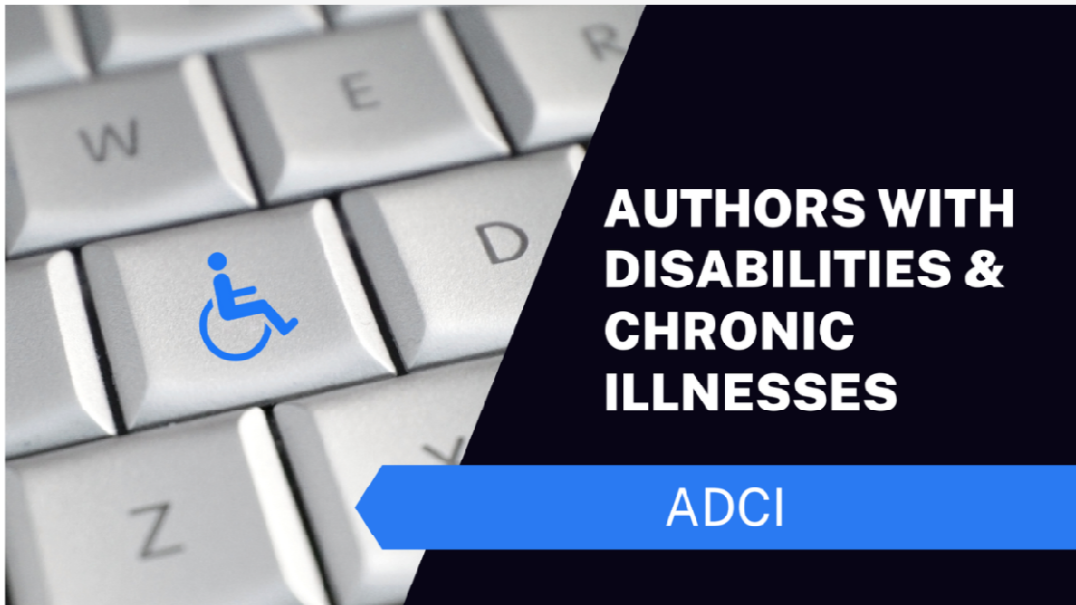


AUTHORS WITH DISABILITIES AND CHRONIC ILLNESSES

ADCI

GUIDE TO WORKING WITH DISABLED AUTHORS



**AUTHORS WITH
DISABILITIES &
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 [CLAIREWADE.COM/ADCI](https://clairewaade.com/adci)

A Guide to Working with Disabled Authors

Disability is an extremely broad and diverse spectrum, covering everything from long term physical to mental health conditions. Disabilities are often invisible and dynamic, varying from person to person, even within the same condition, and at different stages in their lives.

Authors with disabilities, chronic illnesses and neurodiversities are just people, they have the same thoughts and feelings as any other author, but they also have additional challenges they live with on a daily basis. They're the experts on what they need but it can be hard to ask. We have to find a way to make it easier for authors with disabilities, chronic illnesses and neurodiversities to self-identify without the fear of discrimination, judgement and rejection – a big concern for disabled authors.

Society often makes disabled people feel like a burden, an imposition, for things that they can't help or change. Disabled authors need to be able to have open conversations with their agents, editors and publishers, to ask for what they need and to trust that they will be met with patience, a willingness to understand and flexibility in finding a solution.

It's best to approach the challenges of disability from the angle that you're a team and everybody succeeds if you work together to find solutions. It's hugely empowering to the author, who will be able to achieve far more with support and understanding.

Asking authors what they need

Nobody asks for adjustments or access unless they genuinely need something - however strange it might sound, and often small adjustments are all that's needed to make things possible and accessible.

Many publishers have questionnaires for new authors and this practise could also be adopted by agents. Adding a section for additional needs allows authors to state their specific obstacles in a safe, open way, without fear of prejudice.

The author may know exactly what they need to work with/around the situation or they may need your expertise to find solutions.

When they do ask for what they need, they're not being demanding; it's not a diva's rider list, it's simply the things they need to be able to access the world the way every non-disabled person can.

Clear Communication

Everyone appreciates clear communication, but this is particularly important for disabled and neurodiverse authors. Open discussion and a clear explanation of what is required is essential.

- Use simple, clear language.
- Numbered or bulleted lists of required actions.
- A discussion and timetable of when things are planned – asking the author what they can do and incorporating the ability to adapt as necessary.
- Clearly stating how long to expect email responses to take – even if this will be a week/month/longer. This also applies to the author who may be unable to respond quickly.

Personal Questions

While having an open dialogue is important, personal questions about how the author became ill or disabled are inappropriate; if they want to share that they will.

