

NDRN-Accessible Communications 101

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Remote CART Captioning

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>> ALDEN: All right. I see some folks are coming in. I'm going to give it another moment or two and let folks get logged on. I love to see so many names entering the chat today. All right. And it looks like a majority of people have found their way in. So I'm going to go ahead and get started. First, I just want to handle some housekeeping things for us. We are using the interpretation feature that's in Zoom for live American Sign Language, live English captions via Zoom and a stream text link and automated Spanish captions via stream text link. All of those will be available in chat. Please use the chat for substantive questions and comments which will be addressed during breaks for Q&A if you are unable to unmute yourself but when we are at the Q&A question wants to ask a question, please raise your hand to get in the Q&A for speak. For accessibility purposes we ask that the first time you speak, you identify you feel by name, affiliation and provide a short description of yourself. This ensures our attendees who use screen readers will be able to hear and understand that there is a different speaker. And now, I guess we will go ahead and pose our first question, if you'd like, Hira. And then we can do our intros.

>> HIRA: Okay. For our first question, we are just asking you, what are communications? I know it's super broad. But type in the chat your general thoughts that come up when you think about communications. While you do that, Alden and I will do quick introductions. My name is Hira. I will do a quick visual description of myself. I'm a south Asian woman with curly black hair. She/her. I am a communications specialist here at the National Disability Rights Network but also with someone with lived experience with a disability. I have autism and ADHD. You might see me fidgeting a little bit. You might also see me looking to the left at some notes that are keeping me on track. But yeah, today, we're going to be talking about accessible communications. And I'm going to let Alden give her introduction?

>> ALDEN: Absolutely. So to do a little introduction, first I'll just say I'm Alden Blevins, communications manager here at NDRN. Before I found my way to NDRN I worked the Virginia P & A and after that some Virginia nonprofit. I'm well-acquainted with the work. And additionally, I am a White woman in her mid30's with shoulder-length, light brown hair. My pronouns are she/her and I happen to have my own experience with disability as well. I'm autistic. That said you may see me moving around a little bit when I talk or using my hands. That's feedback I've received as a presenter before. But know that I will try my best to be not distracting and engaging for you today.

>> HIRA: I'm seeing some good responses coming into the chat for what communications are. I see Monica shared communications are ways of sharing information. Someone else -- I think it's Jamie -- has given their introduction. Let's see if we have any more -- Preston shared that communications can be verbal, written, audio, video, e-mail, et cetera. Very true. Sarah says communications are ways to convey information through media, marketing, and various other ways of dissemination. And Austin -- sorry, Autumn, I love this description. Communications is a way of connecting with others. Those are all incredible answers. So I'll give you our kind of explanation of communications. And this is some quotes. And Olivia will share in our chat the folks whose original material this is. But Dr. Larson from the University of Utah describes communications as the technology and systems used for sending and receiving messages, for example, postal, telephone, radio, TV, and the internet. The tactics used to execute a marketing strategy, for example, advertising, PR, sales promotion, and events. And another definition we have from Joshua de Lung is communication is the strategy and creativity. It's the planning and managing that takes place first, and then communications are employed through various medias, whether the medium is print or web or whatever, to get those formulated messages across. So definitely hearing some of your definitions in the chat in here. And so moving into the next part, what are accessible communications, this is our brief explanation. So accessible communications are ways of communicating that reach a wider and more inclusive audience. That can include people with disabilities and more. So for example, nonnative English speakers or other folks with marginalized identities. There are also practices you can incorporate in virtual and in in-person forms of communication. They're also a way to increase the reach your projects, events, and classes. I like to start this presentation saying that accessible communications are a practice. They're not a stagnant protocol or a checklist. So you'll see as we go through this this is a one on one training -- 101 training, the basics, getting started in accessible communications. We might not be able to get into the detailed nitty-gritty of everything. But it is a way that we

want you to shape your communications strategy where you're thinking about accessible communications as a practice that you incorporate into your work all of the time.

So another quote I wanted to share here is that increasing numbers of people with disabilities attend professional conferences and meetings. Most presenters have the goal that everyone who attends their presentation is able to fully participate and access information. Reaching this goal involves efforts at many levels. To begin with, think about the diverse characteristics that may be present in your audience. Potential attendees may have different learning styles, may not be fluent in the language in which you are presenting, and/or may have difficulty seeing, hearing, moving, speaking, and/or understanding common phrases and jokes in your culture. And this is by Sheryl ( ) at the University of Washington. I think this highlights the purpose of accessible communications. The idea is that we want everyone to be able to fully participate and access information and that it includes making it accessible for people with disabilities, which naturally makes it accessible for everyone else.

So we are at our first poll. Starting in the accessible communications realm, it is a true or false question. So true or false? Image descriptions and alternative text are the same thing. I'll give you guys a few moments to respond. It looks like we're so far having a mix of answers. We'll let this run a little bit longer. I'll give it, like, ten more seconds. Okay. We're going to share the results briefly. But the answer to this is false. Image descriptions and alternative are not the same thing. And hopefully, you guys will know the difference a little bit better on the next slide.

Here's a breakdown of the difference between image description and alternative text. On the left is image descriptions. Image descriptions are typically located in the image caption, text post, or shared as an external text link. They're usually visible to everyone who wants to see it, and they typically don't have a set character limit. So they can have more details and more context.

On the other hand, alternative text is typically located in the image metadata or it's added in an alternative text box, for example, on social media. Typically -- and this depends on the social media platform -- but it's usually only visible to folks with a screen reader. And because of that it's limited to characters. Usually limited to 100 to 250 characters and it's short and brief. It might very briefly describe something in the image but it's not giving you the context and it's not giving you as much detail.

And that segues us generally into visual accessibility. As you will see in this presentation, we kind of break down accessibility in the different formats that folks might need. So we

talk about visual, auditory, et cetera. Starting with visual, one of the best practices is to describe yourself in an introduction.

So here's an example of a brief visual descriptor. It says -- obviously, this is not mine -- I am a White woman with straight blond hair and glasses. I'm wearing a red blouse and have a white wall background. My pronouns are she/her. The point of this is to describe yourself for folks who may have difficulty seeing you or who may be blind and that provides some additional context for folks about who you are and what you're talking about. I know this image description has in more recent years different conversations on what level of context folks with visual disabilities might want.

