



MELBOURNE FRINGE PRODUCERS GUIDE TO ACCESS

Access and Inclusion at Melbourne Fringe

Here at Fringe HQ we work hard to make sure art is as accessible and inclusive to everybody as possible, and we passionately encourage all Fringe artists to do the same. After all, disabled people and Deaf people want to experience art, and let's face it, you want as many people to see your art as possible. Accessible art = win-win!

It makes good business sense to think about accessibility early – to save costs, and to save audiences from the heartache of not being able to see your (amazing, brilliant, jaw-droppingly incredible) Festival show. When access requirements are met, it says everybody is welcome.

Melbourne Fringe artists - who are also art-loving audience members, say that feeling welcome through accessibility at shows makes them feel considered, like they belong.

“When I’m welcomed at a venue, it feels really warm, that I am considered as a person”

— Jessica Moody, Director and co-founder, Deaifferent Theatre

This guide is aimed at helping artists, producers and venues with making their art and shows more accessible and inclusive, so that everybody wins.

“Access includes more than the scope of deaf/disability; consider ticket prices; transport access; culture and linguistic diversity; gender disparity; socioeconomic statuses.”

— Jessica Moody, Director and co-founder, Deaifferent Theatre

Disability and Deafness covers an infinite range of experiences, and it's important to consider different access provisions. Within this guide we cover a range of various disability types, provide advice on engaging with the Deaf and disability communities, as well as some hot tips from our friends thrown in for good measure.

Jessica-Moody. Photo: Alexis Desaulniers-Lea Photography





At Melbourne Fringe, we say 'disabled people'. Many people in the disability community prefer identity-first language. This positions disability as part of a person's identity and belonging to a cultural group. Another preferred term is 'people with disability' – this term puts the person before the disability, and it acknowledges that disability is caused by societal barriers.

We use 'Deaf people' to refer to people who are culturally Deaf – that is, people who were born deaf, or became deaf early in life, and who use Auslan sign language to communicate.

We discourage the use of euphemisms like 'special needs', 'differently abled', 'handicapable' and 'diffability' because these create further stigma for disabled people.

The disability and Deaf communities are diverse. We follow and respect the community members' lead on what they prefer to be called. Some people don't consider themselves to be disabled at all (especially people within Deaf and Autistic communities), and they will use language that suits them.

More information on language can be found at [People with Disability Australia](#).

Fringe crew, 2020. Photo: J Forsyth.

Our Access and Inclusion Coordinator

Melbourne Fringe's Access Advisor works to support Deaf people and disabled people to participate in the festival as artists and producers, as well as guiding all artists on how to make their event(s) more accessible to audiences.

Our Access and Inclusion Coordinator is the fabulous Carly Findlay – who identifies as disabled. Carly works at Fringe 2.5 days a week. Outside of Fringe, Carly is a writer, speaker, performer, podcaster and cheese lover.

You can get in touch with Carly by:

- Emailing carly@melbournefringe.com.au
- Calling our office on 03 9660 9600.
- Call our office via the National Relay Service on 13 36 77 and then 03 9660 9600.
- Video relay users choose the available NRS video relay contact on Skype and ask for 03 9660 9600.
- SMS relay users phone 0423 677 767 and ask for 03 9660 9600.

Further Reading

- Find out about how our audiences engage with access at Melbourne Fringe by visiting our access information page via [this link](#).
- Access doesn't have to be an add on – it works best when it's a part of your show. Find out more via [this link](#).
- For more information, support and connections around disability and Deaf art, visit the [Arts Access Victoria website](#).
- For even more information, check out our video on [Access and Inclusion in the Arts - A Melbourne Fringe Guide](#)

Carly Findlay – Emerging Writers' Festival, 2017. Photo: Genevieve Bailey





MAKING ART ACCESSIBLE FOR BLIND AND LOW VISION AUDIENCES



Making Art Accessible for Blind and Low Vision Audiences

There are a number of ways to make your show accessible to blind and low vision audiences, including venue considerations, tactile tours and audio description. Whether you are interested in creating an accessible service for the blind and low vision community (e.g. Audio Description of an event) or whether you would just like to take some easy steps to ensure your event does the best it can to engage with more potential audience members, please read on for more info.

“Everyone who is blind and have low vision, we are all very different - in how we use our vision and how we use our technology and services.”

— Maysa Abouzeid, Comedian and Melbourne Fringe Alumnus

In 2020 the Fringe Festival is introducing Audio Ratings, similar to the more familiar Visual Ratings we have used over the past few years. Please see Appendix E for details.

Make Your Venue Easy To Find

Make sure transport options are clearly listed in marketing materials, including the correct address, location(s) of taxi drop off points (many people who are blind use taxis for transport), and public transport links.

You might want to have a volunteer outside your venue to guide Blind or Low Vision audience members inside. If you decide to do so, e-mail audience members in advance to let them know that there will be a volunteer available.

Tech Tip

Your notes should be in a plain text word document or a pdf with selectable text. If the text is not selectable in your pdf, it has been rendered as a picture, and screen reader software won't be able to read it. Avoid tables and unnecessary formatting.

Pre-Show Notes

Consider providing pre-show notes for the blind and low vision community via email or a website prior to the event.

- Things you can describe include: set, costumes and other visual elements of the show.
- Collate these notes in a document that audiences can access using screen reader software or text to voice apps. As an alternative, you could also record audio notes.
- If you have a printed programme, you may also want to send this in advance to blind and low vision audience members, and to consider including a print-run of large-print (20 point sans-serif font) versions available at the event.

Tactile Tour / Touch Tour

Tactile tours allow patrons who are blind or have low vision to have a hands-on experience of the work. A Tactile Tour doesn't just mean the audience can physically touch parts of the set or feel the fabric of a costume – it is a guided, fully facilitated tour of all the important visual elements of an event prior to the experience of the event itself.

- Choose what you would like to have as part of the tour. A common tour would include a guided tour of the stage where people can touch the sets, props and costumes.
- Sometimes performers will take part in this, dressed in their costume – they describe themselves and introduce their characters, including any physical traits they have.
- Make sure the person who is leading the tour can answer any questions about the performance. A director, producer or stage manager would be ideal to lead the tour.

- While tactile tours are open to everyone, a 50:50 split between blind and sighted people makes a tactile tour worthwhile. Encourage everyone to participate in touching the art, not just blind people.
- If you have an audio-described event, it is best practice to include a Tactile Tour in the same performance, organised prior to the event.
- Promote the event through disability networks such as Vision Australia and Arts Access Victoria.

You can click on [this link](#) to see an example of a tactile stage tour in action, or if you would like a more detailed example of a performer leading a tactile tour that includes their costume and props, check out [this link](#).

For more info on tactile tours check out the [Arts Access Victoria website](#).

Harmony by Andrej Bunjevac –
Fringe Furniture Tactile Tour, 2018. Photo: Josh Braybrook



Audio Description



In an audio-described show, audience members can listen to a description of the visual aspects of the performance described live into headphones via a small radio receiver.

For a live performance, audio describers usually work from a sound isolated box, such as the bio box, or in a separate room while following the on-stage action via a live video feed. Your Fringe venue might not have an appropriate space, so you might want to instead consider having the describer in the audience seating bank as part of a Relaxed Performance (as other audience members will hear them talking).

