

# Introduction to Accessibility

## The basics

### What is accessibility?

Making content accessible includes anticipating, identifying, reducing, removing, and preventing barriers that make it difficult for people to access, use or learn from your content, in this case a podcast.

Accessibility considerations in podcast creation are specifically helpful to people with cognitive differences (such as learning and processing difficulties) and physical differences (such as visual, hearing or motor impairments). On the technical side, creating accessible content makes it easier for those who use intermediary technologies and softwares (like screen readers) to interact with computers and digital content.

### Accessibility and guests

**Making an accessible podcast isn't just about how to serve your listeners; creating an accessible environment for your guests is just as important. Here are some things to consider to make sure you are meeting their needs:**

- Ask your guest if they have any accessibility needs and ensure they are met to the best of your abilities.
- Make sure the recording location is accessible to your guest.
- Discuss what you want to talk about in advance.
- Brief them on audio quality and speaking clearly. (**See page 2**)
- Provide them with a prep sheet that outlines details of the interview (the level of detail will depend on your podcast style and goals), details about you, and your podcast and your contact info.
- Offer to take breaks or let your guest know how interruptions can be managed. For Wonks And War Rooms, we let guests know that we will edit background noise (like children crying!) and that guests can take a pause if they need to address something else.
- Consider inviting differently abled guests or guests from marginalized backgrounds to your podcast.

-  [Sample guest prep sheet \(Word, 73 KB\)](#) (East Coast Studio)
-  [Interviewing disabled experts guide](#) (Media Trust)

### Virtual recording

Zoom is a good accessible option to use when recording your podcast virtually. There are also a number of accessible alternatives.

-  [Zoom and accessibility](#) (UCLA)
-  [Microsoft Teams and accessibility](#) (Marquette University)
-  [Riverside.FM virtual recording](#)

This guide offers suggestions to increase accessibility for any podcast, but we are particularly interested in how podcasts can be used for academic purposes including teaching and knowledge mobilization.

Overall, accessible content improves access your podcast and the user experience for everyone. For example, those with language barriers benefit from clear explanations, annotations, and transcriptions, while providing transcripts or video alternatives allows people the flexibility to choose how to consume your content depending on their environment. Accessible content can also help with SEO and general searchability.

-  [Example of JAWS screen reader](#)
-  [Example of eye gaze technology](#)
-  [Example of described video](#)

## Accessibility Statements

### What are they?

An accessibility statement reiterates your commitment to providing accessible content. It presents your overall goals and the methods you are using to achieve those goals, and details a feedback mechanism so users can let you know how you are doing. Also, consider including a commitment to continual improvement. Additionally, these statements can be used to outline any limitations in the accessibility of your platform or content.

### Why create an accessibility statement?

Creating and publishing an accessibility statement demonstrates a commitment to accessibility and provides users with practical information on the accessibility of your content.

-  [Developing an accessibility statement](#) (W3C)
-  [Generator an accessibility statement](#) (W3C)

## Accessibility Audits

### What are they?

Accessibility audits are structured reviews of your organization's current performance relative to your accessibility goals.

### Why complete an audit?

It's hard to know where you stand without looking at goals and best practices. Conducting an audit identifies areas in need of improvement and provides benchmarks for future progress.

-  [Accessibility audit](#) (SiteImprove)
-  [Template for accessibility evaluation reports](#) (W3C)

# Production Accessibility

## Recording preparation

### Sound quality

Background noise can be distracting and make the primary voices harder to hear or focus on. Improving sound quality is important for people with auditory processing differences and attention issues.

- Find a quiet room and make it as quiet as possible. Turn off cell phones, close doors and windows, turn off fans, and reduce other background noises.
- Use headphones/earphones: this reduces feedback and blocks out remaining environmental noises.
- Use a **pop filters** on microphones.
  - 🔗 [What is a pop filter & why you should use them](#) (Audio Mentor)
- If virtual, optimize Zoom for recording.
  - 🔗 [How to record a podcast on Zoom](#) (BuzzSprout)
- Record on separate tracks.
  - 🔗 [Multi-track recorder guide](#) (The Podcast Host)
- Consider using noise cancelling software.
  - 🔗 [Krisp AI noise cancellation app](#)

### Ensuring clarity

Ensuring clarity is important, especially for people with auditory processing differences and language barriers.

