MTS ACCESSIBILITY BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

OVERVIEW

This guide is intended to serve as a resource for creating accessible online content and hosting accessible virtual and in-person events. Ensuring events and content are accessible makes it easier for everyone, especially people in the disability community, to participate in events and interact with content. COVID-19 has affected all of us, including subsets of the disability community to a greater extent, and it is essential that we center equity and inclusion in our work. Accessibility benefits everyone and helps to bring our entire community together to end this pandemic.

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SOCIAL MEDIA

Cross-Platform Best Practices

Alternative Text/Description of images or GIFs

Each platform has different processes for alternative (alt) text but writing good alt text applies across platforms. Please use **this** resource about alt text as a guide for writing effective and disability-friendly alternative text.

Hashtags

Always write hashtags in CamelCase - capitalizing each word in the hashtag. This makes them accessible to people with visual processing disorders and those who use screen readers. Hashtags should always read like this: "**#WeCanDoThis**" instead of this: "#wecandothis" or this: "#WecandoThis". Avoid excessive hashtagging, and place hashtags at the end of posts when possible.

Captions

Each platform has its own processes and resources available for captioning, which are outlined below. For auto-captioning software, it is important to keep in mind that while the software has improved in the last few years, numerous typos and incorrect words are likely to be in the captions. Best practice is to *always* double-check the accuracy of your captions before posting.

Language

Avoid ableist language, including references to mobility (i.e. encouraging people to "stand" or "hear", etc.) and comparisons of illness to bad behavior (i.e. referring to anti-vaxxers as "sick"). **Here** is a helpful article. Refrain from exploiting or utilizing trauma for your messaging. These include stories that include disabled people but strip them of their autonomy, frame negative and/or traumatic events as inspirational, and/or center these events to a degree that is not for the subject's benefit.

Use proper punctuation and capitalization. DoNt TyPe liKe thiS or write long run-on sentences. When you write run-on sentences without punctuation or capitalization, your content becomes difficult to read for many internet users and inaccessible to anyone who relies on visual aids or technology, or who has a visual processing disorder. Use **plain language** when possible.

Emojis

Limit emoji use in posts, and **refrain from using them to replace words**. Many emojis have different "definitions" than you may realize, and screen readers "read" those tweets according to said definition. For example, "📲" is used as a texting substitute often, but its Twitter definition is "mobile phone with rightwards arrow at left"

Fonts

Never use fancy/alternative fonts in posts. These are completely inaccessible to those with visual processing disorders and people who use screen readers. An example of how tweets with these fonts are "read" by screen readers can be found **here**.

Links/URLs

Use short links whenever possible/appropriate. Not only are long links ugly, but they are also harder for screen readers. If your organization does not have access to custom-name services such as **Rebrandly**, you can use free services such as **bit.ly** or **tinyurl.com**.

Facebook

Facebook has a comprehensive guide to its accessibility resources and features that can be found **here**. Basic best practices are to **caption videos** (either via Facebook's guidelines or a **third-party app**), **customize the**

auto-generated alternative text, and use proper punctuation and grammar in text-based posts.

Facebook allows you to edit and/or add alternative text **after** a post has been published.

Twitter

Alternative Text:

Information about using alternative text on Twitter can be found **here**. Alt text can be used on images (photos or graphics) and GIFs. Twitter does **not** let you edit or add alternative text after a tweet has been posted.

For videos (or tweets where alternative text was not added before posting), you can manually add "video/image descriptions" in the tweet itself or in a reply tweet.

Captions

Unfortunately, there is no built-in Twitter feature to add captions to videos. Consider manually adding captions via a **third-party app**.

Tweet Formatting

Many popular tweet formats and memes are inaccessible to those using screen readers. If a tweet relies on a visual/layout component to be understood, it will not be decipherable to those who are visually impaired. Always be cognizant of tweets that rely on these formats and use them sparingly. Below are examples of inaccessibly-formatted tweets.
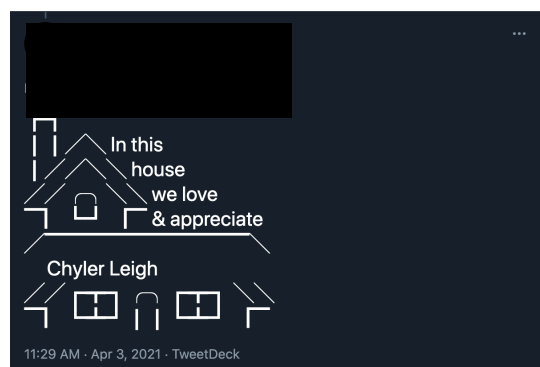
Instagram

Alternative Text

Information about using alternative text on Instagram can be found **here**. This feature is available for regular posts (in-feed) but does not work on videos or animated posts. Instagram allows you to edit and/or add alternative text **after** a post has been published.