So there is -- if you go down the rabbit hole, you'll see some different conversations happening about that. But as a best practice, I think at least that very first sentence, just to give context of who you are can be really helpful. The next point we have is that image descriptions or alternative should be provided for any visual elements like images or icons. You'll see in our presentation that we have alternative text embedded into the presentation itself. But as we go through the slides, we will provide verbal image descriptions for all of -- descriptions for all of the images that are visible on our slides.

Next for visual accessibility, we always, always, always recommend sharing PDFs along with an editable document, which could be like a Word doc. The reason behind that is because PDFs kind of sort of frees your content, the way it looks. Folks can't edit it. And that can be helpful because when folks have access to editing, it can sometimes expand images or make the text funky. So having that frozen document is helpful and adobe has its own internal accessibility checker that you can, again, go down the rabbit hole and get all the details about. So they're kind of the standard for best practice for an accessible document. But along with that, you also want an editable document so that folks who maybe do want to change the text to a size that's bigger or to a text style that's easier to understand or even add more spacing between the words or the letters, have that ability. So best practice is to share both.

Next with visual accessibility, we also try to avoid any visually-led instructions or provide alternatives to those instructions. For example, if I'm giving my team a tutorial on something and I say, okay, after this step, you need to click the red box to download, well, if I have somebody using a screen reader or a different visual disability, I may not be able to see the red box. So we often try to find alternatives to visually-led instructions, if you can. Next, be careful with any moving or dynamic content. You'll see in our presentation the little bit of content that we have that is moving has sort of like a slow fade effect versus something that's more jarring or flashing. And that is really helpful for folks with various

visual disabilities. I know it's helpful to somebody with ADHD. It can be quite a jarring transition to get something popping in my face and it can distract me and take me out of the presentation. And so just be careful with those different moving and dynamic content. That doesn't mean that you can't have anything move in your presentation at all. But be careful with it. Try it out. Try it out with different people and see how that works.

And that's why our last example is test it out. This is huge. The best way to make things accessible is to test it with as many folks as you can with various disabilities. If you can't literally do that, if you're a team of three people and there's a limit to your disability experience, try to do at least -- imagine testing yourself. If you're going through the presentation, okay, if I was somebody with a visual impairment or difficulty seeing, how would I react to this presentation? Are there any instructions I couldn't see? Is there an image in here that I wouldn't understand that is providing some context? As much as you can, we really, really recommend testing it out. On the next slide, we are going to talk about -- we have some videos that are going to provide somewhat of disability perspectives. I'll try to make sure that the subtitles are on and that the sound comes through. Okay. Subtitles are on.

[Cc'd video playing].

>> HIRA: So that gives a little bit more context about screen readers and what text to speech is. So moving in, we're also going to talk about customizable text. I'll share this video.

[Cc'd video playing].

>> HIRA: I love that phrase. Accessible for all. We want to make sure that when we have these different practices and we're incorporating accessibility, again, it's not a one size fits all solution. What works for one person with a visual-based disability might not work for another person. And so really the best -- playing it, testing it out, and also making it customizable when you can.

Another crucial part of visual accessibility is contrast. As you can see, there's an image on the right, and it shows various color contrast comparison with a background color and text on that color. And it highlights text with good contrast and text that has bad contrast. Ideally, colors with high contrast makes navigating, reading, and interacting better. This applies to text, images, links, icons and more. Text is often the one that we focus on because this is where we can see the most concerns usually. And the rule of thumb really is if something is important enough to be seen, it must have adequate contrast. And a really good tool is one that I have linked here. It's [coolers.co](#) but Olivia will share in the

chat and other accessibility checking tools. But I love this example because you can see directly how hard it is to visually read something with bad contrast. And I always like to say if something is not accessible for you if you identify as a person without a disability, then it probably definitely will not be accessible for everyone else in the room with you or whoever you're sharing this presentation or content with.

And here is a demonstration on contrast. And I'll share this video as well.

[Cc'd video playing].

>> HIRA: Another great demonstration of contrast. And I think something the video does really well is highlighting that what is accessible can change depending on the context. So again, if you know you're going to do a presentation or a video outside, what might be an adequate color contrast indoors might not be the same as outdoors. Thinking about the context in which the content is going to be shared and then testing it out whenever you can.

Okay. We're going to be talking about font next. To begin, if you notice anything wrong with this example in our PowerPoint, I want you to go ahead and type the answer in the chat. And I'll give you guys a few seconds to do that.

Looking at the chat. If you notice anything wrong about the content shared on our slide right now, I want you to go ahead and type it into the chat. So lance said that the spacing is far too tight. Monica shared that it is hard to tell the difference between the No. 1 and the lower case l. Not enough spaces between the pink lines. Carla said there might be an issue with the tracking or leading. Laurie said it's leading tight. Facing is tight. Those are all correct. So this is an image of two different styles of font. There's one style of font that is sort of a bright pink color. And the letters and the words themselves are close together and also the lines between the different lines of text are also very close together. So there is overlapping. And as somebody mentioned, it's hard to also tell the difference between some of the characters first. The No. 1 and the l. And then we have some text on the right side that is black text. So the color contrast is a little bit better. And this font has more adequate spacing between the different lines. Some may say that it is still a little bit close in the spacing between the letters. So this is just to show you the different ways that font can or can't be accessible. So we want to make sure that there's adequate spacing both between the words and the letters in the words and the lines. And we want to avoid font styles that can be decorative.

For example -- I'm sure you all had this experience. I notice this a lot when I get fancy wedding invitations, for example. They always have that heavy cursive font that for me can be super difficult to read. We want to avoid font styles that appear more decorative. And

we want to think about the font size and style. So this isn't -- again, not a hard and fast rule of you need to use this font and this style, but think about how you're using it. When you switch a font to italics, does it make it harder to read? Is the size of the font big enough? Does it look all funky? Thinking about bold, in our presentation earlier, we used bold to highlight some key words which can be helpful for something like me with an intellectual disability or autism or ADHD to highlight some of the key points that you need to take away but also if everything is bold, it might not have the intended purpose that you want. So another rule of thumb is that as contrast decreases, font size must increase. And you'll see this in the tool that Olivia shared in the chat. If you have really, really small text, one, it might just not be accessible, period. But then you really need to make sure your contrast is strong. As it gets bigger, text might be slightly easier to read, even with a lower contrast. Like we shared earlier, always it's best practice to provide editable documents that allow readers to change the font, including the font style, the font color with and the font size, if needed.

