Finding Useful Questions

How to treat accessibility, diversity and inclusion as connected aspects of human interaction.

This is a compilation of questions and ideas on how to respond to them. The material provided is supposed to serve as a starting point and resource while working towards more inclusive and equitable business- and communication practices.

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On Finding Useful Questions

Because asking the right questions is often the hardest step in the process to a good answer.

"Finding Useful Questions" is an annotated list of questions a lot of people would like answers to, but often don't get to ask for a variety of reasons. This document is supposed to serve as an entry point to facilitate inclusive and accessible interactions, events, and everyday communications. .

The basic idea behind the framework we are using is that everyone has different needs, and a lot of the time they are easy to address. But only if we know about them! A lot of things are never fixed, simply because they are not recognized as a problem.

There are no one-size-fits-all solutions to dealing with people's needs. In this list we tried to provide a range of questions you could use as a starting point to consider your audience and how to make your space as welcoming as possible — to the biggest audience you can reach.

Working efficiently often means doing the things we already know how. We live in a world that is shaped by standardization, and this has practical reasons. But as soon as we assume a standardized person, we also run into problems. Stopping for a moment to reconsider the things we take for granted is often a great, simple way to improve the outcomes of whatever it is we are trying to do.

We're all human and it is easy to forget about making things explicit when they seem obvious to those in charge. Take a moment to stop and consider this: what information is missing because it's too obvious to the organizers after being so involved with a project? In other words: which standards are we relying on? How to make our tacit assumptions visible?

Learning about the types of information other people find helpful will aid you in uncovering hidden barriers. We want to make explicit some of the problems certain groups of people experience in their everyday lives. We want to invite you to take a moment, step back and consider which information is relevant, and for whom. Because we believe that in order to make good decisions, we need the relevant information first. The point of this document is not to make anyone feel guilty. Whatever it is you are doing, only a part of the points brought up will be relevant for your project or business. And at the same time, it's very likely that you will come across a few specific questions that are not covered here. But one thing is for sure: You will learn something new while working with our materials, and it will help you learn more about your audience!

In the next few pages we will explain some basic concepts and the framework we are using to organize our process and this document.

Accessibility and Inclusion

We have to actively create inclusive environments together, they don't just happen by accident.

Accessibility, diversity and inclusion are loaded terms that are commonly attached to big policies. Those topics and their meaning are often so complicated and so far away from everyday life that it's easier to just hope somebody else will take care of it.

We cannot expect big changes to happen over night, we have to start small. Everyone can work to make their corner of the world more welcoming to others. This is why rather than looking at big plans, we want to talk about small, everyday tasks and practices..

Working Definitions

As a starting point, you can find our working definitions of accessibility, inclusion and diversity below. They are very short and may look overly simplified to some of you. These definitions are intended to give an easy-to-understand overview for anyone new to this conversation.

Accessibility

Access is about physical needs. An accessible environment means the particularities of someone's body (and mind) will be accommodated. Accessibility here does not include other forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, social class, ...

Inclusion

Accessibility is an integral part of inclusive practices. Being inclusive here **means dealing responsibly and respectfully with all structural disadvantages** a person or community might experience. This includes but isn't limited to issues relating to (dis)ability, gender, race/ethnicity, class, religion, ...

Diversity

Ideally **a state where people** of many different backgrounds can **exist as equals.** Diversity is an end goal, but diversity reproduces itself the same way homogenity does. It is widely acknowledged that diverse companies, working groups, communities, ... are usually more open and inclusive in whatever it is they do.

Accessibility is a social issue that is often framed in technical terms. Distinguishing between technology and the social is sometimes useful, but it is not a productive way of dealing with these interconnected phenomena in the long run. We want to think of accessibility, diversity and inclusion as interconnected aspects of human interaction, rather than thinking them as either purely social or technological. These topics play into each other and cannot be detached from each other.

By approaching them as part of everyday communications and organization, we want to invite you to re-think practical matters of accessibility and inclusion. We want to highlight that accessibility is not necessarily about solving a fixed set of problems, but about cultivating an ability to critically and productively engage with people and their needs in our daily lives

We operate under the assumption that nobody excludes others deliberately. Regardless, a lot of relevant questions simply never reach the people with the ability to answer them: Because they're not an issue for those making decisions, or because there is no access point for people to reach out to. And this is why we focus on the process of finding useful questions: We want to make invisible barriers, biases and assumptions visible. You will see that most of the individual needs that come up are easy to deal with as soon as everyone involved knows what the actual problem is.

We want to provide a toolkit that can be used by individuals and small groups, even when resources are limited. The majority of issues discussed need to be solved on a societal level. They are structural problems perpetuated by society as a whole and should be dealt with accodringly. But we also believe that everyone can change the world — and that they should. Often it's the small changes that make a big difference for someone else.

Now we are done with our introduction and definitions, we can begin working together on exploring these concepts in practice. The rest of this documented is organized along the imagined timeline of a project or enterprise.

Set Up

Play

Rewind

The three stages in every project are Set Up, Play and Rewind. On the next page we want to explain the idea behind the framework in a bit more detail.

Set Up • Play • Rewind

This is a short introduction to how we think (and talk) about creating equitable environments.

Using the metaphor of analog tape recording, we want to emphasize the process in what we are trying to do: We are creating, adapting and sharing everything from spaces to ideas. This is why the graphic above is more a knot than a circle.

Similarly, there aren't clear boundaries between the phases. For example, signage is ideally prepared in advance, but might need an update in the middle of a conference day. Planning, getting feedback and adapting whatever it is we are doing cannot be separated, but it is often easier to think them as different tasks or stages of a project. That is why the Set Up, Play and Rewind categories are a useful way to organize questions: Different situations and stages of a project require different modes of relating to people.