For videos, you can manually add "video descriptions" to the caption of your post to make up for the lack of alternative text. You can do this in the captions of photos as well in addition to adding alt text to the image itself.

Captions

Unfortunately, Instagram does not offer an in-app option for captioning regular posts. Consider using a **third-party app** for these. However, Instagram has rolled out auto-captioning for IGTV, Reels, and Instagram stories. Information about and instructions for how to access this feature can be found **here**.

Instagram Stories/Lives

Verbalize visual details in videos - say who you are, who is with/joining you, where you are, what's going on, etc. to assist visually impaired followers. Avoid flashing lights, and give your viewers a flash warning (either earlier in the video, in the caption, and/or on a prior story 'slide') if you must include flashing visuals.

YouTube

You can manage your YouTube accessibility settings **here**.

Captions

YouTube has a built-in caption/subtitle feature that is completely free and editable. This **article** has a comprehensive explanation of how to utilize this

feature. As mentioned in the article, another way to improve accessibility is to add the transcription into the video description.

Warnings/Triggers

Avoid using flashing lights and other visual triggers when possible. When not possible, provide ample warning (both visual and auditory) so that individuals can pause, exit out of, and/or skip that part of the video.

Snapchat

Snapchat is, unfortunately, a largely inaccessible app. There are very limited built-in features to encourage accessibility. However, the app is reportedly working on some accessibility features, such as auto-captioning, which will hopefully be available in the near future.

Captions

To make snaps more accessible, add captions to videos to provide context. Avoid using specialty fonts and stick to the following options:

> **Classic**
> **Big Text**
> **Label**
> **Serif**

Avoid using colors in the text and stick to black or white when possible. If using text on a noisy/busy background, utilize one of the options that include text on a built-in black or white background (classic, label, and serif).

Other Resources

As with other video platforms, avoid visual triggers, and provide warnings if necessary. Include auditory cues in videos - say who you are, who is with/joining you, where you are, what's going on, etc. to assist visually impaired followers.

TikTok

You can find more information about TikTok's accessibility settings and how to manage them **here**.

Captions

TikTok has an auto-caption feature that allows you to automatically transcribe subtitles. This setting can be managed after a video is created/uploaded into the app, and is currently available in English and Japanese. More information about this feature can be found **here**.

Text-to-Speech

TikTok also has a text-to-speech feature that converts typed text into a computer-generated voiceover. This combined visual + accessible auditory representation of a video's content makes TikToks much more accessible.

Photosensitivity Features

TikTok also allows users to opt out of viewing videos with potentially triggering visual effects from its accessibility menu (**Settings and privacy › accessibility**). Other accessibility features, such as disabling animated thumbnails, can be managed from the same page.

CAPTIONING RESOURCES

There are many ways to go about adding captions to videos and your options will vary depending on access to technology, budget, skill, time, and personal preferences. Please note that these are just **a few of the many different options available** and that captions/subtitles are better than nothing, regardless of what software you use to create them.

Adobe Premiere Rush and Pro are great resources for those who are consistently creating professional or semi-professional videos and want to

have larger creative control over the appearance of the captions. However, adding captions in Adobe Premiere is time-intensive and requires familiarity with the technology. Adobe Rush is recommended for beginners, as it is a cheaper program with a more intuitive interface; however, it has fewer available options and neither is free.

Amara is a website that allows users to manually add captions to videos. Amara offers both a free and paid version, with varying levels of access and privacy depending on the plan you choose. This is a great option for organizations on a budget and those with minimal video editing experience. However, because Amara does not automatically generate subtitles for you, this may not be a good option for those who are short on time or need more privacy than the free version allows. You can find a short demo of Amara's subtitling process and guidelines **here**.

