**Top 11 DARN Accessibility Recommendations for Conferences**

****DARN is the [Disability Advocacy & Research Network](https://darndisability.org/), founded in 2021 with the support of a Community Catalyst Grant from SPSP. About 25% of US adults have a disability. With 460 members, we are your colleagues, your students, your mentors, and we could be you.

Dear Conference Organizers and Speakers:

Like you, we have traveled far, spending a great deal of time, money and energy to attend conference programming with the goal of informing our research and teaching. **Each of the following issues has been identified by DARN members as an accessibility concern at previous conferences, and most represent chronic concerns.** Some of our recommendations may seem obvious (use the mic, avoid tiny type), but trust us, disregard is common. Others highlight access issues you may not have considered, such as providing accessible seating, preserving scheduled breaks, and using chats or other online activities.

**Here's our list of the Top 11 ways to be DARN friendly.**

1. **Use the mic!** Don't ask if people can hear you without it – how will people who can't hear respond?

(And why should they have to identify themselves to the audience?)

2. **Repeat the question**. Repeat or paraphrase each question if audience members are not using a mic.

3. **Add automatic captions**.

* Live presentations: [Microsoft Present with real time automatic captions or subtitles in PowerPoint](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/present-with-real-time-automatic-captions-or-subtitles-in-powerpoint-68d20e49-aec3-456a-939d-34a79e8ddd5f?ns=POWERPNT&version=90)
* Zoom: <https://support.zoom.com/hc/en/article?id=zm_kb&sysparm_article=KB0059762>

4. **Use accessible font and formatting.** The following additional suggestions are important not only to promote access for the live audience but also for those using screen readers to review posted slides.

* People often say, "Well, you can all see this, so let's move on.” **This is ableism.** A better approach would be to describe what you want your audience to glean from your tables, figures, cartoons or videos.
* Aim to use 32-point font and never use font smaller than 18-points on your slides.
* Avoid cutting and pasting tables and graphs from journal articles with tiny font.
* APA recommends “sans serif” fonts such as Arial or Calibri, no more than six lines of text per slide, and ample white space between lines of text.
* Avoid using all capital letters (“ALL CAPS”) and excessive italics or underlines (screen readers have trouble when there are multiple ways in which a word is emphasized – for example, underlining, bold *and* italic).
* Don’t use blue text and underlining for anything other than hyperlinks.
* Reduce the use of flying-in objects on PPT slides (and gif images that contain constant movement).
* Embedded videos should be subtitled.
* See <https://convention.apa.org/presenters/accessibility> for more suggestions (high-contrast color schemes, how to check your slides for accessibility in PowerPoint).

5. **Post materials ahead of time**. Advance posting of slides and other materials allows people who work with screen readers to access your presentation. The availability of this material (even if posted after the meeting) will help everyone by reducing the attentional and physical demands of taking notes on your complex findings.

6. **Establish accessible seating for presentations, breaks, meals, and social hours**

Set aside reserved disability seating at front (access for vision and hearing) and at either central or exterior sides to increase access for mobility devices. (Please see attached card.)

Do not sit in reserved disability seating because it appears unused.

Consider also moving a few chairs away from the tables at these reserved locations to ease entry.

At meals, breaks, and social hours, set aside some seats and tables that allow people to sit down and safely handle their food or coffee cups.

7. **Avoid bizarre, unexpected requests of the audience.** When planning how you will engage your audience, ask yourself, “Who might experience a barrier to this?” Don't ask people to get up and exercise with you or engage in other activities people are not expecting in this forum and that assume mobility, energy, role-playing or other abilities. Such requests alienate and "out" people who cannot participate. Instead, plan audience engagement strategies that minimize barriers to participation, eliminate pressure to self-disclose, and maximize accessibility.

8. **Preserve breaks and stick to the schedule.** People need scheduled breaks for reasons you may not be aware of, like taking medication, traveling between sessions using mobility devices, childcare, lactation, caring for their mental health, and checking in with loved ones.

Plan your talk for a few minutes less than the time that you are allotted.

Don't take away scheduled breaks to make up for lost time when talks run late, whatever the reason.

If things are running late, give people a break at the scheduled time to excuse themselves and then continue after that break. Even better, record or transcribe late sessions so people who cannot return have access to the full scheduled program.

9. **Avoid early morning start times.** Folks who have complex or lengthy medical regimens or other disability-related needs at the start of the day cannot just pop out of bed and run to a 7 AM presentation. Transportation and other services may also not be available or predictable at that hour.

10. **"Here, just fill this out!"** In designing interactive elements of your talk, **avoid asking the audience to download new apps on their phones or complete lengthy data requests on the fly** – many of us work with voice recognition and/or screen readers and cannot participate in these activities without specialized equipment that we aren't carrying with us or whose use would disturb others. Similarly, instead of handing out a paper survey, make conference evaluation materials available online in advance or after the meeting so that people using adaptive equipment have an opportunity to complete them.

11. **"Just put it in the chat!"** There may be many good reasons to have an online question interface (anonymity, upvoting of comments, reduced notetaking burden for discussants), but this option excludes people with disabilities that affect typing and vision. Our recommendation in such cases is to offer multiple participation options – by voice or by online interface.

On behalf of the 460 members of DARN, thank you for reading this guide. Membership is free and open to all members of our community, including allies. Visit us at <https://darndisability.org/>

BTW, this guide was created with voice recognition software.

Please send suggestions for revision or addition to [lisa.aspinwall@utah.edu](mailto:lisa.aspinwall@utah.edu).

“Six Methods of Microphone Avoidance: Or, What Not to Say When Someone Asks You to Use a Mic" is a comic collaboratively conceived, designed, and illustrated by Margaret Price and Amanda J. Hedrick.

 

DESCRIPTION. The comic is a circle with six wedge-shaped panels. In panel 1, a bearded person wearing glasses says, “I don’t see anyone deaf here” while audience members respond, “That’s … not how it works.” In panel 2, a person with curly hair wearing a dress says, “The cord doesn’t reach!” In panel 3, a tall person with broad shoulders says, “I was raised in a military family. I’ve got a loud voice.” In panel 4, a speaker says, “A little phallic for my taste” while an audience member says in frustration, “Oh good–jokes.” In panel 5, a balding person wearing a tie says, “Thanks, but I’m trying to quit! Ha ha!” In panel 6, a long-haired person at a podium says, “You can all hear me, right?” while audience members say to one another, “What’d they say?” and “Did you catch that?”

 

CONTEXT. This comic was published on the site "Composing Access" (u.osu.edu/composingaccess) on January 11, 2020. Accompanying text from Composing Access reads as follows: "This comic demonstrates with humor the many reasons why people might try to avoid using microphones, and the reasons why microphones are important. Even those of us who have been 'taught to project' may not realize how our voices come across; for example, if some of your audience members are using hearing aids, it’s likely that your projected vowels will blast into their ears, while your consonants will be almost indistinguishable. Check out Jessie B. Ramey’s essay 'A Note From Your Colleagues With Hearing Loss' (www.chronicle.com/article/A-Note-From-Your-Colleagues/245916) for more on this topic and a list of best practices."

 

INVITATION. Please visit Composing Access (u.osu.edu/composingaccess) and join us in our work to help make events more accessible and comfortable for everyone! The site is run on 100% volunteer effort, and we warmly welcome the contribution of materials to add to the site.

For more info, including accessible description of the above cartoon and other resources: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15199294@N02/49367973533>

<https://u.osu.edu/composingaccess/>



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(Disability Advocacy and Research Network)?

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A QR code with a dinosaur that links to the DARN homepage.




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