Set Up: Planning and Maintenance

Set Up includes planning, preparation and infrastructure. These are things you'll typically think about before an event starts and that will impact your choices going forward.

"Set Up: Infrastructure" covers tasks you start thinking about early. They are ambient in that they continue to run in the background and are never really finished (e.g. your website). At the same time they are less obviously interactive than the topics covered in **"Play"**.

Play: What you actually want to be doing

In this category, we deal with questions that arise in direct interaction with your clients, customers, audience, visitors,... After all, planning and organizing are just a means to an end: Here we discuss how you can get to the things you actually want to be doing with your time.

Planning is important, but being able to respond to whatever comes up is even more valuable when dealing with the people around you and their needs.

Rewind: Reflection and Feedback

At some point, you probably want to know what went well and what didn't — and if it makes sense to change things up a bit in the future. In this section we are looking into facilitating and making use of both internal and external feedback.

Now that we have a basic framework to operate in, on to the actual questions!

This document is organized by topics, which are assigned to the 3 stages (Set Up, Play and Rewind) as outlined above. You can read the whole document from start to finish, or browse and just dip into the sections that apply to your own needs.

Set Up

Preparation: considerations before the event starts, before engaging with your audience or before hitting publish.

Below you can find a range of questions people may have when preparing a night out, booking tickets for an event or seeking to interact with a new-to-them business.

This is not an exhaustive list, and it is unlikely that all of these questions will apply to your specific situation and audience — they are supposed to provide a starting point to challenge our tacit assumptions and consciously reflect on problems that are often perceived to be too minor to even be noticed by those in charge. What are the questions you need to provide answers to?

For Ongoing Operations

Questions relevant for any ongoing operation/service such as businesses, restaurants or organizations

1. **Have you ever considered asking your customers/clients/audience what they would like you to do?**

    Note: In the age of social media, this is easier than ever.

    Try This: If you already have some followers, just ask them what their access needs are and how they would like to be included!

2. **Is there an easy way to access the information needed for preparing my visit/dinner/evening/shopping? Do you have a website?**

3. **Are there opening times? What are they, and are they easy to find online?**

4. **Is there an easy way to contact you if I have questions?**

    Try This: Make clear how people can reach you and where/how you will respond. Offer a text-based mode of communication in addition to a phone number if at all possible.

5. **Is the location wheelchair accessible? What is/isn`t?**

    Note: Even if your venue, office or restauraunt is not accessible, it is better to clearly state these facts so people don't have to work for information. Just describe what visitors should expect.

6. **Who can I contact with accessibility questions?**

7. **Who will be responsible for accessibility questions on site?**

8. **Is there an admission fee?**

    Context: This depends on the circumstances. People will not expect that information for a restaurant, but probably for a club. A lot of people can't afford to just show up and hope it's not too expensive.

    Try This: If not absolutely obvious, then make it clear both if attendance is free AND if there is a fee.

9. **Is this a smoke free venue/office?**

Note: This only applies to venues/offices where it is legally allowed to smoke, there are a range of respiratory problems and allergies that are triggered by smoke on top of people simply disliking it.

10. **I have special dietary needs (for religious, medical or personal reasons), will there be something for me to eat?**

Example: Special dietary needs can go beyond offering access to the standardized list of allergens, or having vegetarian and/or vegan options. Does your menu offer halal or koscher meals?

Try This: You don't have to (and usually realistically cannot) offer everything people might want, but let them know what to expect in advance!

For further food related questions, see the food section in the "Play" Chapter.

Language

11. **Which language(s) do(es) your audience speak?**

Context: Is it the same as yours? Are there people with many different backgrounds? You might have to prepare in advance to deal with language diversity.

Note: Sign language is a language like German or English, as a consequence it is the native language for many deaf people.

12. **Are you aware that not everyone has the same language skills?**

Try This: If you want to reach people regardless of their language (processing) skills, make an effort to communicate in a way that's effective and easy to understand.

Common Mistakes: In a globalized world, it is often assumed that everyone speaks English. This is problematic, especially when someone's English skills are taken as an indicator for intelligence. When someone's English isn't perfect, maybe they already speak 3 other languages, maybe they do not. Don't judge.

13. **Be kind if someone has trouble talking to you.**

Try This: If someone stutters, seems overly nervous or otherwise has a hard time speaking to someone, take your time and treat them with respect.

Note: This also applies to public speakers. A lot of people have interesting/important things to say, and that is not necessarily tied to how well they manage to present it.

14. **Are you aware that a lot of people can't (or won't) read unnecessarily complicated texts?**

Context: A relatively large portion of the population is affected by reading disabilities, The rest of us often don't have the time, energy or specific language skills needed.

Try This: If you want to reach a wide audience, make sure that your language is simple enough to be read comfortably. If the text flows easily, it won't just be easier to read. People want to read good texts. Make sure to explicitly state important information. Even complicated texts can reach more people if you add simple, clear introductions that describe the context and state your intentions.

Note: People are willing to put a lot of effort into reading when they actually want to read something. But often it is not really necessary to make them work extra hard to get information. If you want to get your point across, it's on you to present the information in a way people actually want (and are able to) to read.

Additional Questions for Events

Events for this purpose are endeavors that require more planning in advance for visitors because they are not regular occurrances.

15. **When do I have to be there?**

Context: People like to plan in advance, even if they don't have to.

Try This: If possible, include details early on. When do the doors open AND when will the event officially start? If it's a conference or something similar: when does it start every morning and end every evening? What about scheduled breaks or social evening events?