- Speak slowly and articulate.
- Avoid speaking at the same time as your guest. However, if you record on multiple-tracks, you can also go back and edit out overlaps.
- Use inflections! (Avoid being monotone)
- Explain technical terms and idioms, or link to explanations in transcript annotations. (See page 3)
- Consider using analogies and/or examples.
- Use recognizable cues when appropriate, such as pausing before moving on to a new question or using signposting words like 'first' and 'finally'.
- Choose words to ensure inclusivity and respectfulness.
- Consider designing an "episode template" to follow.

## Video Alternatives

If you're able, consider recording a video version of your episodes. Video content can be helpful for those with hearing impairments or language barriers, as well as those with attention issues or who learn best with visual cues.

This could include a live video recording of your podcast, an **audiogram** version of your episode, or could be a video composed of simple static images with audio superimposed. Ideally, any video content will have captions. You can add

your own captions, or sites like YouTube can automatically generate captions for you.

**See page 5 for video best practices and accessible media players.**

**Make sure you test these tools and techniques in advance!** You may need to make a few practice recordings before you find the right setup.

## Sound Mixing

### Reduce background noise

- The best way to reduce background noise is to ensure good sound quality during recording.
- You can, however, use a variety of tools to clean up unnecessary background noise.
- Most sound editing software will have noise reduction functions, but the exact tool available to you will depend on the chosen editing platform.

### Adjust the volume

- You don't want listeners to have to play around with their volume too much.
  - ▶ Parts of the podcast that are too loud can distort the audio and hurt someone's ears.
  - ▶ Parts of the podcast that are too quiet can make the audio hard to hear.
- Look at the wave and volume levels in your editing software for recording segments that are too loud or too quiet and adjust to an appropriate level.
- Listen to the full episode; you may need to go back and tweak volume levels.

### Audio effects

Background tracks and audio effects can create distractions and make the main content difficult to hear.

- Avoid using them when they don't add anything.
- When they are used, make sure the main content is at least 20 decibels louder than any background audio.

🔗 [Mixing audio files for non-speech sounds](#) (W3C)

**Good audio makes transcription easier, but also makes the listening experience more user-friendly, which benefits everyone!**

# Publication Accessibility

## Transcription

### Transcription vs. show notes

**Show notes** summarize your episodes and provide additional information, while **transcription** is a word-for-word text version of your podcast. Show notes are published via your podcast host and viewable across platforms on episode pages. Transcripts can also be posted to most hosting platforms, however accessibility across distribution platforms varies. To increase visibility, consider posting transcripts to your website, too.

[🔗 The top 5 benefits of transcribing your podcast](#) (We Edit Podcasts)

### Benefits of transcription

Transcripts are most helpful to those with audio processing differences or hearing impairments, people with different learning styles, and those who do not speak your podcast's broadcast language as a first language.

- They give users searchable content, allowing listeners and readers to easily search for specific parts of the episode.
- They also make your podcast more discoverable online, helping with SEO.
- They can be convenient for those who don't have time to listen to your podcast or can't play audio in certain environments.
- **Annotated transcripts** allow you to add more information ([see next section](#)).

### Generating transcripts

There are a number of programs you can use to automatically generate transcripts. Note: best practice is to have a human review and edit such transcripts.

[🔗 Sonix.AI](#)      [🔗 NVivo plugin](#)  
[🔗 Otter.AI](#)      [🔗 YouTube](#)

### Types of transcripts

There are two types of transcripts. They provide the same information, but are accessed differently. Best practice is to include both types when possible.

1. **Text-based transcripts** Text with timestamps, displayed either on a

website, on your hosting platform, or in a downloadable file.

2. **Synchronized transcription** Closed captioning displayed within a media player while listening to the audio (often using an .SRT file).

### Formatting transcripts

Some tips when formatting transcripts:

- Follow a consistent format from episode to episode.
- Identify the name of the speaker.
- Include timestamps.
- Use headings if appropriate.
- Use an accessible font. ([See page 4](#))
- Include descriptions of sounds in square brackets: [music] or [laughter].
- Note unintelligible words and silence; include duration with timestamps if sustained.
- Remove verbal ticks (um, like, so, etc.) that get in the way of understanding.
- When spelling: S-P-E-L-L-I-N-G.
- For words in other languages, include the original text as spoken, and add a translation in either square brackets, footnotes or editor's notes.

