Image description: the Oral History Association logo. The letters OHA in blue with a red dot in the center of the O, a green dot in the center of the H, and a yellow dot in the center of the A, and underneath, the phrase "Oral History Association" in black text.

OHA Accessibility Guidelines

January 2025

Developed by Madison Zalopany
in conjunction with the 2022-23 OHA Diversity Committee

This document is the result of the vision and work of the OHA's Diversity Committee. From 2022-23, members of this committee volunteered their time and effort to develop this accessibility resource, which we now share with our membership.

OHA is grateful to the members of the 2022 and 2023 committees for their leadership and service. We are also grateful to Madison Zalopany, a disabled artist and access worker, who the Diversity Committee contracted to assist and guide them in the development of this document.

Members of Diversity Committee

Madeline Zalopany (consultant)
Anna Kaplan (2017 –2002, co-chair)
Francine Spang-Willis (2020 – 2023, co-chair)
Alphine Jefferson (member at large)
Nairy Abd El Shafy (2020 – 2023)
Benji de la Piedra (2020 – 2023)
Daisy Herrera (2020 – 2023)
Ela Banerjee (2021 – 2024)
Carmen Livingston (2021 – 2024)
Isabel Machado (2021 – 2024)
Alexander Rosado-Torres (2021 – 2024)
Al Stein (2021 – 2024)
Andre Taylor (2021 – 2024)
Moira Armstrong (2022 – 2025)
Kate Singer (2022 – 2025)
Sach Takayasu (2022 – 2025)
Lucas Wilson (2022 – 2025)
Melody Hunter-Pillion (2023 – 2026)
Oluwasola Daniels (2023 – 2026)
Tiffany Gonzalez (2023 – 2026)
Shilpi Malinowki (2023 – 2026)
Gloria Rhodes (2023 – 2026)

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Introduction

The Oral History Association (OHA) is a dynamic crossroads of ideas and people. The organization connects and inspires practitioners, and it supports their work to ethically collect, preserve, share, and interpret memories that foster knowledge and respect. As the leading membership organization for oral history practitioners, we envision a world where a deep humanistic understanding of the past, developed through a process of listening and mutual respect, shapes a more inclusive and equitable future.

This document is a reflection of the OHA and our core commitments to the dignity and humanity of all people. Ensuring accessibility entails more than checking items off a list. It is an ethos and mindset, a commitment to inclusion and community involving sustained learning and adaptation. The foundation of this process is an ongoing conversation with disabled members of our organization and communities, where those of us who are able-bodied employ the practice so crucial to our field—listening.

These OHA Accessibility Guidelines provide current and measured recommendations for members of the OHA with respect to public activities of the association, as well as OHA members and anyone in related fields, who want to make their events and web presence more accessible. They were researched and drafted by the 2022 and 2023 OHA Diversity Committees and, throughout 2023, they were reviewed & edited by chairs of other OHA committees and the OHA Council. **Approved February 3, 2025.**

The OHA intends for this guide to be a first step toward furthering awareness of and conversations about the many accessibility needs within our communities. We hope it serves the membership and leadership of the OHA as:

- open-source guidelines offering accessibility considerations for OHA events, from routine meetings to public webinars and conferences; and
- a resource for OHA members and leaders—some with little to no experience with accessibility support—looking for guidance about considering and addressing a range of accessibility needs.

This is a resource and an aspiration, not a formal mandate. We encourage everyone to move forward thinking about accessibility, engaging with the ideas presented in this guide, and working to make your corner of the oral history world more accessible. For comments, suggestions, and feedback, please contact the OHA's Council or Executive Office.

Key Points

Universal Design and ADA Compliance: ADA compliance is the federally mandated, minimum requirements for ensuring accessibility. Universal design is an aspirational standard, broader than the ADA, which aims to ensure accessibility for all.

Accommodations and Services: It is not always possible to build access into an environment, so accommodations and services like those listed in this section can fill those gaps.

Digital Accessibility: The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines offer a range of recommendations for accessibility in digital spaces. Many institutions require that digital content like websites comply with these guidelines. The important points of advice it provides include:

- Using clear navigation paths and accessible fonts;
- Avoiding visual clutter;
- Providing image descriptions/alternative text, transcripts/captions, and/or audio description for photos, videos, and other multimedia;
- Avoiding ableist language and content;
- Providing clear access information when a website refers to a non-digital space or event; and
- Providing contact information for a representative who can help meet additional or unforeseen access needs.

Accessible Programming: When planning programs and events, ensure that you are addressing ableism on a broad scale by considering accessibility at the planning stage by keeping the following in mind:

- The accessibility of scheduling, pathways, and congregating points around the event space, including seating, lighting, agendas, and menus;
- Audio description, American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, tactile interpretation, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), and general access workers;
- Making sure information about any accommodations is easy to access;
- Performing an “access check” in advance;
- Offering sliding scale for attendees and complimentary tickets for care workers; and

- Flexibility and preparedness to accommodate additional needs as they arise.

For virtual programs, follow these same guidelines.

Quick References

Accessibility is a broad topic, and it can be hard to know where to start. If you are looking to make a particular project or event more accessible, this chart can help you identify what section of this guide contains the most useful information for your needs.

Accessible Programming (begins on page **9**)	Oral history interviews, meetings, conferences, workshops, conference presentations/talks, community events, archiving, interactive projects created from interviews
Digital Accessibility (begins on page **18**)	Websites, publications, social media, slide decks, transcripts, digital projects created from interviews, virtual events, digital archiving

ADA Compliance and Universal Design

Though similar and sometimes used interchangeably, these terms are not synonymous and, in fact, signify two different things.

