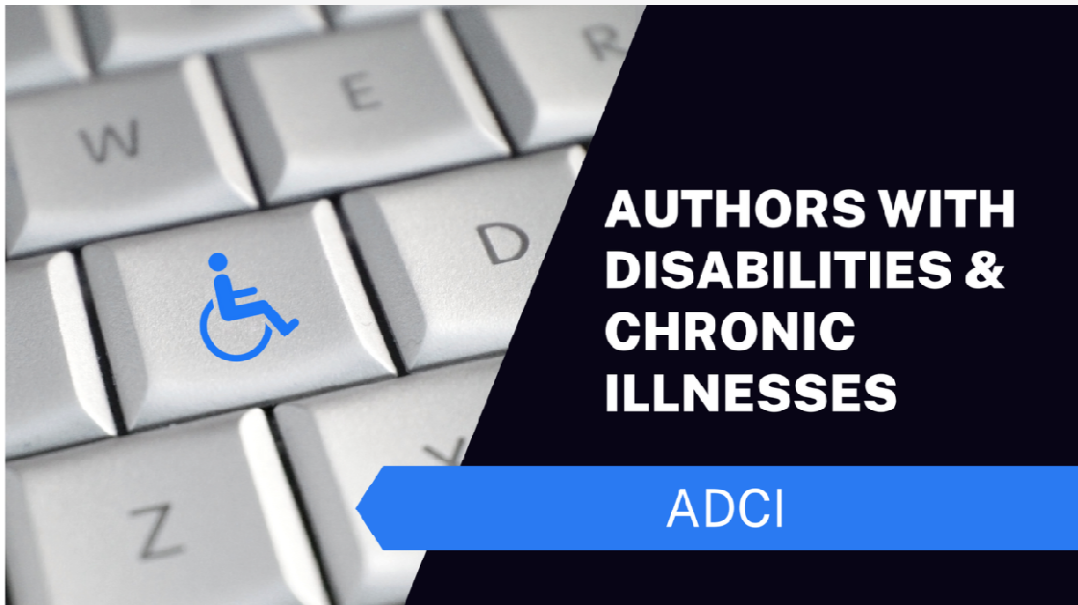


AUTHORS WITH DISABILITIES AND CHRONIC ILLNESSES

ADCI

A GUIDE TO MAKING EVENTS ACCESSIBLE



 [CLAIREWADE.COM/ADCI](https://clairewade.com/adci)

A Guide to Making Events Accessible for Authors and Attendees with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses

Disabled attendees can find events and venues present unintentional barriers that can make them difficult to access. However, when it comes to organising anything, be it a literary festival, book signing, convention, book launch or awards ceremony, accessibility is necessary to ensure everyone feels welcome. We asked members of our Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses network to tell us their experiences and what they would like to see organisers consider and incorporate. We have designed this short guide to help event organisers ensure your event/venue is welcoming and accommodating for everyone.

What to consider before: while it's unlikely any event can be made 100% accessible, even the smallest events, run on a shoestring, can increase their accessibility with a few small changes.

For example, while many people immediately think of wheelchair access when they think of disability, only 8% of disabled people use a wheelchair, so there's a lot more to consider than lifts and blue badge spaces.

However, it also means that other small adjustments can open up your event to more people. For example, one-third of people with a disability have energy impairments, and a third have pain, so something as simple as providing access to seating in suitable locations adds to the accessibility of your event.

This guide breaks up access into four sections.

- General Access
- Disabled Visitors
- Disabled Authors/Speakers
- Links & Resources

General Access

Questions to ask as you begin planning:

- Have you integrated access into every step of the process?
- Is there disabled representation on your boards/committees?

Involving someone aware of access requirements from the initial planning stage onwards will help reduce any extra costs and help you factor these into any funding bids.

- How can you ensure your building is accessible and your signage, advertising, website and booking system are accessible?

Knowing what to do from the outset will reduce costs and increase attendance.

Staff Training

- How will you ensure your staff/volunteers have received disability awareness training?

Specialist trainers include:

Shape Arts <https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/training>

Inklusive offer disability training packages that are clear, accessible, user-friendly and cover in-person, hybrid, online and different types of events.

If your staff/volunteers have appropriate training they will be able to be proactive in accommodating disabled people's needs, finding suitable solutions for the individual.

Venue

- Does your venue offer disabled parking? How far is the parking from your venue?
- Does this venue have operating disabled toilets?