Moving on to auditory accessibility. One of the best practices in auditory accessibility is having captioning. And whenever possible, live captioning. We are now in a Zoom age where a lot of folks -- or I should say just a virtual age where a lot of folks like to use Google meets, Zoom, Teams. And while those tools are helpful and they do have sort of an automated captioning option, really the best practice is to have a live captioner like we do here today. Live captioners are better able to understand context and they also are great for folks who might have a disability in the way that they speak. So if you have any sort of speech impediment or a lisp, then having a live captioner is helpful. And just like accuracy. They are generally more accurate than an automated system.

Another best practice is to have an ASL interpreter, as you'll see in our presentation today. We have two interpreters that are switching off. And this is great for folks who use ASL. The next is audio clarity. So this is when you are talking or when others are talking, thinking about the speed in which you're speaking, the clarity of an enunciating and pausing for processing. This is something I struggle with. I'm the type of person that runs through a presentation as quick as possible. And that can be hard for accessibility purposes when folks need time to process and especially interpreters might need you to speak at a lower speed so they can adequately interpret. I also try to encourage folks to repeat more important concepts more than once. So for example, some of the ones that you see as repeating in this presentation is try it out whenever you can and that there is not always a black and white answer to accessibility, that it is something that you have to incorporate as a practice and make customizable for people whenever possible.

Lastly when we talk about auditory accessibility, we want to think about audio amplification. This is huge in the audio world but also online. I'm sure you all may have had this experience where you were in a classroom or conference or some big group setting and there is a speaker and the folks in the back just cannot hear them. And so as always, if it's not accessible for you, it's probably not accessible for other folks with disabilities in the room. So we always recommend for possible having a microphone for the speaker so the audio can be amplified. This can be dependent on the learning space. If you're deciding to do an event outdoors, you might not have access to audio equipment so you might have to think about amplifying audio in a different way. Maybe that means talking to small groups one at a time and going around the room to explain information.

We're going to share another brief video.

[Cc'd video].

>> HIRA: I love that example because it showed how something simple as a recipe can be made more accessible. We're going to get a little bit more into how to make your content accessible. But first, we'll take a short Q&A break. I know -- I've been seeing the chat popping up, so I know that there are some questions coming in. I can -- and Alden, feel free to jump in with some of these questions as well. I'll start reading some of the first ones that I've seen pop up. I do a lot of e-mails for orgs that love graphic flyers. My alternative text tries to have a little, but I usually end up saying please see more in the article. Is this okay? I think what I'm hearing is that you're able to when doing graphic flyers provide a little bit of alternative text but you often end up saying read more in the article, and is that okay. Alden, feel free to jump in, too, but I'll say any alternative text is better than none. Is it okay? Yes. We want to have alternative text when there's any visual descriptions. But if you feel nervous about the level of content or detail that you're providing, I know one way that we have been able to do this in the past is by providing longer sort of image descriptions externally. So if folks can click on link to get more access to that description. If it's a flyer for example for an event you can include alternative text. You can find all the event details here. And it might be a web page for your readers that is accessible and integrated. But I would say baseline, providing anything such as alternative text is better than nothing. What do you think, Alden? Do you have any thoughts?

>> ALDEN: Yeah. I definitely think the same way. Specifically Canva I know their alt text feature is not great when flattened to a PDF. Do what you can, but know that the tools are still catching up in some ways. I think if you link to an accessible page that has the full and complete information, that's going to be okay. Also, let's say it comes back to considering your audience. Right? If the flyer is for an in-person event and it doesn't matter if it's going

to be screen reader accessible anyway because you're going to be handing it out to people who will be receiving the information in person. Thinking about what your purpose our your audience is and how to make things as accessible as possible in that way. If you were, say, doing an event in person and you wanted to be able to give the information to somebody who maybe couldn't see, you could always say have a QR code reader that then goes to the web page that is screen reader accessible. I know that that would be useful for some of the staff members I work with who do have a vision-based disability. So I think definitely knowing your audience, who are you trying to talk to, and doing what you can with the tools you have -- I heard Adobe InDesign is usually best for making accessible PDFs that the reading order and formatting seems to turn out the best when converted to a document like a PDF, but I know every nonprofit does not have accessibility to those tools. So I want to mention use whatever resources you have available to you.

>> HIRA: I see another question that came up was does italics make documents harder to read? And I would say there is -- I would say there is controversy in the communications space. So I can share my personal opinion. And it is that generally, italics are considered pretty inaccessible in and that if they are used, the best practice is to use it very sparingly. You can -- as somebody who reads italics all the time, you might even notice that as somebody, for example, myself, who doesn't have a visual disability, it can cause me eye strain and it can -- hard to understand what the italics are really supposed to signify. And then I would also say if there is an intended purpose of putting something in italics, some screen reader softwares do not announce that something is in italics. So that might also make it inaccessible for folks who aren't visually seeing the italics. So generally, it's pretty accepted as inaccessible. But, like I said, there's no black and white answer. I'm sure there are some folks who might -- who are in the disability community who might really love italics. I would say if you are going to use it, just try to use it sparingly. Alden, do you have any thoughts?

>> [No audio]. I was going to say, yes, same thing. I generally think especially if the font is small, that's going to be inaccessible. If it's like a larger or more graphic image like something you want to put on a t-shirt or something like that, you might be able to get away with the slanting. But overall, it's something I would definitely use sparingly and really think about if it is going to alter who can understand the design. When I am weighing is it going to look good and engaging versus is it going to be accessible, because of my work and what I do, I go with is it going to be accessible? As a comms person with that's a trade-off to manage, but it's the one I choose.