ADA compliance refers to meeting accessibility needs as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. § 12101). The ADA was a landmark civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on disability. Different federal statutes—like the ADA Amendments Act (Public Law 110–325, ADAAA)—and other federal regulations have expanded the ADA since its original passage. ADA compliance means meeting the most recent, federally-mandated requirements for accessibility.

To ensure your space is accessible, refer to the ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities.

Universal Design is an ever-evolving set of standards, primarily for buildings, products, and general environments, which aims to ensure accessibility for all by considering a wider range of abilities, needs, and principles of accessibility than the ADA. The term was first used by architect Ronald Mace as a concept of design to make a built environment as widely accessible as possible to people, regardless of age, disability, or other factors.

Universal Design, or UD, is not formulated or regulated by law, and so differences in what it entails may vary. The Center for Universal Design at the North Carolina State University College of Design—a leader in the global UD movement—developed a list of seven Principles of Universal Design in 1997. They are:

1. Equitable Use
2. Flexibility of Use
3. Simple and Intuitive Use
4. Perceptible Information
5. Tolerance for Error
6. Low Physical Effort
7. Size and Space for Approach and Use

Remember, as you seek to respect ethical foundations of UD and implement it as part of your accessibility considerations, remember the following:

- Much of universal design is disability centered, but it should be practiced through an intersectional lens. For example, ask yourself if your design is culturally appropriate. The answer to this question may change depending on the context, such as location or the needs of the communities you are serving. Consider seeking opinions from others whose perspective or experience might be different.
- Universal design may never be fully achievable and, therefore, should not replace specialized accommodations.
- Historic preservation should not be used as an excuse to maintain access barriers in physical spaces. There are many adaptations that can be utilized that make a building accessible while maintaining the original integrity of the building.

Quick Tips for Universal Design

There is a slogan born in the Disability Rights Movement: “nothing about us without us.” This harkens back to a time when able-bodied people made decisions about accessibility issues without consulting people with disabilities. Accommodations were made “for” the disabled rather than with them.

To make your space more accessible than just ADA compliant, invite disabled folks as part of the planning process and listen to what they actually want and need to be included and comfortable in your space. Members of the disabled community might also perform “usability” evaluations as a part of the event and should be paid for their time and expertise.

Many institutions or venues now have accessibility coordinators. Check in with your organization or venue to see if they have someone on staff who can help you navigate universal design and ADA compliance.

Accommodations and Services

The little details of hosting an event might be the difference between inclusion and exclusion. These details include the physical elements of the space, accessible services at the event, social barriers, and considerations for virtual events. This section provides information on each of these elements.

When it is not possible to physically build access into an environment, it is still possible to provide that environment with supplementary materials and services. Below are some of those commonly provided:

- Transportation to and from venue (especially in locations without accessible public transit)
- Mobility aids for on-site use, including wheelchairs, scooters, strollers, and carts.
- Flexible seating with different-sized chair frames to accommodate bigger bodies
- Cane detectable stanchions
- Handouts and brochures available in braille and/or large print
- Fidgets
- Assistive listening devices
- Noise canceling headphones
- Audio induction loop to assist hearing aids
- Social stories
- Quiet spaces

When it is possible, considering including access services* to be as inclusive as possible. Below are some access services that are commonly provided:

- Sighted guides or wayfinding for the sight-impaired
- Audio description (pre-recorded or live)
- American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation
- Language interpretation
- Tactile interpretation
- Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning
- General access workers
- Remote virtual access for people who are high-risk for COVID-19 or cannot travel due to cost or inaccessibility to transportation

* Further description of these services can be found in the “Programming” section.

Questions to Consider When Planning an In-person Event

Scheduling

- Did I schedule this event for when people can come? Are there any religious holidays that might coincide with this date? (Consider checking an interfaith calendar.) Will the day of the week exclude people who need dependent-care? Will the time of day exclude people who cannot travel at night? Will people actually attend if the weather is likely to be extremely cold? Do I have a rain date?

Flow of Traffic

- Can everyone (regardless of ability) enter and fully access the space? Is there enough room in every row and walk space for a power chair to get through? What about a person's power chair and service animal? Can someone leave a walker in the aisle, or will that block traffic?

Where People Will Congregate

- Humans are social creatures, who may want to linger and gather in tight spaces. Will this block the flow of traffic? Is there a clear delineation from where food might be served to where it is intended to be eaten?

Seating

- Seating needs will differ depending on the event, but every event needs seating. Does this event have adequate seating for the number of guests? Is there designated accessible seating and is it integrated throughout the event (and not just a row in the back)? Is there consideration for the size and spacing of the seats?

Tables

- Are the tables, whether for dining or writing, wheelchair accessible?

Reserved seating

- If there is an ASL interpreter at this event, is there also reserved seating near the front for people who may use that accommodation? (Otherwise they may not be able to see.) Is there prioritized seating in front for people who are partially sighted to better see the program?

Lighting

- Is track lighting in the aisles available so people who are low sighted have an easier time with wayfinding? Is the ASL interpreter well lit, even if everything else is dark? Is low lighting

(which is more sensory friendly for neurodiverse people) an option for relaxed performances and presentations? Can strobe and flashing lights be avoided?

Finding Accessibility Accommodations

- Many venues offer amazing accommodations like assistive listening devices or closed captioning devices, but they may not bet easily locatable. Are supplementary materials easily obtained? Did I pick a central location so people do not have to go out of their way to find things? Did I create clear signage? Have I trained staff to know what access accommodations the event has, where to find them, and how they work?

Breaks

- Is there an opportunity to take a break? Whether your event is a panel discussion or an informal mixer, consider giving participants the option for rest by scheduling breaks into the program. This will help neurodivergent people who may become overstimulated, chronically ill people who need to take care of medical needs, those with energy-limiting disabilities, such as chronic fatigue, and others. If pressed for time, is there room to create quiet spaces or break rooms for people to go to if they need a little break?

