

HOSTING ACCESSIBLE EVENTS

Building Accessible and Inclusive
Virtual and In-Person Events

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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- Content note: ableist language
- A little about me and my work/advocacy

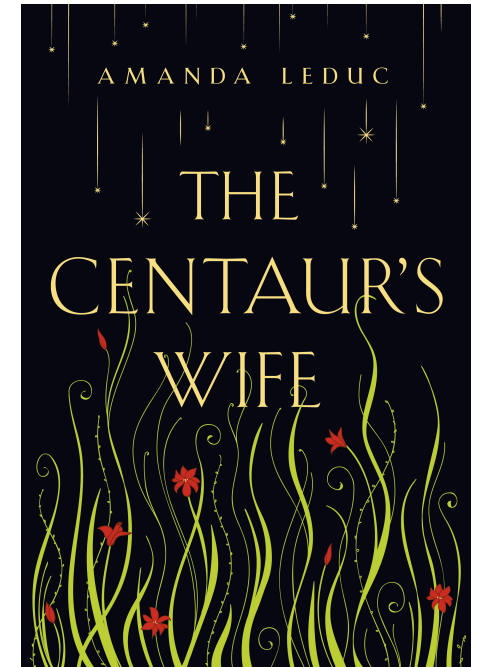
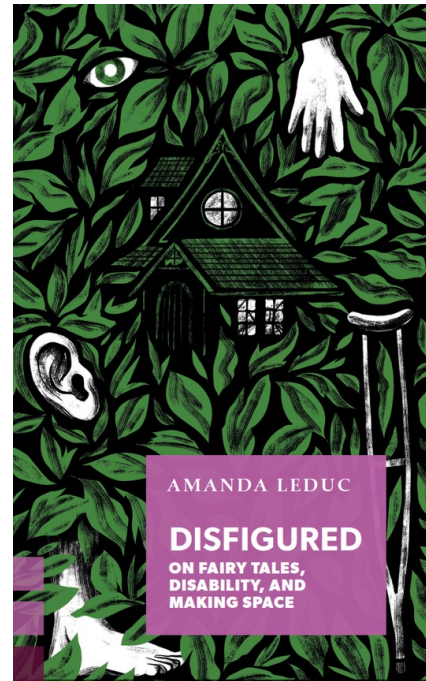
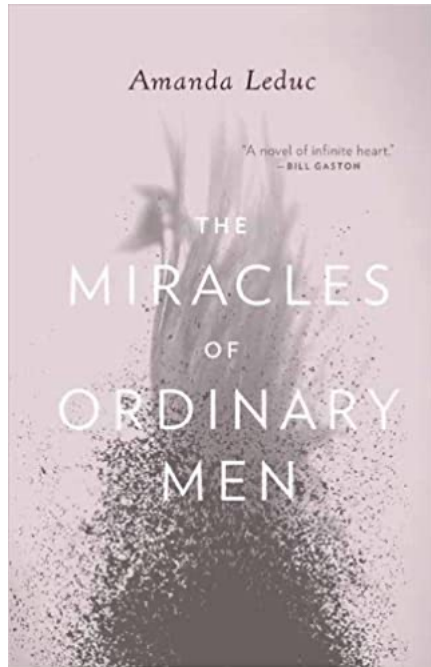
- Terminology used in this presentation & brief overview of terms to avoid in events
- Key things to keep in mind for accessible events
 - In-Person
 - Virtual
- Q&A
- **There are 44 slides in this presentation**

CONTENT NOTE

- I list some ableist words and turns of phrase about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way through this presentation. This list is for educational purposes only and will take about five minutes to go through.
- The language starts on slide 11 and ends on slide 12

YOURS TRULY – AMANDA LEDUC

- Disabled author with cerebral palsy
- Author of three books:



About Me, cont'd

I've been disabled all my life, but only began to work in disability activism in my 30s.

My work was brought about partly because of the themes I explore in my work—difference, otheredness—but also partly because of other disability activists I met and encountered

My disability activism lies primarily in raising awareness of how we use language and story to shape our perceptions of disability.

TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this presentation, I will be making use of *identity-first language*. I will not be using euphemisms for disability (e.g. “differently-abled”)

When planning events, it is important to consider the language that you use when speaking about disability. Language is a significant part of creating inclusive spaces.

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

Person with a disability, as opposed to disabled person

The disabled community by and large prefers identity-first language.

