

BAAL Event Accessibility Guidelines

1. Accessibility principles

The British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL) welcomes and values participation from everyone with a scholarly interest in applied linguistics. As the largest applied linguistics association in the UK, we aim to provide a platform for a diversity of voices, and for our events (including the annual conference, BAAL-CUP seminars, workshops and SIG events) to be accessible, safe, open spaces in which everyone can contribute. We recognise that this may involve supporting others to **see, hear, move, speak, interact, focus and understand better** at our events. We approach accessibility with respect for individuals, recognising that not all needs are visible or possible to anticipate. We are committed to learning from others about how to get better at welcoming and supporting everyone to attend our events.

The BAAL Event Accessibility Guidelines embody these principles and aim to provide guidance to facilitate local organising teams in ensuring their events are accessible to as many people as possible, whilst recognising that they do so within the constraints of local circumstances and available resources and that individuals may have competing needs. While the guidance is aimed primarily at event organisers, please note that presenters and attendees share the responsibility of ensuring that an event is accessible and welcome to all. It is not prescriptive or exhaustive and may not be relevant for all contexts, requirements and preferences, but we hope it is helpful in informing and shaping event organisation.

2. Initial event planning and set-up

- Where possible, reflect on the accessibility of the **location**:
 - Identify accessible public transport options and sufficient taxi services that can accommodate wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Consider alternatives where necessary and be open about any constraints as soon as possible (see Website and Online registration).
 - Locate parking spaces reserved for people with accessibility issues so that this information can be included in the pre-event information (in the UK, this parking is available to [Blue Badge](#) holders).
- Ensure that the timing of your event is inclusive:
 - Avoid major religious or national holidays
 - Be mindful of school holiday dates
 - Schedule regular breaks to accommodate participants who need to reduce fatigue
- Ensure the **venue** is physically accessible, for example:

- Is there step-free access, or else ramps?
- Are doors automatic? (If not, consider stationing stewards at heavy doors.)
- Are bathrooms accessible to people using mobility aids, and preferably on the same level as the rooms and catering?
- If seminar rooms are located on more than one floor, are lifts well-signed? Check that lifts are operational and have a contingency plan if they become unavailable, such as changing rooms.
- Is a lot of walking required between registration, presentation rooms, the lunch area and accessible bathrooms? If so, how will you address this (extra time, more steward assistance...)?
- Is there a raised stage in any room and, if so, what support is there for presenters to access it?
- Is there room to accommodate wheelchairs and assistance animals in seminar rooms and other areas?
- Are assistive listening devices (ALD) (e.g., hearing loops) available in seminar rooms? Have ALDs been tested before the event?
- Is the venue free of fluorescent lighting or constant mechanical noise?
- Provide clear visible **signage** between rooms/venues that has been tested, and ensure stewards are available for attendees who require assistance.
- Identify and test **accessible routes** beforehand and ensure stewards are familiar with them. If these take longer than other routes, make sure this is accommodated in the schedule. Consider whether there are places to rest along the way and, if not, whether these could be provided.
- Ensure there is a space that can serve as a **quiet room** for anyone who needs to take breaks from the activity of the conference (for example, because people are hard of hearing, find the activity overstimulating, or need to breastfeed). People may also use such spaces to work or prepare for talks.
- Consider appointing an **Accessibility Coordinator**, especially for large events: a member of the organising committee with responsibility for ensuring the event is as inclusive and accessible as possible for all attendees. Accessibility coordinators should be included in planning meetings and their contact details should be given to other committee members. They are responsible for ensuring that attendee and presenter needs are understood and addressed. They also serve as advocates for attendees with specific accessibility needs.

3. Online set-up and registration

3.1 Website

- Ensure the website meets **accessibility standards** as much as possible. For example, W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) advise that web content should be perceivable, operable, understandable and robust, and they provide 12 guidelines and multiple techniques for achieving this. See: <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag>
- The website should **provide information about conference accessibility** so that people with different needs and abilities can decide whether it is safe or possible to attend. This information should be available when the call for papers is released, and should be clear and detailed: for example, 'There are wheelchair accessible toilets. Assistive hearing devices are available in all seminar rooms. There is a quiet room for prayer, breastfeeding or private breaks. You can reserve a wheelchair space or a space for your assistance animal. You can bring a carer or assistant to accompany you'.
- **Communicate as early as possible** on the website where the conference cannot meet accessibility requirements, so individuals can decide whether they can attend the conference.
- Consider making the **conference programme** available in multiple formats, including an accessible mobile-friendly digital version as well as a paper or printable version. This is helpful for people using mobility aids and screen readers.

