

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 below.

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.

Live transcription (subtitles) in Zoom meetings

Zoom has provides free, automated transcription of meetings. It is not perfect, but is getting better all the time.

We recommend that you turn this on in all meetings to provide a basic level of accessibility. Participants can easily show or hide the captions themselves.

First set up auto live transcription on the account. This is a one-off task. You can get [written instructions](#) or [video instructions](#).

Enabling live transcription in a meeting

This needs doing at the start of every meeting. It only works in the main meeting room; i.e. not in breakout rooms. If someone needs it then use the main room as one of your breakout rooms.

Instructions for the host in the meeting:

1. After opening the Zoom meeting, click on “CC Live Transcript”
2. Select Enable Auto-Transcription (participants will now need to enable captions)

Instructions for participants:

1. Select “CC Live Transcript” (you may need to select ‘More’ first)
2. Select “show subtitles”
3. Captions can also be turned off by selecting “hide subtitles” in step 2
4. To change size of subtitles, select “CC Live Transcript”, then “Subtitle Settings”, then adjust font size.

Best Practices for Using Auto Live Transcription

The following is good practice for Zoom meetings but also improves transcription.

- A headset with built-in microphone will clear improve audio and caption quality.
- Listen to the room you are in; consider turning down/off anything that makes a considerable amount of background noise.
- Speak slowly, it will help the system capture the words you are saying.
- If there are loud disruptions (e.g. fire engine) pause until the noise passes.
- Auto transcription does not work in breakout rooms. Provide an option for a group to meet in the main room. But don't leave one person by themselves!