Food and Beverage Menu

- Have I considered food allergies? What about dietary restrictions due to cultural factors? Have I avoided serving foods with very common allergens (like nuts)? Have I provided vegan/vegetarian-friendly options as well as non-alcoholic beverages, including water?

Fragrance Free:

- An accessible event is a fragrance-free event. Have I asked my guests or host venue ahead of time to:
  - Use fragrance-free cleaning products and soap
  - Refrain from using air fresheners
  - Arrive fragrance free

Resources

For more information on accessibility accommodations, the Cultural Access Collaborative has compiled resources from across the web to assist with event planning considerations.

Access Services at Events

Audio description: Audio description (AD), also referred to as a video description, described video, or more precisely called a visual description, is a form of narration used to provide information surrounding key visual elements in media work for the benefit of blind or partially sighted individuals. Audio description can take many forms, such as:

- Pre-recorded AD that exists for movies and some performances. Audio description that is prerecorded can be accessed through a separate device that the user can discreetly wear. It can also be embedded into the video and played for the entire audience regardless of disability status.
    - You can produce and record your own AD, if useful to your organization. For example, if you require your staff to watch a training video, you will want to have the video include audio description for any blind or partially-sighted employees. However, if you are hosting a one-time event at your venue, it may not be cost effective to produce/pre-record AD.
- Live AD that functions similarly to pre-recorded AD; the user simply listens to the audio describer in person or through a separate device. However, live description is best for live and short-term offerings (like a one-time performance).

Verbal Description: Some events do not need audio description but will still have some visual content (like a PowerPoint presentation) that should be described. In these instances, consider either hiring a live audio describer or preparing the presenter to describe themselves and their slides. This option can be the better choice as it socializes the responsibility of access beyond the institution's walls. It is also more cost effective.

Quick Tip for Events

When providing live audio description make sure the describer has had the opportunity to see the performance ahead of time to prepare. This can be done by sending them a video of the performance or scheduling them to attend rehearsal(s). You will have to pay them for their preparation time; however, it produces a better quality description. Be sure to vet potential describers, as some are more experienced than others.

Language Interpretation: Access is disability-centered, but not always disability-specific. When thinking about inclusion, think about it holistically.

What languages, and thus translation services, might you need to include in your event?

When booking an ASL Interpreter

- You can request an interpreter a minimum of 48 hours before an event; however, the further out you request an interpreter, the better you can plan for your event and promote its accessibility.
    - The average cost for ASL interpreters includes an hourly fee per interpreter and mileage fees if applicable. Some agencies charge extra for evening and weekend hours and may charge a fee for jobs booked with less than 48 hours' notice. Agencies may also charge additional virtual fees for Zoom meetings.
    - The Oral History Association regularly uses ASL interpreters for events. For more information about the agency they use, contact oha@oralhistory.org.
- Interpreter services usually have a two-hour minimum. Even if your program is less than two hours long, you will need to pay for two hours.
- Interpreters must be booked in teams for events longer than one hour, to avoid fatigue and loss of information.
- Put the day, date, and time frame in the subject line of any request sent out. Consider prep time when determining the time frame for interpreters. For example, if your program is from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., consider requesting the interpreter for 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. This allows them time to arrive and go over any last-minute details, and it provides a buffer in case the program runs over.
- Include information about the type of event, dress code, names, and any field-specific terminology that will be used, as applicable, so interpreters can prepare for the assignment. Send the script to interpreters in advance. Send a link to the event page or any applicable websites. Forward any notes or other prep materials from speakers. Make sure the interpreters know which entrance to use and where to meet the event organizer.
- Hire an interpreter who is appropriate for your event. Some interpretation jobs require specialized skill sets; the person interpreting a lecture on ancient Mesopotamian art may or may not have the same skills and knowledge to interpret a Lil Nas X concert.
- Double-check cancellation fees when booking. Organizations typically pay interpreters if they cancel with less than 24 hours' notice.
- Keep in mind that ASL is specific to North America, and also has several dialects, including Black American Sign Language. You may need multiple interpreters for the various sign languages used by your

audience.

Working with ASL Interpreters

If the interpreter is for a specific guest or staff member, you will want to facilitate that meeting ahead of time, especially because individuals may have very specific interpretation needs or prefer certain interpreters. If a speaker or staff member requests a certain interpreter, it is always best to try to honor the request.

If the interpretation is for an unspecified person or persons, then you will want to make sure that the interpreter is easily findable. This is easy if the interpreter will be in front of a stage; you will simply have reserved seating near the interpreter. But if the event requires floating interpreters, like at a conference or mixer, you will want your interpreters to be easily located and identifiable. Badges or t-shirts with the interpreter symbol often work well.

- Make sure the interpreter is well lit at all times. Do not backlight the interpreter.
- When engaging in conversation with D/deaf and hard of hearing visitors, talk directly to the interpreter and trust them to facilitate communication. Do not say to the interpreter, “Tell her I said …” or “ask him if ….” Or “Do they want to …?”
- In conversational settings, always look at the person you are communicating with rather than the interpreter, and direct any non-verbal responses (smiles, nods, etc.) toward them as well. These are considered an important part of the conversation in ASL.
- Do your best to eliminate crosstalk and ask speakers not to talk too quickly.

Tactile Interpretation interprets spoken language into tactile language for people who are deafblind. The tips above apply when working with a tactile interpreter, but additional time is needed for interpretation.

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is for people who are D/deaf or hard-of-hearing who want an alternative to American Sign Language interpreting and/or assistive listening devices. CART provides real-time captioning for any spoken content during a program and can be provided onsite or offsite depending on the venue and the provider. CART can be displayed on a projection screen, computer, or laptop, or it can be transmitted through the internet to a mobile app. CART can also be integrated in some apps commonly used in presentations, such as PowerPoint.

