INCLUSIVE & ACCESSIBLE VIRTUAL PRESENTATIONS

INCLUSIVE VIRTUAL PRESENTING

When presenting, whether hosting a webinar, delivering a keynote, facilitating a workshop, pitching to an investor, or presenting to a client, there are key ways to make presentations more accessible and inclusive. This guide provides **35 tips** to help you along the way.

CONTENT

When preparing content, do your best to use language and terminology that is inclusive and accessible.

① DO A VIRTUAL LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- Because virtual presentations are, well, virtual, and delivered from a range of places, consider sharing a land acknowledgement about the land you reside on, while also sharing an Indigenous lesson or learning for your audience to engage with to further their learning.
  - The Empathy Institute and Next Gen Men suggest amplifying the work of Indigenous creators in your land acknowledgement.

▶ **Use Whose Land to learn about the land you are on.**   ▶ **Explore this Indigenous Ally Toolkit.**

② INCLUDE DEFINITIONS FOR JARGON AND ACRONYMS

- Jargon and acronyms can be exclusionary to people without specialized knowledge of a particular subject so avoiding them may enhance communication.
- If you need to use specialized language, be sure to define them.

③ USE VARIED EXAMPLES

- Use examples that most people can relate to.
  - For example, in an icebreaker, instead of asking how people like their pizza, ask them about their favourite breakfast item.
- When this isn't easy, use more than one example to appeal to a wider audience.
  - For example, if you refer to methods of eating, refer to using utensils such as a fork and knife, as well as chopsticks and hands.

④ USE PLAIN LANGUAGE

- Because participants may come from all levels of learning and abilities, it is important to use language that is clear and accessible.
- Some examples include: using a two-syllable word over a three-syllable word, a familiar term over the latest technological term, and/or using several clear words instead of one complicated term.
  - For example, instead of using the term "discourse" try "communication."

▶ **Check out Crescendo's online written/spoken communication guides.**

⑤ AVOID PHRASES THAT SUGGEST VICTIMHOOD

- When speaking about experiences relating to disability or trauma, avoid phrases that suggest victimhood.
- For example, consider using "survivor" instead of "victim," or "they use a wheelchair," instead of "they are confined to a wheelchair."

⑥ REMEMBER, MENTAL ILLNESSES ARE NOT METAPHORS

- Terms like "bipolar," "OCD" and "ADD" are descriptors of real psychiatric disabilities, so using them as a metaphor can undermine their impact on people.
- Also, consider replacing terms that stem from the context of mental health, such as "crazy," "mad, or "psycho."

Stamp Out Stigma @StampStigma · May 12
Good morning! ☀ Just a reminder that mental health conditions are not adjectives:

🚫"You're being **so OCD**"
🚫"She can't make up her mind, she's so bipolar"
🚫"He's such a psycho"

Think before you speak! The way we talk about mental health matters 💚
#MentalHealthMonth 🧠

⑦ USE GENDER NEUTRAL TERMS

- When referring to a group of people a common tendency is to say, "you guys" or "those guys."
  - The "universal male" assumes that the normal, default human being is male.
  - Instead, try using terms such as: people, folks, ya'll, teammates – terms that do not imply gender.
- Using phrases and terms that invoke the gender binary (men/women) such as: "opposite sex" or "both sexes" or "opposite gender" or "both genders," can exclude people who identify beyond the binary, such as gender non-binary or gender fluid people.
  - Instead, try using "people of all genders" or "all genders"
  - Consider terms such as "parenting" instead of "mothering" or "fathering."

⑧ BE SPECIFIC

Normalization

- Using the word "normal" when comparing groups can stigmatize marginalized people's experiences.
- Statements such as "we've all been there," might incorrectly assume the audience has the same abilities and experiences.
- Use "I" Statements when sharing to avoid generalizing about other people and groups.

Homogenization

- Be specific when discussing communities of people.
- For example, when speaking about Indigenous communities it is important to speak in the plural.
  - Including "Peoples" after "Indigenous" recognizes that there are more than one group of Indigenous peoples.
  - Indigenous communities are a collective made up of many, separate, sovereign, unique, Nations.
  - If possible, it's best practice to use Nation-specific terms, particularly for territory/land acknowledgments.