### Displaying transcripts

Identify in your show notes, on your web page, and/or in your episode audio that transcripts and/or captions are available. There are several options for displaying transcripts — use as many as you can!

#### Text-based transcripts

**Plain text/HTML:** Use accessible text principles. ([See page 4](#))

**Accessible document files:** Include a downloadable file like a Word Doc or a PDF. A Word file is easiest for beginners.

[🔗 Making accessible documents](#) (Accessible Campus)

#### Synchronized transcripts

**Closed captions:** Allow lines from your transcript to be displayed in real time as a user listens to your episode, usually using an .SRT file or via YouTube.

[🔗 How to listen to podcasts with transcripts](#) (Snipd)

[🔗 How to add captions to videos](#) (Rev)

## Annotation

Annotation involves adding hyperlinks, resources, and additional notes to your transcript. This makes them more user-friendly for everyone, regardless of differences or abilities, because it:

- Clarifies ideas or concepts.
- Adds definitions for unfamiliar words.
- Shares the source of the information including academic papers, studies, or news articles.
- Gives additional background information or additional resources to learn more.
- Adds missing information or context.

### Benefits of annotation

Annotating helps the listener or reader gain additional knowledge or clarify any confusion. At the same time, it lessens the need for constant explanation during the actual podcast audio.

### What to annotate

- Events, news stories, scandals, real-world examples: consider linking to news, encyclopedia, or wiki articles on the subject.
- Names of people or organizations: consider linking to their bios or public social media pages.
- Theoretical concepts.
- Research findings and reports.
- Jargon or technical terms.
- Idioms: consider linking out to an explanation.
- Words in other languages (e.g., Latin terms, borrowed phrases).

[🔗 Sample annotated transcript](#) (Wonks and War Rooms)

# Publication Accessibility

## Basic principles of accessible web design

This is a whole other training session in itself! However, we have included some guidelines to get you started and links to more information.

- **Use titles and headings** (H1, H2, H3), which screen readers rely on.
- **Use accessible colour design.** Do not rely on colour alone to convey meaning and ensure there is a sufficient contrast ratio.
- **Minimize the number of plugins**, but consider including an accessibility plugin.
- **The web page should be scalable** without causing overlapping or extra horizontal scrolling, to accommodate font size increases.
- **Avoid anchor links**, which can be tricky for some users. If you can't, consider using a phrase that indicates the link is an anchor, such as "In this page" or "Jump down to ..."

- 🔗 [Introduction to web accessibility](#) (W3C)
- 🔗 [A guide to color accessibility in product design](#) (Invision)
- 🔗 [Color check for ADA image compliance](#) (OSS)

## Text formatting

- **Less is more:** Opt on the side of using fewer fonts and use them in expected ways.
- **Instructions should be device independent.** Avoid words like 'click'.
- **Avoid all-caps**, which are difficult to read.
- **Dates** should be unabbreviated.
- **Size:** Use a minimum of 12 points, but 16 points can improve readability for many. Avoid tiny print—everyone hates this, regardless of visual ability!
- **Style:** Best practice is to avoid italicized fonts. To a lesser extent, bolding is also undesirable.
- **Use an accessible font.** There are fonts that have been designed for accessibility, such as [Tiresias](#) and [OpenDyslexic](#), but common options such as Arial, Helvetica, Open Sans, and Verdana are also good choices.

- 🔗 [What are accessible fonts](#) (Accessibility.com)
- 🔗 [A web designer's Guide to accessible fonts](#) (Accessibility Checker)

## Links

- **Link text should be:**
  - ▶ underlined and in sentence case (don't capitalize each word).
  - ▶ descriptive but concise and should clearly indicate where the link leads (not 'here', 'read more', or the URL itself).
  - ▶ internally consistent, meaning that identical link texts on the same page should lead to identical outbound URLs.
- **If an image, not text, is hyperlinked, the image ALT-text acts as the link text.** The ALT-text should describe the image and tell the user where the link leads. (See page 5)
- **If the link is a download**, include the file type and size (e.g., PDF, 19 KB)

## Translation

Translating your transcripts and show notes makes your podcast available to a wider audience. It can increase accessibility for those who don't speak your podcast's broadcast language as their first language.

