Accessible and Inclusive Communication:

Adopting accessibility and disability principles and ways of thinking to enhance communications at McMaster – Presentation and Handout

# Question to get us started:

* Can you think of any examples of when you’ve witnessed or taken note of someone saying or writing an **ableist[[1]](#footnote-1)** expression or phrase?
  + If so, did you have any thoughts about what the person could have said instead, or what they were actually trying to communicate?

# Principled approach to accessibility / disability inclusion:

* Respect for dignity
* Inclusion and full participation
* Promoting inclusive design
* Removing barriers
* Accommodating remaining needs

For more detailed information on these principles, please see the Ontario Human Rights Commission [Accommodating students with disabilities](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/accommodating-students-disabilities-principles-fact-sheet) policy paper or the [McMaster Policy on Accessibility](https://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/General/HR/Accessibility.pdf).

# Putting principles into action:

## Respect for dignity:

* Avoid categorizing persons with disabilities as a homogenous group, such as “the disabled” or “the deaf.”
* Use “person-first language” such as “a person with a disability,” unless the individual has indicated otherwise.
* Use words that are factual, inclusive and non-emotional. For example: “She uses a wheelchair” rather than “she is confined to a wheelchair.”
* Avoid categorizing persons with disabilities as either super-achievers or tragic figures; avoid language such as “suffering with,” “afflicted by,” etc.
* If the disability is not relevant to the context, it is not necessary to write about it.

## Inclusion and full participation:

* Be guided by the preferences of those concerned
  + E.g. if you are working with / reporting on a story involving folks with disabilities, look to them to guide you in how they’d like to be written about (some folks prefer “person-first” language [Person with autism, person with hearing impairment], while others politicize their identities and prefer “disability-first” language [Autistic, Deaf, Disabled, etc.]).
  + Engage in a similarly principled approach to photographing / including images of folks with disabilities in communication pieces:
    - If the person would like to be photographed / if the story is about them / if disability is meaningful or important to the communication 🡪 include images of those you’re writing for or about.
    - **If this is not the case**, it will likely be more effective to include imagery emphasizing the point of the article / communication (e.g. photos of terrible, icy and snowy sidewalks to highlight physical inaccessibility in the winter or an image of a screen reader trying to navigate an inaccessible website to highlight digital (in)accessibility).
    - This thoughtful approach can additionally help to avoid positioning persons with disabilities as heroes / tragic figures.

## Promoting Inclusive Design / Removing barriers:

* Avoid clichés that assume everyone is able-bodied, such as “kick-start” or “put your best foot forward.”
* Avoid using “see,” “look” or “hear,” when you can write “refer to,” “check” or “go to.”
* Use a consistent approach to **digital accessibility** to ensure that those using assistive technologies and who navigate digital spaces in different ways can also access digital content.

## Accommodating remaining needs:

* Place a statement on your website, in your emails, and in public-facing reports, policies, and documents that articulates that if your attempts at enhancing accessibility **have not met all of the needs of your audience**, they can contact your unit for an accessible format to be produced and given to them within a **reasonable timeframe**.
  + E.g. “If you have an accommodation need for a planned meeting, please e-mail me directly and I will do my best to make appropriate arrangements.  Should you require any materials sent via this e-mail address in an alternate/accessible format, please let me know.”

# Putting accessibility into practice – At the departmental level

* Recommend to your managers and directors that a departmental accessibility plan be put into place.  Each team member in any project will have specific steps to take to achieve accessibility.  A departmental plan will give common goals and make it easier to adopt standards that span different areas of work (design, content, code, tech decisions).
* Start with an accessibility plan for your own work, and speak with your supervisors about the amount of time and training that you will need to successfully incorporate these (required) accessibility practices.
  + How do you know when the work you are doing or products you are creating are ‘accessible enough’?
    - There have standards and best practices developed with many different user requirements in mind, allowing you to focus on doing the work.
    - Please visit accessibility.mcmaster.ca or contact [access@mcmaster.ca](mailto:access@mcmaster.ca) for support and assistance in upgrading accessibility in your unit or personal workflow.
  + **How to create accessible media / web content / social media:**
    - There are many tutorials, guides, and best practices online:
      * Lynda.com (media and web content accessibility tutorials)
      * [UTS Checklist for WCAG 2.0 AA Compliance (Web Pages)](https://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/wcag/checklist.html)
      * [Accessibility for Mircosoft Office 365](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility/office?activetab=pivot_1%3aprimaryr2)
      * [McMaster Accessibility Hub](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility/office?activetab=pivot_1%3aprimaryr2)
      * Web and HTML Newsletters: [WCAG 2.0 AA](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/)
      * [Association of Graphic Designers – Support for Accessibility](https://www.rgd.ca/resources/accessibility/access)
      * [PDF UA Standard for Universal PDF Accessibility](https://www.pdflib.com/pdf-knowledge-base/pdfua/the-pdfua-standard/)
      * [McMaster Guide to Accessible Social Media](https://library.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/Social%20Media%20Accessibility.pdf)
* Seek out feedback from users of your content, including users with disabilities to inform the next iteration of your work.
* Take notes and share with your professional community.