Vision Australia have trained audio describers and free radio receivers. We recommend using Description Victoria – you can contact them by e-mailing Will McRostie at will@descriptionvictoria.com.au or call/text him at 0405 725 423.

For more information, check their website:
<http://descriptionvictoria.com.au/>

Things to Consider:

- Book your audio describer far in advance – they will need to prepare an Audio Description script with all their notes. For shows in September, the cut-off date for booking Audio Description is early August.
- If your event is a performance, record a full run of the show and give the video to the audio describer so they can practice.
- Offer time in your venue for the audio describer to practice during your show season, before your proposed Audio Described performance date. Audio description could cost anything from \$1,000 to \$2,500 a show depending on your requirements, including initial consultation and the performance itself.
- If the event is appropriate, you could also consider creating your own pre-recorded description. This could work well for an exhibition or live art event, and could be a podcast style description of all the visual elements. This could be provided on an audio player at your venue or be downloadable from a website prior to the performance.

For more info on Audio Description, check out the [Arts Access Victoria website](#).

Melbourne Fringe Awards, 2018. Photo: Duncan Jacob



Disability Pride, 2018. Photo: Carly Findlay

Guide Dogs (and Assistance Dogs)

Guide Dogs and assistance animals are welcome at all Melbourne Fringe venues, and [it is enshrined in Victorian State law](#) that a person with low vision accompanied by a Guide Dog is permitted into any public space, including all performance spaces that admit members of the public. It is discriminatory for anyone to attempt to deny access rights to a person because they are accompanied by a Guide Dog. This legal protection also extends to Assistance Dogs for all disabled people, not just those with low vision (such as dogs trained to pick things up for people with mobility disabilities, or dogs trained to assist people who have seizures), but is not expanded to cover other types of companion animals.

- Consider providing an allocated welcoming space for Guide Dogs and have a water bowl available in case it is needed.
- Show Guide Dog handlers where they can take the dog to go to the toilet.

- If a person is accompanied by a Guide Dog, it is a working animal and it is therefore not appropriate to pat or speak to it.
- Best practice is to provide adequate and clear foot-space for guide dog handlers, as it means the person can navigate pathways easily and have enough space for their dog to sit or lie down while they're watching a show.

For more information and resources about creating access for blind and low vision audience members, head to:

- Vision Australia
- Blind Citizens Australia
- Guide Dogs Victoria

“We are our own community, we have our own strength, we have our own sport, we have our own way of accessing information. We are unique to us, and that’s why we have our culture.”

— Maysa Abouzeid, Comedian and Melbourne Fringe Alumnus



SENSORY FRIENDLY AND RELAXED PERFORMANCES

Relaxed performances are designed to create a safe and welcoming environment for autistic people or people with sensory and/or neurological differences such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Tourette Syndrome, and others. They are also amazing opportunities to break down the stuffy “etiquette” of performance and provide a more relaxed environment for all audience members to enjoy the work

“When you’ve met one person with autism:
you’ve met one person with autism.”

— Prue Stevenson, Dancer and Textile Artist, on the
diversity and differences within the autistic community

Tom Middleditch, founder of A_tistic Theatre, and theatre director, says that “relaxed performances affect everyone’s experience of the show”. He says “a relaxed show needs to be an event in itself. It needs to be different, it can’t just be the show that only autistic people go to, because then it remains an othered item. It needs to be a show that anyone that feels ‘othered’ from the expectations of theatre can attend.”

In a Relaxed Performance, there is a relaxed attitude to noise and movement, and audience members are welcome to enter and exit the venue throughout the show. An easy way to understand the atmosphere is perhaps 'the opposite of the quiet carriage on the train'.

At the end of the day, a properly managed Relaxed Performance means neurodiverse people will be comfortable to express themselves, as you have created a safe space for them to experience your work. Prue Stevenson says: “when there are other people from my community in the audience and something happens, and they’re stimming and laughing and screaming, that makes me feel really comfortable.”

It's important to be aware that Sensory Friendly and Relaxed Performances aren't intended to facilitate the access needs of people with atypical mental health. We have included some very important information about atypical mental health from Fringe alumnus Heidi Everett (Artistic Director, Schizy Inc) in Appendix H.

How to Create a Relaxed Performance

There are a variety of ways you can (and should) make your event more sensory friendly and relaxed, but in order to specifically market your event as a Relaxed Performance you will need to be confident that you can meet the established expectations of a neurodivergent audience member. Failure to do so is unfair at best, and at worst could cause anxiety for the individual. If you do some of the following list, you are taking great steps towards making your event accessible and can market it as Sensory Friendly. If you want to market it as a Relaxed Performance you need to be doing everything in the following list:

- Set a date and time for your Relaxed Performance and communicate this clearly.
- Brief your performers thoroughly and discuss how the event would alter if, for example, an audience member had a loud verbal response during a quiet moment, or got up and left during an intense scene.
- You may need to make changes to lighting and sound effects – for example taking out strobe lighting or loud sound effects, and performers may need to moderate any sudden movements or loud vocalisation.

- House lights stay on at a low level during a Relaxed Performance to facilitate movement in and out of the audience space.
- Provide a Relaxed Pack in advance of the performance, ideally at least one month prior. Give audience members access to as much information about the performance as you can. Some examples of things that should be in your Relaxed Pack include:
 - What audience will be permitted to do during the Relaxed Performance (e.g. stand up, leave the auditorium, make noise, clap, shout, wriggle) – be as clear as you can on what would and wouldn't be appropriate for this particular show.
 - Clear directions to the venue, ideally accompanied by a photographic tour of the space.
 - A thorough content warning list.
 - A plot synopsis or script breakdown (if appropriate), along with a guide to where/when any particularly loud or sensory surprises may occur.
 - Pictures of the performers and a guide to what their characters are like.



Church of Oyster, Melbourne Fringe, 2018. Photo: James Henry

- Provide a chill out room or area, where audience members who desire a break from the noise of a performance and foyer can go before, during or after the show.
- Ensure there is adequate Front of House support for the event to help guide audience members and provide any additional instruction if required.
- Create clear signage for venue entrances, exits, bathrooms, the box office and any other public or safety facilities, including the 'Chill Out' space.
- Where possible, introduce the performers prior to the show as to minimise the level of surprise for the audience.



“A quiet room is a must. Travelling to an event is a lot of information already and being in a new environment is a lot. To get a bit of respite before a show, or after, can help me a lot. My brain can have some downtime to process what’s happened, and then I can watch the show.”

— Prue Stevenson, Dancer and Textile Artist

A Relaxed Performance is a great opportunity to reach out a positive invitation to audience members who may not have otherwise felt comfortable attending your event. Promote the show through your usual networks as well as arts and disability networks, and places that support people with learning difficulties.

It is very important that your front of house team is thoroughly briefed prior to a Relaxed Performance, and that you have done some research into neurodiversity in order to advise them of what to expect. For example, some neurodivergent individuals want to be made to feel welcome at venues but not be expected to make eye contact or be verbal. As with working with any audience member, take an informed lead from your guest’s actions.

Relaxed Performance Consultation

[A_tistic Theatre](#) is a performance company that specialises in facilitating the creation of relaxed performances. Find them on [Facebook](#), send them an email on atistictheatre@gmail.com. Their prices start from \$150, and their services are tiered. More information can be found in Appendix F.