>> HIRA: Yeah. Another great question we got was: Do you have a rough list of fonts that are generally the most accessible? I usually stick to serif fonts or Helvetica, but that can be difficult with social graphics using more boring fonts. So I will share -- hopefully, I can find it maybe during the later half of the presentation. I do have a rough list of some accessible fonts. I would say the best practice, though, sometimes, is to use the more boring fonts for accessibility. There are ways I think to make those fonts more fun and engaging. You can play with color while still making sure there's adequate color contrast. You can sometimes add shadow to the fonts or an outline or even just changing the fonts up a little bit. So maybe you use one font like ( ) is one I know that we often use for the title and then you use a different font for the body of the text. There are ways to make it a little less boring and more fun.

But ideally, yes, we do want to stick to fonts that don't have some of the more decorative bits at the ends or the cursive. So I'll see if I can find my list. I know I have it in the computer saved somewhere. And I'll try to send it at some point during this PowerPoint. I think we can take one more question before we have to move to the next section. Let me see. I see the list. I'm trying to see if there's something that we haven't really talked about. I see somebody shared while in-person captioning is preferable, auto captioning is getting better. Is auto better than none? And again, is there a law? I would say -- and Alden, feel free to jump in -- yes, auto captioning is better than anything. Same way that alt text is better than nothing. Is there a law? I am not sure about the legalities of the comms field. Alden, if you do know -- I'm not sure if you do -- about what is considered legal within the accessibility space, but I would say yes, auto captioning is better but live captioner is best practice.

>> ALDEN: Yes, live captioner is best practice as much as you can. Again, from a law perspective, neither Hira nor I are lawyers. There are lawyers that work within our lawyers. But neither of us are lawyers so I would say check closely with the laws and regs in your area because I live in Virginia and that can be different from your state. We have a Virginians with disability act just as we have the Americans with Disabilities Act. So the rules and your locality may be different depending upon what's going on in your locality. I do happen to know that there have been issues with P & As in the past, getting captioning accommodations for folks who are participating in, like, virtual court. I think in a situation like that where you are accessing your legal rights, maybe there's a law saying this is required. But I'm not a lawyer. No legal advice here. But definitely we want to make sure and check in on the rules and regs in your specific area because they can vary quite a bit from state to state.

>> HIRA: We're going to move to the second half of this presentation. And we're going to start with another poll, which is how comfortable are you writing in plain language? And the options are: I'm an expert; I understand the concept but I'm looking to learn more strategies; I know what it is, but I don't know how to write in it; lastly, this is the first time I've heard of plain language.

>> ALDEN: Giving another minute as folks participate. So it looks like so far, most folks are falling into the category with 77% of I understand the concept, but I am looking to learn more strategies. We have 3% of folks participated that said that they were already an expert. We have 9% of folks participating that said I know what it is, but I don't know how to write in it. And 11% of folks, this is the first time I heard of plain language which is exciting because it means there are folks in here that I get to spread the news about plain language, which is exciting for me. Cool. The first thing we have to talk about is what is plain language? And that is kind of interesting because as you might notice on my screen, plain language, especially in terms of the law itself, the definition of plain language is not necessarily written in the most accessible way.

So I'm going to read you the literal definition from the plain language act but we are going to break down and plain languagify that definition to make sure that everyone truly understand it. Writing that is clear -- can we go back one? Thank you so much. Sorry. Writing in plain language is writing that is clear, concise, well-organized and following other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience. So plain language is material that your audience can scan to find what they need, understand what they read hopefully the first time they read or hear it and use what they find or read to meet their needs. Why do we use plain language? It takes extra work and extra brain power to really think about the clearest way to deliver our messages. So why should we do it? Well, plain language actually does get your message across in the shortest time possible. Right? If you are being as efficient in the way you communicate as you really can be and focusing on clarity, you're going to have fewer people coming back to you with misunderstandings and you're going to have to repeat yourself less. Those are two great reasons to use plain language.

Another great reason that I think is very important for our community is that simply more people are able to understand your message. We know in the disability community that folks will say intellectual and developmental disabilities may have some difficulties processing when they read. Those communities very much benefit from things written in plain language. Additionally to those communities, we also have folks in the ESL or English as a second language community that may also benefit from having things being written in

more plain language. I think the thing that's really important to remember is that you have an audience that you're thinking of. Right? And that United States of America, our reading level of our general audience completely outside of the disability space, our general audience is reading at, say, a 6th or 7th grade level. When we are reading complex legal rights information, we need to keep that fact in mind at all times because people deserve to understand the laws and policies that govern their lives. I'm going to teach you some ways how today. Can we go to the next slide? Thank you.

So as I just mentioned, my No. 1 tip is always think about your audience when you are writing. Right? Again, we have an audience in the United States of America whose reading level might not be as high as you immediately anticipate it to be. We want to make sure that we are really writing -- if we're thinking for the general public that that writing is truly something that the general public can understand. We can do that by simplifying our word choices or using common terms. We can eliminate the use of acronyms or jargon. I know across the protection and advocacy network, we love acronyms. Right? We have so many of them.

But when I am writing for the general public, I really do try to write them out every single time. Instead of just saying the ADA, if I'm working with someone who doesn't have a lot of knowledge about disability rights, I'm going to say Americans with Disabilities Act and take the extra time to spell it out just so my communication and my message is clear for that audience. Only include the information that is absolutely necessary. Don't include things that maybe overexplain or confuse the issue. Another thing you can do is use active voice versus passive voice. And we'll talk a little bit more about some rules for that in a moment, but that is one of those grammar thing that can be tricky. Another thing that can help is to use lists and tables to organize your information. Sometimes simply having a bunch of text on a screen can be incredibly intimidating and make it feel like you will never find the information you need. Think about yourself when you were a learner, maybe even a student in the classroom. When you opened your textbook and saw a wall of text with no bold headings, no pictures, nothing to guide you through the content, would that be intimidating or helpful to you? And then think about adding the lens of disability to that equation. So lists and tables can help. You also want to use sentences that are short as much as possible. You want to be helpful and human.

And again, the thing to remember that's key with plain language is clarity of information for a lay person. You're not dumbing it down. You are instead thinking about intentionally which I actually think is ironically much harder in a lot of situations -- you're thinking intentionally about the clearest and simplest way to put your message. And on my screen I

have a graphic of a lovely woman with a prosthetic limb who is clearly making a list of something in her mind. Next slide.

