

# Conference Accessibility Guide

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## Introduction

The OWCA is committed to centering accessibility and disability in our yearly virtual conference and our organization more broadly. We understand that accessibility is a shared responsibility among those planning the conference, those proposing to present, and those planning to attend. This guide offers common accessibility practices for virtual conference presentations.

Readers should note that accessibility is an ongoing process. We must always be reflecting on how we can make our work more accessible and considering the accessibility of new and updated technology.

This guide, too, is an ongoing document that will be revised each year as we expand and revise our understanding of accessibility. If you have suggestions for this guide, or would like to be involved in revising this guide next year, please email the OWCA Accessibility Committee at [access@onlinewritingcenters.org](mailto:access@onlinewritingcenters.org).

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## How to Use This Document

Conference participants should use this document to determine what accessibility options will be available, how to request accommodations, and how to begin designing accessible presentations.

This document can be used alongside other resources and examples on the [OWCA Accessibility Resources page](https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/conference/accessibility/).

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## Accommodations

During the conference, the OWCA will provide the following:

* American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters in all synchronous sessions
* Recordings of all synchronous sessions and their ASL interpretation
* Edited closed captions for all asynchronous and synchronous video recordings

If you plan to present or attend and we have not appropriately planned for your accessibility needs, please email the OWCA Accessibility Committee at [access@onlinewritingcenters.org](mailto:access@onlinewritingcenters.org).

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## File Checklist for Presenters

Making your presentation accessible involves creating materials that account for varying communication and learning needs (such as a transcript), applying digital accessibility principles when creating your materials, and providing these materials ahead of time so that they are available to attendees at the time of your presentation.

Please visit the [OWCA Accessibility Resources page](https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/events/accessibility/) and review the OWCA Digital Accessibility Guide for assistance in creating accessible files. The OWCA reserves the right to edit presentation materials that are not accessible.

### Asynchronous Session Files

If you proposed an asynchronous presentation, you will pre-record your presentation and provide the following files to the OWCA:

* **Written Transcript (.DOC / .DOCX file).** Create a written transcript for your session and provide your transcript as a .DOC or .DOCX file.
* **Slide Deck (.PPT file).** If slides are part of your presentation, please provide them as a .PPT file.
* **Handouts (.DOC / .DOCX files).** If you have handouts or examples that you’d like to provide with your session, please provide these documents as .DOC or .DOCX files.
* **Session Recording and Closed Captions (YouTube).** After recording your presentation, please upload it to YouTube. We recommend setting your video privacy setting to "unlisted" and turning off comments and ratings. Please also edit the closed captions for accuracy. You will then share the link to your YouTube video, and we will embed it on the OWCA conference website.
  + [How to make a YouTube video unlisted](https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/157177?co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&hl=en#zippy=%2Cunlisted-videos)
  + [How to add closed captions in YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rB9ql0L0cUQ&t=6s)

### Synchronous Session Files

If you proposed a synchronous presentation, you will be scheduled for a specific time slot and will present in real-time with attendees through Zoom. You will provide the following files to the OWCA:

* **Written Transcript (.DOC / .DOCX file).** Create a written transcript for all planned presentation portions of your session and provide your transcript as a .DOC or .DOCX file.
* **Slide Deck (.PPT file).** If slides are part of your presentation, please provide them as a .PPT file.
* **Handouts (.DOC / .DOCX files).** If you have static handouts or examples that you’d like to provide with your session, please provide these documents as .DOC or .DOCX files.
* **Collaborative Documents.** If you are facilitating a workshop activity with a collaborative document (such as a Google Doc), please provide the link. Please also be mindful of accessibility when selecting a collaborative platform.

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## Writing Your Transcript

A presentation transcript can benefit attendees who are D/deaf or hard-of-hearing, have sensory processing needs, are visual processors/communicators, or need help staying focused on the presentation. Transcripts help presenters to organize and focus their presentation, stay within the time limit, trim down filler words such as “umm” or “like,” and remember important information. Transcripts also make the captioning process easier, help with your conference prep, and help prepare the American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter.