Quick Tip for Working with CART

Similar to working with interpreters and audio describers, you will want to give your CART provider as much information as possible up front to make sure you get the right service. This can be especially important if more than one language is being spoken and you need a bilingual captioner.

General Access Workers

Disability affects every aspect of life, and so access should be included in every aspect of event planning. That being said, there is no 100% accessible event. The greatest asset in an accessible event is flexibility and interdependence. Having general access workers at your event is a great way to plan for the unexpected. Access workers might help with:

- Wayfinding
- Providing sighted guide
- Helping people carry items
- Providing technical support if a device breaks mid-event

Remember: You may not be able to anticipate every single person's needs, but access is simply the care we provide to one another, so it can be both anticipatory and reactive. Include access in every step of the planning process by:

- Making sure your venue is as accessible as possible.
- Having the tools, knowledge, and resources to provide access accommodations and services.
- Gathering access requests ahead of time when possible (like in RSVPs)
- Being flexible without being defensive! Nobody is expecting perfection, just a welcoming experience.

Access Check

An access check is performed at the beginning of a program, often by the host. It is an opportunity at the start of the program to make sure that access is being provided as intended. It can be as simple as (or as radical) as you need it to be. Some considerations include:

- Introducing the program's general outline and time frame. Make sure to include any breaks.
- Highlighting all access accommodations and services in case

anyone has missed something.
- Identifying any access workers. Example: “Our access workers are wearing green shirts and are stationed at the doorway where you entered. If you need an access worker at any time, simply raise your hand.”
- Treating access as an invitation; people are invited to use the space as they need. People can be polite creatures and attempt to assimilate into social norms despite it being uncomfortable (or down right painful!) for some disabled folks. Want to sit on the floor? Go ahead, just please do not block the walkway. Need to take a break? Please do so at any time. The presenter stopped using the microphone and you cannot hear? Interrupt them.

Mitigating Social Barriers

Verna Mayers once said, “Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” This is a great way to illustrate the limitations to access. So much of access is focused on getting people into the building and being able to utilize the space, but none of that matters if our social attitudes towards marginalized groups make them feel unwanted in that space. Unfortunately, disability status carries a lot of stigma in our society, so we as cultural leaders have to do our part to mitigate those societal prejudices and barriers. What does this look like on a practical level?

- Hiring disabled staff members, and not just in unpaid and entry level roles.
- Making sure that your policies around accommodations for disabled staff members will actually support disabled employees so they may be successful in their position.
- When reworking job descriptions or recruiting new hires, making sure the position accounts for access skills. For example, if hiring for a social media coordinator, make sure they know how to write image descriptions.
- Making time and space for disability cultural competency training.

Financial Barriers

As much as possible we want to advocate for free admission to spaces and events. This has a lot to do with job discrimination, subminimum wage being

legal for disabled folks, and Social Security Income being designed to keep its dependents impoverished. When creating any price of admission, consider a sliding scale or free admission. At a bare minimum, if a care partner is present with a disabled audience member, the ticket of the care worker should be complimentary. It is highly recommended to build such accommodations into the budget or ticket price.

COVID-19

Disabled people are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Incorporating and communicating mitigation measures such as masks, ventilation, testing, and vaccination is an important aspect of ensuring events are accessible. Organizations like COVID Safe Campus and Urgency of Equity have created best practice documents addressing COVID-19, DEI, and educational settings that can inform your decisions about COVID-19 at your events.

Additional Considerations for Virtual Programs

Virtual programs add additional opportunities for physical access, providing the option of watching from the comfort of one's own home. However, virtual programs still need to consider digital, language, sensory, and endurance accessibility, as highlighted above.

Quick Tips for Virtual Programs

- Start your virtual program with an access check, as you would an in-person meeting. If on Zoom you can include a recap of the information in the chat for people to revisit.
- Zoom and most video platforms have auto-generated closed captioning; however, you may still want to offer ASL interpretation at your event. Make sure to pin the interpreter so they are seen throughout the program.
- Zoom will also generate a transcript for you after your event. If you are archiving the event, edit the transcript for accuracy. You may use the edited transcript to create better quality captions for your archived video.
- Alternatively, you can hire CART services for your event. CART will always be more accurate than auto-generated captions, thus eliminating the need for the video to be professionally captioned.
- Ask guests to use the chat sparingly or not at all. The chat can be

overwhelming for individuals using screen readers. It can also be distracting for people with cognitive disabilities.

- Have someone monitor the chat, if it is in use. You want to make sure guests are remaining respectful. You will also want a designated person watching the chat in case access issues arise and someone is asking for assistance.
- Audio description can be difficult for Zoom events, but not impossible. As with in-person events, consider training your presenters to describe their own visual content. This can be included in their contract when agreeing to participate or in conference guidelines for presentations.

- Livestream is also a way to reach a larger audience. You can livestream from multiple platforms off Zoom, and it can be a casual way to reach people on social media.

Digital Accessibility

Digital accessibility refers to the inclusive practice of removing barriers that would otherwise prevent access to or interaction with websites, social media, electronic documents, digital tools, and technologies by a wide range of users, including people with various visual, auditory, motor, or cognitive disabilities. Thinking about web accessibility can seem daunting, especially since there is no “one size fits all” solution to access. Some institutions will have greater capacity and resources to build access into their virtual spaces than others. But no matter where your institution is on its access journey, here are a few things to help, starting with WCAG.

What is WCAG?

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are part of a series of web accessibility principles published by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium, the main international standards organization for the Internet. Think of WCAG compliance the same you would for ADA compliance for physical spaces. Whether you build your own website, use pre-made templates, or contract someone to build a web presence for you, you will want to adhere to WCAG Standards. This section summarizes many of the standards; however, please reference the WCAG guidelines for a comprehensive list.

