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Hosting Accessible and Inclusive Presentations and Events

Whether you're providing participation awards at an elementary school swim meet or telling a room of your peers about an accessibility initiative, it's important that you present in a way that includes all of the participants. Inclusivity requires an awareness of your audience but also an awareness of what you don't know about your audience - their cultural heritage or invisible disabilities, for example. If a presentation is written for anyone, it will be inclusive for everyone.

Remember that inclusivity is a journey... No matter where you are on that journey, every incremental step matters. What follows is an introductory guide to inclusive presentations. It is not exhaustive, but it will get you started on your journey to inclusion and accessibility when presenting.

I. Preparation and Materials

Presentation Design

- **Alternative Text:**

- Provide alt text for all visual content Use the Accessibility Checker in tools like PowerPoint to identify missing alt text.
- Not all images require alt text. If the image is decorative like a border or typographical flourish, you can either leave the alt text blank or select "Mark as Decorative."
- Visual content includes pictures, SmartArt graphics, shapes, groups, charts, embedded objects, and videos.
- Avoid using text in images as the sole method of conveying important information. If you must use an image with text in it, repeat that text in the presentation. In the alternative text, briefly describe the image and include the text and its intent.

- **Readable Slide Content:**

- Use sans serif fonts (e.g., Arial, Calibri) with a minimum size of 18pt.
- Avoid using all capital letters and excessive italics or underlines.
- Maintain sufficient white space and avoid overcrowded slides.
- Keep slides concise.

- Ensure sufficient color contrast between text and background.
- Use dark text on light backgrounds or vice versa.
- Avoid animated slide transitions.

- **Color:**

- Ensure that color is not the only means of conveying information. People who are blind, have low vision, or are colorblind might miss out on the meaning conveyed by particular colors.
 - Enable the grayscale color filter in System Preferences > Accessibility > Display > Color Filters. In older versions of macOS, go to System Preferences > Accessibility > Display and check Grayscale. Visually scan the slides in your presentation.
 - Add an underline to color-coded hyperlink text so that people who are colorblind know that the text is linked even if they can't see the color. For headings, consider adding bold or using a larger font.
- Use sufficient contrast for text and background colors. Use strong contrast between text and background, so people with low vision can see and use the content. Use dark text on a white or off-white background, or reverse it and use white text on a dark background.
 - To find insufficient color contrast, [use an Accessibility Checker](#).
 - You can also look for text in your spreadsheet that's hard to read or to distinguish from the background.
 - White and black schemes make it easier for people who are colorblind to distinguish text and shapes.

- **Slide Structure:**

- Make sure slide contents can be read in the order that you intend. When someone who can see reads a slide, they usually read things, such as text or a picture, in the order the elements appear on the slide. In contrast, a screen reader reads the elements of a slide in the order they were added to the slide, which might be very different from the order in which things appear.
- Use built-in slide layouts to ensure logical reading order for screen readers.

- Use the Accessibility Checker to find slides that have possible problems with reading order.
- Give every slide a unique title. To find slides that do not have titles or have repetitive titles, use the Accessibility Checker.
- Include a Table of Contents to aid navigation.
- **Links:**
 - Use descriptive hyperlink text (e.g., "Visit WebAIM's Guidelines" instead of "Click Here"). Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination.
 - Add underlines to hyperlinks for clarity.
 - Instead of linking to the text Click here, include the full title of the destination page.
 - For example, there is more detail on [WebAim's Links and Hyperlinks page](#).
 - You can even use the URL of the page if it's short and descriptive.
 - For example, www.microsoft.com.
 - You can also add ScreenTips that appear when your cursor hovers over text or images that include a hyperlink.
- **Tables:**
 - Use simple table structures with clearly specified headers.
 - Avoid merged or split cells, which can confuse screen readers.
 - To ensure that tables don't contain split cells, merged cells, or nested tables, use the Accessibility Checker.

