

Provide multiple ways to communicate

Accessibility Basics Tutorial Series



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General principles

- Be flexible. It's ok if you have to improvise. The most important thing is for all parties to the communication attempt to make a genuine effort.
- We all use different communication methods in different circumstances. Don't be surprised if the same person uses multiple methods depending on the situation.
- If you don't understand something, ask for clarification. Never pretend to understand something you haven't.

Speaking

- Have all speakers say their name before speaking so audience members who can't see the speakers can track who says what. (Differentiating speakers based on the sound of their voices requires familiarity with the speakers.)
- On Zoom: invite participants to unmute to ask questions or contribute to discussion. Not everyone will be comfortable typing into chat to participate.
- In person: have everyone speak into a microphone so hard of hearing audience members can hear. If it's not possible to give the audience access to a mic, have one of the mic'd speakers repeat questions and comments from the audience.

Typing

- On Zoom: invite use of the chat. Read aloud comments in the chat to provide access for participants who can't follow the chat.
- In person: provide a phone number where participants can send a text message to ask a question or request help. This can be especially helpful during discussions of sensitive topics, where someone may

not want to be identified before other participants as the source of a question.

- Know that communication will move more slowly if you have a participant who communicates by typing on an assistive device (AAC). Here are some tips from [AssistiveWare](#) for successful communication:
 - Allow time for the AAC user to make their message.
 - Wait for a message to be composed before talking.
 - Pause for the AAC user to take a turn or respond.
 - Pause expectantly. Look toward the AAC user with an open expression that invites them to take up their turn if they wish to. It can be a great idea to count in our head for at least 5 seconds. This is a useful strategy to help us to pause.
 - Don't jump in with prompts or help if they have not responded immediately.

Signing

See the entry below on ASL Interpretation.

Handwriting

- Have pencils and paper (e.g. index cards) on hand during events so participants can submit handwritten questions. Again, this can be particularly helpful during sessions where participants may want to maintain some anonymity.
- Tools like fat pencils or pencil grips can help make handwriting more comfortable. You can request these tools from [PANDA](#).