It is ALWAYS best to ask someone how they prefer to be referred to.

IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE

Disabled person, as opposed to **person with a disability**.

This is the language that the majority of the disability community prefers.

Identity-first language holds that a disability is an important part of what makes someone who they are. **Disabled** and **disability** are not bad words, and we should not be afraid of using them.

When we avoid using these words, we avoid looking at how society does most of the work of disabling people (through inaccessible environments, etc).

DISABILITY EUPHEMISMS

- Differently-abled
 - Handicapable
 - Diverse abilities
- Person with challenges

Much like person-first language, disability euphemisms are well-meaning but they obscure the systemic problem here, which is the inaccessible world around us that **CAN** change.

Unless someone **specifically requests this language** when speaking of themselves, euphemistic language for disability should be avoided. That's why I won't be using it today and why I encourage event organizers to adopt identity-first language.

Examples of ableist language: words

Lame

Retarded

Cripple

Handicapped

Idiot(ic)

Psycho(tic), when not used in a medical sense

Imbecile

Crazy

Stupid

Examples of ableist language: phrases

- Turn a blind eye (when in reference to ignorance)
- Blind spot(as above)
- “confined to a wheelchair” (assumes a wheelchair = prison, when for many disabled people a wheelchair = freedom)
- “tone-deaf”
- Jokes/stories that reference mental illness in seemingly innocuous ways, e.g. “preserving your sanity as a writer”

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND RE: LANGUAGE AND EVENTS

- Consider providing facilitators/volunteers with resources on language so that people aren't using ableist language unintentionally
- Ask/remind event facilitators to be mindful of the language they use and to avoid using ableist metaphors in speech

RESOURCES FOR LANGUAGE USE

- Lydia X.Z. Brown's Ableism Glossary: <https://www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html>
- Disability Language Style Guide: <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>
- Twitter: pay attention to conversations being had online by disabled activists.

REMEMBER: creating safe and accessible spaces starts with the very language that we use.

It doesn't matter what measures you take to make something accessible—if your language is ableist, disabled people will still feel unsafe in spaces you create.

SO. We're going to be careful with language and work to make our language inclusive and welcoming—great!

And now we want to hold an event or workshop that follows these inclusive principles—even better!

What are some things to keep in mind?

Regardless of the type of event you are planning, and regardless of whether it's in-person or virtual, begin your planning with one very important question:

WHO IS MISSING?

This will guide your accessibility decisions.

Key things to keep in mind when planning
events:

IN-PERSON

5 Questions:

- 1. Financial access**
- 2. Physical access**
- 3. Sensory access**
- 4. Content access**
- 5. Safe space access**

1. Are there financial barriers to the event?

- Is there a cost to attend the event?
- If there's a cost, are there scholarships or free/discounted passes or other mechanisms in place to make the event financially accessible?
- Disabled people are often financially disadvantaged so accessible pricing is especially important.

2. Physical access: can everyone *get in* to the event?

- Is your event held in a wheelchair-accessible space? WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE MEANS:
 - Barrier-free entry (ramps, no stairs)
 - Enough clearance for wheelchairs and other mobility devices to turn around (room should not have so many desks/chairs so as to make it difficult for a wheelchair to move around)
 - Close access to a wheelchair-accessible washroom (holding in a space where an accessible washroom is located far away or on a different premises means it is NOT wheelchair-accessible)

2. Physical access: continued

- Designated area for wheelchair/mobility device users to sit close to stage/event area and/or with good sight-lines to the stage (so they are not forced to sit at the back of the room all the time)
- Stage should also have a ramp so that mobility device users know they are also welcome to come and present on the stage and are not just assumed to be spectators—EVEN IF the scheduled speakers themselves are not in need of it.

2. Physical access: continued

- Are service dogs and animals allowed in the event? Is there enough room for guide dog users and their animals to maneuver?
- Is there a relief area/food area/drinking area for service animals?

3. Is the room/venue free of sensory stimuli?

- Scent-free spaces are a necessary part of events. Ask guests and speakers to refrain from using strong scents so that those with chemical sensitivities don't have trouble in the space.