16. **Where will it be?**

Try This: Providing an address is helpful to navigate to your venue. But if the entrance (or the accessible entrance) is not where standard navigation software would put it, make that information explicit and easy to find.

17. **How much are the tickets?**

Note: Money is always an issue. A lot of people can't afford to just hope it's not too expensive: often it is necessary to take days off work even before ticket sales start or organize child care way in advance.

Try This: If not absolutely obvious, make it clear both if attendance is free AND if there is a fee. Let people know at least a rough estimate for ticket prices early on.

18. **Is all the information needed to make a decision available before signing up/buying a ticket?**

Context: This is easy to forget, but many people need to know accessibility details, exact location, ticket price and dates long in advance to be able to arrange affordable travel, know if their needs are met enough to actually consider attending, organize help (childcare, carers for themselves in case of some disabilities).

19. **What if I can't afford attendance fees?**

Try This: Think about the options early, so you can consider them for budgeting your event. Often, it's possible to fund lower price tickets when they are in the budget early on. Are you offering free tickets to volunteers, and if yes, how can people apply for these schemes? Is there a low-income ticket? Is it easy to get free/reduced tickets for those who need them? Having pricier (supporting) corporate tickets could keep prices for attendees without institutional backing affordable.

Note: There are many reasons for people not being able to afford attending expensive events, shaming anyone for that is a no-go.

20. **Is there anyone to show me around?**

Try This: You can offer mentoring or guides for first-time attendees.

Context: Big, recurring events that have an establisehd internal culture can be intimidating and hard to navigate for first timers. A little support will make them feel welcome.

Outdoor Events

Creating infrastructure outdoors is challenging. Communicating limitations becomes even more important in temporary spaces.

Outdoor events can range from large scale music festivals and camps to small events like a birthday picnic. But also pop-up events that are incredibly popular these days regularly take place outside. What most outdoor events have in common is that infrastructure is more or less temporary. Additionally, everything is by definition more vulnerable to weather conditions and other uncontrollable external factors.

The circumstances are more spontaneous and fluid than, say, at a conference in a university conference space. For temporary spaces, it is harder for participants to research their options and often impossible to rely on reviews or experience.

Having particular access needs often means getting very good at planning ahead. If confronted with a temporary space, experience has to be replaced by communication. On the organizer's side this requires careful planning, communicating possibilities and limitations respectfully and early, flexibility to deal with whatever comes up and — most importantly — quick reaction times.

Communication is key so people know what to expect and who can help them if they need anything.

21. How do I get there?

Context: This is essential to communicate especially when there are no pre-existing structures or buildings. Maps on the internet might have a problem planning routes to temporary locations, so participants have to rely on your information.

Try This: Consider and make available as many options as possible. For some people it is a lot easier to travel by car, where they can transport wheelchairs and service animals. Others have to rely on public transport because they don't drive.

Note: This is applicable to outdoor events of different scales. It's largely the same for a music festival and a birthday picnic among friends.

22. How can I find my way around the location?

Context: This is equally important and difficult when working with temporary venues, such as festivals, camps and pop-up events. Creating good signage can be difficult when there is little prior experience.

Try This: Take inspiration from similar events where you can. Expect and prepare for improvements you can make at short notice or during the event.

23. What is the maintenance level and material composition of roads and paths on site?

Context: Sometimes it's important to know whether a road can be travelled by wheel, or only on foot.

Try This: If you have a map, mark roads that are wide and level enough to traverse with a wheelchair or stroller. Make clear where cars are allowed and where they aren't.

24. Can I find my way in the dark?

Try This: Illuminate signs and pathways. The best signage won't help if people can't read it. Lit roads help people to gauge their condition, and make it easier to notice strangers.

25. Is there a map?

Try This: Make printable maps available online and/or as a download before the event. This helps people to get an idea of the layout beforehand and plan accordingly. Be sure to include facilities such as toilets and showers, and clearly mark accessible infrastructure.

Note: If your event is big enough, consider providing tactile maps. Signage can additionally be labelled in braille to aid navigation for blind and visually impaired attendees.

26. What facilities can I expect? Are they accessible?

Context: This question concerns showers, toilets and bathrooms. It's not only important to know if they are there, but what kinds there are. Are there portable toilets/Porta-Pottis, container toilets or are the facilities in permanent buildings? Is there drinking water everywhere, or only on some locations? Are some, or all, of the facilities gendered (e.g. binary gendered toilets vs gender-free toilets)? Which are wheelchair accessible, if any?

27. What do I have to expect in regards to air quality?

Context: Small particles, like dust or pollen, can make it difficult or impossible to breathe for people with allergies or respiratory issues. Terrain conditions are important here, since dusty roads or nearby traffic do influence air quality. Pointing out allergy and pollination reports can be helpful too, especially if they fall outside the norm for the region.

Try This: If the festival is on a dusty field in the late summer, remind people to bring breathing masks if necessary. It's also helpful to have single use ones available at first aid stations.

See also "Why are you wearing a mask?".

28. Where are people allowed smoke?

Context: It is often assumed that smoking is not a problem outdoors. However, some people are very sensitive to cigarette smoke and have to avoid it entirely. When people smoke at entrances of toilets or other facilities this can create a very difficult barrier.

Try This: Set up clearly designated smoking areas away from important infrastructure and enforce them.

29. What happens if the weather changes? What will happen if it rains/is too windy/too hot?

Example: People have different requirements for ground conditions. A mud road might be annoying for everyone, but impossible to pass for people with limited mobility or wheelchair users.

Try This: It is important to communicate what to expect and how you plan to react to different conditions. Can you put up wooden boards or ramps when roads get muddy? What kind of shelter is available for possible extreme weather conditions? Are there any places to cool down or warm up reliably?

