Partners

More Than Words:
Making Information and Communication Accessible to Everyone

Melanie Thornton

Director, Initiatives for Advancing Disability Access



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

College of Education & Health Professions

What we'll cover:

- Overview of communication access
- ADA requirements
- Making two-way communication accessible
- Making written and digital information accessible
- Making information easier to understand
- Putting communication access into practice



Partners

Overview of Communication Access

Partners

Ways We Communicate



Receive:

Access the Information



Understand:

Make Sense of It



Express:

Communicate Back

Communication access means removing barriers so people can receive information, understand it, and communicate with others.

Who Benefits from Accessible Communication

- People who are
  - Deaf or hard of hearing
  - Blind or with low vision
  - Deafblind
  - Color blind
- People with
  - Speech-related disabilities
  - Dyslexia and other learning disabilities
  - Conditions that affect auditory or visual processing
  - Intellectual disabilities

Partners

ADA Requirements

Partners

Effective Communication

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
  - Title II: State and local governments
  - Title III: Businesses and nonprofit organizations that serve the public



- Communication with people with disabilities is to be ***equally effective*** to communication with people without disabilities.

Partners

Further ADA Guidance



- Provide auxiliary aids and services when needed to communicate effectively with people who have disabilities.
- The rules also apply to communication with the person's parent, spouse, or companion in appropriate circumstances.

Source: ada.gov/effective-comm

Partners

New Rules Under Title II of the ADA

- Requires state and local governments ensure web content and mobile applications follow Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.1, Level AA
- Compliance dates:
  - April 26, 2027 for entities with 50,000 or more people
  - April 26, 2028 for those with 0 to 49,999 people



Partners

Responding to Requests for Access

- Title II and Title III: Reasonable Modifications of policies, practices and procedures
- Title I (Employment): Reasonable Accommodations



Partners

Making Two-Way Communication Accessible

Partners

Providing ASL-English Interpreters

Partners

Finding Qualified Interpreters



- Communication Plus: (501) 224-2521
- Communicating Hands: (501) 374-5293
- Specialized Interpreting Services: info@specializedinterpreting.com
- Sign Language Interpreter Network of Northwest Arkansas: (479) 268-2417

Partners

Choosing Sign Language Interpreters

- Level of credentials
- Family members or non-certified “signers” should not be used
- Certified interpreters are bound by a code of professional conduct
- Arkansas Interpreter Licensure Law (Act 1314)
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI): Advantages and Limitations



Partners

Using an Interpreter

- Pay attention to the seating configuration
- Speak naturally
- Speak directly to the person
- The interpreter's role is solely to facilitate communication access
- The interpreter will interpret everything you say



Partners

Other Access Services

- Speech to Text Services
  - CART
  - Typewell
- Oral Interpreters



Partners

Assistive Technology

- Assistive Listening Devices
- Two-way text communication devices and apps
- Communication boards