To save time and labour costs, you can run transcripts through an **automatic translator** first. There are a number of programs and apps that can do translation:

- 🔗 [Sonix automated translation](#)
- 🔗 [Subtitle translator](#) (Veed.io)
- 🔗 Free translation website: [DeepL](#)

With any automated translation, it is best to have someone review it for errors. **Human translators** can help identify the correct translations of specific industry phrases and edit for local dialect or vocabulary. This can be expensive, but is most reliable.

- 🔗 [Sample translated transcript](#) (Wonks & War Rooms)

## Social media and promotion

Your podcast doesn't end with you publishing your episode, and neither should your accessibility practices. You've gone through all this effort to make your podcast accessible - it's counterproductive to then promote your episodes in a non-accessible way.

Promotional and social content is often the first thing potential listeners encounter; they act as the "face" of your podcast. It signals to users that you are committed to accessibility and can even inform users of how to access accessible content.

**Hashtags:** Capitalize the first letter of #EachWord in your hashtag so it's better understood by screen readers.

**Use ALT-text on social media** (See page 5). These are supported by [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

# Publication Accessibility

## Images

- **Use alternative text**, also called **ALT-text**, ALT attributes, or ALT descriptions. This is one or two sentences of text describing the content and purpose of an image in a concise and unambiguous manner.
  - ▶ Do not use ALT-text for purely decorative images.
  - ▶ There is no need to use the word “image” or “graphic”; screen readers identify file types to their users.
- **For text in images:**
  - ▶ include a text-based version (e.g., a caption).
  - ▶ use a color or **contrast checker** to assess accessibility.

 [Image accessibility principles](#) (Accessibility Oz)

 [Color contrast checker](#) (Polypane)

 [Color check for ADA image compliance](#) (OSS)

## Video & Audiograms

- **Do not use flickering** or strobing images or video.
- **Include captions** and a transcript or audio description.
- **Disable autoplay** whenever possible, including for videos and image carousels.
- **Add captions to promotion videos on social media.** [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) support uploading an SRT transcript file. On Instagram, the best practice is to embed the transcript within the video (embedded closed captions).
- **Audiograms should have closed captions.** If you’re using an audio snippet to tease an upcoming episode, be sure it includes closed captioning.

 [Video accessibility principles](#) (Accessibility Oz)

 [Making YouTube videos accessible](#) (uConn)

 [How to add captions and subtitles to Instagram videos](#) (REV)

 [How to make an audiogram with closed captions for social media](#) (WAVVE)

## Accessible media players

Accessible media players have user interfaces which can be navigated with a mouse, keyboard, screen reader, or speech controls, can be easily zoomed larger, and offer sufficient colour contrast. Many of the players available from podcasting hosts are not fully accessible—providing alternatives is important.

When choosing audio and video media players:

- **Consider including a link to allow users to download the podcast** (audio) directly to their computers. This allows users the option to use a different media player that better meets their needs
- **Include captions and a transcript.**
- **Disable autoplay:** If possible, edit the player’s embed code to turn off autoplay and include a title.

 [Accessible media players](#) (Podcast Accessibility)

## Accessible ideas

**Remember, your listeners will often be learners and non-specialists.**

Especially in the context of academic podcasts where we are typically talking about complex ideas, it is important to consider how much background information your listeners will need, which terms and acronyms need to be explained, and what you can do to structure your episode in a way that is conducive to learning.

## Funding accessibility

**Creating accessible resources can come with a cost**, whether that’s extra time, equipment or staff. Here are a few ideas to help fund your accessibility efforts:

- Check with IT or accessibility support at your university or organization; they might be able to provide equipment and training.
- Consider hiring someone with a disability. Not only are there grants available to support inclusive work environments, differently abled team members also might better understand accessibility issues!
- Look for grants that support accessibility projects:

 [Enabling Accessibility Fund](#)

 [Enabling Change Fund](#)

## Other resources

 [Podcast Accessibility](#) (Nicolas Steenhout)

 [Podcasts and accessibility](#) (Accessibility.com)

 [Making Your podcast more accessible](#) (The Podcast Host)

 [Top 5 Ways to Make Podcasts More Accessible](#) (Bureau of Internet Accessibility)