“What I love the most about relaxed performance is talking with artists about taking moral responsibility for their content.”

— Tom Middleditch, Theatre Director and Founder of A_tistic Theatre

Further Reading

- Opening Up Our Theatres:
What are Relaxed Performances?
Who are they for?
And Why do they Matter?

[witnessperformance.com/
opening-up-our-theatres](https://witnessperformance.com/opening-up-our-theatres)

Lake, 2018. Photo: Jeff Wortman





**MAKING ART ACCESSIBLE
FOR DEAF AND HARD
OF HEARING AUDIENCES**



Making Art Accessible for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Audiences

For many years, Deaf-led art has been a part of Melbourne Fringe, as well as many Auslan interpreted events. Jessica Moody, Director and Co-Founder of Deaifferent Theatre, has helped define the Deaf community.

“On a basic level, the Deaf community are made up of individuals that share a common identity and language. We also refer to the Auslan community to include Auslan users that may not be Deaf such as family members; friends; interpreters; workers; Deafblind people, educators, allies and so forth.”

— Jessica Moody, Director and co-founder, Deaifferent Theatre

There are a number of ways to make your art accessible to the Deaf community – including Auslan interpreting, captioning, and visual ratings.

Auslan-Interpreted Performances and Events



Auslan is the sign language of the Australian Deaf community.

Auslan interpretation is available for a range of different type of performances, talks and events. Experienced Auslan theatre interpreters stand to the side of the speaker or action and interpret the text and dialogue into Auslan, signing live.

An important consideration when deciding on whether your event should be Auslan interpreted or not is the content of your show. If the language in a show is too complex it might be difficult to interpret; if it relies heavily on spoken comic timing, or is mostly reliant on music, rhyming couplets or the rhythm of the English language, then it may not translate perfectly.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't investigate the possibility of having an Auslan-interpreted event, but when in doubt consult with the Deaf or hard of hearing community, or at least your potential interpreter, to get their thoughts on it. On the other end of the spectrum, if a show is completely visual then it is naturally accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing audiences, and no interpreter would be required.

Arty Farty Opening Party, Melbourne Fringe 2017. Photo: Josh Braybrook



Booking Interpreters

- Set a date for the Auslan Interpreted event. For a two-week performance season, usually once or twice will be sufficient.
- Book the interpreters as early as possible. A month in advance is possible at other times of the year, but at Fringe time 2-3 months is usually required.
- Deaf community members often like to know the names of the interpreters engaged, and some have preferred interpreters who they will go to see, so make sure you are listing the name of your interpreter on all marketing material.
- Seek interpreters who have specialised skills - for example those with theatre interpreting experience. Auslan Stage Left specialises in Auslan Interpreting for theatre and has a Deaf language/cultural consultant working with the interpreters for each event.
- Two interpreters are usually required so they can share the tasks and take breaks, but ask your interpreter – it may depend on the event complexity and length.
- Interpreters' rates are between \$50-\$150 per hour, and a booking is usually a two-hour minimum.

- Don't just look at the price of your interpreter. Often those who charge more will have specific experience. Organisations that engage with the Deaf and hard of hearing community can often help spread the word of your event, ask if that's something they can offer. An individual / freelancer interpreter cannot and will not promote your event – don't put them in the difficult position of asking them, this is not within their role or their standards of professional practice.

Here are some organisations you can contact to book Auslan interpreters:

Auslan Stage Left
info@auslanstageleft.com.au
Ph. 0423 933 361 (Voice/SMS)
www.auslanstageleft.com.au

Auslan Services
admin@auslanservices.com
Ph. 1300 287 526
www.auslanservices.com

Expression Australia
info@expression.com.au
SMS/Facetime. 0402 217 586
TTY. (03) 9473 1199
Phone. (03) 9473 1111
www.expression.com.au/

Melbourne Fringe also occasionally works with freelance interpreters with a range of interpreting skills. If you would like to get look into booking a freelance interpreter please contact a member of the Participant Services team who will be able to put you in touch.

Melbourne Fringe Awards, 2018. Photo: Duncan Jacob



Preparing for Your Auslan Interpreted Event

- Allow time and budget for interpreters and the language/cultural consultant to attend rehearsals or earlier performances to familiarise themselves with the show.
- Give the interpreters as much information about the event, in advance, as possible—a transcript of the speech or lecture, scripts, videos or a summary of the show. Please note that complex language, poetic text or performances involving comedy will take more time to prepare for.
- If you are planning a public social event after the show, book interpreters for longer so they can interpret the chatting and networking.
- Consult with the interpreters on the best location for their position on stage to allow optimum viewing.
- Reserve seating that allows a clear view of the interpreter position. You can ask the interpreter agency to give a rough idea of how many Auslan seats to reserve.

- Ensure there is adequate stage lighting for the interpreter, ensuring that the top half of their body is clearly lit, with no shadows on their face. Facial expression is an important part of the Auslan language.
- Let your front-of-house staff and volunteers know you are having an Auslan Interpreted event. Ask them to print out any key information that they say in a pre-show announcement and ensure you have adequate visual signage so people know where to go. Ensure they have a pen and paper ready in case they need to write things down to communicate with Deaf audience members.
- Consider having two or more Auslan interpreted or captioned performances, or integrate the interpreting into your show so it's a part of every performance.

If you have to cancel your Auslan interpreted event, let your audience know as soon as possible. You could consider booking a video interpreter or providing another method of communication such as open or closed captions. Jess also suggests providing information on how you will rectify the situation – “will you provide a refund; reimburse travel costs; will you rebook an interpreter for a future event? Please ensure that you are as sincere and helpful in this situation (it's not a pleasant one)”.

Never, under any circumstances, cancel an Auslan interpreted event close to the performance because you're not aware of any pre-bookings requesting the access service. Many Deaf and hard of hearing audience members will rightly assume that if an event has been advertised as Auslan interpreted there is no need to put an “access note” in their booking – it is just a part of the night they are attending.

Creative Access has a great guide for performers who want to work with Auslan interpreters. [View that here.](#)

“Deaf people want an equality of experience”

— Luke King, Deaf artist and art gallery guide

Luke King, a Deaf artist and Fringe alumnus suggests that Deaf people should be involved in the planning process, and where possible, the performance process. If this is done well, the Deaf community will know Deaf people are involved. Luke also says he loves it when he arrives at an Auslan interpreted show and the venue and Festival staff know a little Auslan. Staff and volunteers should know basic Auslan signs such as “toilets”, “drinks” and “tickets”.



MINDY DIVERSITY • FRIENDSHIP STRINGS

Disability is not a personal problem, but a geographical situation.

DISPRIDE

DISABILITY PRIDE!

Invite magic into your home

Disability Pride, 2018. Photo: Carly Findlay



Choosing a Visual Rating

Visual Ratings gives audience members who are Deaf or hard of hearing a better understanding of your work. They outline the level of audio in an artwork.