Quick Tips for WCAG

- Refer to the most up-to-date WCAG standards.Guidelines and best practices are always changing.
- Standardize language around access requirements for any contracts you

may draft for a freelancer or third-party website developer.
- If you are using a template to create your website,ay attention to its access features. If there is no mention of accessibility, it probably is not be accessible.
- If you are working on a presentation for a virtual or face-to-face conference, use the OHA guidelines to help ensure that your slides are accessible.

Navigation

Just like clear paths of travel are important for physical access, barrier-free navigation is critical in virtual space. Many people may be using adaptive tools to scroll through your webpage, so it is important to remember the following.

- Use clear and consistent navigation throughout your website, including the main navigation buttons at the top and bottom of your page.
- Make your information easily locatable by utilizing heading styles. This makes it easier to read if you have low vision or processing disabilities. Be sure to:
    - Use succinct language. Your language should help guide the user regardless of sight.
    - Add extra space around headings and between paragraphs.
    - Emphasize the header with a size that is 20% larger than the body text (so if the text is size 10, and 20% of 10 is 2, your header will be size 12 font). Consider bolding or differentiating with color (but see below for considerations related to color blindness).
    - Refrain from italicizing and underlining text.
    - Avoid multiple columns of text on a page.
    - Align left.
- Label hyperlinks with specificity to cue the individual into where the hyperlink will take them, rather than using vague language like “click here.” (If you are underlining your header, please distinguish the text from any hyperlinks.)
- Specify language in the code. Switching languages on the same page or website can be disorienting, so indicate that the language has changed in the code.
- Consider how a user might experience mouse-free navigation, as not all users will find a mouse to be accessible. Can the website be navigated solely through the use of the keyboard?

Accessible Fonts

Using accessible fonts is necessary because they are easier to read for both people who are partially-sighted and people who may have processing disabilities or other cognitive disabilities.

- Always use a Sans Serif font (like Arial), rather than a Serif font (like Times New Roman). Sans Serif fonts are simpler in design since they do not have serifs, which are decorative strokes on the ends of letterforms. This makes them easier to read, particularly on older technology with lower resolution displays. If you have questions about what fonts are considered serif or sans serif, see if your processing program automatically sorts their fonts into groups; many offer this feature. These include Serif and Sans Serif, so it is easy to find the right font, but lists are also available online.
- Accessible font size is 12 to 14 point. Text can be larger, but not smaller. Most fonts that live online can be enlarged by the user and do not have to be large print, but they can be if desired.
- Allow enlarge/zoom capabilities on your site. It will give the user flexibility to adjust the size to what is comfortable to them.
- Do not write in all caps. This can make the words difficult to read for users with dyslexia or those relying on word shapes to recognize the word.
- Use bold for emphasis whenever possible. The accessibility of underlining and italicizing is debated and may depend on a reader's specific disability, so bolding is the most accessible option.
- Inter-letter spacing (spacing between letters and other characters) should be approximately 35% of the average letter width.
- Inter-word spacing (spacing between words) should be 3.5 times the inter-letter spacing.
- Line spacing should be proportional to inter-word spacing; 1.5/150% is preferable.
- Color contrast should be at least 70%. This includes hyperlinks which must retain the same level of contrast after they have been clicked.

In addition to color contrast, remember to consider the perception of color when selecting a color scheme. For example, a red and green color scheme may not be perceivable to some who are color blind. WCAG recommends a minimum

color contrast ratio of 4:5:1 to be accessible to color blind or visually impaired people.

Image from Access Guide

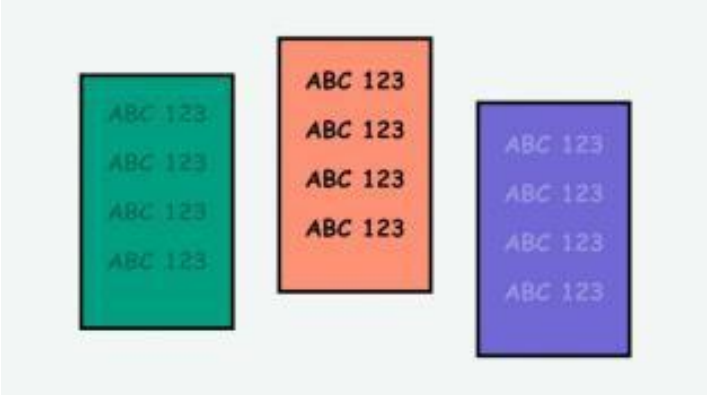

Image description: 3 vertical rectangles (green, light orange, and purple) outlined in black. The letters, "ABC 123" are repeated 4 times on the green rectangle in light gray, and on the purple rectangle in a faint white - both of these are difficult to see. These letters are repeated on the light orange rectangle in black - which is higher contrast and easier to see.

Clear of Clutter

When the layout and text of your website are structured, remember not to over-clutter your web presence. Flashy aesthetics may seem pleasing, but they can add significant barriers. Avoid flashing animations or lights, patterned backgrounds or images, and videos that play automatically. Instead, try to carefully curate imagery, making sure text is not superimposed over images. This can make it difficult to both read the words and see the image. If you do have video or animations that people may be sensitive to, add a warning to the video.

Digital access resources:

WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools

Nu Html Checker

Access Guide

Alternative Text and Image Description

In order to make images accessible to people who might be using screen readers, you need to include an image description in the alternative text. Alternative text, or alt text, briefly describes the appearance, function, and context of any non-textual digital element. Image descriptions provide more detail describing the element, whether it is an image, graphic, or logo.

Some images are easier to describe than others, but everything must have an image description. This includes PDFs that are not screen reader compatible. For example, if you scan a page from a book, it will be treated as an image and therefore the screen reader will not be able to read the text. In this case, the image description will just be the text from the copied source. (As a result, it is usually easier to ensure that PDFs are screen reader compatible.)