# Putting accessibility into practice – At the individual level

## Digital Accessibility – Tips to motivate the ongoing process of inclusive design

* Consider the **how your content is being perceived**, **i.e. is the format of the content,** in addition to the content itself, accessible?
  + If you are embedding video**, do your videos have captions?**
  + Are fonts **contrasted well** against the digital background?
  + Are they **big enough** to be perceived by a broad audience of readers (e.g. minimum 12 pt. font, but 14 is better for digital print)
  + Are you using **sans-serif** fonts vs. **serif fonts?**
  + Have you made sure to **embed your hyperlinks in text** vs. copy and pasting them into the communication piece as a URL?
  + Have you **removed** distracting images from any backgrounds (e.g. text on a patterned slide for a public presentation)?
  + Are you cognizant of **not overlaying text on images**, as much as is possible?
  + Have you included **alternative text** on your **meaningful** images, so that those using read aloud technology can also understand the use of images?
  + Have you attempted to **remove jargon** / **field specific** language from public communications, in order to practice **plain language principles**?
  + Is your writing **well-structured** using **heading styles** that indicate clearly title, subtitle, heading 1, heading 2, etc.?
  + Are you publishing in **HTML / Word Docs vs. PDF**?
    - PDFs are publishing tools vs. word processing technologies, and therefore can present great difficulty to those using certain assistive technologies when:
      * The PDF has been published as an **image**
      * The original document was not **well structured or laid out** before importing to Adobe
      * The person publishing the document does not know / have access to **accessibility remediation tools** in Adobe to remediate **inaccessible documents**
      * **Rules to go by**: Where possible, publish on the web or in a Word Document 🡪 if this is not possible, include a Word / HTML version of the document as an **alternative format**.

# Resources

* The list above is by no means exhaustive – for more information, support and training on **Digital Accessibility,** please visit the [Accessibility Hub](https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/) > [Tools](https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/topic/tools/)
  + [How to caption videos](https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/topic/captioning/)
  + [How to create accessible presentations](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VNHqwJpCZOeAadTVYa5T4x5jnsq4-Cv71p4n8MGnuTw/edit)
  + [How to create accessible Microsoft Word Documents](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-YRYzXs9S8ZaehvpUVptR44GMntVbChIYiiszXm_63o/edit)
  + [Accessible images for digital print](https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/topic/graphics/)
  + [Text checker for readability of your content](http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php)
* For more information, support or training in the areas of **Accessibility and Disability Inclusion**, please email [access@mcmaster.ca](mailto:access@mcmaster.ca)
* For more information around disability-related accommodations for students and student-staff, please visit [Student Accessibility Services](https://sas.mcmaster.ca/)
* For **employees / staff who identify with disability, chronic illness, trauma, mental health issues, addiction, severe allergy, etc.** and who would like to join a growing community of McMaster staff who have similar experiences, please email [access@mcmaster.ca](mailto:access@mcmaster.ca) for more information about joining McMaster’s [Employee Accessibility Network](https://equity.mcmaster.ca/events/announcing-a-new-accessibility-network-for-mcmaster-employees-with-disabilities-accessibility-mcmaster.ca).
  + If you, as a staff member / employee, are in need of or would like to discuss with your manager or an HR representative receiving medical or disability-related accommodations for yourself, visit the [Human Resources Services](https://hr.mcmaster.ca/employees/health_safety_well-being/) website > [Employee Health, Safety & Well-Being](https://hr.mcmaster.ca/employees/health_safety_well-being/).

1. The practices and dominant attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. A set of practices and beliefs that assign inferior value (worth) to people who have developmental, emotional, physical or psychiatric disabilities. Taken from: http://www.stopableism.org/p/what-is-ableism.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)