100%
Visual Content

100% - No music or dialogue – for example, an art exhibition in a gallery, a mime or dance with no music. No hearing is needed to participate in the show



75%
Visual Content

75% - Fully subtitled or very minimal dialogue; some background music and/or sounds (e.g. theatre show with subtitles whenever there is speech)



50%
Visual Content

50% - Partly subtitled or includes very minimal dialogue, only incidental background music and/or sounds not essential for fully experiencing the work (e.g. dance or movement piece with a subtitled spoken introduction)

Visual Rating less than 50% - Sound is required for the full engagement of the show (e.g. music work or theatre piece that includes mostly un-subtitled dialogue)

Captioning

You may also consider captioning your performance so that Deaf or hard of hearing audiences – particularly those who are not Auslan users – can engage with your work. During the performance, captions are displayed on a screen, enabling the audience to read what is being said, without obstructing the actors.

Open captioning is always in view, and cannot be turned off – it is often presented as a projection above or behind the action (surtitles). Closed captioning can be activated or deactivated by the viewer – it is often presented on a tablet or other electronic device the viewer can use as they wish.

Jessica Moody says captioning can be really cheap – a PowerPoint presentation with the script could suffice. At its best, captioning will be cued manually by an AV operator as each line is spoken. AV programs such as QLab have this functionality

Captions vs Interpreters

Many Deaf or hard of hearing people are native Auslan users, with English being a subsequent learned language for them. So, remember for these people that captioning a show in English is not the same experience as providing an Auslan interpreter.



Queen of the Night, 2018. Photo: Duncan Jacob

Engaging with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

The Deaf and hard of hearing community can access marketing material that is 100% visual as well as captioned videos.

- Online platforms such as Facebook are popular with the Deaf community.
- Online bookings are preferred.
- Provide an email address or mobile phone number for SMS, where Deaf people can make enquiries.

Include the Sign language interpreted symbol  in all your promotional materials.

Promote your work through local Access organisations, including Deaf organisations such as [Expression Australia](#) (previously VicDeaf), [Arts Access Victoria](#), [DeafconnectED](#), [Able Australia](#), [Deaf Children Australia](#) and [Deaf Victoria](#).

“While the interpreters cannot promote the show - you can do so with the interpreter. Talk to the camera about the show, and the interpreter will provide the information in Auslan. Or even better, have a deaf person share information about the show.”

— Jess Moody, Director and Co-Founder of Deaferent Theatre

ENSURING YOUR EVENT IS PHYSICALLY ACCESSIBLE



Ensuring Your Event is Physically Accessible

Physical access is more than just getting in the door. It's about where the accessible entrance is located, whether there is a lift between levels, whether wheelchairs can get through the doorways once inside, and whether there is an accessible toilet that can be used without assistance. It's about ensuring the venue for your Fringe event is safe and comfortable for all audience and performers, from the moment they arrive right through to leaving the venue after your event.

It's really important that you go to your venue and audit things like entrances, lifts, toilets and surrounds from the perspective of a person with mobility access requirements. This way, when you're registering and promoting your show, you can accurately state how accessible the venue is.

See Appendix G for Accessibility Definitions.

Key Resource

One of the best resources you should be reading as a supplement to this information pack is the [Arts Access Victoria Quick Wins](#) document. It has a detailed list of easy things you can be doing to make your event more accessible and inclusive for all audience members

Fringe Awards, 2018. Photo: Duncan Jacob

Questions to Ask When Visiting Your Venue

- Can the audience and performers get through the main point of entry? Is there a ramp? Is the door wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair user?
- Is there an accessible toilet? Is it clearly marked by signage? Can people use it independently?
- Is there a lift in the venue?
- Is the venue close to accessible public transport?
- Are the surrounding streets evenly paved or do they have cobblestones?
- Are the surrounding streets well lit?
- Is there a staff member to assist people with disability or who are Deaf?
- Is there a communication board available? (see Appendix C for an example)
- Is there information about physical access on your Facebook page, company website and online listings?

You may also have a performer or technician with access requirements as part of your Fringe event, so it's worth considering access in the performance spaces as well.

Does your venue:

- Have an accessible stage door?
- Is there a ramp to access the stage?
- Have an accessible green room or dressing room?
- Have an accessible operating desk / bio box?
- Have access to an accessible toilet backstage, not just in the foyer?
- Have a back of house area that is easy to navigate and accessible?
- Have the capacity to be flexible with technical requirements?
- Have adequate heating and cooling?
- Have a space for performers to rest before and after the show?
- Have staff to show performers to the space prior to the show?



Church of Oyster, 2018. Photo: James Henry

Jess Kapuscinski Evans, singer, theatre performer and director says that ...

"a lot of access is stuff that's easy to fix, cheap or free", and it can benefit all people. Simple solutions can be, placing chairs in the waiting area, clearing a walkway, putting up clear signage and making sure an accessible toilet is not used as a storage room."

A venue access checklist is in Appendix D, at the end of this document.

MARKETING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Marketing Your Event to Deaf and Disability Communities

It's very important to let the disability and Deaf communities know your show is accessible – how will they know they're welcome if you don't tell them? If you're providing an access service (Auslan, Audio Description, Relaxed Performance, etc) or even if you are simply making it more accessible (sensory friendly, 75-100% visual rating, pre-show audio descriptors of important visual elements, etc), then make sure you advertise to the relevant communities. Make sure you let the communities know with as much lead time as possible – three to four weeks is good!

Some general tips on marketing your event:

- Make sure you advertise your accessible performances in all of your marketing and promotional materials, not just what you provide to access organisations – disabled people use Facebook too!
- Contact disability and Deaf art support organisations, and organisations run by these communities (check out the end of this section for a great list of suggestions). Tell Arts Access Victoria about your shows. Even tell sporting and community groups – you never know who you'll reach.

- You can email and tag these organisations in your posts (but don't spam them!). And be sure to only contact the organisations that are relevant to the type of accessible performance you are presenting – for example, there's no point inviting the Deaf community to your Relaxed Performance if it's not also Auslan interpreted.
- Collect email addresses of people attending so you can market future shows to them.
- If you are doing more than one Auslan interpreted/ audio described/relaxed performance show, you could give out a comp pass to a Deaf/blind/autism org and ask them to review it/spread the word for a future accessible show.
- Get in touch with the local council where you live and/or are presenting the work – there is usually an Access Officer role who works closely with the Deaf and disability community who might be able to help you spread the word of your event.

The end of this section has some great organisations and service providers that you can get in touch with to promote your event. We encourage you to reach out directly to these organisations to find out what their members and clients might be interested in hearing about.

However, there is much more out there than we can fit in this resource – search online for Facebook and Meetup groups, niche service providers and community activities such as sports groups.

Marketing Materials

One month prior to your opening night, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your marketing material fully accessible? Are paper based materials available in large format and/or have you looked into braille or audio transcriptions? Are your social media / digital advertising / online listings accessible to all audiences?
- Have you promoted the event to disability organisations?
- Have you let your local council's Access Officer know about the event?
- Have you asked your contacts to promote the event through their diverse networks?
- Have you approached disability focused media and social media influencers to promote your event?

It's just as important to communicate what is *not* accessible as it is to communicate what *is* accessible. For example, if your venue has a wheelchair accessible entrance and lift, but the toilet is not wheelchair accessible, state that.

Universal Access Symbols

Our community consultation with the disability community has made it clear that the use of universal access symbols is essential in for marketing material to be noticed.