When describing images, you want to create your own institutional voice. Everyone writes image descriptions a little differently, and this can make uniformity difficult for cultural institutions. Stylistic choices include:

Length: Most image descriptions are too long. Realistically, you willl want your description to only be a few sentences. Three tends to be the sweet spot.

Tone: A lot of institutions will aim for a “neutral tone.” However, it- is important to remember that there is no true neutral and tone can really add to the description.

Structure: “General to specific” can serve as a good starting formula as your institution develops image descriptions. Using this formula, the first two sentences give the general overview of an image, and the third sentence is one important detail that emphasizes the tone of the image.

Examples:

Example of an image description:

“A grumpy gray cat wears a green snail costume, complete with a shiny blue shell on its back and googly eyes on its head.”

This is simply one to two sentences that give the flavor of what you are describing without over-describing. That being said, if the image is more complicated than the one selected for this description, it can be appropriate to have a longer description.

Example of a description that is too abbreviated:

“A cat in a snail costume”

While this description delivers the information, it does not convey much about the image. That is not to say an abbreviated description is not appropriate at times. In fact, some folks will argue that over-describing can be a distraction. When making stylistic choices, you will want to consider the function of the image.

Quick Tips for Captions

- You do not have to define your own institutional voice. There are many style guidelines you can follow. It is best, however, if everyone involved in writing image descriptions receives the same training.
- When describing works of art, consider the piece’s gallery label as a great

starting point.

- If you are working with a living artist, consider asking them for their input on the description. This can help to make sure you do not misrepresent someone's race, gender, disability status, or other personal identifiers.
- For in-depth instructions on adding alt text to images on social media, see the Social Media section.

Image Description/Alt-Text Resources

Alt Text as Poetry

Cooper Hewitt Guidelines For Image Description

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Guidelines for Describing

Video and Multimedia

Many institutions disseminate information through videos and multimedia experiences. It is important to make sure these materials are just as accessible as the rest of your website.

Transcripts and Captions

Similar all visual content on your website, you also have to describe auditory content from videos, sound clips, podcasts, or audio stops. There are a few ways to do this; depending on the media, you might choose one of these options:

Captioning is a written representation of any auditory content, displayed in real time. The ways in which captions are displayed vary slightly. **Open Captions** are fixed on the screen and cannot be turned off while **Closed Captions** can be toggled on or off. An example of closed captioning can be found on YouTube and is identified with the "CC" icon. It is generally preferable to use closed captioning on your videos to give individuals the choice of using that feature.

To read the entire caption key, please visit https://dcmp.org/learn/captioningkey.

Remember that although subtitles may seem like captions, they are actually not intended to represent auditory content in the same way. Subtitles function to translate the dialogue into language other than what was originally spoken. For more please see "Language Access."

Transcript is a written description of auditory content. A transcript typically lives on the same page as the source material so it is easy to locate. Unlike captions, a transcript can be read at the individual's leisure.

Sound description is a type of transcript, but for sounds other than spoken words. It is more general and more abstract than a transcript, which is intended to be an exact representation of the auditory content. For example, if you were to create a transcript for Pope L's work "Choir," where the sound is an intentional part of the work but there is no dialogue, the sound transcript would describe the sounds heard, such as "crashing waves," "traffic," and "car horns."

Captioning Resources

Audio description is the description of visual content in movies or other media. Like closed captions, you should be able to toggle the description on and off. Description is only heard in between dialogue and narration. Like image description, audio description should tailor the description to give the audience context without over-describing the visual content.

Quick Tips for Video and Multimedia

- Primarily focus on the actions that are happening. Remember that audio description is intended to provide context for what might be happening visually—if there is a visual that is crucial to understanding the video, it must be included in audio descriptions.
- Environmental description should be limited to when a scene transitions to a different location or when it is important to the actions happening.
- Likewise, descriptions of objects should also be limited by relevance. The same way we do not see everything all at once because our brains filter out irrelevant information, our descriptions will not name everything with the same amount of detail. If a room is described as "a dusty attic full of cardboard boxes," it may not be relevant to describe the size and shape of every box.
- What about aesthetics in audio-description? Sometimes the visual content **is** the story. For example, the visual decadence of Sofia Coppola's "Marie Antoinette" is important to the artistic direction of the movie, where the plot is somewhat secondary.
- There are as many ways to audio describe as there are people in the world. It is important to develop standards of description for your institution.

Audio Description Resources

American Council for the Blind Audio Description Project

Art Beyond Sight Writing Verbal Descriptions for Audio Guides

Language Access

When thinking about access, it is always important to think broadly. Who is a potential audience member, and who are we excluding? When prioritizing a dominant language in your multimedia, you inadvertently exclude people. It is impossible to include information in every language, but we recommend considering the following: What are the languages most spoken in my community or audience, and who could I better reach with increased points of access?

For example, you can rely on subtitles, but you might also want to consider making videos in multiple languages when possible.

This includes making videos in American Sign Language rather than asking people to rely on captions. There is a misconception that spoken and written English directly translate into American Sign Language; however, this is not quite the case. American Sign Language is a visual language and does not necessarily have a 1:1 translation.

Content

Inclusion is not just about ensuring someone can access a digital space, but also making sure that the content is appropriate and welcoming. In practical terms, this means having the cultural competency around language as it pertains to disability and accessibility. Organizations typically defer to using person-first language; however, since norms do change, be prepared to defer to anyone who prefers to be referenced with identity-first language.

Examples of person-first language include people with disabilities, people who are blind, people who are D/deaf, etc.…

The idea behind person-first language is to put the person first, not the disability. Examples of identity-first language include disabled woman, disabled artist, or the Deaf community.

Many people who identify with the cultural model of disability prefer identity-

first language and push back against the idea that a disabled person's personhood has to be reinforced.