- Aim for step free access – choose an appropriate venue from the outset or provide ramps where necessary.
- Will a wheelchair or mobility scooter be able to physically fit through the spaces in your venue - are there steps, kerbs, lips/ledges or narrow doorways to navigate?

Hire a wheelchair user to test out your venue and advise you on what needs to be improved.

- Can you offer a quiet breakout space for anyone who needs to rest, take a break from overstimulation, or ease conversation for people with hearing impairments.
- Do you have safe parking space for wheelchairs/scooters, where they can't be stolen - while some people might need their wheelchair for the whole event, some people might only need one to reach the venue.

Unsuitable Buildings

If you're stuck in an unsuitable building, or your budget won't allow you to make all the changes you'd like, put a warning on your website.

Tell people what you can offer them, and equally, if you can't make certain parts of your venue accessible, list these too. Knowing there's no lift, which doorways are too narrow, if there are steps or ledges into rooms and how many can make a big difference to someone's decision to attend.

When checking accessibility, also include outside areas of your venue. Look at the additional information section at the bottom of the page for examples of how venues have done this.

Websites & Ticket Bookings

It's good to show you are actively interested in being inclusive. For example, reach out to local disabled audiences to let them know about your event.

Provide booking information, programmes and publicity materials in accessible forms and make sure any website meets basic accessibility criteria – see Other Information at the end of this document.

Ask people to list any access needs they may have when booking their tickets.

Include access information about your event and the venue on your website. Many disabled people have to research an event before they attend to know whether they will be able to access it, make it easier for them to know if the event is suitable for them to attend.

1. Make sure information on venue access is clear and easy to find.
2. Provide information on public transport (what is available how far away it is).
3. Include whether you have disabled parking and how close it is to the venue. If there is limited parking near your venue, consider reserving it for disabled use.
4. Include information on the distance from parking to your venue, including the types of paths/surfaces if you are holding an event outdoors.
5. Give clear directions to get to your venue and to navigate it once there. For example - if in a multi-floor building, say which floor your event is on.
6. Aim for step free access at your venue, but if impossible, use your website to list any restricted access areas and obstructions like lips/ledges to doorways, steps or stairs at venues. Wheelchair users need to know if they can't access toilets or a bar, for example. It's also helpful to list if steps have handrails.
7. If you can, provide a map or photos and describe any possible obstructions/types of outdoor surfaces (gravel/cobbled areas/grass) so people can judge accessibility and raise any queries. For examples, check the links at the bottom.
8. Include information on whether your venue has a hearing loop, lifts, whether your event will include British Sign Language interpreters and if there is seating and where.
9. Aim to ensure wheelchair accessible loos are close to event spaces.
10. Warn about any loud or unexpected noises or strobing lights during events.

Flexibility

Be open about the support you are offering for disabled attendees - in all the information for the event and on your website.

Provide contact details for anyone who needs to get in touch about accessibility questions. If possible, try to offer several contact options. A combination of email/phone/online chat, for example, will help you accommodate attendees different communication styles. For example, someone who is deaf, has a speech issue or language processing issues, might be unable to use a phone.

Everyone's needs are different. So be prepared to be flexible and supportive. For example do you need to bring out your temporary wheelchair ramp before they arrive?

Consider offering attendees the chance to bring an assistant/carer for free or at a concessionary rate if they need assistance to attend.

Not all disabilities are visible – Consider offering a discrete lanyard or wristband scheme for disabled attendees to alert staff to anyone who might require extra help or allow them access to specific areas/seating. Or get involved with The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme <https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com/>

Make it clear that assistance dogs are welcome.

Offer a check-in service. Sometimes accessibility issues will only become apparent when people arrive at the event, so ask in advance if attendees would like you to check in with them to discuss any issues once they arrive. Assistance might include offering extra help, e.g., carrying their drink from the bar to their table or entering an event without queuing, which may be too overwhelming/tiring/painful.

Use clear signage from the entrance to guide people or events/areas. Make sure signing is simple, clear and has good colour contrast for visibility.

Deaf attendees may require hearing loops. These need to be clearly signposted and working correctly.

If your event is large, offer to loan disabled attendees wheelchairs/powerchairs or scooters. List how many you will provide on your website if possible. You may need to ask people to book their use ahead of time.