To create a transcript, start with writing and organizing the basic content of your presentation. Then, format your transcript so that it provides as much information as possible. Here are some considerations when writing your transcript:

* Write shorter sentences and choose plain, everyday language.
* Clarify acronyms and abbreviations.
* Include a summary/abstract.
* Introduce accessibility options/needs at the beginning of your presentation. You might tell attendees how they can participate and ask questions during your session. You can also state any requests/needs that you have as a presenter, so the audience can help your presentation go smoothly.
* Use headings to organize your content.
* Give an outline or agenda for your presentation.
* Include direct links to resources or articles that you reference.
* Provide descriptions of images, visual characteristics, audio cues, or sound effects used in your presentation.
* Include all direct quotations that will appear on your slides or that you will read during your presentation.
* If you are presenting with multiple people, use brackets to clarify who is speaking in each section and anytime there is a change in speaker.
* If presenting alongside a slideshow, insert the slide numbers in brackets next to each heading in your transcript, so attendees can find their place.

You can find example transcripts on the [OWCA Accessibility Resources page](https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/events/accessibility/).

## Designing Accessible Documents

Here are some common digital accessibility principles that you can apply when designing your presentation materials:

* **Heading Styles.** Use heading styles (Heading 1, Heading 2, etc.) to clearly label headings in your document.
* **Lists.** Format bulleted and numbered lists within your document.
* **Descriptive Hyperlinks.** Place hyperlinks on specific words or phrases that clearly tell readers where the link will take them.
* **Alternative Text and Image Descriptions.** Provide a textual description or alternative text for images in your document.
* **Spacing and Layout.** Use page breaks and paragraph styles to change the spacing and layout in your document.
* **Object Order.** Double-check the displayed order of slide titles, textboxes, images, and other objects on each slide in your slideshow.
* **Unique Slide Titles.** Write slide titles that are unique and are clear outside of context.
* **Color and Contrast.** Make sure your text is easy to read and has high contrast with the background.
* **Animations.** Avoid animations in slideshows.
* **Accessibility Checkers.** Use accessibility checkers to double-check if you’ve missed any common accessibility issues.

For assistance in applying these principles, please review the OWCA’s Guide to Designing Accessible Documents on the [OWCA Accessibility Resources page](https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/events/accessibility/).

## Practicing for Your Presentation

In the weeks or days before your presentation, try to do the following:

* Practice reading your transcript aloud multiple times. Read slowly and time yourself to stay within your time limit.
* Create a presenter’s version of your transcript. This version could remind you when to advance your slides, give stage directions, indicate words you wish to emphasize, or indicate slight pauses that you want to make. An example is available on the [OWCA Accessibility Resources page](https://www.onlinewritingcenters.org/events/accessibility/).
* Practice as if you are recording (e.g., using presentation slides in presentation mode), so that you’re comfortable delivering your presentation and can troubleshoot any potential technical difficulties before you record/present.

## Testing Your Technology and Lighting

On the day of your presentation, try to do the following:

* Plan to be in a quiet location. Avoid being near ambient sounds or moving air sources, such as under a fan or next to an open window.
* Place your light source in front of you or slightly to the side. Avoid putting your light source behind you or placing your back to a window.
  + It is best when you can mix natural and artificial light and are able to control both.
  + If you are relying on natural light, be mindful of how it might vary due to weather or time of day.
  + Pay attention to shadows that your light sources are producing.
* Test your microphone to make sure it is working. Using an external microphone can increase your recording quality.
* Clean your camera lens with a microfiber cloth (this is especially important if you are recording from a phone).
* Silence your phone, electronic alerts, and notifications on your devices.
* Record a 15-second test and review it before proceeding with recording your entire presentation.

## Giving Your Presentation

During your presentation, try to do the following:

* Share your pronouns and describe what you look like during your introduction.
* Open the session with an indigenous land acknowledgement. Visit the [Native Governance Center’s Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgements](https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/) for assistance and the [Native Land map by Native Land Digital](https://native-land.ca/) to help locate the land you sit upon.
* Read slowly and take your time. A rushed reading of your transcript will be difficult for both attendees and a sign language interpreter to follow.
* Speak loudly and clearly, if you are presenting orally.
* Enunciate your name, the names of any schools/organizations, and the names of any scholars you discuss.
* Describe any images or visuals on your slides/screen.
* Encourage participants to use the chat tool to submit comments or questions if someone else has the floor.
* Remind attendees that there are multiple ways of participating. Check in with participants to see if they have something to say, as not everyone can access the chat feature.
* Read questions from the chat out loud.
* Repeat back or paraphrase what participants say.
* Speak out URLs that you post in the chat. Participants using assistive technology may not be able to copy or activate links in the chat.