Accessible Presentations and Conferences
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Partly adapted from the materials at http://composingaccess.net/

Making your presentation or workshop accessible means designing and delivering your materials so that everyone can participate. Like most inclusive or universal design strategies, these benefit both disabled participants and all participants. These are tips to get you started (not an exhaustive list).

FOR PRESENTERS

Create a script or detailed outline for you talk and bring copies to distribute. Many people find it hard to follow auditory talks, but this is particularly helpful for those who are Deaf but also helps the many people who struggle to process you reading your paper, such as those with traumatic brain injuries and second-language learners. If your talk is not scripted, consider providing a detailed outline. Note if you do not want your work cited without your permission (or collect drafts at the end).

Make your PowerPoint more accessible. Avoid flashing images, arguments that rely solely on color, and small print. Use a plain background without any watermark, photo, or design behind the text.

Bring versions of all handouts and scripts in large print (17 point or larger). Large-print copies should be single-sided as they may be held close to the face for viewing.

Consider sharing your paper online. This can be an alternative to providing printed drafts if there is consistent access to the Internet.

Speak at a reasonable pace. People read much faster than they typically talk, and the ASL interpreter or CART transcriptionist needs to keep up. (CART is Communication Access Real-Time Transcription, which is live captioning for a computer or projected screen.) If you find it hard to slow down, take longer pauses between sentences or paragraphs. Provide a script to the ASL interpreter or CART captioner with jargon you’ll use repeatedly (so they can create signs or short-cuts).

Announce the accessibility practices you are using. Before you begin, note that scripts, large print, copies of the PowerPoint, etc., are available. Ask if you can be heard and let interpreters know that they can ask you to slow down. Have someone distribute handouts rather than having people come forward.

Describe any images you display. This includes those with low vision and makes your images more purposeful. Rich auditory descriptions are best done in advance, and avoid only describing what is in the photo –communicate meaning if that is clear and pertinent to those who can see the images.

Use captioned videos. Recognize that YouTube automatic captioning is flawed. Avoid forcing the participant to choose between watching the video or the interpreter.

Use the microphone. This helps all listeners and is often connected to a FM monitoring system for those with hearing impairments.

Re-voice questions. Re-voice the questions so all can hear before answering them.

Avoid wearing scents. They are triggering for headaches and various kinds of environmental illness.

Communicate access needs to event organizers. It’s important that events be accessible to you.
FOR ORGANIZERS

Contact attendees to encourage or require accessibility moves. (See notes on previous page.)

Communicate access barriers to presenters and participants before the event.

- Walk the event space to locate accessible entrances and bathrooms. If there is not an accessible bathroom, consider identifying another space.
- Identify the lighting options and communicate if there is fluorescent lighting or no natural light.
- Ask participants not to wear or use scents.
- Note whether the space is noisy, crowded, scented, or cold.
- Track the food options, especially if you are not providing food or only narrow selections.
- Identify relief spaces for service animals.
- Provide information to presenters and a summary to attendees.

Mention accessibility in promotions and advertisements. Note existing accessibility (such as wheelchair access) and invite participants to request access (by email). It is typically best to use the event coordinator as the access contact, rather than putting the participant in touch with a university office. Avoid extended deadlines for requesting access (such as weeks in advance).

Budget for accessibility. ASL interpreting or CART captioning may or may not be covered by the university or venue (likely not). Budget for this and other access needs, such as providing printers or photocopying for attendees to create handouts.

Re-arrange the space. If possible, shift chairs so there are spaces for wheelchairs to move about and not only be situated in the back. Avoid tiered spaces when possible.

Clearly identify food options. Provide food for those with food limitations (gluten-free, dairy-free). Whenever possible, provide ingredients of foods being served. Keep sauces and additional ingredients separate for participants to add and provide foods with simple ingredients (such as potato chips or apples).

Designate a quiet room. For larger conferences, designate a space that is a quiet room away from the hustle and bustle of the conference. Clearly identify the rules of the room and have people check to make sure it is being used appropriately. This is useful for neurodiverse people and all participants.

Note proximity to public transportation. Some cannot drive or walk to events. (Also, avoid tours, as these are very difficult to make accessible. Provide information for those interested instead.)

Encourage virtual participation. Consider a set hashtag, Facebook page, and/or designated person who creates a Storify of the event. Some disabled people cannot easily attend events.

Consider interaction badges. These are colored sheets of paper added to name tags that allow the participant to identify their comfort level in speaking with others. (Green for open, yellow if open for conversations with known friends, red if not interacting.) This grew out of autism conferences.

Ask for feedback on access. Ask both during the conference and in end-of-event evaluations.

Encourage presenters or moderators to ask about access issues before they begin their presentations.

Create an Access Guide for your event. For an example, see https://sdsindenver.wordpress.com/.