3.2 Online Registration

- Ask presenters and participants about their **accessibility requirements** at the point of invitation or registration. Include a question on registration forms and invite people to include specific requests. Clarify any deadlines (such as requesting sign language interpretation before the close of early registration).
- Include a question on registration forms asking participants to indicate **dietary requirements**, including religious dietary requirements, cultural or individual preferences, and allergies or intolerances. For allergies, clarify if cross contamination is an issue.
- Consider free or discounted places for **carers/assistants**.
- Consider **childcare support** or provide information about local childcare services.

- Consider asking participants for their **pronouns** and including them on name badges.
- Follow up with registrants to clarify accessibility requests.

4. International participants

Much of the guidance given in this document will help facilitate the participation of scholars based in countries outside the UK and particularly in the Global South. The following are additional points to enhance the inclusion of international participants.

- Consider **equitable representation** when selecting and inviting presenters for events, especially for online events where travel and attendant costs are not an issue.
- **Plan ahead** – send out acceptance letters, publish the conference programme, and open registration as early as possible to allow international scholars to obtain visas and make travel plans. Visa approvals take processing time and depend on appointment availability at visa application centres. Forward planning is also helpful for many UK-based participants.
- Publish a **refund or deferral policy** in the event of visa refusal, with an automatic offer of online presentation (if available) where visas are refused.
- Consider issuing an **invitation letter** automatically with every acceptance (or give an option to check a box about it during the proposal submission), rather than on request afterwards. This should be signed, on letterhead, with the participant's name as it appears in their passport, the event dates and venue, the paper title, any funding or fee waiver, and a named organiser contact. Issued on request, the letter only reaches people who know to ask and who get a reply in time to obtain a visa.
- Provide **scholarships, bursaries, registration fee waivers or differential pricing** where possible. Banded registration fees can be tied to a published index such as the [World Bank income classification](#). Flexibility of payment options is important in enabling overseas participation. Keep any bursary applications light-touch as requiring people to evidence hardship in detail can be a deterrent.
- Include information about **time zones** in publicity around events and in event programmes. Where possible, schedule online events at or across different days or time slots, to improve accessibility for members in different time zones.
- **Do not assume familiarity** with local customs, landmarks, regulations, and cultural phenomena. (For example, the UK Blue Badge scheme mentioned above may not be familiar to people coming from outside the UK.)
- Support **hybrid participation** and/or attendance where possible.

5. Sign language interpretation

- Consider whether your budget can include sign language interpreters, and where possible, offer this as an option alongside captioning. An event should provide sign language interpretation for any invited deaf presenters. Note that BAAL will cover the cost of sign language interpretation for the BAAL annual conference and that BAAL SIG and BAAL-CUP seminars/workshops can also apply for funding through the relevant officer on the BAAL Executive Committee.
- Flag up the availability of sign language interpretation in the **call for abstracts, on the website and on registration**. Ask attendees on registration whether they require sign language interpretation, and which sign language(s) they use.
- Consider whether sign language interpretation should be in British Sign Language (BSL) or International Sign, which is used and understood across countries.
- For multi-track conferences, if there are several attendees requesting sign language, consider allowing for two or more sets of sign language interpreters.
- If sign language interpreters are present, allow **a clear line of sight** between them and the audience. Ensure presenters are positioned so that they can easily be seen by both interpreters and the audience. Reserve spaces at the front for deaf participants. If the conference is online or hybrid, work with the AV team in advance to ensure that sign language will be adequately visible online. Do not obscure the bottom of the interpreter's screen with captions or labels.
- Consider whether sign language interpretation can also be provided for **social events**, both on and away from the conference venue.
- **Captioning** can also be used to increase accessibility, not only for deaf people. Note that it is not always sufficient on its own for users of sign languages from other countries who may not work primarily in the language of the conference and the captions.

