

Taking steps to make your gallery or exhibition more accessible to Deaf and disabled audiences increases the potential number of visitors able to enjoy, and possibly buy your work. Even small actions can make a big difference in the accessibility of your exhibition. Thinking about the barriers to Deaf and disabled guests at the start of your exhibition planning means you can take steps to increase the access available. The list below offers some free or low-cost steps you can take to increase the accessibility of your exhibition.

Don't assume you can tell a patron's access requirements just by looking. Ask or wait to be told. Consultation is a great way to understand what disabled patrons and visitors require most. Ask disabled visitors or members for their feedback or contact Access2Arts to get an idea of how accessible the exhibition space is.

The space

If you have a choice of exhibition spaces, think about using an exhibition space in a step-free, street-level venue or on the ground floor. If it's not on the ground floor, make sure there is an appropriately sized lift or a way to change levels without using stairs.

Think about the entry to the exhibition. If there is a step or staired entry, consider having an appropriately-sized ramp available. If the door is hard to open or hard to find, have a doorbell that people can ring for assistance, and make sure it is well signed or easy to find.

Make sure every space is wheelchair accessible. And this includes the toilets! Remember they are not a storeroom. Make sure they are unlocked and clearly signed.

Increasing Exhibition Accessibility

Give your patrons the choice to contact the venue, or the coordinator, through various means - email or telephone, in case they have questions regarding the artwork or the specific venue access-related. Unsure how to word the statement in your marketing material? Simply say, *“If you have access requirements you want to let us know about, call <name of contact> on <contact number> to discuss your requirements.”*

If a ramp is needed to get to other levels or to a staged area, consider hiring or borrowing a suitable access ramp instead of making or improvising your own. If that is not an option, consider alternatives to how you set-up the event to not require a ramp.

Keep in mind that even small steps or raised doorways can be inaccessible and will require a ramp.

The artwork

Consider how high the work is hung. Hanging the work at a height of 130cm from the centre of the work to the floor makes it more accessible to wheelchair users or small-statured patrons.

If you are exhibiting sculptures, a plinth height of 80cm is best, unless the work is very tall in which case you might need a shorter plinth or none at all.

Sticking tactile indicators around a plinth or floor-based work helps to mark the space for blind or vision-impaired patrons.

Leave a gap of at least 1.3m between any furniture, walls or floor-based items for audiences using mobility devices (wheelchair, walking frames, walking sticks, etc.)

Increasing Exhibition Accessibility

Visitor communication

Have a notepad or clipboard available for writing on - this can help with communicating with people who are Deaf or non-verbal communicators.

Busy, crowded launch events can get overwhelming for some patrons. Setting up a Quiet Space with low light and comfortable chairs, offers a safe area to unwind in.

When holding an opening or exhibition launch where you expect a crowd, leave room to allow for patrons using wheelchairs.

If you're holding artist talks, workshops or 'in conversation' events, ensure you provide access at these as well – book an Auslan interpreter well in advance of the event date, or provide live or 'Open' captioning for Deaf or Hard-of-hearing guests.

Printed material

When making exhibition programs use a plain, high-contrast font size of at least 12pt. Avoid italics and strikethrough text. Have large-print variants (with size 18 textual style) of all print material accessible on request.

Matte and low-sheen papers are best for printing programs, books or brochures. Glossy or shiny papers can be hard to see for people who are blind or have low vision.

Artwork labels and interpretive signage should all be at an equal 'moderate' height (around 1.1 meters) and should be of a minimum of at least a 14pt font size.

Clearly identify any access available on any promotion or marketing materials like flyers, emails or Facebook. Avoid saying "this exhibition is accessible". Consider using Disability Access Symbols to identify what access is available. You can download the symbols from [here](#).

Avoid layering text over images when making flyers or other promotional material. The text should be set against a clear, high-contrast background. And always use a minimum 12pt font.

Increasing Exhibition Accessibility

Off-site accessibility

Consider making the exhibition available online. Even if audiences can't access a physical gallery, being able to direct them to an online exhibition space supports them to enjoy your work. Remember to make sure all images have alternative text descriptions of the work to make it accessible to audiences using screen readers.

Have any film work captioned, or have a transcription available.

Audio Description

Audio Description is a professional service delivered by trained describers. It provides an outline of the visual elements a viewer would get from a work. For blind or vision-impaired patrons, and sighted audience also, Audio Description enriches their engagement with the exhibition. Consider holding a touch/Audio Description tour presented by a professional Audio Describer, or work with an Audio Describer to create a scripted description that can be delivered by an invigilator, gallery coordinator, or the artist themselves. A description could also be recorded and made available online. You can use online audio platforms like Soundcloud or Audioboom.

Increasing Exhibition Accessibility

Holding an accessible exhibition?

If your exhibition is accessible, you can notify Access2Arts and have it listed as an Event on our website.

To find out more, go to
<https://access2arts.org.au/promote-your-event/>

Access2Arts coordinates a number of trained audio describers who are able to offer fee-for-service audio description services in Adelaide.

At Access2Arts we are passionate about the arts and disability. We want to remove barriers to arts and arts opportunities. We are an experienced disability led organisation and seek new ideas and opportunities.

Access2Arts has widespread arts-industry knowledge and a track record of working with artists and organisations to achieve outcomes. We believe that being inclusive can elevate you or your organisation to a new level.

For further assistance or consultation, you can contact Access2Arts by phone: 08 8463 1689 or email:
hello@access2arts.org.au.

References:

Easy Access: Quick Wins, Arts Access Victoria, 2018,
<https://www.artsaccess.com.au/assets/Uploads/Quick-Wins-Updated-9-March-2018.pdf>

How to Put On an Accessible Exhibition, Shape Arts, 2018,
<https://www.shapearts.org.uk/news/accessible-curating>