These are symbols representing Auslan, audio descriptions, tactile tours, wheelchair accessible etc. Disabled people and Deaf people often determine the shows they see based on these symbols. They can be found on [Arts Access Victoria's website under Resources](#).

Particularly during Fringe time, when there are hundreds of events vying for attention, having the appropriate access symbol clearly presented on all marketing materials will increase the chances of your potential audience member becoming aware that you are presenting work that is accessible to them.

Choose Art

Choose Art is designed for and by Deaf and disabled people. It's a website to help find accessible arts programs, opportunities and events. You can register your accessible Fringe show on Choose Art – visit chooseart.com.au.



Queen of the Night, 2018. Photo: Duncan Jacob

Social Media

Make all social media posts accessible – you never know who your audience is.

Some essential tips to do this include:

- Caption your videos so that Deaf people know what's being said. (<https://www.washington.edu/accessibility/videos/free-captioning/>)
- You might want to do a video in Auslan only to supplement your other videos.
- Create some Facebook posts and Tweets that organisations can easily put out, for example: Hey @artsaccessvic, we are doing an #Auslan interpreted show at @melbournefringe in September. Please spread the word! [Link]
- Use relevant hashtags on social media, targeting your audiences (like #Auslan, #AccessibleArts, #RelaxedPerformance).
- Ensure all images you post have appropriate image descriptions so blind or low vision users can engage with your content (via a screen reader).

Image Descriptions

The inclusion of an image description below any photos – especially if they include text – ensure that people who use screen readers are able to know what's in the photos. It's no use posting an image that not everybody is able to engage with!

Keep image descriptions as short yet detailed as you can. Describe what you see in the photos. Some items to consider when writing your image descriptions include:

- Placement of objects in the image
- Image style (painting, graph)
- Colours
- Names of people
- Clothes (if they are an important detail)
- Animals
- Text and placement of text
- Emotions, such as smiling
- Surroundings

From: <https://veroniiiica.com/2018/01/31/how-to-write-alt-text-image-descriptions-visually-impaired/>

An example of an Image Description is found in Appendix B, at the end of this document.

Church of Oyster, 2018. Photo: James Henry



Inclusive Language

This section contains disability slurs – as examples only.

At Melbourne Fringe, we discourage ableism in all its forms – that is, discrimination toward disabled people and people with audism – discrimination towards Deaf people. We want all our audience members to feel safe and respected when they see a show at the Festival.

Using disability, or disability slurs, as a punchline of a joke or thread in a performance – even if it's not targeted towards disabled people – can hurt. Mocking disability, or using slurs lowers expectations of disabled people. While words such as spastic, cripple, midget, loony, mad, retard, moron or mongol might have a medical history, language has evolved and these words have a negative impact on how disabled people feel and are perceived.

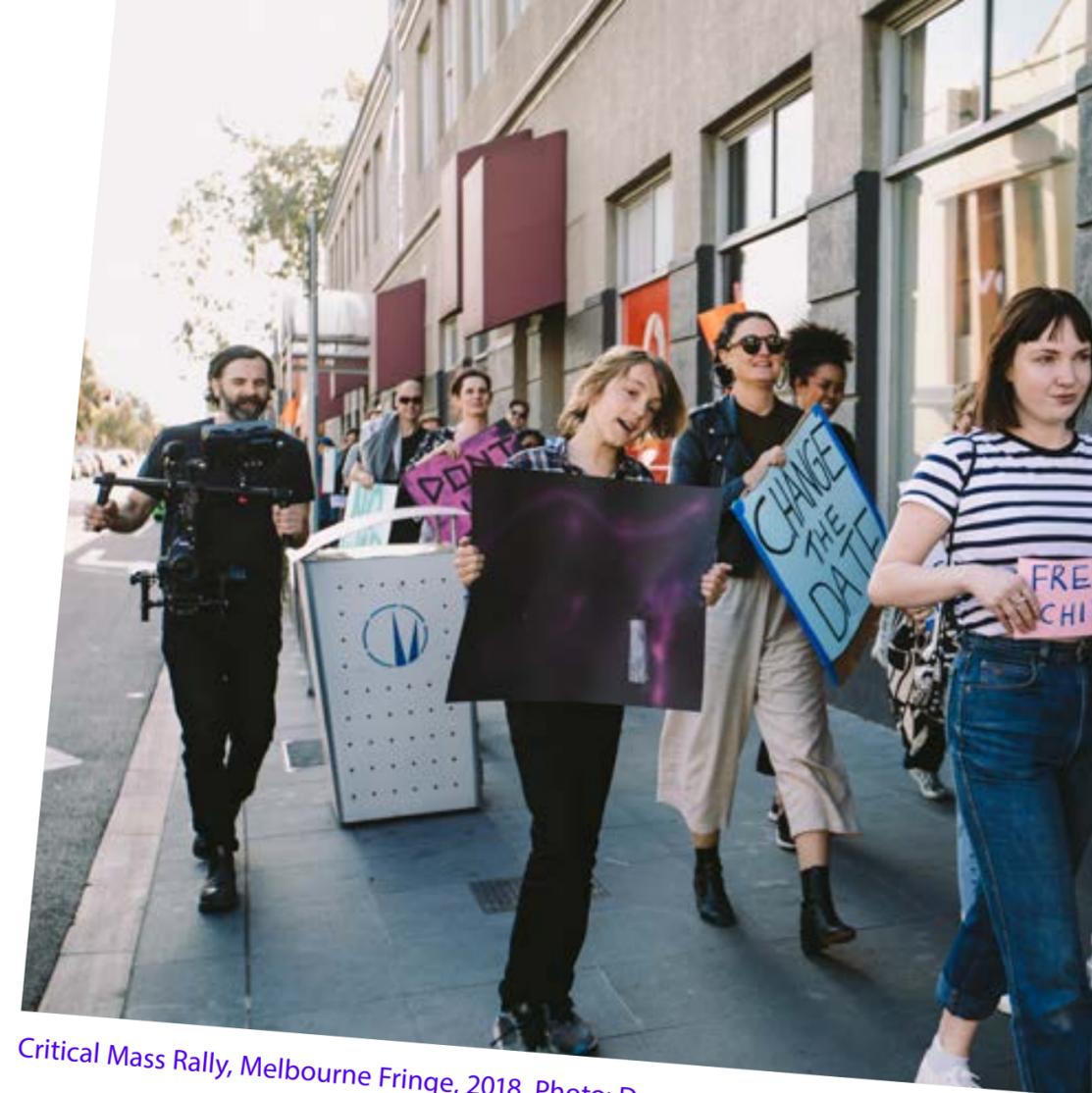
There are also words that are used in every day speech that are ableist. These aren't as well known as the slurs mentioned above – but include words often used casually like stupid idiot, crazy, deaf, blind, OCD, and insane.

Particularly when used as a pejorative, or used flippantly to exaggerate a situation's gravity, this language can have a negative impact on disabled people, Deaf people and people with mental illnesses.

Be aware that some disabled people reclaim language that is considered derogatory. They use terms like "crip" to refer to themselves and in the company of other disabled people. It's important not to correct disabled people on how they identify, and not to use these words if you are not a part of the disability community.