⑨ PRACTICE THE CORRECT LANGUAGE FOR IDENTITIES

- Refer to women as just that--"women," instead of females.
  - "Female" refers to biological sex, which is not the same as gender identity and can be exclusive of trans women.
- When talking about trans people, use terms like "trans community" and "transgender community" not "transgendered" or "transexual"
- Avoid using euphemisms or stereotypical terms when referring to racial groups, like "urban" or "inner city" when you mean "Black" or "African-Canadian/American."

⑩ ASK PEOPLE HOW THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE IDENTIFIED

- When describing an individual, some people put the person ahead of the characteristics, while others might do the opposite.
- For example, some people use the language of "a man who is blind" or "a woman on our engineering team," while others might use "a blind man" or "a woman engineer."
- When addressing people, ask what works for them!

⑪ CHECK-IN ON TECH-RELATED NEEDS

- Survey people in advance of the presentation date to assess accessibility needs.
- When presenting content, check in with participants to determine if they are experiencing any tech related challenges or barriers.
- Designate a team member to work with participants directly to resolve emergent issues and address needs.

PRESENTATION MATERIALS

Presentation materials that complement content are not only important for aesthetics but are also important for accessibility.

1 **KEEP SLIDES SIMPLE**

- Consider how much time your audience needs to take in and understand each slide.
- Use keywords and short phrases instead of whole sentences and paragraphs when possible.

2 **MAKE VISUALS LARGE AND VISIBLE**

- Making text and visuals large can help people take in information.
- This includes "less important" information like graphs, image captions, footnotes, URLs, and references.
  - 'Sans Serif' fonts such as Arial are great.
  - Be generous with spacing (between letters, words, and lines).
  - Use bold for emphasis — underlines and italics are less identifiable.
  - Use mixed case, not all caps.
  - Keep web links on your slide short.
  - ▶ **Try a URL Shortener**

This is **more** accessible.

THIS IS *LESS* ACCESSIBLE.

3 **AVOID UNNECESSARY SLIDE TRANSITIONS**

- Slide transitions can make members of the audience feel sick or distracted.
- Transitions and animations can trigger nausea, headaches, and dizziness for some, particularly those with vestibular (inner ear) disorders.

④ CAPTION AND DESCRIBE MEDIA

- Videos: When playing a video, introduce or summarize the video to add context or explain what occurred.
- Audio: If an audio clip doesn't have a visual component, display equivalent text while the audio is playing.
- Images: When using images caption and describe the pictures.
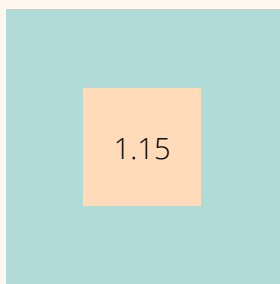 - Avoid saying phrases such as "As you can see here…"

⑤ CHECK COLOUR CONTRAST

- Colour contrast values help make text visible.
- There are specific resources to help determine sufficient contrast, aim for a ratio of 4.5:1.
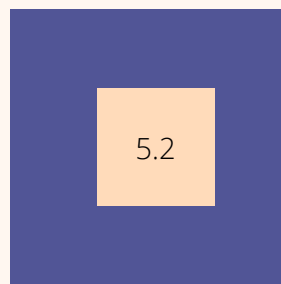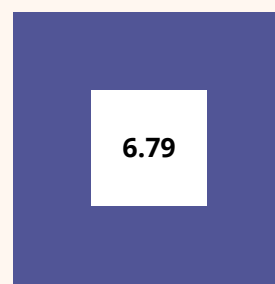
See example below.

▶ **Colour Contrast Guidelines**   ▶ **Colour Contrast Evaluation Tool**

1.15	5.2	**6.79**
Inadequate	Sufficient	**Great**

⑥ ENSURE REPRESENTATION IN STOCK PHOTOS

- If using a diversity of people to represent a brand or organization, make sure it's authentic.
- When using stock photos there are numerous resources for accessing images that represent diverse experiences and people.

