

Accessible online meetings: guidance for facilitators

Considering accessibility in advance of a meeting, even if no-one has specifically asked for anything, will make your meeting more inclusive, for a disabled person and for many others too. Here are some ways to make your meeting more inclusive.

1. Build a culture of inclusivity

Be mindful of people's needs. For example, describe visual elements orally, for those who cannot see these (they may be visually impaired, or they may be connecting via a phone with a small screen). You could also start your meeting by describing yourself for those who cannot see you.

2. Assign an accessibility host

It is good practice to identify someone in the meeting who can respond to access needs if they arise during the meeting. Introduce them to participants.

3. Provide captions

These help many people, not just those with hearing impairment. With any paid for Zoom account, you can turn on free auto-captions. For greater accuracy hire a human transcriber who types what is said in real-time. See separate guidance.

4. Improve clarity of speech

A headset with built-in microphone reduces background noise and improves sound quality. This also helps with creating good captions. Ask people to stay on mute unless they are speaking. Speak clearly, without rushing, so people have time to take in what you say and the captioner can keep up.

5. Manage the chat

Extroverts speak to think while introverts think to speak. That's an oversimplified view, but having chat available allows introverts to write as well as speak.

In Zoom, a screen reader reads out everything posted in the chat; you can't mute selectively. Consider limiting participants to chatting with the host only. This way the host can share relevant information with the whole group verbally, without screen reader users being distracted by chat.

6. Stick to the timetable

People can plan their own needs better if they know when there will be breaks and when you will finish. For a meeting of one hour or less, it is generally OK to hold the meeting without a break. For a 90 minute meeting, it is good practice to give people a short break half way through. Set your breaks in advance and stick to them.

7. Manage cognitive overload

Video chats can be exhausting. Zoom fatigue is a genuine phenomenon. Some people find turning off their camera helps to manage stress. You might also remind people that in Zoom they can turn off the self-view if they find it distracting to see an image of themselves.

8. Provide information in advance

If using slides or written documents, provide them in advance. This enables people to prepare well and thus to participate more fully.

9. Give content warnings

Consider giving content warnings before mentioning topics that may be triggering or difficult for some people: e.g. food, alcohol, racism, state physical violence and sexual violence. If referring to such content, also provide details before the end of the session of a relevant helpline for support.

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