Set Up: Infrastructure

Some infrastructure and communication channels are ambient rather than happening at a specific time.

In this section we are collecting the topics that are transgress both the Set Up and Play categories. Your website or social media presence require continuous work (often in the background). Unlike other tasks, there is no clear beginning or end to maintaining your infrastructure.

30. What about my kids?

Example: Parents (especially single parents or those who cannot afford babysitters) are often unable attend events because they have children to care for.

Try This: If you can afford it, your event is big enough, or your target audience includes a lot of young parents, consider offering childcare during the event.

31. Can we fix your problem by sending a person?

Context: Especially for smaller events, it can be impossible to fix a problem for everyone but easy to deal with individually.

Example: If you rent a conference room in a large building, the way there might not be properly labelled in Braille. If you know that a blind participant will attend, you can offer to have someone pick them up outside and show them the way.

Try This: Make sure to invite requests of that nature in advance. That way you can designate a helper or helpers (make sure that those who need help can reach them) to solve problems you are not able to solve on a larger scale. Individual assistance can be a good option to deal with specific needs if done right: first, you have to know your participant's needs and offer support in advance. Second, someone has to be responsible and easy to reach for the person you want to support. It's best to give them a direct phone number. Third, everyone knows their own needs the best.

32. Do you consider color blindness?

Try This: Never rely on color alone to communicate information. Be mindful when using graphics or text in color, or on colored background. In these cases, readability can be affected for colorblind people. Thin white text on a yellow background, for instance, is not great for people with blue/yellow colorblindness. Adjust your line widths and contrast accordingly. There's great tools online to help you check how different kinds of colorblindness affect your graphics and palettes.

Example: Traffic lights always have the same layout so they can be understood based on the position of the light alone.

Note: There's different kinds of color blindness. It is pretty rare for someone to be completely unable to perceive color. For most people with color blindness, it is hard to distinguish two specific colors, most commonly red and green or blue and yellow.

Social Media

Accessibility on social media is more a social issue than a technical one.

If you are using social media for your business or community, there's a range of fairly recent developments to be considered. But what's surprising to a lot of folks is that the issues below are not actually technical problems. Solving them doesn't require someone to be tech-savvy and know all about all recent technological developments. Most problems have simple, very low-tech solutions that make many people's lives easier without requiring much effort for content creators.

33. Are you adding image descriptions for pictures you post on social media?

Context: Image descriptions are mostly for users that can't see the images and access content via screenreaders. The goal is to describe the relevant parts of your picture or illustration so people can understand your content and participate online.

Note: A screenreader isssoftware that reads a website's content out loud. As screenreaders cannot interpret images it is important to have text descriptions for images (they are called alt-texts).

Try This: Add alt text to every image that is not purely decorative. On a static website, this is done by setting the alt text attribute on image elements. Many platforms like Wordpress have inbuilt text gadgets where one can save the alternative text with their image. This is also helpful for when users experience technical problems: If the image itself is broken, the alt text is shown instead. Platforms like Instagram and Twitter also offer alt text features where the image descriptions can be added to every individual picture.

Example: An older convention is to add image descriptions in your posts captions in square brackets, looking like this: [picture: A description that contains all the relevant information but isn't unnecessarily long and detailed. end.] The "end" marks the end of the description.

Note: Sometimes people add both descriptions in brackets and the in-built alt text features since not all readers are compatible with newer features.

34. Do you post images of text?

Context: Text in pictures is very hard to read for a lot of people, especially when they are resized in the way that's customary on most social media platforms.

Common Mistakes: Sharing images of text is mostly bad form nowadays.

Try This: If you expect your audience to be able to read the text you're posting at all, type it out and put the transcript into the post. If you want to share longer text on platforms that have a character limit, you can use a pastebin/text storage site to make it easily accessible.

35. Do you capitalize each word in a hashtag?

Try This: Capitalize each word in a hashtag when it consists of more than a single word. This is a very easy way to be more inclusive. Screen readers and human brains alike have trouble separating words in hashtags.

Example: #thisisveryhardtoread #ThisIsMuchEasierToRead

36. Are you using "funny" alternative letters or mathematical symbols in your username or content? It could look s!ʅʮɫ ǝʞ!ⅼ.

Context: Since social media sites only have one font available to display content, all funny looking characters are mathematical symbols or letters from various alphabets. While they might look similar for proficient readers, the underlying special characters are not part of the regular alphabet. Assistive technologies do not understand these symbols and can't interpret them as part of everyday language.

37. Do you caption your videos?

Context: Not everyone can hear the audio that comes with your videos. Some folks because they are deaf or hard of hearing, some might not have the volume on due to sensory overload and others might simply be in situations where they can't use audio while browsing on their phones.

Try This: Caption/Subtitle your videos. This usually does require special add-ons or apps, but speech recognition software is developing quickly these days. It is steadily getting easier to have your captions generated for you by a piece of software, some platforms already offer this service as a standard.

Note: Keep in mind that most of those speech to text engines are trained in English. As a result, they usually favour English as a language, and native speakers with certain dialects.

Registration and Contact Forms

I want to fill in your form without having to lie, please.

We're all human and it is easy to forget about making things explicit when they seem obvious to those in charge. Take a moment to stop and consider this: what information is missing because it's too obvious to the organizers after being so involved with a project?

Working efficiently often means doing the things we already know how. Stopping for a moment to reconsider the things we take for granted is a great, simple way to improve the outcomes of whatever it is we are trying to do.

38. **Are you explicitly asking for people's pronouns?**

   Try This: Ask everyone which pronouns they use, or simply how they want to be addressed.

   Note: People might not be using the pronouns that might seem obvious to you when you look at them.

