

Accessible Writing Strategies

Oftentimes, we are unsure of whom exactly our writing will reach. Some writers' goals are to reach a larger audience, so it can help to make your writing more accessible. Taking careful steps to ensure accessibility allows for a higher rate of people to be able to see, read, and understand your work, allowing your writing to connect with more individuals.

The purpose of the handout is to introduce strategies that can make your writing more accessible for others. It outlines how different fonts, captions, and writing styles that can make it easier for others to understand. Approaching a paper with accessibility in mind ensures inclusivity and helps with clarity and concision.

Definitions

The following definitions will help you better understand how writing with accessibility in mind can reach a larger audience and improve your writing overall.

- **Accessibility:** A person with a disability is granted equal opportunities to experience the same interactions, services, and activities as a person without a disability.
- **Learning Disabilities:** Some learning disabilities are caused by genetic and/or neurobiological factors. Disabilities alter cognitive function and can impact cognitive processes that are related to learning. Some of these problems can hinder basic learning skills such as reading and writing.
 - **Dyslexia:** A learning disability that affects reading and interpreting words/letters.
 - **ADD/ADHD:** A disorder that makes it difficult to stay focused and pay attention and impedes the ability to control behavior and hyperactivity.
- **Reading Difficulties:** Reading difficulties consist of challenges with understanding what is read and/or the inability to decipher certain letters or words.
- **Comprehension:** Having the capability to read and understand something.

Strategies to Make Your Writing More Accessible

- Keep an open mind. Accessible writing isn't restricted to academic essays. Humans communicate in a written format in a multitude of ways. Some of these methods include texts, emails, presentations, webpages, social media posts, and printed materials. When writing in these formats, think of how you can accommodate others.

- Use readable fonts, such as Arial or Times New Roman. Choosing clear, readable fonts deliberately will make your text easier to read.
- Use an appropriate font size, ranging from 12 to 14. Again, this allows for those with reading difficulties to see the words clearly.
- Use simple and concise language and limit paragraphs to one main idea. Taking these steps helps readers who find it hard to focus; they can gather information in discrete chunks, which ultimately makes it easier to understand the writer.
- Write in active voice instead of passive voice (e.g., “Jai opened the book” instead of “The book was opened by Jai.”). The passive voice is wordier and less direct, making it more challenging to read and/or understand, especially if used repeatedly.
- Pair any visual aids with brief descriptions. Do not assume that everyone will be able to see or comprehend your visual aid immediately; having the accompanying description ensures that more people will understand what’s being depicted.
- Include headers and sub-headers to create distinct segments within your writing. Depending on the required format for a piece of writing, headers can help readers separate ideas, decreasing the possibility of confusion.
- Provide explanations for abbreviations. Giving your reader the necessary context allows for better understanding.

Concluding Note

Overall, using these strategies to write with respect to those with any learning and/or reading disabilities allows for more inclusivity in our community. Every individual is different, and we must be sure to validate their needs, feelings, and preferences when possible.

Activity

Using the information provided, determine if each sentence would be accessible for those with a learning disability ranging from dyslexia to ADD/ADHD to other reading barriers (yes or no). If no, identify what aspect of the sentence is making it less accessible. Once determined, explain how the text could be changed for accessibility.

1. **Emily decided to take the bus instead of her car because the traffic was bad.**
2. Throughout the day, Nick decided to study in portions so he wouldn’t feel too burnt out.
3. Sophia was upset because her one and only best friend, Elizabeth, had spilled coffee, ripped, and stepped on her prom dress, which was to be worn in exactly a week.

Answer Key for Activity

1. This sentence would not be accessible for those with a reading/learning disability. Although the text is a large size, the font puts the letters too close together, which could make it difficult for those with dyslexia to separate the letters and be able to read through the sentence smoothly. To change it, we could leave the size the same but instead change the font of the text to Times New Roman, which is more readable.
2. This sentence would also not be accessible for those with a reading/learning disability. The text is in a readable font, but it is too small of a size to be able to read clearly. In this case, we would make the font size bigger.
3. This sentence is not accessible. The font and size of the text are good, but the sentence is unclear and contains too many different ideas. “One and only” falls under the category of redundancy and is unnecessary. We could remove this phrase to make the sentence clearer. In addition, “to be worn” is in the passive voice, so we could revise it to be in active voice. Both changes to the sentence would make it clearer and easier to read.

References

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