Try some of these:

▶ **Diversity Photos**   ▶ **WOC in Tech**   ▶ **Body Liberation Stock**   ▶ **TONL**

⑦ USE CLOSED CAPTIONING

- If possible, use a platform that has a closed captioning feature.
- Use video conferencing technology such as Zoom Rooms, or Microsoft Teams (offers closed captioning in multiple languages).
- Or present with Google Slides and turn on the captioning feature.
- If this feature is not built in, consider using a captioning service, or having a person provide captions in real-time.
- Try turning the captions on and observe what the experience is like.

8 POSITON INFORMATION TO NOT INTERFERE WITH CAPTIONS

- Closed captioning text may appear on the bottom third of Powerpoint slides, or on the top or bottom with a Google products.
- To avoid captions getting cut off, determine where captions will show ups and place important content accordingly.
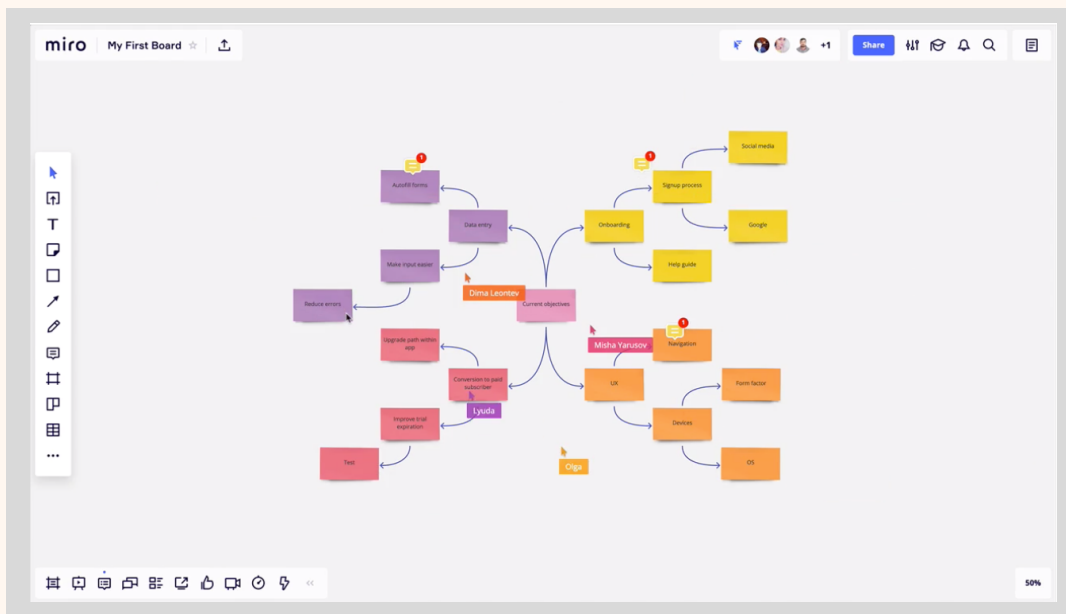
9 AVOID STEREOTYPICAL GIFS OR EMOJIS

- Sometimes our use of GIFs and certain slang terms can perpetuate stereotypes against marginalized groups.
- Think about how you can be inclusive with your emoji use, to ensure virtual chats remain fun but safer spaces for all.

▶ **Check out this blog on Black Vernacular English**   ▶ **Read this blog on Inclusive Emoji Use**

10 TRY OUT VIRTUAL-FRIENDLY ANALOGS

- To capture audience inputs or brainstorms, get creative with digital tools.
  - Zoom has built in whiteboard and poll features.
  - You can also try using Google Docs as a digital notebook, Miro for a digital whiteboard (example below), Poll Everywhere for a polling feature, or Airtable for a digital submission box.
- Consider accessibility of digital tools through the lens of disability, budget, and Internet/web access.

PRESENTING STYLE

When presenting content, the following are some inclusive guidelines to remember.

① PRESENT INFORMATION IN A CONVERSATIONAL AND HUMAN MANNER

- A conversational tone can help build rapport with the audience.
- Try connecting with emotions and senses instead of using situations or examples while presenting to help participants better connect with the material.
- If presenting verbally, the volume, tone, and rhythm of speech convey can help to bring the material alive.