39. **What if my legal name is not the name I'm using in my everyday life?**

   Context: Someone's legal name might be different from the name they use every day. This can be for personal safety reasons, because of a change in marital status, because they have a pen name or go by a pseudonym, because they have not been able to legally change their documents, or other reasons.

   Try This: If you need participant's legal names for official reasons, provide a separate input field for the name people want you to use. This input field is for the name people want to use for name tags and correspondence. This can be done in addition to the field asking for their legal name which is to be used only to process payments and such.

40. **How are you dealing with names that do not fit the western first/given name + surname scheme?**

   Note: Templates or other technology we're using without giving them a second thought might not work for everyone. Does the font you're using for your nametags and programmes have all the diacritics needed for your participants names?

41. **Mr. or Mrs.?**

   Try This: Asking this is not very inclusive, address people using their names instead.

   Context: Only giving Mr and Mrs as options is outdated since this binary does not reflect everyone's reality anymore. If you have asked people for their genders in an inclusive way you cannot just address them this way.

42. **Why are you asking for my gender?**

   Common Mistakes: Avoid asking people if they're male or female unless absolutely necessary. Is this really a relevant question for the event you're planning?

   Try This: If you have to ask this question, add a free text field in addition to binary gendered options. This way people can fill in their correct gender and it is not a lot of extra work to implement. If you need to ask for gender purely for statistical reasons, it might be enough to add an "other" option.

Self-Hosted Web Infrastructure

The previous section can be used by everyone who posts content online. In the following, we want to take a closer look at the more technical aspects of accessibility online.

Social Media platforms already provide most of the tools needed to create an accessible experience. Making your own website accessible for everyone can require some technical expertise. But there are easy questions you can ask yourself and/or your web developer.

Good accessibility is not only about making your website accessible for people. It also helps search engines in understanding your website, which contributes to SEO (search engine optimization.)

43. Can a color blind person understand your website?

Context: About 5% of all people do have a color astenopia or a form of color blindness. Therefore user interface elements should be able convey their meaning without relying on color coding.

Example: Signalling whether an e-mail address is accepted is problematic when it is only indicated by a color change (e.g. by making the text box green or red). Add another way to distinguish it, like text or an icon.

44. Is there enough contrast between foreground and background elements?

Context: High contrast is essential to keep text and graphics readable for people with (and without) visual impairments.

Try This: Consider adding different color schemes a user can pick from. For some people it is easier to read light text on dark background, while others prefer dark text on a light background.

45. Is it possible to change the font size without breaking the layout?

Context: Some people might need a larger font-size and use the zoom function in order to read your website.

Try This: There are different ways to provide a mechanism for changing the font size. One possibility is to provide buttons for different sizes directly on your website. Browsers have a built-in mechanism for zooming, which you can rely on as an alternative. Try and find out if your website is still usable when zooming to levels like 200% and 400% in your browser.

46. Are there textual alternatives/descriptions for images?

Context: Some people browse the web using a screenreader, software that reads a website's content out loud. As screenreaders cannot interpret images it is important to have text descriptions for images (they are called alt-texts). This is crucial for interactive elements like buttons or links, as a blind user might not be able to understand the meaning of an element.

Try This: Describe the image in a way so blind users have the same information available as sighted users. Make sure that any text which might appear in the image is provided as alt text.

Note: As an added bonus, text alternatives make it a lot easier for search engines to understand your content. This typically results in a better search engine ranking.

47. Are there textual alternatives/descriptions for audio and video?

Context: Audio content is inaccessible to deaf people, but also for users that have their devices muted (e.g. when at work or nursing a child at night). Text alternatives for audio and subtitles for video allow them to access this content as well.

48. Is your website operable by using the keyboard only?

Context: Keyboard navigation is crucial so people using screen readers (software that reads your website's content out loud) can navigate your website. Additionally, limited mobility might make it hard or impossible for users to use a mouse.

Try This: There is a simple test that shows if people with screen readers can navigate your website. Open your website and repeatedly press the "tab" key. Are you able to select all links/buttons and other interaction elements in a meaningful order, without using your mouse or touch screen? Is there a way to skip the menu and jump directly to the content (this can be done by so-called skiplinks)?

49. Is it possible to use your website on old hardware or over slow internet connections?

Context: For people working in tech, it is sometimes easy to forget that a lot of people use outdated hardware. Their internet connection might be slow, with restrictions like limited bandwidth or access. Our minds often go straight to the global south when access issues are being mentioned, but it also applies to rural areas everywhere. Consider the different impact "expensive" content like videos or social media plugins can have. While a megabyte of data can be barely noticeable on a fiber connection, it takes more than a minute to download over EDGE. Animated snow might work fine on a high-end CPU, but render an older computer unresponsive.

Try This: There are different ways to simulate slow devices and internet connections, a rather simple one is: Find a slow internet connection (a metro station, that part of your apartment with horrible WiFi reception, or restrict your phone to use EDGE), open a private tab (in order to prevent cached files that improve performance) and open your website. How long does it take until you can see/read something, how long does it take until you can really interact with the page?

50. Does your website use semantically correct markup?

Context: A website can be structured in many different ways from a technical point of view (the HTML source code). This is not about how the website looks but about correctly marking a headline, a subheadline, a paragraph or a quote. Often, assistive technologies use semantic information from HTML tags to ease navigation or improve presentation.

Note: If you write HTML code by yourself or using some kind of rich text editor in a content management system (CMS), make sure that the markup corresponds to its hierarchy in the text. A headline should be marked as headline and not only be marked as bold. Headlines do have different levels, so use h1 on the top level (Every page should only contain one headline h1). Under each h1 there can be multiple subheadings (h2), that can contain a subsubheading h3 and so on.