MixCaptions is an app that automatically transcribes captions for videos, and allows you to edit captions after they've been automatically generated. Your first video (up to 3 minutes) is free, but you must pay for every video after that. MixCaptions transcribes captions in 23 different languages and offers a variety of customizations on its subscription plan. This is a great option for those who are short on time (and prefer automatic transcriptions) and those who are primarily creating content for social media.

YouTube has a captioning feature that can be used as a free workaround to paid services. The best way to do this is to upload the video as private and use the "Auto-sync" feature to sync your transcript to the timings in the video. Once you're done, you can go back and fix any sync issues and export the captions. You will need to type the captions in manually, and have limited control over their appearance, but this is a free workaround for those on a budget! Unfortunately, it is not available for languages other than English.

Instagram also has a similar automatic workaround for those looking to quickly and freely caption vertical videos. Simply upload your video as an Instagram story, click the sticker icon from the top menu, and select "captions". From there, you can edit the captions and adjust the text style, color, and placement. The stylization is limited, but this is a free and easy workaround for vertical videos primarily intended for social media!

EVENT RESOURCES

Prior to events, always make your attendees and volunteers aware of the accessibility resources you will be providing. Don't simply say that an event is "accessible" - let them know whether there will be captions, an ASL interpreter, both, etc. If possible, provide attendees with a point of contact to communicate with **ahead of the event** for accessibility requests and questions. It is best practice to put a spot in the registration form for attendees to request specific accommodations. When providing accommodations, **confirm with attendees ahead of time**.

It is very important to note that **ASL and captioning are not substitutes for each other** - they are both important accessibility tools, but the groups of individuals that they assist are not the same. Not every deaf or hard of hearing (HoH) individual uses sign language, nor is it always possible for individuals to rely on reading captions at events.

Virtual Event Best Practices

1. Have every speaker introduce themselves at the beginning of their part of the presentation with their name, title, and pronouns. When switching between speakers, always reintroduce yourself with your name (or have the speaker before you introduce the next speaker).
   a. Ask all participants to introduce themselves before participating in Q&A or other interactive sessions

2. Describe visual components of slides/presentation materials (i.e. images, graphs, charts, etc.). Always verbalize questions, transitions, reactions, etc.
    a. For example: if asking participants to engage in an activity for 5 minutes, don't simply put a timer on the screen and then move on. Say out loud how long there is, give people an auditory warning when time is running out, and let them know again when it is time to move on
3. Create a distraction-free auditory environment. Speak slowly and clearly, and have participants mute themselves when they are not speaking. Be prepared to mute attendees when necessary.
4. Save transcriptions of all captioned events and make them available to attendees afterward.
    a. Here are some **best practices for live-captioning events**.
5. Record events whenever possible, and make the recordings available to attendees.
6. Avoid using the chat box for conversations when possible, as most screen readers are not able to access the chat box. If there is important information shared in the chat box, also share this information via other means, either verbally, over email, or both.

Zoom

You can find a general overview of all of Zoom's accessibility features **here**.

Captions

Zoom offers multiple options for captioning an event. To access these options, log in to Zoom, and go to **"Settings"** on the left sidebar. Scroll down to **"In Meeting (Advanced)"**, and enable **"Closed Captioning"**. You can find out more about closed captions and live transcripts on Zoom **here**.

Once in a meeting, you will have several options for how to caption your event. Please note that **manual live captioning** is *always* better than **auto-captioning**, but it is more time-intensive. Zoom will give you the option to enable captions manually, through a 3rd party CC service, or enable auto-transcription. **Here is a quick guide** for integrating Otter.ai into Zoom.

Sign Language/Interpreters

In addition to captioning events, providing ASL services via an interpreter will allow your events to be accessed by a wider variety of individuals. If providing interpretation services, please make attendees aware of this ahead of time, and always pin the interpreter's Zoom square so that attendees can easily find and utilize the service. Always rename the interpreter's square to say "**ASL Interpreter**" so they can easily be found by attendees.

You can typically book ASL interpreters through your state's Deaf and Hard of Hearing agency.

Google Hangouts

You can find a general overview of all of Google Hangouts' accessibility features **here**.

Captions

Google Hangouts offers an auto-captioning service using Google's speech-to-text API key. Enabling captions is user-specific and cannot be activated for an entire meeting or other participants. Once in a meeting, it can be activated by clicking on the "CC" square in the meeting controls panel at the bottom of the screen.