Further Reading

- When is language ableist or offensive?
– Crippled Scholar
- Spread the Word to End the R Word
– Spread the Word
- Autistic Hoya's guide to ableist language
– Autistic Hoya
- We've had all the insults. Now we're reclaiming the language of disability
– Penny Pepper
- [Identity first vs people first language](#)



Critical Mass Rally, Melbourne Fringe, 2018. Photo: Duncan Jacob

Key Resource

Arts Access Victoria have put together a very useful resource for inclusive language and best practice for terminology when talking to a person who is Deaf or has disability. It's included in Appendix A, at the end of this document.



Spotlight Stage, Melbourne Fringe, 2018. Photo: Duncan Jacob

Content Warnings

Content warnings alert audiences to potentially triggering content – such as mentions or descriptions of violence, death, suicide, miscarriage or self-harm, and/or to any visual and auditory effects such as strobe lights and loud noises.

It is important to be clear and upfront about content that forms part of your event for all audience members, but this becomes particularly important when considered in the context of disability. All audience members have a right to be aware of potentially triggering content prior to purchasing a ticket to an event; however, this goes further into the realm of mental or physical harm for an audience member with disability.

You may consider certain content to be edgy or in need of a social spotlight; and while that may be the case, an audience member with a mental disability such as PTSD or disabling anxiety can be severely harmed if not made aware of the content in advance.

This can be the same with dramatic effects like sudden loud noises and flashing lights – these can be extremely effective in shocking some audience members, but for many neurodiverse audience or those dealing with epilepsy this shock can be damaging to their health.

Consider the content of your work and how it might affect an audience member with a different experience of life to you. If you identify a potential content warning make sure it is included in all advance marketing material, at the point of ticket sales and at the venue. If you're unsure, get in touch with the Participant Services team at Melbourne Fringe and we can provide advice.

Content Warnings can become more difficult to know in advance when it comes to physical warnings such as strobe lighting or volume levels. The reality is that you may not know of a potential issue until close to your opening night. If this is the case, please ensure signage is clearly placed at your venue prior to entry and get in touch with Participant Services immediately so we can update your listing, no matter how close to your season it is.

Responding to Feedback About Accessibility

You may receive public or private feedback if your show is inaccessible but was advertised otherwise, or if it contains ableist, discriminatory or exclusionary language or themes.

If this is the case, please take the time to listen, rather than shutting the conversation down.

Disabled people and Deaf people spend a lot of time checking in advance whether things are accessible, and find it disheartening when they encounter barriers to accessibility. It can also be tiring for disabled people and Deaf people to educate people on how to create accessibility – many of them do this daily.

Here are some tips for responding:

- Don't get defensive. Listen, take advice on board.
- Apologise to the audience members, and publicly on social media.

- See if there's a short term solution – hiring a ramp, or bringing in an extra person to assist with wayfinding.
- Edit the script to remove the offensive language.
- If applicable, notify Melbourne Fringe Participant Services to update your event listing on our website (call 03 9660 9600 or email artists@melbournefringe.com.au).
- Consider ways to make your future shows accessible.
- Get in touch with Melbourne Fringe for some advice, and be sure to come along to our next info sessions about access and inclusion.
- Communicate back to the complainant on what you have done to resolve their complaint.

It matters how you respond to feedback about access and discriminatory language. If you take the time to listen, respond and make improvements, it could mean the difference between a happier audience member or news about dissatisfaction going viral. Make sure people are talking about your show for the right reasons!





Organisations and Service Providers

There are a range of organisations and service providers you could approach to help promote your show. We encourage you to reach out directly to these organisations to find out what their members and clients might be interested in hearing about.

Some great starting points for general disability organisations are:

- [Arts Access Australia](#): Australia's peak disability arts advocate network
- [Able Australia](#): Leading provider of disability services and community support
- [Women with Disabilities Victoria](#): Empowering women with disabilities
- [The Boldness Radio Show](#): A radio show about equality and disability
- [Are You Looking at Me Radio Show](#): A radio show about equality and disability

Some contacts specifically for the Deaf and hard of hearing community are:

- [Expression Australia \(Previously VicDeaf\)](#): Peak body for the Deaf and hard of hearing community
 - Expression Australia has a [list of organisations](#) that might be useful too
 - [Melbourne Polytechnic Auslan course](#): Auslan training course
- [Magic Hands Auslan](#): Auslan training course

Some organisations that have neurodiverse networks are:

- [AMAZE](#): Peak body for people on the autism spectrum
 - AMAZE also have a [great list](#) of Victorian support groups for autism
- [Autism Spectrum Australia](#): Largest non-profit autism-specific service provider

And organisations that advocate for blind and low vision networks include:

- [Blind Citizens Australia](#) - Australia's leading and most recognised Blind community advocacy group.
- [Blind Alliance](#) – Community collective for Blind and low vision people.
- [Vision2020 Australia](#) – Preventable vision loss advocacy group.
- [Albinism Fellowship](#) – Advocacy group for people with albinism.
- [Blind Sports & Recreation Victoria](#) - Coordinates, helps create and publicises Blind and vision impaired specific sporting and recreation events.
- [Vision Australia Radio](#) - Network of radio stations for the Blind/low vision community
- [Guide Dogs Victoria](#) – Provide support for Victorians with low vision or blindness.



APPENDIX

A Guide to Talking About Disability

Content in the appendix is from A guide to talking about disability by Arts Access Victoria

The language of disability is always evolving and different terms are used within and outside of Australia. It can be political, it can be personal, and it can be quite confusing. Here are a few tips to help you on your way:

- Avoid stereotypical or stigmatising depiction of disabled people
- Avoid phrases and words that demean individuals with disability
- Promote the 'people first' concept
- Disabled people are not 'suffering from', 'victims of' or 'afflicted by' their disability

- Disabled people are not overcoming their disability, but the barriers that the rest of society puts in front of them

- Disabled people should not be portrayed as courageous or tortured, but rather as individuals who find alternative means to accomplish everyday activities

A guide to engaging with disabled people

- Talk directly to the person with disability, not their friend/partner/carer
- Talk directly the Deaf person, not the Auslan interpreter
- Ask if the person with disability needs help, but don't be offended if they refuse
- Don't guide a blind person or person in a wheelchair without their permission, and follow the directions they instruct
- Don't make assumptions about a person's ability. Always assume competence

Disability, not disabled

Arts Access Victoria uses and recommends as best practice the use of the term 'people with disability.' Other terms commonly used in Australia include: 'people living with disability' and 'people with lived experience of disability.' This is because we use the word 'disability' in its social model context, which means that someone has been disabled by social barriers and/or discrimination, not by their disability.

When should I capitalise Deaf?

A capital D is used to indicate that the subject or audience identifies with Deaf culture. Lowercase 'd' is used when speaking about a person's ability to hear. When writing about topics around Deaf culture, use 'Deaf'. When writing generally, or referring to both people who are Deaf and people who are hard of hearing, use 'deaf or hard of hearing'.

Identity first language

Some people prefer identity first language – because they see disability as part of their identity. For example, 'disabled person' or 'disabled people'. It's best to listen to or ask people what term they prefer and follow their lead on language.

