

SummerWorks

Making Your Performance More Accessible

CONTENTS

Intro 2

Relaxed Performances 2

- How to prepare 3

- The Day of the Show 3

Sign Language Interpretation 4

Assisted Listening 5

Captions 5

Audio Described Performances 6

Access from the Creation Process 6

Crip Time 7

Introduction

SummerWorks is committed to contributing to creating accessible experiences in our organization and in the performing arts sector at large. We have been working toward making our programming accessible for Deaf and disability performing arts patrons and artists.

We strive to go beyond the bare minimum standard of accessibility practices in the performing arts and to support artists, programmers and partner organizations in considering how access can be incorporated throughout all aspects of a production and throughout all stages from development to presentation. It is our expectation that the artists we work with will also strive to put accessibility practices at the forefront of the creative process and implementation of their work.

To help you embody the accessibility practices, below you will find a list of methods you can employ to make your performances more accessible for artistic collaborators and audiences.

Artists who wish to utilize any of these accessibility practices are encouraged to contact SummerWork's Accessibility Coordinator - outreach@summerworks.ca.

Relaxed performances

Many autistic people, people with learning disabilities, or those living with sensory and communication needs may be wary of visiting the theatre for fear of disrupting the performance and/or other audience members. Relaxed Performances (“RP”) are a positive way to offer the choice to patrons of all kinds to experience theatre together in a way that loosens the traditional behaviours of attending live performances – it also offers a space where people who experience anxiety, people with Tourette’s or parents with toddlers can come to the theatre in a more relaxed setting.

These performances will have a relaxed attitude to noise and movement, including reducing extreme sound and lighting effects, leaving house lights on at a low level, and allowing patrons to come and go as they please. It is also suggested to have designated ‘chill-out’ areas for audience members to use, should the program become overwhelming.

A key element that accompanies Relaxed Performances is the creation of a visual story. This is a document that has essential information about the venue of the program, as well as details of the program itself. It is sent or made available to patrons a week or two in advance of the program, and is helpful for those who are less familiar with going to the theatre.

In order for your live program to be labelled a “Relaxed Performance”, several of the elements

mentioned above need to be incorporated into your production. The SummerWorks access team will work with you to determine if your performance will be promoted as a Relaxed Performance, as well as support around outreach to potential RP audiences. Whenever possible it is best to integrate these considerations from the beginning of your artistic process rather than at the end, as it makes it more challenging to incorporate.

When implementing relaxed performances, it is important to note that patrons may have moments that might divert from a traditional quiet and dark performance space. It is integral that performers, directors, technical personnel, and front of house staff know what to expect during a relaxed performance and to embrace the possibilities of what could happen during a relaxed performance. It's important that all parties involved in your production are on the same page of the adaptations being made for an RP performance, SW technical personnel (tech / FOH) will support your production to deliver these elements. SW can relay information to the technicians supporting your production and they can walk you through your artist team the changes: i.e. lights, sound cues, etc

How to prepare

- environmental audit: do an environmental audit of the performance space the relaxed performance will be held in.
- adaptations to venue: based on the environmental audit, make any possible adaptations to increase the access of the space
- adaptations to the program: identify where dramatic cues are and plan to reduce the effect of these
- rehearsals: have a relaxed performance rehearsal to go through adapted lighting and sound cues with technical personnel, and prepare the performers for possible noise and movement by audience members
- prepare a visual story preparing audiences of what to look out for in terms of content that might be distressing or sensory sensitivities
- checklist for how to implement an RP - determine / agree on who is taking care which elements - SW or the artist's production team

The day of the show

- pre-show speech: for some audience members, it may be their first time attending an RP. A pre-show speech will allow you to tell the audience what to expect. In your pre-show speech you should make audience aware of the following items:

- audience members are encouraged to not feel confined to their seats and are

- free to move around the space or exit the theatre as they wish.
- Audience are to be told that they can make noise, if need be
 - the production team is encouraged to introduce cast members and the most sensory sensitive moments.

A pre-show speech means that audiences who have not experienced Relaxed Performances before will have the opportunity to contribute to the welcoming environment, learn something new, and cultivate a community of equity-driven theatre

- you could consider dedicating a space for movement within the audience space (i.e. take out the front row of seating to give audience members more room), as well as a designated “chill-out” space somewhere outside of the theatre with privacy and comfortable seating
- latecomers are permitted, and patrons can exit / re-enter at any time

Relaxed Performance resource links:

[RP audit template](#)

[Visual Story sample](#)

[Visual Story checklist](#)

Sign language interpretation

We provide ASL (American Sign Language) interpretation for all SummerWorks produced events and performances (i.e. Opening Night Party) and whenever possible, also offer this for projects we present.

Sign Language interpretation in live performance can be used for performances that are not in sign language and therefore not understood by individuals who are Deaf and use American Sign Language as their primary means of communication.

You may consider incorporating ASL into your productions. A live production has several options for working with sign language interpreters, and the director will play a big role in deciding where to place interpreters and how to light them. The director can choose from two different types of interpretation:

1. **Zoned:** Interpreters are located within the acting space in visible proximity to d/Deaf patrons, but not mixed into the action on stage (i.e. off to the side of the stage, on the house floor, or up higher on a bench or a balcony). They usually move

only during a change of scene or act

2. **Shadowed**: Interpreters are located in the acting space and move around in a manner which shadows the movement of the actors they are interpreting for.

Since some performance productions include multiple characters, with many of them on stage simultaneously, it's usually necessary for sign language interpreters in the theatre to work in teams; depending on the complexity and length of the performance. Up to 4 interpreters may be required. For major characters with big parts, one interpreter may be assigned to each character, while another interpreter handles the signing for multiple smaller roles.