Try This: Turn off stylesheets, make your browser window small and see if the website still makes sense. By turning off stylesheets you see a default styling of your content that solely relies on the HTML markup. In some web browsers, this can also be achieve by simply switching to the screen reader view.

51. Are there any dynamic changes in website content?

Context: Modern websites often provide interactive elements, typically powered by JavaScript. Whereas such interactivity can add additional value to your website, it can make things difficult for some people. Dynamic elements like collapsible content, custom dropdowns or tooltips must be handled with special care. All of these features change a site's content while it is being displayed. Not being able to see those changes often renders the website useless.

Example: The anti-spam plugin you are using to protect your email address might obscure this address for spam bots, but render it invisible for screen readers too.

Note: People using screen readers and other assistive technologies or features might parse your website differently than you expect. Screen readers read the website content line by line, and high magnification can mean that only a few words fit on the screen at once. This makes it hard or impossible to notice changes that occur in parts of the website which are not currently in focus.

Play

Creating accessible, inclusive environments is a continuous effort during all stages of a project.

In this section, we bring up all sorts of questions that arise in various everyday situations. It is helpful to keep in mind that any initial planning likely didn't cover everything that needs to be dealt with, and unexpected situations will almost certainly arise.

We are providing plenty of examples for the need for clear communication that works in situ. By discussing a wide range of topics relevant to everyday interactions, we want to show how considering a range of potential questions in advance will help to effectively and respectfully deal with anything that might come up.

Basics

Questions that apply to most interactions

52. **Who can I ask about this when I get there?**
> **Note:** This is incredibly important. Planning an inclusive event or space is great, but you need to have the staff on site know about the measures you're taking.

We will not add this to every bullet, but it really applies to most of the questions we are posing here. All staff/volunteers/guests need to know about the measures you're taking to make your space more accessible and/or inclusive. Everyone interacting with guests, clients, customers or audience should know about the plans and protocols in place, otherwise they are not helping anyone.

Being promised a ramp, just to find upon arriving that nobody at the venue has an idea where to find it (or how to install it) is incredibly frustrating.

The next few questions might seem obvious, but maybe only after someone asks them:

53. **Is there someone who knows about the allergy list, and does everyone else know who to ask about it at any given time?**

54. **If you put up a safe-space-policy before the event, who will be responsible for enforcing it on site? And how? How can I reach them?**

55. **What do I do if I need help?**

56. **Who do I need to talk to in order to get what I need?**

When implementing measures to accommodate a wider range of people, it is important for them to know who to talk to and who is responsible for dealing with their problems. Knowing that they have someone to turn to will make people feel welcome, and thus more likely to come into your space.

Provide a contact person for specific topics and reliable information on how (and when) to reach them. As always it is best to provide ways to immediately reach them when needed, and if possible offer a text-based form of communication as well as a phone number.

Gender

57. Why "Ladies and Gentlemen"?
Context: Putting emphasis on the gender binary when addressing a group of people feels alienating to many.

Try This: Use "Hi folks", "dear colleagues", "dear guests" or "everyone" instead of "Ladies and Gentlemen" or addressing a group of people as "guys" by default.

58. But that's not my actual name on my badge?
Context: Someone's legal name might be different from the name they use every day. This can be for personal or safety reasons, because of a change in marital status, or because they are trans and have not been able to legally change their documents.

Try This: Give people an option to use an alternative to their legal name. This applies to name badges and other communications (This only applies if you need to ask for their legal name in the first place, which is usually only relevant to process payments and such).

See also registration form section.

59. Can you use the right pronouns, please?
Try This: If the event has name badges, a nice way to go about this is having a mandatory pronouns field on the name badge. This also avoids singling out trans and non-binary folk who require a marker to avoid getting misgendered all the time.

Note: Don't assume you know anyone's gender. Of course that depends on the situation a bit, but choosing more gender-neutral language will become easier quickly. If someone asks to be addressed a certain way, do not disrespect that.

60. Which toilet?
Try This: If possible, provide at least one explicitly ungendered (unisex) restroom where people outside the gender binary can feel safe.

61. Where is the bin?
Context: A lot of people use sanitary products for different reasons (e.g. incontinence or menstruation), and not all of them are women.

Try This: Make sure there's bins in all toilet stalls, not only in women's toilets.

Note: Bodies are silly sometimes. You can provide tampons and menstrual pads in the bathrooms or toilet stalls. It's a small gesture that is usually very much appreciated.

62. That dude won't leave me alone, can someone please help?
Context: Most people have experienced (sexual) harassment over the course of their lives. So, while this is not a nice topic to deal with, it is a big concern for many. Are there rules in place that are transparent and known both by guests and staff?

Try This: Openly communicating that violence is not being tolerated helps a lot of people feel safer. Of course, a big convention or night club has different needs than an office, but having a plan how to deal with such incidents is important wherever many people interact. It is crucial that a plan for dealing with this exists, but it is as important to communicate it to everyone involved.

63. **Do you have an anti-harassment policy or code of conduct?**

Context: It might seem obvious that you, your company or community won't tolerate harassment and discrimination. but those who had bad experiences will appreciate you making it explicit.

Try This: Make sure everyone knows who is in charge and what to do if something does come up! If you have an anti-harassment policy or a code of conduct, make sure both staff and visitors are aware of it.

Physical Access

Usually people know what they need, so just ask them.

We want to emphasize that there is no one-size-fits-all guide to interacting with other people, no matter what their specific access requirements are. But one thing is for sure: living with a disability makes someone an expert in dealing with it.

People know what they need, but as an organizer or provider of infrastructure you are in charge of dealing with their needs. Being experts on their own needs does not make anyone responsible for enforcing accessibility standards or educating others.