Because this cannot be activated on a meeting-wide basis, please provide information for participants about how to utilize this function ahead of time.

Microsoft Teams

You can find a general overview of all of Microsoft Teams' accessibility features **here**.

Captions

You can activate captions in Microsoft Teams (with speaker attribution in its newest version) by going to your meeting controls and selecting More options > Turn on live captions. You can find more information about captions in Microsoft Teams **here**.

Mobilize America

Accessibility Features

When creating an event in Mobilize America, there is the option to mark whether an event meets ADA standards. Mobilize has recently added a feature that allows you to select which accessibility features are available at a given event. Please check **only** the features that you are 100% sure will be available, but provide as much information as possible. You can also provide more details in the text box provided.

Accessibility

☑ This event meets ADA standards
Shown on the event page if checked. Helps supporters discover accessible events.

Accessibility features
Let supporters know which accomodations are available to help them take part in this event. Learn more

☐ Accessible restrooms   ☐ Dedicated parking spots
☐ Mainly flat ground   ☐ Wheelchair ramp
☐ No stairs or steps   ☐ Wide doorways and walkways
☐ Dedicated seating   ☑ Live captioning
☐ Audio descriptions for video ☐ ASL interpretation
☐ Spanish interpretation   ☐ COVID-19 safety protocols

Additional accessibility details (optional)

Other information explaining accessibility accommodations for this event

In-Person Events

Location Accessibility

When hosting in-person events, attempt to choose accessible venues whenever possible. Please note that accessibility constitutes a multitude of features, including elevators/stairs, parking, hallway and door width, even/paved ground, seating availability, restroom accessibility, and more. Consider accessible transportations to and from the space, and know accessible emergency routes in advance.

Though reading through this in its entirety is not necessary, you can find the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design **here**.

Accessible Resources

When hosting events, you may need to prepare and provide several forms of materials to ensure overall accessibility. These include but are not limited to:

1. **Multilingual Materials** - particularly in communities where there are several dominant languages
2. **Text-Only Materials** - these are key for individuals who rely on screen-readers and other virtual processing software for reading. Many of these technologies cannot read documents (whether printed or virtual PNGs, PDFs, etc.) that contain both images and text.
3. **Braille Materials** - please note that these typically have processing times of 2-6 weeks
4. **Color-Sensitive Materials** - materials created using accessible color schemes for those with visual-processing disorders including color-blindness.

Please note that you likely do not need all of these for every event, and some may be generally difficult to produce (i.e. Braille). However, it is best practice to keep in mind the community you are serving and create accessible options for those who cannot take advantage of some of your resources.

Training Resources

General Best Practices

1. Use Sans Serif fonts such as Arial, Calibri Century Gothic, Helvetica, Tahoma, and Verdana
   a. Stick to one font when possible
2. Use plain, everyday language and always define new terms and acronyms

3. Avoid run-on bullet points and sentences
4. Use large font sizes (24pt and larger for slide decks, 12-14 pt and larger for documents)
5. Avoid using an excess of font and background colors and stick to accessible color schemes. You can find great resources for creating accessible color palettes and testing contrast **here** and **here**.
6. Flexibility is key - let your participants know that adjustments can be made if necessary (i.e. adjusting the boldness of a font, changing colors, etc.) and create an open line of communication with volunteers.

Slide Decks

Add alt text to important graphs, graphics, GIFs, and other images. When possible, also create accessible, text-only versions of slide decks to be shared with individuals who use screen readers. This means no: emojis, GIFs, images, or videos. Utilize slide numbers and unique slide titles when possible so that people can easily follow along.

Documents

When possible, create accessible, text-only versions of documents to be shared with individuals who use screen readers. This means no: emojis, GIFs, images, or videos. Utilize page numbers and built-in document headings when possible so that people can easily follow along.

Convert all text to black text on a white background.

Other Resources

The general guidelines outlined above apply to all other resources - i.e. spreadsheets, Google forms, etc. Some formats may be less accessible than others - if you are ever unsure, default to formats such as Google docs, PNGs, PDFs, etc.

This guide from the American Association on Health and Disability includes some specialist-approved checklists for making a variety of resources accessible, as well as some helpful tips to keep in mind.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS