Accessible Online Meetings

Online meetings can be accessible. Just like designing an accessible website or face to face meeting, a bit of planning and consideration is all it takes to make your meeting accessible.

The tips in this resource focus on making meetings inclusive for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing and people who are blind or vision impaired. However it's worth remembering that embedding these practices into all your online meetings is simply just good inclusive practice, which is better for everyone!

Tip 1 — Turn on your video

- Enables Deaf and hard of hearing people to lip read.
- Seeing facial expressions and gestures supports communication for people with intellectual disability.
- It's not to judge your isolation haircut, your home decor or if you are wearing your pajamas after midday!

Tip 2 — When you are not talking, go on mute

- Keeps the focus on the speaker when in 'active speaker' view which is what Deaf and hard of hearing people use for lip reading. If the focus moves, the speaker disappears and they miss that part of the conversation.
- People who are blind or have low vision rely entirely on the audio which can be distracting and disorientating with lots of background noise.
- Use features like the 'raise hand' feature in Zoom or chat to indicate that you wish to speak. The facilitator can then direct the discussion to ensure that only one person speaks at a time.

Not all Deaf and hard of hearing people are created equal in that they have individual preferences for supporting 'listening' and speaking'. Some use speech, captioning or Auslan interpreters exclusively but many use a combination depending on the situation. So its very important to find out what support they need, then follow through.

Tip 3 — Who is in the 'room'

- Do a roll call. This helps everyone to know who is in the room. This is best done by the meeting host.
- If the host doesn't name you, introduce yourself before you start speaking. This helps meeting attendees know who is speaking and who to focus on.

Not everyone can see who is in the meeting. Remember that time when you joined a teleconference late? You had no idea who is speaking or who else was on the call and it was hard to know when to jump in without cutting off other people. The confusion and isolation you felt was because you couldn't access body language cues that would otherwise be available to you. That's what meetings can be like for people who are blind or have low vision.

DARU

Tip 4 — Captioning and Auslan Interpreting

- When using Auslan Interpreters, ensure they have the link to the virtual meeting so they are in the virtual room just like the other participants. Deaf attendees will then 'pin' the interpreter to be on screen at all times.

- Enable closed captions (which turn the speech to text) through the online platform. Although many online meeting platforms have a built in captioning service, these are notoriously poor quality. It is recommended that you book a third party captioning provider who will work with you to ensure that the captions work on screen.

Tip 5 — Be prepared

- Ask attendees to let you know if they have accessibility requirements in your meeting invitation.

- Make sure you have all accessibility needs covered before the meeting. Have all materials and slideshows been provided in preferred formats?

- Have an agenda to follow, just like you would in a face to face meeting, and make sure it is circulated as far ahead of time as possible.

- As a meeting host, you need to know how to use your platform's features. You should know how to turn video on/off, mute and unmute, use chat, raise hand and screen share on different devices. If you are not confident, consider roping in a co-host to assist.

- Be prepared to read out and describe what is up on the screen during the meeting.

Tip 6 — Slow down

- Create pauses to give note takers and people using captions or Auslan interpreters time to translate.

- Helps people using slow band width to keep up.

Tip 7 — Be wary of Zoom fatigue

- Remember that it's harder to process non-verbal cues like facial expressions, the tone and pitch of voices, and body language in online meetings.

- A short meeting is a good meeting to maximise concentration.

Tip 8 — Don't worry about making mistakes

- It's OK to apologise if you get accessibility wrong. We're all still learning how to optimise accessibility in the virtual room.

- Be proactive in resolving accessibility issues so that it's fixed for the next meeting.

- Making meetings inclusive is a skill that you get better at the more you do.

For more detail and useful links, go to the DARU courses page to complete the Accessible Online Meetings micro course at: www.daru.org.au/courses

DARU