64. **Can I sit down somewhere?**

Context: Not everyone can stand or walk for long periods of time.

Try This: Make sure people can sit down when they need to, and provide at least a few chairs.

65. **How do I best talk to someone who doesn't hear very well?**

Try This: Talking very loudly is not necessarily helpful. Looking at someone while talking to them usually aids their understainding. Seeing lip movements gives additional information; try to articulate your words clearly.

Common Mistakes: Don't turn away while talking to them, and don't speak too fast.

66. **How do you offer navigation help to a blind person?**

Common Mistakes: Never grab a blind person's arm, especially not without their consent.

Try This: Ask if they need help, and what exactly it is they need. Some people prefer to be guided just by voice or the sound of your shoes, but they will tell you that. If you are offering your arm to guide someone, do it in a way that puts them in charge. Offering your arm, the back of your hand facing the blind person, makes it their choice to grab you when/if they want to - not the other way around.

67. **Does everyone on staff know that they are not supposed to move or touch someone's wheelchair without the wheelchair user's consent?**

Try This: If you need to move it, you should ask for permission if the person isn't in the wheelchair at the time.

Note: A wheelchair is often considered to be an extension of it's user's body. Moving their wheelchair is considered an intrusion the same way grabbing their legs without asking would be.

68. **Does the venue provide wheelchairs for visitors who need them?**

Note: This is only helpful if people know about it. Is this information available to your (potential) visitors? Does everyone on staff know it too? Do they know how the procedure to get one? Who is responsible?

69. **Are there any ramps staff/volunteers would need to help with?**

Note: Everyone should know about the accessibility aids on hand - and how to use them.

70. Do you have proof that this is a service dog?

Note: There are very few cases where someone is required to justify their needs or give you their medical history. In most cases you simply don't need to ask this question.

Common Mistakes: It depends on where you are, but asking people to prove to you that they actually have a disability is illegal in many countries/cases.

71. May I pet that service dog?

Note: Assume service dogs are working when they are in public. The safety of both the dog and its owner often depends on the dog being able to work without interruptions.

Common Mistakes: Do not interact with the dog without the owner's permission. Do not offer the dog food or treats. Being approached by strangers is disruptive.

Try This: Always ignore the dog, with one exception: If a service dog is alone and approaches you, it likely means that the dog is trying to get your attention. Follow the dog wherever it wants you to go, the owner probably needs help and it might be an emergency!

72. Do you have a quiet space?

Context: There is a range of conditions that require people to have a quiet, not too bright space to rest a bit during an event. But it can also be helpful for people who breastfeed.

Try This: Offer a designated quiet room. If you are doing this already, let your guests know about it!

73. Why are you touching me?

Note: Be mindful about touching people without their consent. Personal boundaries differ from person to person.

Common Mistakes: Never touch people without their consent.

74. How do you teach your staff how to offer support respectfully?

Context: Dealing with physical acces needs is something that has to be learned, and it is a part of how you treat customers/users as an organization.

Try This: Take some time to come up with a basic protocol on how to handle needs of that nature when they arise. Teach your staff how to best deal with access problems.

Note: Having protocols in place is only helpful if people actually know about them. Well trained staff staff members won't be surprised by a problematic situation and can respond more professionally.

Food

75. Will there be food? What should I expect?

Context: People often take medication with/around meals, or they have other reasons to specifically schedule their food intake. In those cases it can help knowing about the meals that are being served and the rough food schedule in advance.

Try This: Offer catering details for the coffee breaks, provide a list of food vendors at a convention, or compile a list of nearby restaurants and supermarkets for your guests and staff.

Note: It can be particularly helpful to know whether there is food available outside specifically scheduled food times (e.g. lunch break), for example at a coffee bar, during coffee breaks, etc. In these cases, it is helpful to know very roughly what is available — sweet or savory snacks, juices, coffee, tea, water?

76. Do you label the food?

Context: In addition to a list of ingredients relevant for allergies or vegan/vegetarian diets, additional nutritional information can be helpful for people with various medical conditions or personal requirements. This includes information on the composition of the food (amount of protein, carbohydrates, and fats), the caloric value, etc.

Try This: Coordinate with catering so you can prepare the relevant labels. If you serve readymade food (e.g. store-bought snacks), you can simply copy or cut out the nutritional information from the packaging and present it alongside the food.

77. I can't eat onions, are there onions in this?

Note: It's probably impossible to label non-packaged foods in a way that's sufficient for everyone. If you serve food, there should always be someone on staff that knows what is in the food. There are many regulations about this by now, but they don't help much if staff on site can't answer questions.

78. I'm vegetarian, what can I eat?

Try This: It is always good to have both vegetarian and vegan options available. Label them as such! For events, is also helpful to inform people about food options beforehand. If you cannot provide vegan or vegetarian food (or anything else people might require), communicate that early on so people have the option bring their own food.

79. Will there be sugar-free drinks?

Context: For medical or personal reasons, some people cannot or do not want to drink sugary drinks such as juices or sodas.

Try This: Make sure that plain (not sparkling) water is always readily available and can be consumed independently of the water source (provide cups, glasses, or bottles). This helps your attendees to stay hydrated, and take medicine.

Note: For diabetics and others who don't consume certain sugars, non-sugar sweetened drinks (diet sodas, etc.) are great alternatives. People who cannot have sugar enjoy alternatives to drinking plain water when everyone else gets different options.

80. But I don't drink alcohol?

Context: Many people do not drink alcohol, and this can have reasons beyond health and addiction. Having a glass of beer or wine together is so normal we don't even think about it.

