

# Accessibility Guidelines for AIC Online Events and Presentations

The following guidelines are meant to make presentations and conference sessions more accessible to attendees with a focus towards those with disabilities. They are also intended to help avoid some common pitfalls of online presentations. This makes the presentations and sessions more inclusive of all members including participants with different learning styles and non-native English speakers.

Online presentations can pose particular issues for those who are hard-of-hearing, deaf, or have low visual acuity as well as those with slower internet connections.

Keep in mind disabilities may not always be visible or obvious. It is also important to recognize that some issues of accessibility for speakers, moderators, and attendees may conflict or may not happen as outlined below. We encourage everyone to continue to learn and work to make their presentations more inclusive and accessible. Resources and further reading are included at the end of the document.

## General:

- **Face the audience/ camera and do not obscure your mouth.**  
This is not always possible due to masks, but it is still important when possible for those who use speech reading techniques.
- **Speak clearly and use simple language. Try to avoid idioms, unnecessary jargon, and undefined acronyms.**  
Idioms can be particularly difficult for those with cognitive disabilities to interpret and may be taken literally. Additionally, they are often geographically specific, making them less comprehensible outside that region.
- **Provide trigger warnings for sensitive material and topics.**  
Sensitive topics might include human remains, excavation of burial materials, or photographs of specific groups or with sensitive or violent imagery.
- **Use gender neutral language when possible and appropriate.**  
The use of gendered pronouns (his or her) can exclude those who identify in other ways. "They" is increasingly acceptable for both plural and singular gender-neutral pronouns.
- **F/AIC now provides live automated Closed Captioning (CC) for online workshops and events.**  
Speakers are still encouraged to send slides or other notes in advance to help those who are hard-of-hearing or deaf to follow along; update materials if you make changes. CC can be activated in the menu bar along the bottom of the screen in Zoom Webinar.
- **Test all technology BEFORE the meeting.**  
This includes camera and video functions, Wi-Fi, and screen sharing if you plan on using these. Hosts and all participants should also know how to mute microphones.

If possible, offer a session to test that all technology works beforehand.

- **Only one speaker at a time and take pauses between speakers.**  
Don't interrupt other people when they're speaking or attempt to speak over them. Interrupting speakers is difficult for all participants to understand and especially problematic for those using speech-to-text software.  
Most online formats do not support multiple speakers at a time.  
Pausing between speakers allows people and software to catch up (such as those using text-to-speech, with slow bandwidth, or taking notes).
- **Minimize background noise and notifications.**  
Find a quiet place to host or call into your webinar. If you can't find a quiet environment, use a headset with a microphone to help reduce background noise.  
Turn off all notifications on cell phones, messaging apps, and mail clients. Setting your status to "do not disturb" can help reduce interruptions.
- **State your name each time you speak.**  
This allows anyone using an interpreter or listening only to voices to know who is speaking.

## Presenters:

- **Use sufficient color contrast for visuals.**  
Avoid busy backgrounds and lots of pattern. Be mindful of how colors appear to those who are colorblind, especially red/green and blue/green.
- **Use an easy to read font.**  
Sans-serif fonts, such as Arial, Verdana, Helvetica can be easier to read  
Avoid complicated and fancy fonts.  
Italics and underlining can reduce legibility of text. Use them sparingly or not at all.
- **Maintain large font sizes for titles, bullet points, and other important text.**  
Font size should be kept above 18 pt. Headers should be between 36 – 44 pt.  
The appearance of a font's size can vary greatly by typeface.
- **Provide minimal text on each slide.**  
Try to stick to only a few points or bullets.  
Less than 6 lines of text in a block is recommended.
- **Keep text away from edges and bottoms of slides.**  
Text near edges and bottoms of slides can be harder to read on small screens, can be obscured by CC, and is more likely to be cut off.
- **Do not use color of text as the only means of differentiating information.**
- **Have a clear presentation title.**  
Providing these will help participants follow along and set-up the proper expectation for a presentation.

