audience time to view each slide before speaking about it. Describe images, charts, and graphs verbally, as not everyone may be able to see the slides. With practice, you will learn to do this in a natural way that does not sound like you are just reading your slides. Your slides should support—not replace—your spoken content.

Videos

Make sure the captions are turned on. If there are portions of the video that are visual only, make sure you are prepared to describe that content. Make sure the volume is adequate.

Activities

As you explain your activities, check in with the group to make sure they understand the activity and ask if there is anything that needs to be considered to ensure everyone can participate. Observe participants and be prepared to adapt the activity as needed.

By implementing these strategies, you'll be able to create an inclusive and accessible virtual event that allows everyone to participate fully. Small adjustments and thoughtful planning can make a significant difference in ensuring accessibility for all.

Suggested Resources

Presentation and Event Accessibility
- **W3C Accessibility Initiative – Making Presentations Accessible for All**
- **W3C Making Events Accessible**

MS PowerPoint Accessibility
- **NCDAE Cheat Sheet: MS PowerPoint**
- **University of Washington: Creating Accessible Presentations in Microsoft PowerPoint**
- **WebAIM: PowerPoint Accessibility**

Document Accessibility
- **Explore Access: Creating Accessible Documents**

Accessible Videos
- **NCDAE: Captioning YouTube Videos**
- **DCMP: Captioning Key**
- **University of Washington: Captioning Your Own Video**

Amplification
- **Rooted in Rights: Like the Mic (Video)**

Access Services
- **National Deaf Center: Interpreting**
- **National Deaf Center: Speech-to-Text Services**

These links are created to be accessible digitally. If you are receiving this handout in print format, use the QR code on the next page to get access to these links.

Unlocking Accessibility: Practical Tips for Inclusive Presentations

This handout is available in an accessible format at:

uofapartners.uark.edu/projects/increasing-digital-access/

To request other formats, contact us, partners@uark.edu.

Partners
for Inclusive Communities

Partners for inclusive Communities is administratively located in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas. Partners is the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service.

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