Provide safe parking/storage space for wheelchairs/scooters, where they won't be stolen - while some people might need their wheelchair for the whole event, some people might only need their scooter to get to the venue.

Be aware one-third of people find fragrances cause them health problems. Therefore, discourage the use of scented products in toilets and other venue spaces.

Remote Attendance

Have you considered offering remote attendance for people who cannot visit in person?

Consider allowing attendees to join events via video link.

The pandemic has shown it is possible to run or offer access to many events remotely. Zoom and Google Meetings offer closed captions for people with hearing impairments. Consider filming some events to put online afterwards for people who can't attend in person.

What to consider during an event.

Regular breaks

Make sure to offer frequent breaks. Comfort breaks are always necessary, but they can be essential for anyone who has any form of chronic fatigue, needs to decompress after sensory overload, or needs to visit the bathroom more frequently or for longer. Having scheduled breaks, in addition to checking in with your attendees regularly during the session, is welcome.

Some individuals cannot sit for long periods and need to switch from sitting to standing. Make it clear attendees are welcome to leave sessions if they need to for health reasons. Explain to speakers, volunteers etc. they shouldn't call attention to anyone who needs to do this.

Seating

Some people with a disability or chronic illness will require seating in areas that are traditionally standing only, such as champagne receptions or halls full of stalls at conventions.

Make sure there are chairs set aside for disabled attendees, and these are clearly marked so that other attendees don't take the seats.

At seated events, reserve some seating at the front or ends of aisles for disabled attendees and accompanying friends/family. It will make access easier.

Wheelchairs

Ensure there are spaces for wheelchairs in all event spaces.

Ensure disabled seating and wheelchair spaces have a clear line of sight of the stage/speakers to help those with a hearing impairment or reduced vision.

In addition, ensure disabled attendees are integrated into the rest of the audience and can sit with their friends/family group/assistant.

Making sure your speakers are heard

Ensure you have loop systems in all spaces where talks are given/allow deaf attendees to attach assistive tech to the PA system. Check it is working correctly first, and staff are trained in how it works.

Visual Presentations

When giving a presentation, ensure that the content of any slides is spoken/described - so that anyone unable to see them/read them (e.g. visual impairment, dyslexia) knows what's on there - both for your audience and disabled author speakers.

Don't put too much information on each slide - too small to read, too overwhelming.

Providing the slides in advance to attendees would be helpful so they can be downloaded onto a device, and attendees don't have to rely just on the big screen.

If showing a video with speech on the soundtrack, it must have captions.

If showing a video full of infographics and no speech, ensure its audio described, or just make sure that it has speech on it and isn't just music.

Access to written material

If you are using handouts, having large text versions to hand can be a good option for people with visual impairments.

Emailing handouts in advance or making them available to download from your website is always advisable.

You can hire many types of access equipment, including temporary platform lifts, ramps, disabled toilets and Changing Places toilets that allow people who cannot move from their wheelchair to access a toilet.

Disabled Author Speakers

Disabled people make up 1-in-5 of the working-age population. If your organisation doesn't already include disabled author speakers at your events, please ask why they haven't been included.

Are you approaching disabled authors/groups to ensure they know about opportunities to appear at your event?

If you are running an open invitation to authors to submit to events, the submission process should be accessible. Don't just rely on a downloadable pdf. Offering multiple submission methods to increase access, for e.g., an online form and the chance to email a Word doc cover most bases, rather than just a pdf or online form.

Check your author/speaker's access needs. You should aim to ask every author you work with if they have any access requirements as many disabilities are invisible or authors may not feel comfortable asking. Do not expect authors to explain why they have access requirements or give away personal details about their health.

Check if any information/contracts etc. needs to be provided in a larger font or electronically. Ask which form of communication is most accessible for any information you want to send: e.g. email, word doc, phone, audio file.

Check if your author has a disability rider - a sheet of information listing their access needs makes it easier for you and them.

Have you considered dedicated slots for remote presentation? Is this clear in submission information, so disabled authors don't have to ask you every time whether you will consider including them.

Can your author attend in person? If not, is a video call or recorded interview an alternative or possible as a backup?

Make it clear to authors whether if they cannot attend due to disability, they are welcome to give remote presentations at your event. If not, could someone give a talk on the author's behalf?

If travelling to the event, does your author need to stay overnight before / during / after the event to ensure they can take part fully?