Videos and Multimedia

- Include captions or subtitles, ensuring they describe both dialogue and key audio cues.
- Provide audio descriptions for important visual content. Audio descriptions are the narration of visual elements.
- Use videos with high contrast and avoid flashing content to prevent triggering seizures.

Document Formats

- Share materials in multiple formats, including large print and plain language.
 - Ensure PDF files are accessible, with navigable headings and alt text for images.
 - Advertise your events with as much detail as possible so that disabled people can make informed decisions about attending and accommodation requests.
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II. Delivery and Presentation Style

Once your materials are prepared, it is time to focus on presentation delivery. While you could say there is some science to making an accessible presentation, the act of delivering an inclusive presentation is more of an art. As speakers, we quickly default to what we are used to saying or doing, not always realizing that old habits may exclude part of our audience. Giving a thoughtful presentation requires preparation and practice.

Inclusive Communication

- **Survey attendees** in advance to request their access needs.
- **Introduce Yourself:** State your name, position, and pronouns (if you are comfortable).
- **Visual Descriptions:** Verbally describe key visual elements for blind or low-vision participants, but avoid unnecessary personal descriptors unless culturally relevant or requested.
- **Live Audio Description:** Do not assume that everyone can see your presentation. Read on-screen text and describe visuals when presenting.
 - If there are text and images displayed on the screen or if you are relying on visual cues, please make sure to verbally explain them for blind/low vision participants, as well as others who may be looking away from their screen at that moment.
 - Begin by reading all visible text and images on the slide out loud before explaining more information.
 - If switching between multiple speakers, please state your name before speaking. For example, begin with "This is Stephanie speaking."

- **Clear Speech:** Speak slowly, clearly, and at a moderate pace to ensure understanding.

Language

- **Gender inclusivity**

- When referring to others, use the gender-neutral pronoun of “they” instead of “he or she.”
- Avoid gender-specific titles and terms, e.g. “businessperson” or “business executive” or “manager” instead of “businessman.”
- Avoid assuming an individual’s pronouns/name, clarify first.

- **People with disabilities**

- Emphasize abilities, not limitations, e.g. “person who uses a wheelchair” instead of “wheelchair-bound”
- Use people-first language (e.g., “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”) ([Disability Language Style Guide](#)). (*Note: This preference is not universal. If you are introducing a speaker, ask if they prefer person-first or disability-first language.*)
- Use language that emphasizes the need for accessibility rather than the presence of a disability, e.g. “accessible parking” instead of “handicapped parking”.
- Do not portray a person with a disability as heroic or inspiring for simply living their lives. Stereotypes may raise false expectations that everyone with a disability is, or should be, an inspiration.
- Avoid terms such as “handicapped,” “victim,” “afflicted,” and “confined.”
- To refer to people who have some hearing, use *people with hearing loss*. To refer to formerly hearing people who have lost all of their hearing due to an accident, illness, or aging, use *deaf*. Refer to young children, no matter what their degree of proficiency in sign language, as *deaf*. To refer to deaf people as a generic group, the audiological condition of not hearing, or deaf education, use the term *deaf*. (*Note: Not all deaf people know sign language.*)

- **Inclusive Language**

- Use an adjective hyphen noun when referring to ethnic groups, as in African-American, Arab-American, and Irish-American.
- Whenever possible, when referring to indigenous peoples, use the specific tribe's name. To refer to a group as a whole, use "Indigenous people" or, for US-specific, "Indigenous Americans."
- Use Black and White as adjectives, but try to avoid using these words as nouns.
- Avoid using examples or references that are obviously specific to the United States (such as cultural or political references). If you need to include a U.S.-specific example, be sure to provide the appropriate amount of context needed for someone who is not native.
- Strive for diversity in terms of gender, age, race, and ethnicity. One way to do this (for ethnicity) is to use names that come from a wide variety of groups in any examples or scenarios.
- Always ask speakers/panelists if they have specific language that they prefer to use regarding their area of inclusivity.