Whenever possible, it is best to book interpreters who best reflect the cultures of the people they are interpreting for. For example, if you are booking an interpreter for a female identifying South Asian speaker, it would be great to have a female identifying South Asian interpreter.

This provides consistency and keeps interpreters energized so they can keep the pace.

Also, considering theatre performances are often complex, pre-planning is an absolute necessity to ensure a successful interpreted show. Ideally interpreters should be included in the process as early as possible, but at minimum, interpreters will need:

- the script at least 3 weeks before opening (lyrics to songs, translations of non-English dialogue and audiotape of songs are also helpful)
 - access to rehearsals, performances and audio/video recordings of the event (if available) to rehearse
 - access to the director, assistant director, participants or stage manager for translation clarification and consultation
 - notification of subsequent script changes
- any meetings or tech rehearsals with d/Deaf artists will require interpretation
- multiple interpreters (at least 2) for the event

Notes for ASL Interpretation on Zoom or Online presentation

- sound checks/internet speed checks
- scripts/lyrics sent at least one week in advance to interpreters to allow for familiarity and prep, with technical difficulties, this allows interpreters to catch up if they've missed any audio content
- breakdown of event schedule sent in advance to interpreters

- interpreters will self-assign each performance and share this info with hosts
- all interpreters standing by with video/mic muted, host controls moving between interpreters video
- giving directives regarding identifying and 'pinning' the interpreter's video for ASL users (could be given in the Guidelines pop-up upon entrance to party, as well as in-person at top of event)
 - Pinning can be done by the individual or by the host
- screen sharing does not allow an interpreter to be seen

Live captioning

Captioning is a way of converting the spoken word into visible text that is displayed on a screen situated on or next to the performance area. Captioning can be particularly useful to hearing impaired people or d/Deaf patrons who do not use sign language, such as those who only recently lost their hearing.

Live captions in a theatre setting are operated with a trained captioner triggering each line of text to be displayed as it is being spoken in real time. As well as dialogue, the captions also include the name of the character who is speaking or singing and descriptions of any sound effects or music. Typically, the captioner will have worked on pre-formatting the script into the captioning software, working with a DVD recording of the show and viewing several live performances to make sure the text displayed accurately matches what is being said.

See [ASL Interpreters / Captioners PREP document template](#) to help prepare materials for the captioners.

For instructions on adding live captions to Zoom, seeing the reference document: [Closed Captioning in Zoom](#)

Assistive listening systems

Assistive listening systems allow those who are hard of hearing to have the audio from the production's sound desk played through an individual device, amplifying what they are able to hear in the performance space. Typically, there are two types of devices patrons can choose from:

- the stethoscope headset, generally used by those patrons who do not use a hearing aid
- and the necklace unit, used by those with a hearing aid switched to the 'T' position

Both units give the user the opportunity to increase the volume of the show audio on an individual basis.

Audio described performances for the blind or low-vision

Audio description is for people who are blind, have low vision, or who are otherwise visually impaired. It is a narration service that attempts to describe essential, visual aspects of the performance. This is typically done through a single earphone and tiny (3 by 4-inch) receivers, but due to the small nature of some SummerWorks performances, it may be possible for the audio describer to sit with the individual and talk directly to them. The describer does not keep a running commentary throughout the show; rather they depict the sets, costumes and non-verbal onstage action in order to help listeners share the total experience of the performance. The audio describer's goal is to be as unobtrusive as possible and use vivid words to give the most direct description of the action of the performance.

Another option is having 'open audio description', which is when the audio describer describes the performance live for everyone in the audience to hear. This option does not require individual headsets.

Touch tours

Touch tours are an access element that can be added to your performance experience, where patrons are able to touch some pieces of the set, and costume designs before the beginning of the performance. The performance venue can be open and available for the tours 30 minutes the performance start time. Touch tours are helpful for those who are visually impaired or blind and are a good pairing with performances that have audio description, as it helps give patrons a better understanding of the performance environment that has been created.

Attendants

Attendants are trained personal support workers that can be hired to be present at events to assist any people who require extra support potentially with eating or going to the washroom. When hiring attendants it is important to provide both female and male attendants. Having attendants at events allows some people with disabilities to feel comfortable attending an event on their own.

Access during the creation process

Thinking about accessibility during the creation process involves thinking through how you are shaping a space or performance for a group of people. It requires the maker to consider how a vast amount of embodied experiences will take in the core of your production. It uses creativity, consultation, resourcefulness, and requires a certain level of fluidity and care.

Understandably, you may already have a fully formed vision of your production, but for those who are in the position of making something from scratch, thinking through how your artistic decisions will be accessible allows for access to be woven into your piece, rather than an afterthought or add on.

Work culture

We work with a diverse community of artists, producers, partners and audiences. Preliminary applications and questionnaires provide the voluntary options to identify any accessibility needs collaborators have. We are continually adapting ways of working and communication forms that suit each individual.

Crip Time

SummerWorks coordinates its tasks through managers and producers who use a variety of organizational tools to deliver multi-faceted, complex programming. We have shared calendars, and lead coordinators to ensure deadlines are met and delivery of programming happens on time. We also recognize that the structure of time that we use are structures from ableist expectations of 'normal' timespans. SummerWorks aims to incorporate the latest practices of implementing "crip time" into our management tools.

Crip time is a practice that encourages us to recognize that everyone moves at their own unique internal clock, pace and rhythm. Not all of us are able to work at the same level of productivity that intense capitalist structures demand of us. We need to set meeting times and show times, but we also need to be understanding that for whatever reason people might have to leave earlier or not be able to show up on time based on their specific embodied experiences and the barriers they face on a daily basis due to society's ableist framework.

Performing Normal But Becoming Crip: Living with Chronic Pain

<https://www.sjdr.se/articles/10.16993/sjdr.619/>