D/deaf, Disabled and non-disabled people collaborate together in Diverse City. When we talk about our work we may talk about disability in some way. Language and behaviour matters. When we use the wrong words, we can reinforce unequal power relationships. We can cause offence. when you use the right words, you signal that you - as an individual or organisation - are thinking about access and inclusion.

The Basics

We use the **social model of disability**. This means that we think that it is the barriers in society that disable people. Disabled people are not 'victims' of impairments or conditions. We can grow public awareness by using the right language. We can tell our stories using the social model of disability.

Below are guidelines for being effective in our communication and interaction with disabled people.

This is not a list to learn, but the guide might give you useful pointers.
Openness in with one another and common sense, are the most important things.

Communicating

Be guided by a disabled person as to the most effective ways of communicating, they know best how you can communicate most effectively.

Talk directly to disabled and D/deaf people – not to their assistant or interpreter. There may be a time delay while a personal assistant or interpreter communicates with the disabled or Deaf person, or while a person gets ready to reply to you, or

uses a communicator board. Be patient and pay attention - it's just a different way of having a conversation.

Don't panic if the person you are communicating with does not understand you at first, or if you can't understand them. Never just pretend you have understood. Ask politely for them to repeat what they are saying until you are able to understand each other.

Many disabled people find written English is not accessible. It may be a second language for some or there may be other barriers to reading.

Users of British Sign Language learn a completely different language structure when learning to communicate. Written and spoken English is a foreign language.

Basic language guide	
✔	✗
disabled	handicapped, crippled, invalided
disabled people	the disabled, people with disabilities
has ... (an impairment)	suffers from..., victim of ...
non-disabled	able bodied, normal, healthy
learning disabled*	mentally disabled, retarded, backward
wheelchair user	wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, in a wheelchair
Deaf**	the deaf
Deaf sign language user, BSL user**	deaf and dumb, deaf mute

blind or partially sighted people, visually impaired people (VIP)	the blind
mental health service user / survivor	mentally ill, insane, mad, crazy
has cerebral palsy	spastic
person of short stature	dwarf, midget
personal assistant/PA, support worker access worker	Carer (unless used directly by a disabled person)
accessible toilet	disabled toilet
accessible parking, blue badge parking	disabled parking

* Learning disabled people may choose to use the term 'differently abled'

****Deaf, deaf and disabled:** 'Deaf' (with a capital D), 'deaf' (with a small d) and 'disabled' mean very different things.

- British Sign Language (BSL) is an official language in the UK. Users of British Sign Language learn a completely different language structure when learning to communicate. Written and spoken English is a foreign language.

- Deaf culture is very strong for many people whose first language is BSL, some of whom see themselves as a linguistic minority rather than disabled people. In this case, people may refer to themselves as 'Deaf people' (with a capital 'D') and not see themselves as disabled. People who have become deafened and non-BSL users are more likely to use the lower case 'd' (and call themselves 'deaf people'). They are also more likely to think of themselves as disabled people.

General tips when communicating with a diverse audience

Speak clearly.

Use short words.

Use short sentences.

Do not use jargon.

Summarise important points.

Check understanding.

Allow space for clarification.

Allow the person you are communicating with time to respond. If you are unsure what someone has said, ask them to repeat themselves. This reduces the risk of misunderstandings. Never guess. If you are still unsure what is being said explore other ways of communicating.

People who are lip-readers

Find a quiet place if possible.

Face the person, about 3-4 feet away and at the same level.

Face the light.

Make sure the background behind you is not too busy.

Make sure the person is looking at you before you start.

Do not shout: this will distort your lip patterns. Speak at normal speed, but don't go too fast.

Do not lean towards the person's ear - they need to see your lips.

Phrases are easier to read than unconnected single words.

Repeat words as necessary, but re-phrase what you are saying if the person can't understand after a few repetitions.

Keep your head still and upright. Stop speaking if you turn your head away.

Keep your hands away from your face.

If you start to speak about a new topic, make sure the person understands.

Lip reading can be tiring.

If you are using a sign language interpreter, remember to look and speak directly to the person you are communicating with, not the interpreter

Visually impaired People

Very few people have no sight whatsoever.

A small percentage of people read Braille, large print and simple layouts are often enough.

Audio tape and emails are often more convenient.

Tell the person who you are – announce yourself.

Give verbal feedback during conversation e.g. 'yes', instead of nodding your head.

Ask before you touch somebody.

Ask how the person prefers to be guided.

Tell the person where you are, within the context of your environment, highlighting any obstacles, cups of tea on tables, steps, ramps, railings or doorways. Tell people about approaching curbs, the first and last step on a staircase.

Think carefully about doors, especially those that swing back.

If appropriate tell people where the nearest available chair is.

If you are guiding a person to a chair, place their hand on the back of the chair

When communicating with someone with a visual impairment introduce yourself and ensure that you inform them when you are leaving a discussion so that they are aware you are departing.

People with Learning Disabilities

Do not assume the extent of someone's learning disability.

Use 'open questions' to encourage people to tell you what they understand.

Present information in different ways.

Keep language simple and speak clearly.

Repeat important points.

Give the person time to absorb information and to reply to you.

People with different speech patterns

Don't panic; relax, listen and don't just guess.

Try not to interrupt

Don't assume someone with a different voice has a learning disability.

Ask them to repeat themselves.

Offering assistance

Listen to and be guided by a disabled person. They know best how you can assist.

Remember that the disabled person will know how to manage their own adjustment

needs but be prepared to offer assistance if requested.

Do not make assumptions. Everyone's experience is unique.

If you see someone you think would benefit from your help, ask first.

Wait until your offer of help is accepted before you start.

Don't be offended if people say "no".

Wheelchair users

Ask before touching or pushing someone's wheelchair.

Do not lean on someone's wheelchair.

Think about space, access and obstacles.

If possible sit at the same height as a wheelchair user when you have a conversation

Think about parking spaces.

Assistance Animals

Do not distract working assistance animals when they are on duty. A guide dog is a
working dog, not a pet. Do not distract them. Assistance dogs can grab food. Keep
it out of their reach. Provide water if an assistance dog is working.

Resources

- Writing in plain English: **The Plain English Campaign** http://www.plainenglish.co.uk

- Advice on 'easy read': Mencap https://www.mencap.org.uk/easyread-video and use Easy Read Images

- Information on how the UK is trying to be a country where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else: Scope http://www.scope.org.uk

- Information about support for disabled artists or organisations: Shape Arts www.shapearts.org.uk

- Access Resource Pack: Shape Arts https://www.shapearts.org.uk/FAQs/access-resource-pack

This guide is written in plain English and with Easy Read layout.