Interactive Elements

- Offer multiple ways to participate, such as Q&A via chat, email, or in-person discussion.
 - When answering a question posed by someone with a disability, speak directly to the person and maintain eye contact; don't speak to a companion, aide, or interpreter.
 - Offer assistance and listen to the response; follow any specific instructions. If the response is "no, thank you," this should also be respected.
 - Clearly label interactive features, such as buttons or forms, for screen reader compatibility.
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III. Event Accessibility

Physical Access

- Ensure venues are wheelchair accessible, including:

- Barrier-free entryways and sufficient space for mobility devices.
- Accessible restrooms nearby.
- Reserved seating areas with good sightlines.
- Allow service animals and provide relief areas as needed.
- Equip stages with ramps for presenters using mobility devices.
- Offer sighted escorts to guide attendees to areas of the event.
- Ensure welcome desks and food stations have low-height counters for wheelchair users.

Sensory Accessibility

- Designate low-sensory rooms with quiet spaces and dim lighting.
- Ensure events are scent-free by requesting attendees avoid strong fragrances.
- Ensure adequate breaks, especially for digital events—15-minute break per 1.25 hours of content, at the very least.

Content Accessibility

- Provide printed materials in alternate formats, such as braille, large print, or plain language.
- Use microphones and sound systems to ensure all participants can hear. Require the audience to use microphones during audience participation.
- Offer sign language interpreters and/or CART for attendees.
- Content warnings should be provided every time there may be sensitive content discussed at an event.
- Create high-contrast signage.
- Create/provide a tip sheet and/or video outlining how to navigate your event (where and how to register, bathroom locations, etc.) so that people know what to do to get into the event.

Financial Accessibility

- If you can, offer scholarships or discounted/free admission options for attendees with financial constraints.
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IV. Virtual Event Considerations

Platform Accessibility

- Choose platforms with live captioning and screen reader support. Become familiar with these features in advance to provide live support to attendees, as needed.
- Offer dial-in options for participants without reliable internet.
- Share tip sheets or video tutorials for navigating the platform.

Content Delivery

- Ensure captions and ASL interpreters are available.
- Provide recordings with captions for on-demand viewing.
- Avoid rapid transitions or excessive animations.

Safe Space Protocols

- Provide content warnings for sensitive material.
 - Allow attendees to leave or take breaks as needed.
 - Encourage feedback through accessible and anonymous channels.
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V. Additional Resources

Accessibility Guidelines

- [WebAIM: PowerPoint Accessibility](#)
- [Creating Accessible Presentations](#)
- [Inclusive Design for Presentations](#)
- [Microsoft Support: Make Your PowerPoint Accessible](#)
- [W3C Accessible Online Meetings](#)

- [WebAIM: Accessible Online Meetings](#)
- [W3C Remote Meetings Documentation](#)

Language and Inclusivity

- [Disability Language Style Guide](#)
- [Ableism Glossary](#)
- [UW Newsroom on Inclusive Language](#)
- [Toolkits for Equity by C4DISC](#)

Captioning and Interpretation

- [Comparison of Captioning Services: Rev, GoTranscript, Scribie](#)
- [DCMP Captioning Types, Methods, and Styles](#)
- [ASL Interpreting Services](#)
- [Learning American Sign Language Resources](#)

Event Planning Tools

- [Smashing Magazine: Inclusive Design Tips](#)
- [Accessible Customer Service for Businesses](#)
- [DSPA Workshops and Classes](#)
- [ADA Fact Sheet](#)

Implementing these guidelines will foster a welcoming and inclusive environment, ensuring all participants can contribute meaningfully to your event. Keep in mind that people with the same disability may require vastly different types of support. Practice asking your attendees what will work best for them, early and often. Begin where you can and prioritize incremental improvements—every step matters in building truly accessible and inclusive experiences.