Meetings - in person/phone/Zoom

- Can the author travel to meetings?
- Is the venue accessible?
 - Are there stairs?
 - A lift?
 - Nearby parking or close to accessible transport links?
- If in person meetings aren't possible, do they prefer phone or video calls?
- Do they need subtitles for video calls?
- Is there a better time of day for them to be able to talk?

Flexible deadlines

Some disabilities and chronic illness aren't static, they can fluctuate, and because a task is possible once doesn't mean it's always achievable or always within the same timescale. This is frustrating to everyone concerned, especially the author, but it requires patience and understanding.

- Publication dates – if the author has energy impairment and needs long deadlines for rounds of edits, then picking a distant publication date or being able to move the date is essential.

- Deadlines – if an author with a disability or chronic illness needs to extend their deadline, it's not because they're lazy or disorganised, it's because their health physically won't let them achieve what they want within the given period. It's frustrating for everyone but it needs to be met with flexibility and compassion. If the author is forced to push themselves it can lead to worsening their health and further delays, or the inability to continue to write, which is a problem for everyone.
- Contracts – These flexibilities can be incorporated into contracts by building in language to the effect that if the original deadline isn't met, the publisher and author will decide on a new deadline by mutual agreement.

Editing/ Proofing

- Authors with dyslexia or conditions that affect their dexterity may need assistance with manuscript accuracy, before it goes through the editing process. They can write well, but their typing isn't always as accurate as they want.
- Editing and submitting hard copy page proofs can make the process faster and more efficient.

Events

If an author is able to take part in events, they can be a fantastic opportunity, but may also need some adjustments to make them accessible. These are a few things to think about, but you can find more information in the ADCI Guide to Making Events Accessible here... www.clairewade.com/adci.html

Is the author able to take part in events?

- Are there alternatives to in person participation
 - Can it be done via Zoom, even if the audience is in person?
 - Could the interview be pre-recorded?
 - Could someone else give the speech on behalf of the author?

If the author can attend in person:

- Do they use a mobility aide, like a wheelchair or walking stick? If so, are there stairs, a raised platform or stage? How can it be made accessible?
- Do they need a chair to sit for some or all of the event?
- If they have an energy limiting condition or sensory overwhelm, is there a separate room they can use before and after speaking?
- Is there an accessible toilet?

- If travelling to the event, do they need to stay overnight before/during/after the event?
- D/deaf authors might need assistance with questions from the audience. An intermediary might need to repeat the question louder and closer to the author, because sometimes PA systems aren't clear enough. The author may prefer to go into the audience so they can stand next to the person asking the question. Alternatively, they might bring their own microphone which connects directly to their hearing aid.

Covering the costs

An Access to Work grant can pay for practical support for disabled authors. It's a publicly funded employment support grant scheme that can provide practical and financial support for people who have a disability or long term physical or mental health condition. Open to employed and self-employed people, it's there for anyone who needs support or adaptations beyond reasonable adjustments.

For more information visit... <https://bit.ly/3Ax5sAP>

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-guide-for-employers/access-to-work-factsheet-for-employers?fbclid=IwAR3mvcWPLc-CvVYbMagUJTvQSBM8rdhnM1q1bi18KRVj4ECa2i50bS5q_nE

Open Submissions / Competitions

Offering an accessibility email address for anyone who needs to ask accessibility-related questions shows commitment to improving access, being open to diverse voices, and understanding that one size doesn't fit all. For instance, if you take direct submissions through Submittable and someone's disability makes it hard/impossible to use, they might miss out on being able to submit. Or if there are limited spaces available and it's on a first come, first served basis, this can exclude disabled people. An accessibility email address would resolve this issue.

Forms

A form isn't "just a form" if you're using accessible technology like a screen reader or have visual impairment. PDFs are difficult to view, so online forms are best or if necessary a Word document with a large print version available.

There needs to be a space for any other information or a way to opt out of certain question, for example if asking for a phone number and the person is unable to use a phone due to hearing or speech difficulties.

Accessible Websites

Since the end of 2019, public sector websites have been required by law to be accessible, following the international standard WCAG 2.1AA. Although private sector websites and apps are exempt from this legislation, ensuring your websites and apps follow best practice is important for everyone.

The standards mean that websites are navigable by those using screen readers, and/or use keyboards rather than mice. It also means that videos have closed captions (without relying on automatically-generated ones). Avoid attaching documents, especially PDFs is helpful too, so that text is on a webpage and not too many clicks away. Many of the standards which make websites and apps accessible for people with disabilities also make them easier to use for everyone, especially those using mobile devices.

See WCAG 2.1 standards: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

Disability creates people who are very disciplined, driven and focused. They're used to having to be flexible, self-motivated and solution driven to navigate a world not built for them, qualities that are essential in any successful author. It's in everybody's best interests to work together to find solutions to potential obstacles and build strong relationships that produce great books, because that's what we're all here to do.