I have an example here from a medical testing environment, where in one example, they chose words that were maybe more confusing for a general audience. And in the next example, they tried to fix it. So the first unplain language version says: If your initial screening evaluation indicated you have high blood pressure, you will be asked to participate in the second phase of this research investigation. The investigation aims to examine a new medication that may prevent cardiovascular disease. The simplified version says: If your tests show you have high blood pressure, we ask you to be in the second part of that study. Our goal is to test new medication that may help keep some people from getting heart disease. I love that this has some examples of very simple swaps, right, instead of the investigations goal. Our goal, us, the research team. Instead of cardiovascular disease, simple swap, say heart disease. That's what it is. So there are very, sometimes, simple ways that you can think about your word choice or structure your sentences in shorter chunks to really make your things more plain language. Can we go to the next slide?

Here's another definition. Now, for this definition, plain language sometimes shorter sentences is better. But remember that your guiding principle is clarity for a layperson who doesn't know anything about what you're talking about. So in this example, I like to include it because it shows that shorter isn't always better. The definition on the left says: A legal guardian has the authority and duty to care for the personal and property interest of another person. Clocks at the grade level of 13.5, so college and up. On the right it says a legal guardian acts as a parent for another person. The guardian must care for and make decisions for that person. For example, the guardian must make sure the person is properly fed, clothed, housed and goes to school. And the guardian has the power to make property, medical care, and schooling decisions for that person. This definition is longer, but if you do not know what the personal and property interest of another person are, the definition on the left isn't going to help you. Now, the definition on the right might give you a little bit more context, and we can see that it came in at a lower reading level of 7th grade. Shorter is good, but it's not always better. Clarity is what's key. Can we see the next slide?

I love this example because I live in the city of Richmond, and in Richmond, we have a lot of parking signs that look like the one on the left where it feels like they're trying to trick you and get you to park you somewhere you should not normally be parking [chuckling]. But instead, this is a great illustration of the way that visually organizing the information into,

say, a chart or a table can be incredibly helpful. I on the left side would probably not have a chance of not getting my car towed. On the right side where it clearly displays in red the times you cannot park and green the times you can park, I would have a lot better chance of avoiding a ticket if the signs in Richmond were like the right soon the right. That's a dream that we'll have parking signs like the one on the right. Next slide.

Great. The other grammar rule I mentioned earlier is active and passive voice. When you are writing in active voice, generally the sentence structure will be subject, verb, object. Alden did something. Hira made a report. Or Olivia wrote a caption. Right? In another way people write sometimes, it's passive. So a report was written. We don't know who wrote the report. Or a social post was made. We don't know who made it. If you can find a way to think about writing in that subject, verb, object structure, you can really refine your writing and make things more simple for your reader.

So one test you can use that kind of helps sometimes is called the bunny test, which is just adding by bunnies at the end of the sentence and if it still sounds kind of grammatically correct, that's a hint you might be in passive voice. So a report will be submitted. By who? By bunnies. We know that sentence is in passive voice. We could instead reword it as we, or department X or X person will submit a report. Passive voice, another example will be, the class syllabus will be posted. If we add by bunnies, we know that the class syllabus will be posted by bunnies. That still sounds a little bit grammatically correct. So we have a clue that this sentence might be in passive voice. And if you get that clue, then the goal is to try to reword it in passive voice. Make the subject clear to your audience if you have a passive and turn it into an active. The biology professor or I will post the class syllabus as opposed to the class syllabus will be posted. One tip, we have a link that will be put into a chat by Purdue which is a great writing resource if you have looked on their website. I used it a lot when writing my thesis in college. A lot of good tips for you there. Next slide, please.

So I have some words on my screen that I'm going to read out loud. And for this portion, if you are able, I would love if you could help me translate some of these words by dropping your translation in the chat. So I'm going to give you a word, and then if you hear that word and you can think of a simpler translation and you'd be willing to put it in the chat for me, that would be awesome. The first word we're going to try out is conceal. Yes. Lots of people are saying hide. That's a great plain language swap for conceal. What about consent? Agree, allow, give permission. I'm hearing lots of good examples. Yes, we'll reveal what our answers were in just a moment. I tried to choose some words that often show up in legal writing so that we could think about what those words really mean and

break them down. What about enjoined? Yeah. I see some interesting answered in the chat. Connected could be an answer in one context. But if we're thinking about the legal context, Sharon, shout out, I saw she said required. Enjoined usually means ordered by the court to do something. In a legal specific context, it usually means ordered or told, told to do something by X date. Right? What about expenditures? Cost. One of my favorite -- I believe it's a Destiny's Child song. I pay my what? Bills. Bills could be another answer. Cost, expenditure, bills. Those can all be a more simple word. Cost, bills. Sometimes I've even seen people say finances, things like that.

Injunction. That's another one that has a legal definition. Yes, stop, ban, order to stop. Those are all great swaps that you can make for that word. What about modification? Change. Great, simple swap to make. What about parties? And I will say in this sense, I'm not talking about this type of party. I wish that I was. Yes, in a more legal sense. Persons, groups, participants, people. And last but not least, shall. Kind of an a Shakespearean one for you. What's an easier swap? Have to, must, will, do. Those are all great answers. If we go to the next slide we can read some of the answers we came up with. For conceal, we said hide or cover up. For consent, we said agree, okay, allow. Again, which swap you choose might depend on the context of what you're writing about. So you know, it's good to do this exercise and break it down to word by word. But it's also okay do think about the context that you're going to actually be using these words in when you do go to do plain languageification of a document that somebody has made at your work or organization. Consent is agree, okay, allow. Enjoined, ordered or commanded. Expenditures, costs or expense. I like bills better. Injunction, ban, order, ruling. Modification can be change or adjustment. Parties are people involved. And shall is must, will, or going to.