② PAY ATTENTION TO BODY LANGUAGE AND VISIBILITY

- Body Language: Facial expressions, gestures, and posture are body language tools.
  - Smiling with open-arms are universal signals for inclusion.
- Visibility: Set the camera at eye level while keeping the webcam far enough away to show as much of the body as comfortable.

③ TRY OUT HEADPHONES

- Test sound levels and quality before a presentation.
- Try out headphones or a USB microphone if verbally speaking in the presentation.
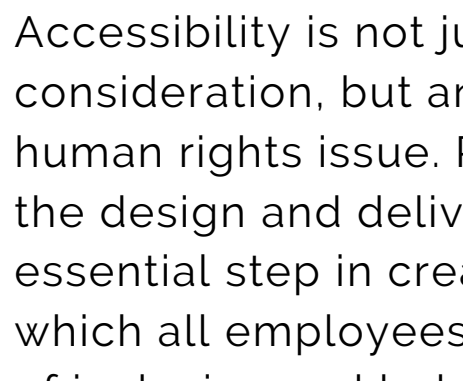
④ PAUSE BETWEEN TOPICS

- Giving people time to process information allows time for responses and contributions, and also gives room for technology lags.
- When asking for questions, give people extra time to form their thoughts into words.

⑤ HAVE A HOST

- Have a dedicated "host" to support with any issues that participants may be having.
- The host can also monitor and facilitate question and answers times.
- If a participant wants to ask a question anonymously, they may also be able to send a question to the host directly rather than the full group.

⑥ ENGAGE PEOPLE EARLY

- Whether you're pitching to investors or sharing and update with clients, the "show" starts the moment people enter the presentation.
- Help people to feel welcome and comfortable by playing music while they join the meeting, or by repeating a dialogue about expectations for the presentation.

> Accessibility is not just a technical consideration, but an incredibly important human rights issue. Prioritizing accessibility in the design and delivery of presentations is an essential step in creating an organization in which all employees feel a meaningful sense of inclusion and belonging.
>
> **Prasanna Ranganathan,**
> **Diversity & Belonging Lead, Shopify**

AUDIENCE INTERACTION

Here are some tips for inclusive audience interaction.

① ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE BEFORE THE PRESENTATION

- Before the session, when checking in on accessibility needs, check in on people's access to reliable Internet connectivity and devices and select a platform that meets these needs.
- Sending instructions or cheat sheets about the chosen platform/technology can also be helpful. Click here for an example.
- Depending on the type of presentation, provide a downloadable "Key Takeaways" overview for the participants to support different learning styles and those who may need to pop in and out to manage caregiving responsibilities or other needs, or those who may need to leave before the presentation ends.

② ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE AFTER THE PRESENTATION

- If sharing slides or other complementary materials, include links and mention this in the introduction.
- If everyone on the screen provides consent, consider recording the session to be watched and referred to at a later date.

③ USE A SINGULAR "THEY"

- It is best not to assume someone's gender pronouns by the way they look, dress, or act.
  - Consider using people's names or they/them pronouns until you have more information.
- Try to avoid using attention grabbers such as "ladies" and "gentlemen."
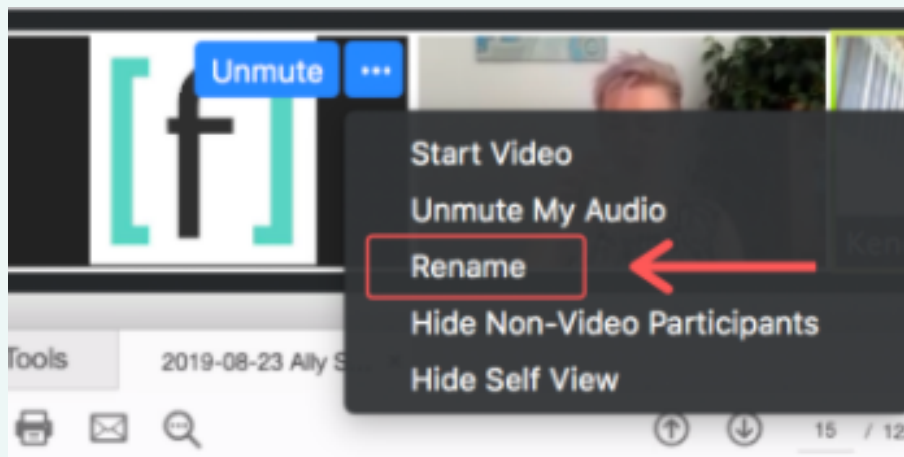 - Try "ya'll" or "everyone" instead.

