

Beyond the Ramp

Creating Truly Inclusive Library Experiences

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Why This Matters

1 in 4	61 Million	71%	36%
U.S. adults lives with a disability (CDC)	Americans have a disability of some kind (CDC)	of web users with a disability leave inaccessible sites (Section508.gov)	of people with disabilities report feeling unwelcome in public spaces (ADA National Network)

The Inclusion Spectrum

Level 1 Legal Compliance ADA requirements, physical access, basic accommodations	Level 2 Accessible Services Assistive technology, alternative formats, trained staff	Level 3 Inclusive Practice Disability etiquette, welcoming culture, proactive design	Level 4 Disability Justice Community co-design, centering disability voices, systemic change
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Disability Etiquette: Language That Respects

✔ What TO Do Speak directly to the patron, not their companion Ask before helping — never assume Get to eye level with wheelchair users Allow extra time without drawing attention to it Follow the patron's language preference	✘ What NOT To Do Speak loudly or slowly unless asked Finish someone's sentences for them Ask personal medical or diagnostic questions Use "special needs" or "differently-abled" Make disability the center of the interaction
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Person-First Language: "Person with a disability" — places the person before the condition.

Identity-First Language: "Disabled person" — embraced by many Deaf and autistic communities.

When in doubt: be warm, be patient, and follow the patron’s lead.

Understanding Disability: A Broad View

Most disabilities are invisible. Every patron deserves a presumption of competence.

Physical & Mobility	Wheelchair users, chronic pain, limb differences, muscular dystrophy
Sensory	Blind and low-vision, Deaf and hard of hearing, deafblind
Cognitive & Learning	Dyslexia, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, traumatic brain injury
Psychiatric / Mental Health	Anxiety, depression, PTSD, schizophrenia, OCD
Chronic Illness / Invisible	Fibromyalgia, lupus, diabetes, cancer, ME/CFS — often not visible
Neurodivergent	Autism, Tourette syndrome, sensory processing differences

Inclusive Communication Checklist

Spoken	Written & Visual	Digital & Online
<input type="checkbox"/> Face person directly when speaking <input type="checkbox"/> Natural pace; rephrase if asked <input type="checkbox"/> Use plain language, avoid jargon <input type="checkbox"/> Offer paper, text, or AAC support <input type="checkbox"/> Sign language interpreters on request	<input type="checkbox"/> Minimum 14pt font (16pt preferred) <input type="checkbox"/> Sans-serif fonts: Arial, Calibri <input type="checkbox"/> High contrast — 4.5:1 minimum <input type="checkbox"/> Left-align; no justified text <input type="checkbox"/> Proactively offer alternate formats	<input type="checkbox"/> WCAG 2.1 AA website compliance <input type="checkbox"/> Alt text on all images <input type="checkbox"/> Caption all video content <input type="checkbox"/> Tagged, accessible PDFs <input type="checkbox"/> Full keyboard navigation

Practice Scenarios

Discuss with a partner (8 minutes), then share with the full group.

A

A patron with a speech impediment is asking for help. You are having difficulty understanding them. Another patron is waiting. How do you handle this respectfully?

Notes: _____

B

A caregiver asks you to speak only to them, not the adult with a developmental disability they are with. What is the most respectful approach?

Notes: _____

C

A patron with a service animal is at a computer. The dog is in the aisle and another patron complains. How do you navigate ADA requirements while maintaining community relations?

Notes: _____

D

A patron with anxiety asks for a quiet space to complete their library card application. No private room is available. What immediate accommodations and long-term solutions can you offer?

Notes: _____

My Library Action Plan

Take 10 minutes to complete this before you leave today.

One thing I will do THIS WEEK:

One thing I will propose to my team or director:

One policy or practice I will advocate to change:

A community partner I will contact:

Share your number-one action with a colleague today for accountability and support.

Key Resources

Organizations	Library-Specific	Reading & Media
ADA National Network — adata.org Nat'l Center on Disability & Journalism — ncdj.org American Foundation for the Blind — afb.org ASAN — autisticadvocacy.org NAMI — nami.org	ALA Accessibility — ala.org/accessibility WebAIM Evaluator — webaim.org NLS BARD — loc.gov/nls PLA Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice Initiative — ala.org/pla/initiatives/edi	Haben Girma — Haben (memoir) Alice Wong — Disability Visibility Crip Camp (2020, Netflix) Disability After Dark podcast The Accessible Stall podcast

The library is the last truly public space — a place that belongs to everyone.

Let's make sure that's true for everyone.

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