Now we're going to try the same thing but with short phrases. You might not have time to type them in the chat but just think in your mind what might be a simple, plain language swap for some of these phrases. At the present time could become now. Effective date of termination of order. This is a real phrase I have seen. Effective date of the termination or of order. The end, the date that the order ends. Yes, exactly. Set the matter for hearing. Schedule. You're schedule your hearing date. With regards to. That's three whole words when you could just say about. A true and correct copy. It usually means a hard copy. This one is one of my favorites that fully came from a court pleading. Found a loophole with which to circumvent the truth. Lied. They lied. Tell it like you see it. They lied. Exactly, exactly. I love that one. Made a statement that, said yet. Supply an explanation that is satisfactory, just explain. Just explain. Yeah. So all of those are examples of short swaps that you can make of this kind of legal ease way of writing. If you're writing for a court, that's your audience and you are speaking to them in their language. That might be

effective. But if you are communicating with someone external who do not know what these words or phrases mean and they deserve to understand the laws, procedures, the information that are going to govern and impact their lives, you are going to have to do translating of phrases like those.

So I have a sample passage we're going to work on today. This last passage which I will read out loud, we're going to take maybe three to five minutes, and I'm going to let you guys think more about how you would translate this passage. What does this passage really mean? What is the core of what they're trying to say? And then I'm going to ask some folks to come off mute, maybe with a raised hand, and maybe share what more plain language portion of this statement they were able to come up with. And I'll have a version that I'll show you as well. Here's the sample. And this is a real section from title 1 of the ADA.

It says: As used in subsection a of this section, the term discriminate against a qualified individual on the basis of disability includes -- failing to select and administer tests concerning employment in the most effective manner to ensure that, when such test is administered to do a job applicant or employee who has a disability that impairs sensory, manual, or speaking skills, such test accurately reflect the skills, aptitude or whatever other factor of such applicant or employee that such test purports to measure rather than reflecting the impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills of such employee or applicant except where such skills are the factors that the test purports to measure. That is an extremely long sentence that doesn't have an end. Right? Not very plain language.

So I want you to take a couple of minutes to yourself and just think about what is this passage really trying to say, and what are some more plain language ways I could word this section? So give yourself a little bit of time. Think about it. And I'm going to think about my answer as well. I see some people putting answers in the chat. But this is tricky, so I'm going to give folks another minute. And this is the part where I would love some interaction or participation if anyone is feeling brave. If you are willing to use the plain language -- the raise hand feature in Zoom, you click the button that says raise hand at the bottom or you can drop that you would like to speak in the chat. And I'm looking for volunteers you might be able to tell us what their plain language is for this particular passage. And see one example in the chat. I believe it's Kara. Employment test must assess the skill they're supposed to measure, not the applicant's disability unless the disability-related ability is itself what the test is intended to evaluate. That's a good definition. Anybody have another one? I see an even shorter one from Carla in the chat. When employer select tests that are biased against a person's disability, that is discrimination. Employers must make sure job tests measure a job's abilities not the effects of a disability such as difficulty seeing,

hearing, or seeing. The only exception is when those skills are what the test is designed to measure. Anybody else? I think we have some great answers already. Can we go to the next slide, please?

So here's my version. And I've got to be honest with you. I don't love it. I want to take the third paragraph you see down, I really think this would be even better if I had put that portion into bullet points. Right? But here is my definition I came up with. This document says that illegal discrimination against a person with a disability includes: Choosing and using employment test formats that do not reflect job skills. If a candidate has a disability that affects their senses, affects use of hands or body, affects their speaking skills, steps must be taken to ensure that the employer is testing the candidate's actual ability to perform the job. This means that the test cannot simply screen for sensory, manual, or speech skills. Instead, employment tests must screen for specific skills that are relevant to the job. The only exception to this law would be when the specific skills mentioned are uniquely relevant to the job itself such as needing vision to be a commercial driver. I think given an example, needing vision to be a commercial driver, are helpful for helping people see the exception when there is an exception. I like some of your definitions even better. I think some of them were shorter, more concise. And I think that my definition would be even better if I had added some bullet points in.

Oh, and Sharon also asks, what's the audience? That's a great question because if the audience is folks with IDD, I think that my definition on the page could even be potentially too wordy. Maybe sentences need to be shorter. Maybe I needed to employ those bullet points. Again, access is a practice, not a checklist. Right? It's something that we continually do to work to improve upon and we check when we receive feedback from people within the disability community about what might be better for them. I see one raised hand, if you want to go ahead and come off mute. I think Devon might be able to help you.

>> There we go. Yeah. Georgeena Moran, she/they. Working with multiple people of all abilities as a founder and owner of couple of businesses and as a quadriplegic, I also have worked with somebody on my website who says that, okay, all these words are wonderful, I suppose. But, you know, I won't read it. So what I would like you to do is to do like a subject and bullet points. And I could see if it's of interest. I could read a bullet point and move on, you know. This isn't for me. You know, that kind of thing. We all have better information on outdoor recreation. So that is -- and we give a lot of information on, you know, adventurous trails. But again, you know, too much information and the way you supply it could be beneficial or a show stopper.

>> ALDEN: I think that's so smart, and I think that's so true. I heard some people refer to this concept with not just the disability community but with the general public as the attention economy. We are all constantly in a world where people are vying for our attention in this economy. Ads are constantly chasing after us. There's a screen on every corner. Right? You've got advertisements coming out of your pocket. Right? Your cell phone. So there are all sort of these factors that are vying for our attention at all times, the fast news cycle, our own personal lives, our own work lives. So I think it is extremely important not just for a disability audience but for a general audience to be as expedient as possible with your information. And I think balancing access with that expediency, that kind of ability to swiftly adapt, I think that it can be really challenging as times. I saw someone put in the chat earlier that they had a news letter and that including the image description made the newsletter way too long and was worried folks wouldn't read it. I hear you. I completely understand. We had folks on our social media who feel that we should be using image description on every post instead of using the alt text feature. However we found that when we do that our post is exposed to a smaller audience. The algorithm doesn't like posts that are walls of text. So we have to think about and balance is it more important for us to have an image description that is right out in front? Or is it more important to us that people see this information at all? Right? And you do have to kind of balance and think about some of those factors when you're working in a communications landscape, I think. That's something that we definitely do on my team.

I think we can head into our last Q&A section. I have some resources at the end of the document that we used to create this document as well as some other materials about plain language that I thought might be accessible, helpful for the audience to have. So those will be available in the presentation doc for you if that's something you'd like to check out later. And I think really our last little bit is just if you guys all have questions, if we could maybe go back to that questions doc that was -- that we had, Hira, and try to answer some of those. That would be great.