APPENDIX A

Wording we recommend

- People/person with disability (preferred)
 - Person with a disability
 - People with disabilities
-

- People/person without disability / non-disabled person
-

- Wheelchair user
-

- Person who is blind
 - Person with low vision
-

- Person who is Deaf/deaf
 - Auslan user
 - Hard of hearing
-

- Intellectual disability
 - Learning disability
-

- Person of short stature
-

- Mental health issues
 - Person with mental illness
 - Person with lived experience of mental illness
-

- Accessible toilet
 - Adapted toilet
-

- Accessible parking
-

- Has
 - Experiences
 - Lives with
-

- Do you have any access requirements?

Wording we don't recommend

- Differently abled / diffabilty
 - Handicapped
 - Physically challenged
 - Someone who can't [hear, speak, walk etc]
-

- Able-bodied
 - Normal
-

- Wheelchair bound
 - Bound/confined to a wheelchair
-

- The Blind
 - Person without sight
 - Vision impaired
-

- The Deaf
 - Deaf and dumb
 - Mute
-

- Retard/ed
 - Slow learner
-

- Midget
 - Dwarf
-

- Mental health problems
 - Mental
 - Mentally-ill
-

- Disabled toilet
-

- Disabled parking
-

- Suffers from
 - Afflicted with
-

- Do you have a disability?

Further resources

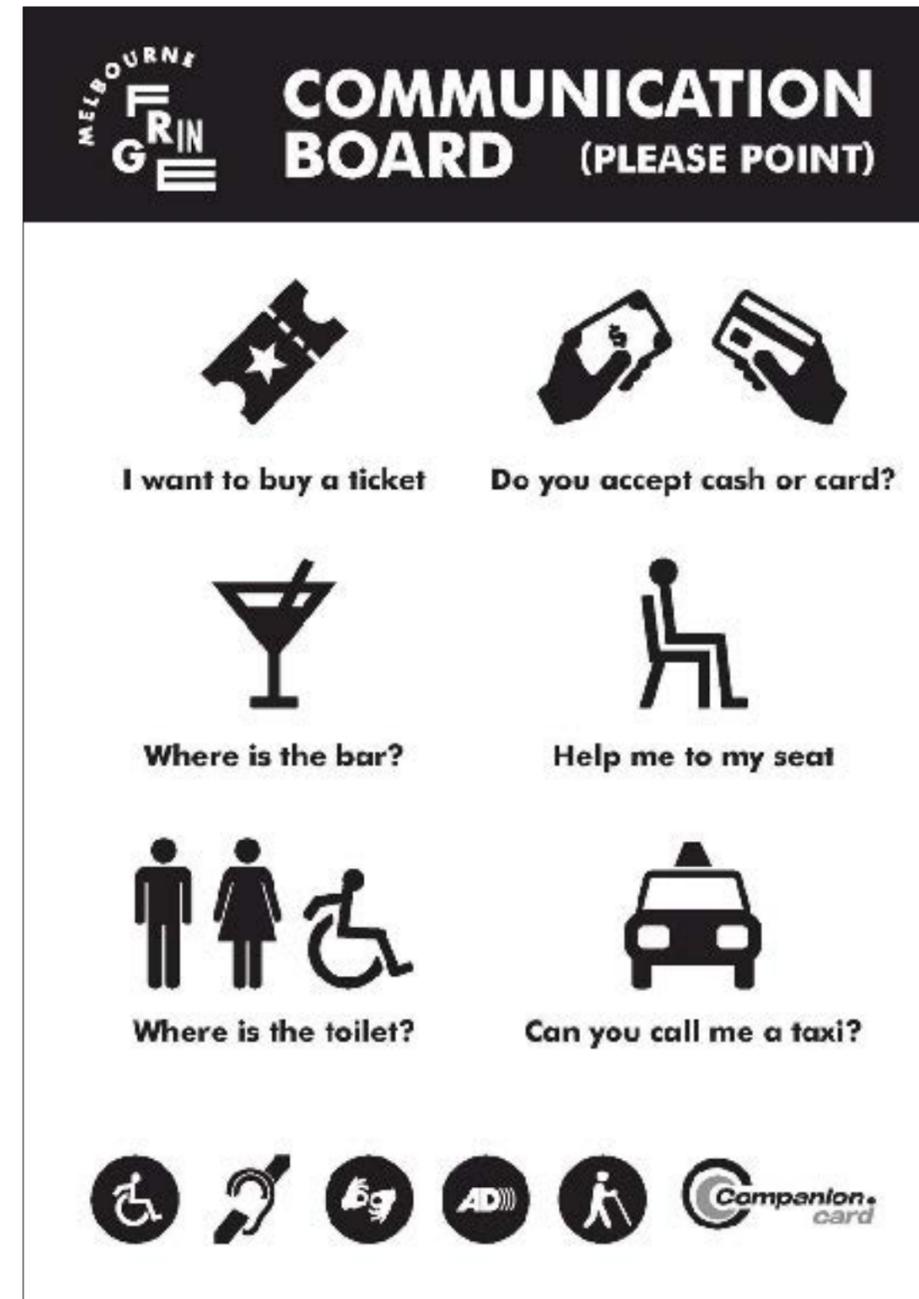
- [Guiding a person who is blind or has low vision](#), by Vision Australia
- [Communicating with someone who is Deaf or hard of hearing](#), by the Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre
- [A Neurotypical's Guide to Speaking to Someone with Autism](#), by Healthline

An example of image description



Image description: a neon graphic of a child running into a building off a laneway. The child is pictured side on – wearing a white shirt and red pants and light blue sneakers. There are many buildings in the lane way – all with different textured walls and doors – ranging from pink to purple to navy. There are garbage bins in the laneway, and the cobblestones look wet. There are horizontal pink neon stripes on the left to centre of the graphic, with a navy and blue left corner; and the right side of the graphic moves from a darker purple to navy. “ARE YOU GAME?” is written in white distorted font. It’s placed over the purple and navy buildings and tops garbage bins.

Box Office Board Example



APPENDIX D

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Getting to and from the venue		
Is the venue close to public transport?		
Is there accessible public transport and stations/tram stops?		
Are there accessible parking spaces at or near the venue?		
Is there a drop-off space outside the venue?		
Are the roads and paths near the venue well-lit and free from obstruction?		
Is there clear signage outside of the building?		
Access at the venue		
Is there an accessible entrance at the front of the building?		
Are the doors automatic, or easy to open independently?		
Are the doorways wide enough for wheelchair users to wheel through (1100 mm or more)?		
Is there a lift that can be operated independently?		
Does the lift have braille signage inside and out?		
Does the lift have an audio voiceover?		

Venue Checklist

These are things to consider when finding an accessible venue. Just meeting a few of these is a good start, but if you meet many or all, that's even better!

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Access at the venue		
Are there flat surfaces and clear pathways throughout the venue?		
Is the counter suitable for a wheelchair user to see over?		
Is there adequate seating in the waiting area?		
Is there a hearing loop in the venue?		
Is there braille signage in the venue?		
Is there a communication board for people to point to?		
Is the venue well-lit?		
Is there adjustable lighting?		
Is there a separate room for people to retreat to?		
Has the venue got, or is there the capacity to hire, a portable ramp?		
Does the venue accept Companion Cards?		
Is there shade at the venue?		