Common Mistakes: Don't make someone feel uncomfortable for not drinking alcohol, and do not make them justify their choice. Nobody has to drink if they don't want to!

Try This: Sometimes, organizing explicitly alcohol-free events is a good idea.

81. What if I'm fasting?

Example: During the month of Ramadan, most Muslims who observe the holiday do not eat during the day. Keep that in mind when organizing company lunches or other events including food.

82. Do I have to pay extra for food/participating in the dinner?

Context: If someone needs to be careful with their expenses during an event, knowing about all potential costs upfront will make attending less stressful. Food is often a big factor when money is tight.

Try This: Explicitly state if the dinner is included in the ticket price early on.

83. Will you join us for lunch in that fancy new restaurant that just opened across the street?

Context: Financial and dietary restrictions as well as access needs as discussed above also apply to lunch hour and after work drinks.

Example: An intern or young/single parent might have less money to spend on lunch than someone that's more established already.

Try This: Be mindful of your colleagues' possible limitations without shaming or excluding them.

Others

84. Why are you wearing a mask?

Context: Immunocompromised people often wear masks in public. When someone's immune system is compromised because of a disability, medication or other treatment they can wear masks in stay healthy.

Example: Recently, people are also starting to wear masks when they have a cold in order to not spread it.

Common Mistakes: If someone is wearing a mask, they are either protecting themselves, or they are protecting you. It does not mean they are dangerous to you.

85. Do you provide towels in the bathrooms?

Context: Hand dryers as are often found in public bathrooms are not very hygienic as they generally distribute germs very effectively. This is especially problematic for people who have compromised immune systems.

Try This: Providing paper towels is an easy fix, and especially appreciated during flu season.

Rewind

Looking back is an important step in any learning process.

Looking back on your experiences and reflecting with others on the different organizational aspects of your project will help you to see what worked well and where there is room for improvement.

In particular, it helps to build a sustainable communication network and can make it easier to hand over information and responsibilities if needed. It also helps to compile information that you might want to share with others in the future (e.g. with colleagues, new employees, collaborators, etc).

In the cycle of Set Up, Play and Rewind, getting feedback from your team and your audience can prove invaluable for creating better future experiences for everyone.

It's also important to acknowledge that the act of evaluation is an active one. So instead of highlighting the implicit assumptions no one questions, we will give some advice on how to approach the process in a meaningful way.

Questions to Ask Yourself

86. **Did we succeed with what we set out to do?**

87. **Was there something surprising or unexpected that happened along the way?**

88. **How can we improve our efforts for the future?**

A good opportunity to consider these sorts of questions is after an event is being wrapped up, but it also makes sense to incorporate reflextion and feedback loops in ongoing permanent operations. Experiences can be reflected on individually and/or discussed in group settings including a larger number of people involved.

Discussing what happened in a team will help to learn about what went well (or didn't) from everyone included in running the business, event or whatever it is you are doing. A feedback session in a group setting can provide a venue to openly discuss any potential changes or problems respectfully and productively. While one has to be mindful of potential power imbalances that could bias the outcome of open reviews, it can generate a lot of new ideas when done right.

Sharing thoughts and emotions openly can help to make sense of everything that happened, how things worked out in practice and the impact it had on the individuals involved in a given task or situation. For this process to be fruitful, it is important to listen to each other, to be interested in what everyone has to say, and to try and understand where everyone is coming from.

Outside Feedback

Getting feedback will get you outside perspectives on your actions and gives you the opportunity to improve.

89. **What kind of feedback do I want/what would help me the most?**
   Note: Depending on what you were organizing, and if you plan to have the event recur, you might want to ask different types of questions targeted to separate audiences.

90. **How can we get feedback from clients/attendees/followers on social media?**
   Try This: There are many different channels for feedback that depend on your situation. Generally, it is good to provide some mechanism that's both asynchronous and remote - such as follow up emails, an online survey or a text gadget on a website. The reason for this is that gives people time to process their experiences and think about what they want to say.

91. **Who could give feedback on the aspects we are actually interested in?**
   Note: If you are asking for feedback, don't expect people to respond and don't take it personally if/when they don't. The act of giving feedback requires effort and uses resources (e.g. time, energy) that not everyone has to give. Giving feedback is an act of caring, treat it accordingly.

Negative Feedback

Everyone makes mistakes, and that's okay.
The real question is not if we make mistakes, but how we deal with them when they inevitably happen.

Sometimes feedback can be hard to process if it contains criticism. However, the poing of having a feedback loop is improving what we do — and how we do it. We often have very high expectations of ourselves. What is considered negative feedback is often about the recipient feeling underappreciated for the efforts they put in in the first place.

If negative feedback about issues surrounding diversity, includsion and accessibility feels like a personal attack, it is usually an indicator about our own insecurities. If people pointing to problems or issues they encountered makes us feel bad, we should take a step back and try to ask ourselves why that is the case.

When people are giving us feedback, they do this to help us. They are investing time and energy to be helpful, even though they don't have to do that. We should always try to see giving feedback an act of caring.

After all, it means someone invests their time to teach us something and we should be grateful for their efforts. It means someone chose to productively use their frustation about interacting with a world that does not cater to their needs.

Not fitting in is painful, and when people chose to share their experiences, that's amazing. We should take this as a sign of trust. Sharing issues means our community thinks that we can (and will) handle their problems with respect and care. In this sense, negative feedback is really a good thing as it gives us the opportunity to listen and learn.

To summarise, this part of the cycle is about:
- obtaining feedback about your actions.
- interpreting this feedback productively and respectfully, and
- using what you've learned to improve things going forward.

The key take away from the feedback aspect in this cycle is that it is an opportunity to affect positive change on the environment you helped create.