>> HIRA: I did want to quickly say someone had asked earlier about a list for accessible fonts. And I just shared that into the chat. This is a guide that I really like. It's by Vision Australia and it gives examples of the types of fonts, serif, sans serif, it explains the different types of fonts, and then also has a longer list of the accessible font styles within each of those types of fonts. So I really like that. It also explains -- I'm kind of a nerd when it comes to typography and it gives you a Zoom in of the letters themselves to give you the different styles that make it accessible or inaccessible. So I really love that document. But I know Olivia has been tracking the questions for us. And one question that we got, which is are AI platforms a good tool for converting text into plain language? And I know this has

been a really, really hot topic right now. So Alden, since you are our sort of plain language queen, I will let you give an answer. But I'm also dropping a document in the chat that I think will be helpful as well. But Alden, if you want to take it away.

>> ALDEN: You know, I think that there are a lot of people right now using AI tools. And I understand that. And I understand that for some folks, there is almost an accessibility component to using those tools. I will say that I personally, especially for plain language, do not choose to use AI as a conversion tool. That is simply because I have found that it writes in a very specific way, at least the AIs I've used, that is homogenized or kind of all sounds the same, and I don't think it necessarily is truly a plain language voice.

Now, I think if you are working with, say, an exceptionally difficult document and you potentially need help understanding it a bit yourself, I think that maybe there are ways that you could use those tools to help organize the information. But when it comes to really thinking about the language swaps themselves, I think using a human brain and really double checking am I being as clear as possible is really what works the best. And then the other thing that works the best is just you might get it wrong the first time. You might get feedback from your community that what you wrote wasn't as plain language as it could be. I've had that happen to me in a project before where someone comes back to me and say hey, this isn't really plain language. And they've been right. And I think it is okay to acknowledge that in your human attempt to understand what people need to know and really figure out that information, that you might not get it perfect on the first try, and that is going to be a learning experience for you that is valuable when you go to write your next document.

>> HIRA: Yeah. I just wanted to add to what Alden shared. As I mentioned, I put a document in the chat by some great advocates at the autistic self-advocacy network. And some of the things it highlights is that oftentimes, generative AI is not very good at making things plain language. So for example, generative AI often focuses on words as opposed to human brains that focus on ideas. And so with that -- and when I say generative AI, I'm referring to programs like ChatGPT or Copilot. They might be able to make the reading level -- usually standard is around a sixth grade reading level. They might make the reading level that level. But it doesn't always actually understand the idea that you're trying to express. So for example, in their piece, they share ways that it's actually changed the idea that the original authors were intending to share. Sometimes it's added additional information that wasn't necessarily sore that made it more confusing. And also there are times where it has just manipulated the original information that was shared. And I know in our field where we also work with a lot of legal documents, that can actually be kind of

dangerous for our clients and the folks we work with if we're not giving the right information. And then also I think they shared that plain language as a terminology is sort of a newer concept that generative AI doesn't fully understand yet. And so they have a lot of mistakes there. So really, best practice is -- I think, like Alden shared -- being able to use your own skills to try to make something in plain language. And I think we even saw in the chat, somebody asked a really great question of who is your audience. Generative AI probably doesn't know your audience and the folks in the audience. So you yourself being able to think about your audience and their needs and what might be the most accessible information to give them, I think, is ideal.

>> ALDEN: I do want to also say somebody with their own executive functioning difficulties, I am very empathetic to the fact that people use all sorts of technology tools when writing. Some folks use, say, Grammarly. And I think that that's okay. But just know that nothing beats the human proof reader. Proof read, proof read, proof read. You've got a brain in your body. Use it. Use it as much as you can.

>> HIRA: Another question we got is, is there a website you can use to test the reading level of your text? I think one of the most common ones is the flesh kin cade calculator. I can put that text in the chat because it's not intuitive the way it's spelled. What was that?

>> ALDEN: I think it's somebody's name.

>> HIRA: Yeah, I think so. So that is one of the most common calculators to sort of get a baseline reading level. But as I mentioned and I think Alden mentioned as well, plain language is more than just reading level. It might be a good starting place to make the content more level, but reading level is definitely not the final and last place. Plain language really requires you to think about the ideas that you're wanting to convey and making sure that you are keeping up with whatever level of legal precision you need and making sure you are expressing those ideas accurately. So while I definitely use the flesh kin cade calculator and everything I'm doing kind of as a starting point, but do think of it as a starting point.

I'll see if we have more questions. We have a little bit of time so we could also, if we're interested, go into some of the other questions I saw popping up in the chat earlier. I know Alden kind of touched on one already, but somebody in the chat shared in newsletters, we have a lot of decorative images like a picture of a person playing guitar next to an article about music therapies. Adding text makes the newsletter really long. We are using alt text. What is a good -- Alden I know you touched on this briefly. But did you have any other thoughts?

>> ALDEN: I think somebody asked a question alluding to this as well. I want to bring the question to the forefront. But there's a concept in the community called accessibility friction. And I feel like this is a really good example of that. If something is long and has a wall of text, then it might be completely inaccessible to someone with any sort of -- maybe they have a neurodivergence like mine and that wall of text prevents them from being able to read or engage with the content. But then you have the person with a screen reader who needs and wants image descriptions to be able to understand the concept. That's accessibility friction, right? When there are two people's needs that might compete or conflict with each other at times said. Honestly, we make decisions based on feedback from the audience and based on what we think will meet the needs of the greatest number as much as possible. So being responsive to your audience when they ask for something but also thinking about what is going to meet the most people's needs and do that as much as possible. I think if you say, you know -- if you have your newsletter and use that alt text feature but maybe more of the images are decorative to begin with, then maybe it's okay to use your alt text feature so your newsletter isn't incredibly long because again, there's that attention economy piece. Are people going to scroll to the bottom to read it? I also talked a little bit with people before about the concept of the capital A accessibility is the accessibility we think of, the accessibility we talk about today. But there's also lowercase a accessibility, which is will people actually find and read it? Not disability specific but will the whole community be able to access it? Is this information finding the audience where it already lives? And I think it's important to balance and consider both of those factors when making decisions about accessible communications.