4. Can everyone access the *content* of the event?

- Are there ASL interpreters at your event? If no ASL, are captions being provided?
- Can everyone hear the content? Microphones should ALWAYS be used if the room is large, regardless of whether speakers can “project” or not.
- Are there pamphlets or information packages of what’s being discussed in the event/workshop so that people can take them and refer to them later?
- Are the pamphlets provided in alternate formats? (Large print, plain language, etc)
- Is there a presentation? Is it provided with clear graphics, in a high-contrast format? Are PPT slides numbered for ease of access? Are the PDF slides accessible?

Read Aloud

- Read Aloud is a Google Chrome extension that allows you to plug in any webpage address to check the accessibility of the text.
- In order to test the accessibility of a PDF, upload it onto your site and then put the address of the uploaded file into Read Aloud.

5. Are content warnings and safe spaces outlined and provided?

- Content warnings should be provided every time there may be sensitive content discussed at an event.
- Safe spaces should be designated in a physical venue and made available to all who need them.
- Similarly, a low-sensory room(s) should be designated at a venue and made available to anyone who might need it. (Quiet room with low lighting, soft chairs and/or cushions)

Key things to keep in mind when planning
events:

VIRTUAL

5 Questions:

- 1. Financial access**
- 2. Internet access**
- 3. Content access**
- 4. Sensory access**
- 5. Safe space access**

1. Financial access

- Is your online content offered for free or for a reasonable price?
- Are there mechanisms in place for people to access the content for free if they don't have the financial means to pay?

2. Internet/Platform access

- Is dial-in an option for your event? Some people don't have access to streaming video—can they access the content another way?
- Can you create/provide a tip sheet and/or video outlining how to use your event platform (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, other, etc) so that people know what to do to get into the event?

3. Content access

- Are captions and/or ASL interpreters available for this event?
- Is it possible for viewers to access the digital event space in large print or other formats?
 - Editors Canada conference – Pheedloop example
- Are video recordings (with captions) of the event available if people cannot tune in at the time of the event?
- Are info sheets/transcripts of the event available for people to refer to after the event? Are those info sheets provided in alternate formats (large print etc)?

4. Sensory access

- Flashing video and graphics can pose difficulty for viewers who have epilepsy or other seizure disorders. Is your content clear and easy to follow?
- Are your graphics high-contrast?
- Do your images have alt-text?
- Are your presentation fonts at least 14-point or higher?
- Are your presentation slides numbered?

5. Safe Space Access

- Do event attendees know the protocol if they encounter difficult content? Are they free to leave or take a break/turn off their screens and return if they need time?
- Are your facilitators aware of ableist/difficult language and how to remove that from their presentations?
- Are attendees aware of the process for providing feedback and encouraged to provide feedback in a safe manner?

TIPS FOR BOTH KINDS OF EVENTS:

- Ensure adequate breaks, especially for digital events—15 minute break per 1.25 hours of content at the very least.
- Ensure that your speaker(s) speak clearly and slowly so that everyone can understand them.
- Offer multiple ways for people to participate—for in-person, options to send in questions ahead of time, for virtual, Q&A via chat, call-in, email questions ahead of time, etc.

TIPS FOR BOTH KINDS OF EVENTS, cont'd:

- **Advertise your events with as much detail as possible so that disabled people can make informed decisions about attending.**
- **Make it easy for people to get tickets to your event—easy registration process, etc.**
- **Remember to include alt-text in any online posts/advertising!!!!**

**VERY, VERY IMPORTANT:
AVOID USING THE TERM “FULLY ACCESSIBLE”**

It will likely never be possible for something to be **fully accessible**. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't still be striving toward this goal. There will always be room for and ways to improve.

REMEMBER



Accessibility is a lot of work—that's true!
But it's important to remember: **this is work
that always should have been done. The
work before was incomplete.**

Sometimes you may encounter people with **conflicting access needs.**

Eg. I find black-on-white contrast better for my eyes, but white-on-black contrast can be better for those with astigmatism.

The key is to have **options available.**

Accessibility is an ongoing transformation. There will always be new things to learn and new ways in which to grow. **Humility and a willingness to learn is key.**

A key part of an accessibility journey is listening to the disability community. Here are some disability activists to follow and learn from on Twitter:

- Imani Barbarin: @crutches_and_spice
- Rebecca Cokley: @RebeccaCokley
 - Keah Brown: @Keah_Maria
- Andrew Gurza: @AndrewGurza_
 - Ashe Grey: @CrippledScholar
 - David Perry: @LollardFish

QUESTION PERIOD!