④ MODEL INCLUSIVE BEHAVIOURS

- Repeat participant questions and comments so everyone can follow the conversation.
- During group activities or discussions, model inclusive behaviours and be ready to intervene in micro-inequities, such as someone getting interrupted.
- Avoid asking participants to represent their entire identity group.

⑤ SHARE PRONOUNS

- Sharing pronouns can help alleviate potential misgendering and can help to normalize the sharing gender identities.
- Share pronouns when doing introductions and depending on the format of the presentations, invite others to do the same if they are comfortable.
- Try adding pronouns to screen names. Below is an example of how to do this on Zoom.

▶ **This resource has strategies for respecting pronouns.**
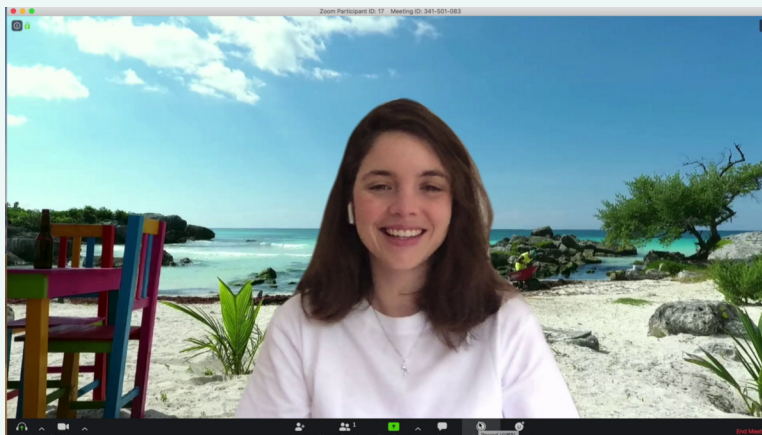

⑥ LISTEN AUTHENTICALLY

- If you ask participants to contribute, listen with a spirit of inquiry, an intent to learn, and the oppenness to change a perspective.

⑦ INVITE PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE

- Depending on the format, find ways to make space for quiet or spatially removed people.
- Encourage the use of a chat feature to answer or ask questions.
- Try out a "voting" poll for participation and to show that the opinions shared by the most interactive or vocal people aren't necessarily shared by the majority of the group.
  - Alternatively, turn on Gallery view and ask for a wave to represent a vote.

⑧ MAKE USE OF SMALL GROUP METHODS

- Depending on the nature of the presentation, small groups can foster stronger bonds, increase comfort levels, and can foster collaboration among different groups of people.
- In platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet, breakout rooms can be used to separate participants into small group discussions.
- If your platform does not have this feature, consider providing links to other meeting spaces.

9 **TURN VIDEO ON WHENEVER POSSIBLE**

- Videos help with nonverbal cues, such as when someone raises their hand, unmutes themselves, or attempts to speak, as well as having social benefits.
  - Some will need video for connection or to read lips, while others may need a higher level of privacy for a variety of reasons.
- Discuss expectations for video calling in advance. Include discussions such as:
  - If children, family members, or pets may interrupt the calls.
  - If someone joins a meeting in a different time zone.
- Suggest virtual backgrounds to help offset concerns of what people's working spaces look like and to add some fun and variety.

This resource reflects a particular moment in time, North America in 2020, and like most things in life, may eventually need updates. Everything changes— from technologies and innovations, to social norms, cultures, and languages. As such, this resource is not meant to be a static guide, but rather a compilation and reflection of our learnings to date.