Creating Accessible Presentations

**An informal tip sheet from the Disability Studies SIG
and the Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition**

Designing an accessible presentation can seem overwhelming at first. But in fact, many of the steps needed to make your presentation accessible are quite simple and straightforward. And remember that you don't have to be perfect.

1.   **Pay attention to the room setup.** The session chair should make sure there is space in the room for at least one person using a wheelchair and/or a person using a service dog. Please keep this area and the aisles clear for persons who may be using wheelchairs, canes, crutches, or motorized vehicles. Please make sure the doorway area is unobstructed. If there will be interpreters for the session, please also help assure that the interpreters (usually two of them in a team) have reserved seating in the front row and in direct visual and auditory access to the speaker's area.

         People who use sign language interpreters or read speech / speechread need to sit where they can see both the speaker and the interpreter. Make sure the interpreter can stand close to the speaker or in a position where the audience members can see both interpreter and speaker. Make sure the place where speakers are standing is bright enough so audiences can see their mouth and face.

2.   **Be prepared to work with a Sign Language interpreter.** Meet with interpreters just before the beginning of your session, if necessary. It is helpful to give them a page listing all the names and technical terms you will be using in your paper. An interpreter may not know "Foucault" or "episteme," for example, and clarifying terminology ahead of time will help him/her do a better job.

3.   **Provide alternative formats of your presentation.** Bring several full-text copies of your talk, and do a couple of them in large print (16 point or larger). If you do not have full-text copies of your presentation, provide a handout that outlines your main points and gives your contact information. Offer the copies at the beginning of your talk. It is best to copy on white paper.

4.   **Describe all visuals, use captioning, and read slides aloud.** If you are using PowerPoint, video, or other audio/visual materials, consider how to make this material accessible for audience members who do not see it, or who have difficulty processing multiple channels of information

simultaneously. Ideally, videos should be captioned; if not, provide oral descriptions of what appears on the screen. PowerPoint slides should be read aloud, and any images should be described. If you are using PowerPoint, produce handouts of the slide show to distribute to the audience. Keep PowerPoint slides uncrowded, large-type, and high-contrast.

5.   **Speak slowly enough that your audience can follow what you say.** It is tempting to try to cram 10 pages of material into 15 minutes of presentation time, but the resulting rushed speech is hard for everyone to follow, regardless of disability status. If your session includes an interpreter, simply speak at conversational speed. Providing the interpreter with a copy of your talk before the presentation is extremely helpful. Also, be sure to spell out long and difficult words for interpreters, including surnames.

6.   **Attend to accessibility during Q&A and unscripted periods.** During Q&A sessions, and other less-scripted moments of exchange, make sure that questioners have the opportunity to speak into a microphone. If this is not possible, restate questions for the full audience. Ask questioners to provide their names at the beginning of their contributions. After the session, keep aisles and the space around the presentation table clear so that persons with mobility impairments can move around easily. If at all possible, turn off equipment when you are not using it. This reduces background noise and distractions.

7.   **Don't be shy about asking what people need.** We're all used to the standard "Can everyone hear me?" question at the beginning of a presentation. Consider incorporating this sort of check-in more often, asking questions such as "Is this slide readable?" or "Do I need to slow down?" You can also ask interpreters to let you know if your speed is appropriate.

Resources

- "A Policy on Disability in CCCC." http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/disabilitypolicy
- "Disability Rhetoric." Website of the CCCC Disability Studies SIG. http://www.disabilityrhetoric.com
- Dolmage, Jay. "Mapping Composition: Inviting Disability in the Front Door." *Disability and the Teaching of Writing: A Critical Sourcebook.* Ed. Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Brenda Jo Brueggemann, with Jay Dolmage. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008. 14-27. *Note: This sourcebook is available for free.*
- University of Hawaii / Manoa Center on Disability Studies. "A Model for Accessibility." http://www.cds.hawaii.edu/main/publications/modelforaccess
- Vitullo, Margaret Weigers. "Universal Design: Creating Presentations That Speak to All." American Sociological Association. http://www.asanet.org/footnotes/julyaugust08/presentation.html