6. Catering

- Ensure that the caterers accommodate **special meal requests**: vegetarian, vegan, low salt, kosher, halal, gluten free, other allergies or intolerances. Can the venue prepare gluten free and allergy/intolerance-sensitive food without cross contamination? If not, will the conference be allowed to make alternate arrangements with a supplementary caterer?
- It is helpful to clearly **label special meals** and/or where necessary a system to identify people who have requested special meals (e.g. coloured stickers on the conference badges).

- When ordering food, be aware that meat-eaters will take from vegetarian and vegan options, so ensure there is sufficient of the latter for those who do not eat meat.
- Ask the caterers to provide labels on buffet dishes listing ingredients or indicating the presence of gluten/meat/dairy products/fish/nuts/sulphites.
- Consider whether **public announcements** may be necessary, for example to let delegates know of any serious allergies.
- Try to place any buffet in a blocked off area with clear aisles for the benefit of low-mobility users. Consider providing chairs and tables so that attendees who need to can sit down and/or have somewhere to put their food whilst balancing mobility aids. Have stewards assist with buffet-style food where needed.

7. Social activities

The social side of a conference is as important as the academic content. Try to create events that include all attendees.

- Social activities should have broad appeal (e.g. not purely visual or auditory, not excessively loud, not visually intense). Consider including events that are not based predominantly around alcohol to ensure that events are accessible for those following certain religions, pregnant people, and those who have been alcohol dependent, among others.
- Participants will need to be informed of the **walking distance** to nearby events, so they can decide how best to get there, and whether the walking route is wheelchair accessible (flat enough with curb cuts).
- **Accessible transportation** should be available for any off-site events. Check that offsite venues (e.g. restaurants) are wheelchair and scooter accessible with an accessible bathroom and ramps where appropriate. Stools or chairs should be available for people who are unable to stand, and for people who want to converse face-to-face with colleagues in wheelchairs or scooters. These should be spread throughout the event space.
- **Quiet places** can be reserved where people can gather for social conversation, for people who are hard of hearing or who find the main area overstimulating.

8. Conference Sessions

- Consider accessibility when planning the **schedule** to ensure there is time to get between rooms and that there are sufficient breaks. No session should last more than 90 minutes without a break. Remember that some people may need more time than others to get to a room and may need breaks for medical or other

reasons. Keep to the schedule as far as possible and inform participants of any changes.

- Consider **reserving seats** in the front and/or back row and/or in the aisles for people who need them. Keep aisles clear to facilitate ease of movement.
- Arrange for captions and, where possible, **assistive listening devices** (ALD) (e.g., hearing loops) and interpreters as needed.
- **Avoid distractions** such as setting up catering during a talk. Consider not having background music in the halls or conference rooms, including during breaks, or keep the volume low. Background noise is difficult for people who don't speak the conference language as a first language, those who are hard of hearing and for some neurodivergent people. Design the schedule to limit the number of delegates joining a session late.
- Ensure there is adequate **lighting** in the room, so that the audience can see the presenter and the slides, and the presenter their own notes; avoid bright sunshine or flashing lights where possible.
- Where possible, include high-quality **microphones** for chairs, presenters, interpreters, and for audience members asking questions. Encourage all presenters to use these and do not assume that they can project sufficiently for all attendees to hear them. Check beforehand that the microphones are working, that chairs and assistants know how to use them, and that there is good audio quality.

9. Accessible talks

As well as considering the guidance for organisers below, consider passing on the following presenter and slide guidance to chairs and presenters.

Organisers

- Tell presenters that you require their slides and other materials to be accessible to everyone (see suggestions below), and where possible to be made available in advance.
- Work with presenters to **get material to sign language interpreters** in good time, usually 1-2 weeks before the event.
- Ensure chairs are briefed to **keep to the scheduled time** and that they have access to a copy of the programme.
- **During question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions**, chairs should repeat questions or statements from the audience, and where appropriate should clarify or rephrase them, to ensure everyone has understood.