Access Information

Many members of the disability community are used to encountering access barriers. Having an access page, even an imperfect one, broadcasts that your organization values the disability community and strives for a positive experience if they choose to visit. All access pages should include:

- What is accessible (automatically and without request);
- What additional accommodations may be requested;
- What significant access barriers might be present (example: second floor can only be accessed by stairs); and
- How to contact someone with questions or requests.

Example

Playwright Horizons

Language Access Resources

Stanford University's Disability Language Guide

Social Media

Many of our daily interactions are online now! Social media is a wonderful way to connect with an institution's audience. And, luckily, a lot of the skills that you have acquired to make your website accessible are the same ones that can guide your presence on social media. While most social media platforms will guide users in how to make your posts more accessible, here we feature three platforms.

How to Insert Alt Text

X/Twitter

- Select your image and click the "ALT" icon in the bottom right corner.
- Insert your image description into the alt text.

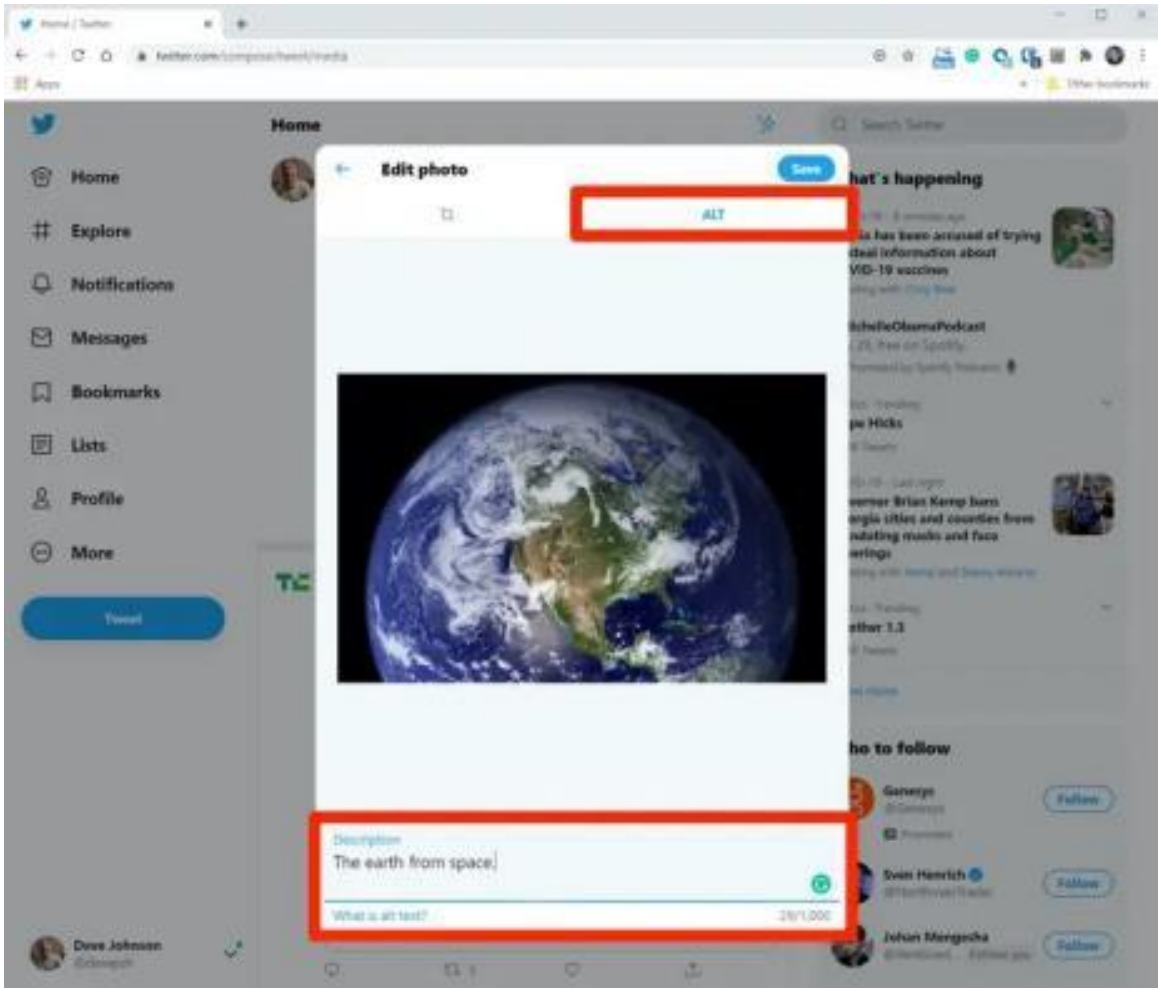

Image description: a screenshot of X/Twitter. The home page is visible but darkened in the background. The alt text box is brighter in the foreground. At the top of the box is the title "Edit photo" and a blue save button. Below that is a header that says "ALT," which has a red box around it for emphasis. Underneath, there is a photo of the earth from space. At the bottom is the "Description" box, which has the text "The earth from space" in it. There is also a link that says, "What is alt text?" and a word counter that reads "29/1,000." This bottom section also has a red box around it from emphasis.

Facebook

- Go to the post, then tap on the photo.
- Tap in the top right or tap and hold.
- Tap Edit alt text.
- You will see the automatically generated alt text in bold starting with “Image may contain:” Type your alt text in the box, then tap Save.

Image description: a screenshot of a Facebook menu. There is a back arrow at the top, followed by the options "Crop," "Rotate," "Tag photo," and "Alternative text." Each is paired with a small symbol. There is a red arrow pointing to the "Alternative text" option.

Instagram

- After selecting and editing your photo, you will hit Advanced Settings.
- Click “Accessibility, write alt text” and input your description.