- **Use slide templates.**  
Templates provide a hierarchy to the information on a slide so that screen readers can read the elements of a slide in the intended order. Templates also make it easier for slides to be turned into outlines. Inserted text boxes can be read out of order by screen readers and should be used judiciously.
- **Incorporate audio description and alternative text of important images, graphs, and charts on your slides; videos should be closed captioned.**  
For example: “After aging, all samples showed increased yellowing and darkening.” vs. “As you can see, the samples didn’t age well.”  
Alternative text (Alt text) is used by text-to-speech software to describe an image.
- **Read out or describe content of slides.**  
Those with low visual acuity or Visually Impaired People (VIPs) may find the smaller format of individual screens more difficult if their standard text reader cannot be used.
- **Avoid flashing lights or quickly changing graphics.**  
Flashing lights can cause issues for those with chronic migraines or epilepsy, along with others. If these need to be used, provide a warning to the audience at the beginning of the presentation then again right before they appear.
- **Use Microsoft Accessibility Checker.**  
Microsoft PowerPoint has a built-in Accessibility Checker that can identify issues for screen readers and other Assistive Technologies. It is a good check for presentations that will be distributed in other formats but should not be relied on solely to check for accessibility of presentations.
- **Be mindful of clothing, accessory choices, and the environment.**  
If you’ll be on video, solid color clothing (instead of patterned) is less distracting. Be mindful of any accessories or jewelry if you are expressive with your hands. The noise and movement can be distracting and interfere with audio for participants. The positioning of light and certain virtual backgrounds make speech reading techniques difficult (e.g. backlit speakers, glares from the sun, and low light settings).
- **Wait to share your screen until you are ready to start presenting.**  
Sharing your screen before the presentation starts can mean that people who use speech reading techniques can’t see participants and speakers.

## Moderators/Hosts:

### Before Sessions:

- **Know the call-in option for people without webcams or microphones.**
- **Hardwire your internet connection, if possible.**  
Hardwired connections can help alleviate issues with an unstable Wi-Fi connection, which can affect your audio quality, make sound drop out, and render the use of speech-to-text programs difficult.

- **Explain expectations for meeting participants and event attendees.**  
Information might include how everyone can participate, how to contribute, and any roles that need to be assigned. A code of conduct can be introduced if you anticipate issues around some of these conventions.

## **During Sessions:**

- **Greet/Introduce all participants or speakers.**  
Sign in to the event 5-10 minutes early to allow attendees to join before the content begins. This can also give some time for those with technical issues to resolve them. Specify your gender pronouns when doing introductions and/or add gender pronouns to your name as it appears on the screen. Ask participants their pronouns before you introduce them, do not assume. Practice names before the session begins.
- **Mute participants for presentations.**  
Muting participants ensures the speaker is always the focus of the presentation and their video feed remains prominent.
- **Inform participants of how to turn on the provided Closed Captioning (CC).**  
CC will need to be turned on by individual participants if they wish to use it.
- **If a sign language interpreter is present, make sure they remain visible at all times.**  
Ask presenters to allow extra time for inspection of visuals after they are done speaking. People using interpreters cannot examine slides while they are watching the interpreter. Incorporate pauses into discussion and between topics to allow people to catch up (such as those using text-to-speech, with slow bandwidth, or taking notes).
- **Encourage engagement in meetings and presentations.**  
Ask participants to submit questions and comments; multiple people have the same one. The online venue is a good opportunity to provide immediate answers. Be prepared to ask questions of the speakers to start Q&A sections. The “raise your hand” feature in Zoom can allow people to be equally recognized and contribute. All conferencing programs have a similar feature.

## **After Sessions:**

- **Request feedback after the event.**  
This will allow participants who experienced issues to let you know so they can be addressed in the future.
- **Clarify what will come out of the event.**  
Let participants know if there will be follow up, minutes, or a recording to be shared.

## **Resources and further reading:**

[British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia friendly style guide](#)

[Web Accessibility In Mind, Contrast Checker](#)

[Coblis — Color Blindness Simulator](#)

[Web Accessibility in Mind, PowerPoint Accessibility](#)

[Special Interest Group on Accessible Computing, Accessible Presentation Guide](#)

[Microsoft Office, Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities](#)

[Web Accessibility Initiative, How to Make Your Presentations Accessible to All](#)

[Purdue University Online Writing Lab, Using Gender-Neutral and Gender-Inclusive Language](#)

[Best Practices for Hosting a Digital Event](#)

[7 Best Practices for COVID-19-Necessitated Online Meetings | Learning Innovation](#)

[University of Washington, Hosting accessible online meetings | Accessible Technology](#)

[Accessibility in Video Conferencing and Remote Meetings](#)

[Guide to making your online events accessible for autistic people](#)

[American Foundation for the Blind – 5 Accessibility Actions You Can Take When You're Moving Your Conference or Classes Online](#)

This resource has been compiled from multiple resources and edited to fit the needs of the AIC community. EIC would like to acknowledge the help of Sarah Reidell, Suzanne Davis, Rebecca Kaczowski, and Sally G. Kim who shared resources, provided guidance, and/or reviewed the document.