>> HIRA: Yeah. I think actually this bleeds in perfectly into another question we have. Could you speak a bit about how to navigate conflicting access needs, example the need for captions versus being distracted/confused by captioning? And Alden defined this already. We use the term access friction or accessibility friction. And I wanted to add to what Alden shared. Whenever possible we try to make things customizable for the folks in the audience. For example, you'll notice on Zoom, there's an option to turn off captions. And that's a way to make it customizable for the audience member. Although that's not always possible -- if you're sending out one newsletter, you might not be able to make it customizable for every single person in your audience. But if you have the time and capacity, one of the ways we've been able to approach that is again by having another customizable option. So for example, we have this dinner newsletter. This is what is sent out to everyone. Maybe there's a link on the bottom that says if you want to read this letter with full -- full-length image descriptions, click here. And that can be another option that makes a little bit customizable so when someone sees the e-mail they can choose that

version or choose this version. I know that is more work on us. Ideally, one day we'll have tools, for example, in Zoom that lets you click on and off the things you want to see. I know that isn't really interpreted very well in all of our communication tools. But if you do have the ability to add another alternative option or to make it customizable for the person on the receiving end, I think that is also really helpful.

>> ALDEN: I did just think that our specific -- I don't know if every newsletter platform does this, but you may want to check your platform because ours does at NDRN. There's a way to edit the plain text version of the e-mail separately from the visual version. If I want to make plain text -- because that's probably what folks with screen readers are looking to access then maybe I'll add in the plain text version and not the other version. That's another way to think of customizing.

>> HIRA: And I'll pull one last question. But I did -- before we do that, I want to thank you all so much for the content that you're sharing with each other in the chat. It has been so wonderful to see some folks ask questions and other folks in our community give a response and some resources. So we really, really appreciate that. But last question. They were talking about the editable document. So for giving things in a PDF as well as edible document, how do you prevent people from editing the content itself to avoid -- excuse me, to avoid misinformation, for instance? Alden, do you have any thoughts on that?

>> ALDEN: Yeah. I would say, you know, definitely make sure you're not just sending out the editable Google doc or the editable SharePoint file. You're going to want to make sure you download the .docx or .pptx, whatever format. You want to make sure you've downloaded it to a desktop version so that hard version is saved on your computer. And then you put the hard version out as a link instead of saying -- linking directly to the Google document because then you might have some folks editing or sharing. Now it is a good point that if you do send out the doc files that folks could potentially edit something with your header on it. Which wouldn't be great. I think we all have fears in the digital age about, you know, either certain information being stolen or used in a weird way or represented in a way that's not true to you online.

So I definitely understand those concerns. I think there is a way to lock documents, so that would be another avenue you can take to be helpful. You can also password protect documents in some websites if this is something just for your board and not for the larger community. You can explore password protecting. If it is for the larger community I think it's important to have the accessible version out all. You have a logo on the website. We have a logo on the website. If somebody wanted to get creative and feisty and pull out our

logo and put it on a header on something completely different in a Word document. They can do that too. We should be worried about bad actors. And I understand that concern in the current landscape. But I do believe having the most accessible version is what's most important at least for my community.

>> HIRA: Sharon shared that Word has a lock function. And Olivia shared the read only functions. Those are great functions. But also, if the goal of the sharing the editable document is for them to be edit it to, for example, change fonts, change colors, you do have to be careful with what you're locking. So if you lock the font function from the user, they're not able to change that, then there isn't really -- the point of the editable document is that it is editable. And I know there are ways that you can play around with what is locked and what isn't. But I think there is a little bit of risk assessment that has to happen there.

Okay. That was our last question in the chat. I just wanted to take a second. I think we may have had one person who raised their hand for a question. I just want to check in on that to see if we're still --

>> ALDEN: I think that was Georgena if she has a question still.

>> I wanted to make a comment.

>> ALDEN: Okay.

>> As I said, I'm the executive director, access for all, LLC, access Recreation. And I use eye gaze technology as a quadriplegic. And so everything is run flawlessly. I do all these different meetings and trainings. But I use AI in order for me to take notes. And I adapt them for sure to make sure that they're accurate if I were to ever share them. But it's critical because I don't necessarily go on crazy wilderness trails anymore as a nearly 70-year-old. But with different issues. But I am there virtually. And I gather all that information. I'm pointed in the right direction so that I can see and hear everybody. So just, you know -- different people, different strokes, different things. Just wanted to throw that out.

>> ALDEN: Yeah, definitely. And I think that that's like a theme that we love and want to refer back to, that this is not -- there is not one set answer for how to be the best, most perfect, most accessible, right? You need to continually listen to your community and figure out what you can do to best support their needs with the tools that you have around you because the tools we have around us aren't perfect right now. And I think that's okay. I think sometimes folks get intimidated with the idea of trying to make their practices more

accessible. But there really are simple things you can do to make things more accessible for your audience every day.

>> Cool.

>> HIRA: Thank you for sharing. I'm sorry. I know we have some more questions, but we have to wrap up just to respect everyone's time. We will be sharing at the end of this PowerPoint -- or sorry, at the end of this Zoom meeting, once you close out, you will get a Zoom link -- sorry, I am messing all my words up. It is 2:00 p.m. You'll get a survey link. And we'll really, really appreciate if you can fill that out for us. It's very short but it gives us helpful feedback. It is kind of what we talked about in this presentation. If there are parts of this presentation that didn't meet your accessibility needs or were hard for you to understand, like, that is helpful feedback for us to know as we continue to do this work. You'll also see in the chat that Olivia has shared all of our social media platforms. We are on everything in the world it seems like. We're on blue sky, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, Threads. So all of those links are in the chat that Olivia just shared. So if you want to stay connected to our work, please feel free to follow us there. We also post content like this every once in a while about our trainings as well as how we try to make the world more accessible.

But yeah, thank you all so much for joining us today.

>> ALDEN: Yeah. Thank you, everybody. Great participation in the chat and everything. Really appreciate that. It makes our job easier, you know. I used to teach very small people. And with very small people, you get lots of instant feedback from children, right? But I love you participated so much today and gave us a lot of feedback. So thank you. I really appreciate that.

>> AUTOMATED VOICE: Recording stopped.

[End of event. Thank you for using human realtime captioning.]