- **One person should contribute at a time**, and contributors should identify themselves by name. This is especially important in the presence of sign language interpreters.
- Chairs calling on audience members should designate them by physical characteristics rather than their assumed gender, for example, ‘the person in the back row in a blue shirt’ rather than ‘the man in the back row’.

Presenters

- If comfortable, introduce yourself with your **pronouns** and invite attendees to do the same.
- Be aware of your language use; **define and explain acronyms and jargon** that audience members may not know and **avoid very idiomatic language** that second-language speakers or neurodivergent attendees may misinterpret.
- Keep to a **moderate pace** or speaking speed and limit your content to enable this. Pause between phrases to ensure better understanding.
- **Give people time to process information**; pause between topics or slides and provide sufficient time for complex slides (e.g., those with graphs) so viewers can fully process the information before moving on.
- **Describe images and graphs** rather than assuming everyone in your audience can see and interpret them.

Slides

- **Limit the amount of text** on each slide, retaining words with high lexical value (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) rather than full sentences, whilst being mindful of clarity.
- Use **sans-serif fonts** like Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, Tahoma or Verdana which are easier to read for most audiences. Keep font sizes at a minimum of 24pt for body text and larger for headings to ensure visibility from the back of the room – the bigger the better.
- **High contrast** between text and background is crucial; for example, dark text on a pastel background or white/yellow on a dark background. The latter can be more accessible to a wider range of people. Avoid using only colour to convey meaning, as colour-blind audience members may miss important cues. Consider combining colour with symbols or patterns when creating graphs or highlighting elements.
- Consider highlighting the particular point you are addressing using the functionalities of PowerPoint.

- Always describe **images and graphs**, to accommodate people who are visually impaired. Visually highlight the information you want the audience to process.
- **Limit animations** and avoid flashy effects, as these can be distracting and may pose issues for people with epilepsy or those sensitive to motion.
- When using videos or audio, **provide captions or transcriptions** for attendees who are deaf or hard of hearing. Make sure video audio is descriptive enough for those who may not see the visuals.
- Try to **read out loud anything that is on your slide** and describe all but decorative graphics or images (which should be kept to a minimum).
- Where possible, test your slides beforehand in the venue.

10. Hybrid and online events

Online events:

- Include information on the event's **time zone** for participants based outside the country in which the event is being held. Where possible, schedule online events at or across different days or time slots, to improve accessibility for members in different time zones.
- Create event programmes with multiple **breaks** every 60 or 90 minutes to give participants a rest from the screen.
- Consider **recording** online events and making them available afterwards with subtitles (which can be auto-generated). Obtain consent from presenters and alert attendees before recording so they can turn off their videos if they wish. Consider whether you need to record the Q&A sessions as well as the talks.
- Consider whether to allow participants to use **AI note-taking devices**. These can help with accessibility, but raise potential issues around confidentiality, accuracy and consent.

Hybrid events:

- Test the **equipment** (online connection, sound, and video) in advance.
- Consider the **room layout** in advance, ensuring that online attendees can see all physically co-present contributors and presenters, as required depending on the nature of the event. Position presenters so that they can speak to both the online and physical audience.
- Assign one organiser to the task of checking or facilitating the **online written chat** and troubleshooting.

- For every **group activity**, consider how it will work for online attendees as well as those in the physical room: for example, will they be moved into breakout rooms or will they interact in the chat?
- Consider whether physically co-present attendees can or will also join the online room. Unless required to join online, don't assume all physically co-present attendees can read or access the chat and other online functionalities.
- Hybrid events can be very challenging for **sign language interpreting**. Consider if deaf participants and interpreters are online or offline or both, and consult all concerned on their needs.
- Consider whether you will download **a record of the online written chat** and make it available to both online and offline participants. If so, alert participants to this beforehand.

For **both online and hybrid events**, consider setting clear guidelines for participation (e.g. use of mics online and offline, use of cameras, chat conventions, turn-taking).

11. Safety and reporting

- Publish a clear code of conduct for attendees.
- Provide multiple reporting routes for concerns (online, email, in person) and ideally more than one contact who attendees can approach.
- Where available, identify trained staff responsible for handling reports.

Contributor roles (CRediT)

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