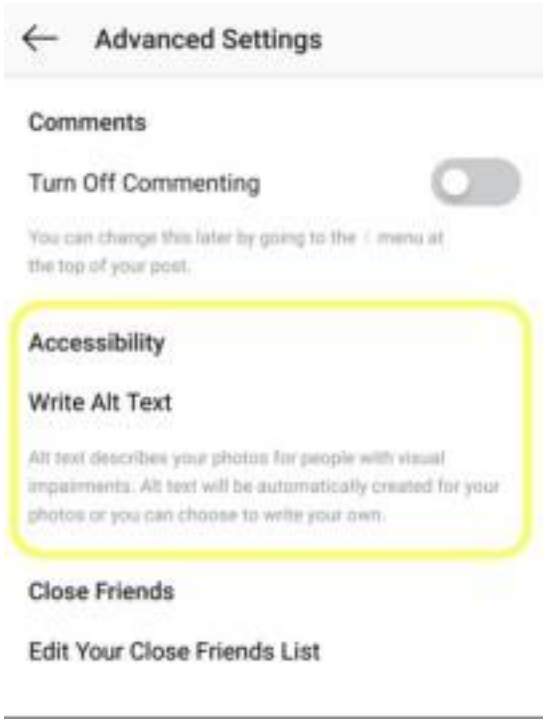

Image description: a screenshot of an Instagram menu. At the top is a back arrow and the title "Advanced Settings." The first section, titled "Comments," has the phrase "Turn Off Commenting" with a toggle switch, followed by the description "You can change this later by going to the ⋮ menu at the top of your post." The second section, titled "Accessibility," has a subheading "Write Alt Text" and the description "Alt text describes your photos for people with visual impairments. Alt text will be automatically created for your photos or you can choose to write your own." This section has a yellow box around it for emphasis. The final section is titled "Close Friends" and has the subtitle "Edit Your Close Friends List."

Quick Tips for Social Media

- Some platforms have auto-generated image descriptions; however, it is always best to write your own. Auto-generated descriptions are notoriously incomplete, and you want to put as much thought into your description as you do the rest of your post.
- If you would like to acknowledge that there is an image description in the post, consider using the hashtag #AltText so that people looking for described content can find you. It also might act as an educational moment for sighted users who are not familiar with the term.
- Filters are fun, but not all of them are accessible. Some might be dangerous for people who are sensitive to flash.
- If you use hashtags, remember to capitalize the first letter of every word, also known as using title case. This makes the content more readable, especially for screen readers. For example: #ArtistsForAccessibility, not #artistsforaccessibility. Hashtags are not case sensitive, so even if you are using an established hashtag that does not use title case, your use of the hashtag with title case will still show up in search results for the hashtag.
- If there is violent or graphic content, it is always best to give viewers a content warning so they may skip content that could trigger them.

Resources

American Alliance of Museums Accessible Communications Guidelines

Evaluation and Feedback

It is important to remember that there is no such thing as 100% accessible and no “one size fits all” strategy. We should all strive to be as inclusive as possible; however, everyone’s background and abilities will vary.

Make yourself available for communication and critique. Position current contact information clearly on your website. If someone has an issue, it is important for them to know whom to contact and have at least two ways of contacting the individual.

Typically, cultural institutions will have a generic “access” email, which is a very good start. It is ideal, however, to include contact information for specific needs. If there is a flaw in the web design, the feedback can go to the department needed to fix the problem.

Make it a priority to re-evaluate access on a routine basis by:

- Hiring individuals who already include access in their skillset;
- Regularly attending trainings to help acquire new skills;
- Attending access peer groups to keep up to date on best practices; and
- Most importantly, making connections with members of communities that you may not be reaching to get feedback as to why your organization is not accessible, inviting, or meeting their needs..

Relationship building is your biggest asset.

Glossary of Terms

ASL interpretation: American Sign Language, or ASL, is interpreting spoken English to sign for members of the D/deaf community.

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART): also called open captioning or real-time stenography or simply real-time captioning, CART is the general name of the system that stenographers and others use to convert speech to text in order to provide real-time captioning for any spoken content during a program.

Fidgets: a small, handheld object that a person can fiddle with to provide an outlet for restless energy and nervousness.

General access workers: individuals designated to assist all persons with disabilities.

Induction loop: also referred to as a hearing loop (HL) or an audio induction loop, this is a special type of sound system for use by people with hearing aids. The induction loop provides a magnetic, wireless signal that gets picked up by the hearing aid when it is set to the 'T' (Telecoil) setting. It is the only assistive listening technology that can broadcast directly to a wide range of hearing aids, making it the most popular option for accessible audio in public spaces.

Serif Fonts: decorative strokes on the ends of letterforms. Sans Serif fonts lack these decorations for a simpler, more accessible look.

Stanchions: an upright bar, post, or frame forming a support or barrier used to to create specific areas for queueing or to keep folks away from restricted areas.

Social stories: a clear written or visual guide, describing various social interactions, situations, behaviors, skills, or concepts. It should follow a logical sequence, providing information in a positive and simple manner using descriptive and directive sentences.

Tactile interpretation: interprets spoken language into tactile language for people who are deafblind.

Wayfinding: the process of orienting oneself in physical space and navigating from place to place. It involves planning and

decision-making that allows one to reach a destination that is not in the immediate sensory field.

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG): a set of guidelines created by the Accessibility Guidelines Working Group of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) as part of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) which is an international public-interest non-profit organization where member organizations, a full-time staff, and the public work together to develop Web standards that ensure the long-term growth of the Web, and work for the benefit of humanity. The guidelines cover a wide range of recommendations for making Web content more accessible to a wider range of people with disabilities, including accommodations for blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity, and combinations of these, as well as some accommodation for learning disabilities and cognitive limitations.