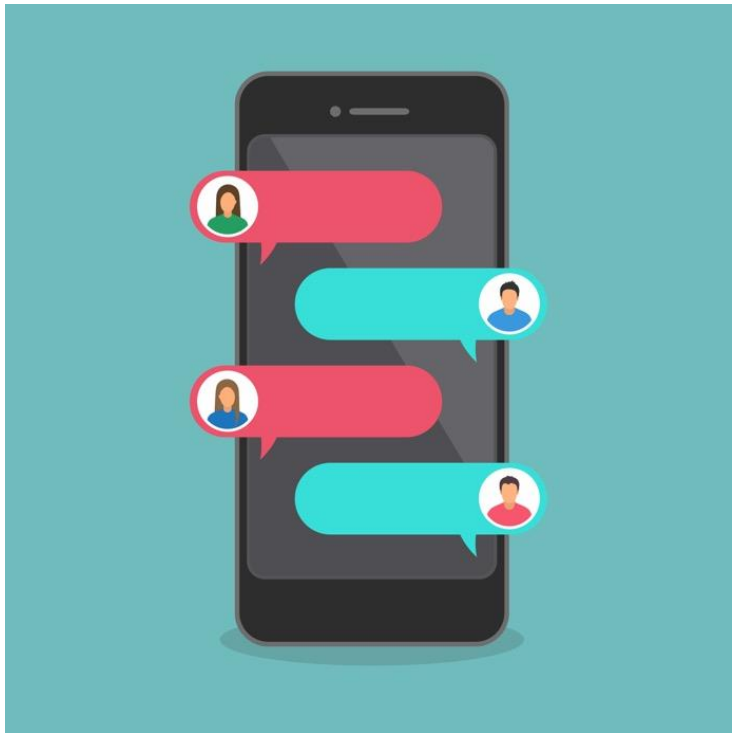
Partners

Providing Accessible Methods of Contact

Partners

Offering Various Methods of Contact

- Phone
  - Be prepared to answer relay calls.
- Email
- Facebook messenger
- Chat



Partners

Access By Phone: Video Relay Services

1. The Deaf person calls the relay service and signs to the operator
2. The relay service dials your number.
3. The person speaks directly to you.
4. When you speak, the operator interpret what you say to the Deaf person

- Graphic from National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes: https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/resource/telecommunications-vrs-vri-and-trs



Icons by Icon Works, Scott de Jonge, Freepik, and Zurb from www.flaticon.com

Tips for Video Relay Services

- **Don’t hang up!!**
- If you say you’ve never used relay services, the operator will give you instructions.
- Speak directly to the person rather than saying “tell them.”
- If you need to call the person back, the person will give you a VP number that automatically routes you through the relay service.



Partners

Making Written and Digital Information Accessible

Partners

Creating Accessible Documents

Partners

MS Word Accessibility

- Use headings properly
- Add alt text to images
- Make links that make sense
- “Save as PDF” for sharing
- MS Word Accessibility



Partners

PDF Documents

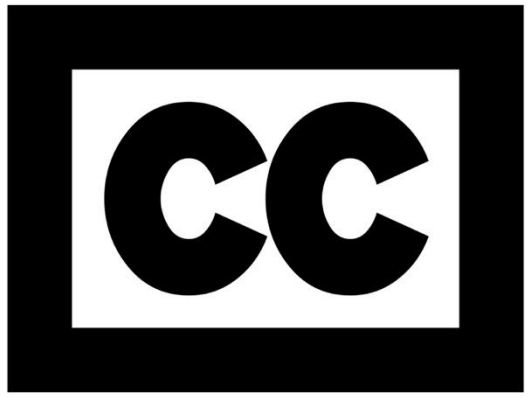
- Sharing the original files in Word or PowerPoint may be best.
- Create accessible Word or PPT documents.
- Choose SAVE AS PDF (not Print to PDF).
- Creating Accessible PDFs



Partners

Accessible Videos

- Captioning
- Audio Description





Partners

Making Information Easier to Understand

Partners

Plain Language

- Writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.



Partners

Tips for Using Plain Language

- Write for your audience
- Organize the information
- Choose your words carefully
- Be concise
- Keep it conversational
- Test your assumptions



Center for Plain Language

Make it clear.

Partners

Putting Communication Access into Practice

Partners

Offering Accommodations

Partners

Sample Statement

We are committed to providing accessible services. To inquire about accessibility or request disability-related accommodations, please contact [name] at [phone number] or [email address].

Partners

Reasonable Modifications in Policies, Practices, or Procedures

Examples:

- Longer appointment times
- Assistance completing forms
- Quiet meeting area

Partners

Communication Access: Where to Start

- Make information accessible.
- Use plain language.
- Offer different ways to communicate.
- Ask what people need.
- Be prepared to respond.

Partners

Suggested Resources

- ADA Network: Effective Communication
- National Deaf Center: Interpreting
- National Deaf Center: Telecommunications
- Arkansas Relay Services
- Creating Accessible Documents
- WebAIM
- Explore Access: Plain Language



Partners

Contact Info

Melanie Thornton
Email: mthornt@uark.edu



Partners