

ARC Centre of Excellence for Integrative Brain Function
Gender Equity and Diversity Committee

Recommendations for Giving Accessible Presentations

Preamble: One in five people in Australia have some form of disability. The likelihood of living with a disability increases with age. 50% of people aged 65 years and over live with a disability, compared to 12.5% of people aged under 65 years. Of the range of disabilities, vision and hearing impairment are the main impediments to understanding oral presentations; 55% of Australians have at least one long-term vision disorder, and 16% are affected by hearing loss.

Scope: In this document, we recommend simple guidelines for CIBF members to follow to ensure their oral presentations are accessible to all members of an audience, regardless of whether they are CIBF presentations or not. We focus on visual and hearing impairment, but the spirit of the document is to improve oral presentation style to be as inclusive as possible for people with any accessibility issues.

The guiding philosophy is to make all presentations accessible by default, rather than asking individuals with issues to self-identify and request accommodations be made.

Guidelines for Hearing Accessibility

Hearing loss in adults is defined as mild (> 25dB and < 45dB), moderate (> 45dB and < 65dB) and severe (> 65dB). Most speech sounds are in the 30-65 dB range, and some sounds (nasal, stops) have lower sound levels (30-40 dB) than others. Most adults with hearing impairment (85%) do not have assistive listening devices. Note however that assistive devices do not provide hearing comparable to natural intact hearing, as they amplify all sounds, regardless of source. In addition to hearing loss, many people have additional problems with extracting information from auditory sources, particularly in directing auditory attention to changing sources in the environment.

The best way to improve hearing accessibility is to use the technology provided at the venue

- Always use the microphones provided. Do not assume that because no one demurred when you asked “Does everyone hear me”, that everyone actually can. Speaking loudly or projecting your voice can not replace the microphone
- Using the microphone also ensures that additional assistive devices, such as induction loops, work effectively
- Encourage all questions from the audience to be delivered via a microphone. If that is not possible, repeat the question so all can hear it
- Some people who use hearing aids or cochlear implants also benefit from support from additional devices which transmit sound directly to the person’s aids or implants (FM, Bluetooth or infra-red systems). It is usually as simple as the speaker wearing a small device around their neck while speaking, but the person will be able to provide instructions on its use. Just be aware that while wearing the device, everything you say will be transmitted directly to the person, so remember to remove it before having confidential discussions!
- Speak at a normal rate, facing the audience. Keep background noise (e.g., chatter) to a minimum if possible
- Be open to providing copies of slides to those who request them

References & Resources

Access Economics (2006). Listen hear! The economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia. <https://audiology.asn.au/public/1/files/Publications/ListenHearFinal.pdf>

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Australian Network on Disability (2018). Disability statistics. <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>

Centre for Eye Research Australia, Vision 2020 Australia (2016). National eye health survey. http://www.vision2020australia.org.au/uploads/resource/250/National-Eye-Health-Survey_Full-Report_FINAL.pdf