If your author has an energy-impairment disability such as fatigue or pain, is neurodivergent or has mental health issues, they may need rest breaks or have limits on how long they can comfortably work for.

Ensure disabled authors can bring a PA or carer to help assist them if needed. Cover the extra travel expenses of their PA if you would cover the author's costs. Admittance to the venue for a carer or PA should be free of charge.

Check if they have mobility issues/use aids like a wheelchair, walking frame or walking stick?

- If so, do you have a raised platform or stage with steps?
- How can it be made accessible?
- Do you need to reconsider your stage, hire a ramp or platform lift?
- Do you expect authors to get onto the stage in front of the audience, or will you offer to arrange for them to access the area before the audience arrives?

Check if certain times of day are more manageable for an author to appear (some people may be in too much pain or fatigue by the end of the day to attend but be able to earlier or vice versa)

Do you need to provide a chair if someone can't stand for long?

Do you use a podium? If your author uses a wheelchair, needs to sit or is of short stature, can you change the podium's height or replace it with a small table they can slide their wheelchair under comfortably?

If using a fixed microphone, is it adjustable if your author is sitting or is shorter or taller than average?

Can you provide a hands-free lapel microphone if someone can't hold a mic for prolonged periods or will find juggling a book and microphone difficult during a reading?

D/deaf authors may need assistance with questions from the audience. For example, an intermediary may need to relay the question louder and closer to the author as sometimes PA systems aren't clear enough.

Can a mic be taken into the audience if an author needs to have audience questions amplified to hear them? The author may prefer to go into the audience themselves and stand next to the person asking the question. Alternatively, they might bring their own microphone, which connects directly to their hearing aid.

Many disabilities may require your author to keep to strict schedules.

Encourage prompt timekeeping from others so your author can manage their health and contribute to your event while minimising symptoms like pain, fatigue, sensory overwhelm or anxiety. Having a firm written schedule, with plenty of warning of any

changes, enables people to arrange their rest or treatment schedule around your timetable.

Is there a quiet space your author can wait before or after the event, or in-between appearances if they need to? Is there suitable seating? Not everyone can lever themselves up from a sofa; not everyone can tolerate a hard-backed chair. Is there somewhere for people to store mobility aids if they need them to get to the venue but do not use them full time?

Have you asked if they need priority parking?

Send easy read information /questions in advance of events, so there's time to prepare.

For Remote Author Attendance:

For remote presentation, there are options of sending pre-recorded videos, video conferencing or having a representative speak on someone's behalf.

This guide gives you the basic questions you need to start asking as you are planning your event, but it's important to talk to disabled experts, participants and attendees. Pay them for their time in advising you and follow their feedback. Your event will be better for it.

Useful links

Author Nicola Griffiths has a great PDF guide to bookshop accessibility, from the simplest low-budget ideas to more expensive options. It's aimed at US bookstores, but most of the information is still directly applicable.

<https://nicolagriffith.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/making-bookstores-accessible1.pdf>

Accessibility Guides from UK outdoor and street festival specialists

The Without Walls guide to outdoor festival access includes checklists, sample access plans, and low-budget options with lots of advice.

<https://www.withoutwalls.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Without-Walls-Outdoor-Arts-Festivals-and-Events-Access-Guide-2020.pdf>
also <https://www.withoutwalls.uk.com/resources/>

And the older Independent Street Arts Network access toolkit
<https://outdoorartsuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Access-Toolkit.pdf>

Examples of how to create website Access pages
<https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/make-your-business-accessible/create-accessibility-guide>

Visit Scotland example of an access guide including helpful photos.
<https://www.accessibilityguides.org/content/example-attraction>

The Lowry <https://thelowry.com/visit-us/access/navigating-the-building/>
Brighton Centre <https://brightoncentre.co.uk/media/70756/brighton-centre-access-statement-may2018.pdf>

Natural History Museum <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit/access-at-south-kensington.html>

How the Bronte Museum describes a listed building with restricted access
<https://www.bronte.org.uk/visit-us/access>

How the National Trust describes Hilltop
<https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/access-guide/1431729744610-hill-top.pdf>

Other information

Changing Places Toilets <https://www.changing-places.org>
and <https://www.changing-places.org/about/view/mobile-and-modular-options>

Accessible online author events
<https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/writing-and-authors/industry-labs/resources/ever-dundas-ways-to-make-online-author-events-accessible>

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/>