Accessible Conference Presentations
Debra Kimok debra.kimok@plattsburgh.edu

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The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act protects the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. This protection extends to public meetings, including conferences.

Much can be said about how to make a conference location accessible, but the advice in this document is limited to the accessibility of presentations at conferences, all of which can also apply to making other kinds of meetings accessible.

Accessibility is for Everyone

Much of what is advised here will benefit not only people with disabilities, but will allow everyone in attendance to better comprehend and enjoy the presentation.

Whenever possible, discuss in advance with people who have special needs about what kinds of accommodations are required and whether an interpreter is needed.

Some examples of accommodations:

Interpreter	Large print
Note taker	Braille
Assistive listening device	Presentation recording
Open captioning	Wheelchair access
Computer Disk, large format	

Choosing an Accessible Meeting Room

It is imperative to ensure that the room in which a session is taking place is accessible to people with disabilities.

The Space

- The room should be obstacle-free
    - Wheelchair users should be able to navigate through doors and aisles easily.

    - Protruding objects may not be easily detected by people with visual impairments.

- There should be adequate space for wheelchair users to sit with the rest of the audience, rather than being relegated to the back of the room or in the aisles.

- Seating for people with disabilities should not be close to air conditioners, heaters, hallways, or other noisy areas.

The Sound

- The room should have good acoustics.

- Background noise should be kept to a minimum.
    - Check to make sure that the room is not near noisy areas or that noisy construction or other event will be going on near the room during the presentation.

The Lighting

- The room should be well-lit and have adjustable lighting.
    - Darkness may make it difficult for a person with a hearing impairment to see the presenter.

    - Bright lights may create glare, making it difficult for a person with a visual impairment to see the overhead presentation.
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Presenting with Accessibility in Mind

Every effort should be made to work with presenters to ensure accessibility.

Presenters with disabilities should also be asked about their own special needs.

Creating the Presentation

The main points of presentations should be provided on overheads or slides.

These are some basic rules about PowerPoint accessibility, many of which are just good practices for interesting presentations:

- Use highly contrasting colors for text and background.

- Do not crowd the slides with text.
    - Use words and brief phrases in outline style and explain these more fully in the oral presentation.

    - A good amount of white space makes the text much easier to read and follow.

- Do not use animation of any kind.

- Make sure the font is large enough to read clearly from a distance (at least 18-pt).

Delivery of the Presentation

- It's good practice to ask at the beginning of a presentation whether everyone can clearly hear the presenter.
    - If not, a microphone should be used to deliver the presentation.
    - Be sure to speak into the microphone.

- Unless some part of the presentation requires otherwise, the presenter should remain in the front of the room.
    - This will accommodate people who need to read lips.

    - It will also accommodate people with mobility impairments, who may not be able to easily turn around to see the presenter.

- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.

- Make eye contact as much as possible, watching for signs of difficulty seeing, hearing, or understanding the presentation.
  - Allow attendees to interrupt anytime during the presentation to ask for clarification or for lighting or sound adjustments.

- Be specific about references made when referring to slides or overheads (e.g.: avoid vague references like "here" or "there").

- If scrolling through information on any overhead is required, do it slowly so that everyone can follow along.

- It's best to have a wireless microphone in the room so that people asking questions can be heard by everyone.
  - If no wireless microphone is available, before answering a question, the presenter should repeat it to the audience.

- People who are unable to raise their hands will have difficulty indicating that they wish to ask a question.
  - Make eye contact with as many people as possible to try to detect whether they would like to ask a question.

- Sessions should be recorded, with free copies of the recordings available to those who are unable to take notes during the presentation.
  - Alternatively, allow attendee recording of sessions.

Handouts

- Provide handouts of complete copies of the presentation, not just the slide outline, in advance of the start of the program.
  - Have an assistant available to make sure that late arrivals receive copies of the handouts.

- The handouts should be in large enough print for all to be able to read them easily (at least 12-pt. font is recommended).

- Highly contrasting colors should be used for the text and background colors used in handouts.
  - If needed, Braille alternatives should also be provided.

- Information should be provided about how attendees can access the presentation materials following the conference.

Making PowerPoint Presentations Accessible for the Web

Assistive technologies, like screen readers, can access PowerPoint presentations on the Web, but some adjustments must be made for particular issues.

Please contact Lisa Snider (lsnider@thesnidersweb.com) for more information about Web Accessibility. A few reference materials are also included in the Resources List below.

Resources

Accessibility Essentials 2: Authoring Accessible Documents. JISC Techdis, n.d. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/AccessibilityEssentials/2003/AE2/modules/authoring%20accessible%20docs/index.html

Arditi, Aries. *Effective Color Contrast: Designing for People with Partial Sight and Color Deficiencies*. Lighthouse International, 2011. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. http://www.lighthouse.org/accessibility/design/accessible-print-design/effective-color-contrast

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. The Council for Exceptional Children. *Planning Accessible Conferences and Meetings: An ERIC/OSEP Information Brief for Conference Planners*. ED369242. ERIC Education Resources Information Center, Oct. 2000. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED369242.pdf

"Microsoft PowerPoint Universally Designed." *The Access Project*. Colorado State University, n.d. Web 1 Aug. 2011. http://accessproject.colostate.edu/udl/modules/powerpoint/mod_ppt.cfm

Making Presentations Accessible to People with Disabilities: Guidelines for Presiders, Presenters, and Discussants. Population Association of America, March 2004. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. http://paa2004.princeton.edu/AccessibilityGuidelines.pdf

Paradi, Dave. *Color Contrast Calculator*. Think Outside the Slide, n.d. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. http://www.thinkoutsidetheslide.com/colorcontrast.htm

Presentation Tips and Information: Presenting to People with Disabilities. American Educational Research Association, 10 Jan. 2005. Web. 20 Aug. 2011. http://www.aera.net/meetings/Default.aspx?menu_id=22&id=490

"Tutorial for Creating Accessible PowerPoint Presentations." *Web Accessibility for All.* The Center on Education and Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 8 Oct. 2002. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. http://www.cew.wisc.edu/accessibility/tutorials/pptmain.htm
Includes a section on creating accessible PowerPoint presentations for the Web.

WAVE: Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool. Web Accessibility in Mind, 2011. Web. 1 Aug. 2011. http://wave.webaim.org/