APPENDIX D

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Toilets		
Is there an accessible toilet inside the venue?		
Is the accessible toilet clearly signposted?		
Is the accessible toilet unlocked, clean and clear?		
Is the hand basin at a suitable height for a person using a wheelchair, or a short statured person?		
Is the mirror at a suitable height for a person using a wheelchair, or a short-statured person?		
Is the hand dryer at a suitable height for a person using a wheelchair, or a short-statured person?		
Is there an adult-sized change table in the accessible toilet?		
Is there a hoist in the accessible toilet?		
Is there a sharps disposal box in the accessible toilet?		

Venue Checklist

These are things to consider when finding an accessible venue. Just meeting a few of these is a good start, but if you meet many or all, that's even better!

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Seating in the performance space		
Is the wheelchair seating in clear view of the stage?		
Is there enough room for wheelchair users to turn and move?		
If the venue or event is predominantly standing-room only, are there a few seats provided for people who need them?		
Is there preferred seating for people who are blind?		
Is there preferred seating for people who are Deaf?		
Can disabled people sit with their companions?		
Emergencies		
Is there a visual cue for emergency alarms and exits?		
Is there an audio cue for emergency alarms and exits?		
Are the venue's staff aware of evacuation procedures for disabled people and Deaf people?		

APPENDIX D

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Guide dogs and service animals		
Does the venue allow guide dogs and service animals?		
Is there an area for toileting the animal?		
Is there a water bowl provided?		
Performers' space		
Is the stage wheelchair accessible?		
Is there a hearing loop for performers?		
Is there an accessible toilet for performers (accessibility provisions as above)?		
Is the greenroom and/or dressing room accessible?		
Is the rehearsal space accessible?		
Is there a key disability and/or Deaf liaison contact at the venue?		

Venue Checklist

These are things to consider when finding an accessible venue. Just meeting a few of these is a good start, but if you meet many or all, that's even better!

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Venue staff		
Have the staff done disability awareness/competency training?		
Are any of the staff Auslan users?		
Are the staff across the accessibility provisions within the venue, and are they able to communicate them to audience and performers?		
Food and drinks		
Is there food and drinks available?		
Is there a variety available for people with dietary requirements?		
Is the food clearly labelled?		
Is the food and drink served at varying heights?		
Is the bar reachable by people of different heights?		

APPENDIX D

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Marketing the event		
Is marketing material accessible? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paper based• Electronic/social media – with image descriptions• Braille• Audio• Transcripts		
Have you promoted the event to disability organisations and community groups?		
Have you let your local council know?		
Have you asked your staff to promote the event through their diverse networks?		
Have you considered approaching disability focused media and disabled/Deaf social media influencers to promote your event?		

Venue Checklist

These are things to consider when finding an accessible venue. Just meeting a few of these is a good start, but if you meet many or all, that's even better!

Access Considerations	Yes	No
Portable access		
Is there an option to hire a portable ramp?		
Can you hire a hearing loop?		
Do you need to hire accessible portaloos?		

It's also a great idea to list how to get to your venue, as well as detail what to expect when arriving at the venue. This could be as easy as including a paragraph attached to your show information about the public transport routes, as well as some photos of the outside and inside of the venue – plus image descriptions. We have done this for our Common Rooms venue – [getting there](#).

And see Trades Hall visual guide [here](#).

APPENDIX E

Audio ratings

Audio ratings can determine the level of audio material in a work – which can aid people who are blind or have low vision decide on whether they can access a show. For example, a show that features mostly singing or a conversational podcast might appeal to them.

100% Audio Content - a show in complete darkness. No sight is needed to participate in the show

85% Audio Content - All music or dialogue that doesn't rely on visuals – for example, a play reading, a live podcast or a music performance

75% Audio Content - Audio described visual art or tactile tour, or a fully audio described performance – for example – a musical or theatre show with full audio descriptions

50% Audio Content - A performance that contains both visual and sound elements - only incidental movement and visual art not essential for fully experiencing the work (e.g. dance or movement piece with audio descriptions and spoken introduction)

Audio Rating less than 50% - A show that relies on visuals for the engagement of the show (e.g. art work hanging in a gallery or performance that includes non-audio described material)

APPENDIX F

Relaxed Performance Packs

2019 Fringe artists have created fantastic, informative Relaxed Performance packs. Check out packs by [Artemis Muñoz](#) and [Charlotte Sareno Raymond](#), and use these to guide your Relaxed Performance shows.

Don't forget to send us your Relaxed Performance packs four weeks from your show so we can upload them to our website.

Making Online Events Accessible

2019 Fringe artists have created fantastic, informative Relaxed Performance packs. Check out packs by [Artemis Muñoz](#) and [Charlotte Sareno Raymond](#), and use these to guide your Relaxed Performance shows.

The global pandemic has meant online art has taken priority. Here are some resources:

- [Accessible Arts 10 tips for running online events](#)
- [Closed captions on Zoom](#)
- [University of Southern California tips for creating accessible online events](#)

We have a number of video resources from 2020 which might be useful for creating accessible IRL and online events.

- [Access info session](#)
- [Access FAQ](#)
- [Masterclass](#)
- [Art x Access VCR Fest discussion](#)

APPENDIX G

Accessibility definitions

Fully accessible

Venue has wheelchair accessible entrance as main entrance, enough room in the venue for a wheelchair to turn around, wheelchair accessible toilet and lift – all which can be used independently. There are no steps in entrance or in venue. Venue has installed hearing loop.

Venue has accessible performance space for artists – including toilet and backstage area.

Partially accessible

Accessible entrance but no accessible toilet, wheelchair accessible entrance separate to main entrance, staff required to guide audience members with access needs, accessible entrance that cannot be accessed independently (e.g. a door needs to be unlocked or a staff member needs to be called to put down a ramp), a few stairs that someone with a mobility aid could handle, a hired hearing loop that can be organised with prior booking.

Venue has an accessible performance space, but performers have to use the same accessible toilet that audience use.

Not accessible

Stairs on entrance or in venue with no lift, no accessible toilet, not enough room in the venue for a wheelchair to turn around.

APPENDIX H

Mental health

[Heidi Everett](#), founder and director of [Schizy Inc](#), has provided some useful information about making Festival spaces safe for people with lived experience of atypical mental health:

"Lots of people with lived experience of atypical mental health now use the term 'trauma' when talking about the reasons behind our mental health issues. Post Trauma Stress, or PTS, can develop in people who've lived through unsafe situations growing up. These memories stay with us right through our lives and seemingly everyday situations can make us feel unsafe and overwhelmed because they remind us of these times. Society can help us a lot by understanding why some things make us feel unsafe and aim to replace them with feelings of confidence.

- Imagine the environment in which people with PTS might be reminded of unsafe environments at your event or venue, and be prepared to show some compassion
- Does your show include loud unexpected noise, bright lights and strong smells? Some of your audience may experience sensory overload (now you understand why)
- Know and offer a clear path alternative through or around chaotic, random movements of people should someone ask for it
- Provide clear entry/exit signage
- Provide confident directions to seating or performance area, don't just point and say 'through there' or 'over there' to someone who looks, sounds or seems unsure
- Know the closest tram, bus, taxi or train stop"

Contact schizyinc@gmail.com for a consultation.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact:

Carly Findlay or Danny Delahunty, Participant Services, Melbourne Fringe

P: 03 9660 9600 | E: artists@melbournefringe.com.au