

Arts House Access Overview

What to know about:

Access

The social model of disability says that disabled people are not disabled by differences in bodies and brains but by a society that doesn't account for the needs of disabled people.

When we put in the work to either remove those barriers or provide accommodations to minimise them, we typically call this *access*.

When working at Arts House you may be asked to describe what you need to do your best work. Some language you may see around this includes:

- access requirements
- access needs
- access requests
- access accommodations

Any of this language may be circumstantially appropriate.

It can sometimes be hard to work out what it is that we need, especially when engaging with new experiences. You have probably been asked for one of the above during your early engagement conversations with Arts House. Please do not consider that the end of the conversation about access. If you discover something new that will make your experience of working with Arts House smoother, please do let us know about it so we can try to accommodate your needs. You can request any number of things but these are some [requests we've received from artists before](#).

Access Guides

This is a document designed to give audience an overview on the experience of attending an event at Arts House. All Arts House events will have an access guide.

In the lead up to the presentation of your event you will likely be asked for details about the content of your event such as confronting themes, perceived dangers and sensory information. It's okay if your work is in development and you don't have answers to every question but please do at least give your best attempt at answering. We can provide further updates to audience if things change.

If you're unsure if your event will include something, it's best to *over warn* and *under promise*. For example, if you are on the fence about whether your event will have flashing lights, it's best to warn people early and remove the warning later than to not warn people upfront and risk causing accidental harm to people who might book into your event early. On the flip side, if you are uncertain about your ability to provide Audio Description for example, it's best to not advertise your event as having that service until it is confirmed.

Access guides are usually prepared by the Business Support Officer but may occasionally be written by the creative producer instead. Arts House aims to make them available to audiences at least two weeks prior to the event. This document does warn patrons that changes are constantly being made but please still try to give the Arts House team as much up to date information as possible.



Audio Description

Audio describers provide verbal descriptions of visual elements of a work or event. These are usually delivered live through headsets but may occasionally be pre-recorded, such as for exhibitions or digital works.

Your work might be a good candidate for Audio Description if it is highly visual or has any meaning or key elements that can be understood only through visual cues. This can be applicable to both performance and exhibition works.



Auslan Interpreting

An Auslan Interpreter helps provide access to a work for those whose primary language is Auslan. For events, they will often interpret live, positioned in a place clearly visible to

attendees but not impeding visual elements of an event. Sometimes Auslan interpreting may be pre-recorded such as for video works.

Your work might be a good candidate for Auslan Interpreting if it is text dense or if any meaning or key experiential element is conveyed through auditory cues alone. This can be applicable to both performance and exhibition works.



Assistance Animals

There are many kinds of Assistance Animals that patrons may need to access our offerings at Arts House. This could include Mobility, ASD or PTSD assistance dogs, Guide Dogs or medical alert dogs. Assistance Animals almost always have a jacket or vest indicating their role as a working animal.

All Assistance Animals are welcome at Arts House. You should never approach a working animal in a social manner unless given the go-ahead from their human.



Assistive Listening

Assistive Listening Systems help deliver audio directly to a listener. Audio is delivered via a small device which is connected to either a headset or a neck-loop which can connect to patron's hearing aid or cochlear implant. If your work is in the Main Hall, we are able to provide this service to patrons by default. If your work is being presented in another space and you would like to make assistive listening services available, please chat to someone in the Production team so they can prepare the space and check the availability of the technology.



Captioning

Captions are a written representation of spoken text and other key sounds, enabling the audience to read what is being said. Captioning that is always in view is referred to as Open Captioning where Closed Captioning can be activated or deactivated by the viewer.

Online video content should be captioned always. Captioning is strongly recommended for exhibited video works also. Live performances might also benefit from captioning if they are text dense works.

If you are writing captions, it is important that they are a clear representation of what has been said. That said, meaning is the most important thing so minimal noises (umm, mmm hmm...etc) and false starts should be excluded if they are excessive. Captions should be well timed to speech and care should be taken to ensure that there is not too much text on screen at once and that sense is maintained across line breaks. There should be clear indicators of changes of speaker, especially if the speaker is not visible.

Describer Guides

Describer Guides help Blind/Low Vision people navigate space while also describing visual information as they do so. If your event is a highly social space or requires the audience to move from place to place, it would be good to offer this service to patrons.

Image Descriptions and Alt Text

An image description is designed to convey visual information through text. Any image based marketing materials should have image descriptions.

When writing image descriptions, please focus on the most important information when describing an image. Ideally you want to get the most meaningful ideas across in a sentence or two. Going into detail with every colour and texture is not ideal. Instead, you should be drawing people's attention to the most important feature of your main subject and highlighting what it is doing within the image. E.g. "Jane Doe, a white woman in her 30's, wears a chicken costume and gestures dramatically as she performs on stage" OR "A

sculpture sits in the centre of a gallery. It is made from plastic bottle caps of various colours. They form a giant mouth”

Image descriptions are not the same as Alt Text, though people often put image descriptions in alt text. Alt Text is the text that a screen reader will pick up when encountering an image. If this is not edited it will usually end up being the file name. At Arts House we put image descriptions where everyone can see them, not just screen readers. If writing Alt Text, you should use only a handful of words to get the most vital information across. E.g. “Jane Doe chicken performance image” OR “Bottle cap mouth sculpture”

Low-sensory Performances

Low-sensory performances are events where the sensory elements of a show’s design have been softened to allow people who may have heightened sensory sensitivity to access the work. This is sometimes done by the creative and technical team of a work.

Your work might be a good candidate for a low-sensory performance if the most intense moments can be softened while maintaining the artistic integrity of the work. For many works this is entirely feasible and a consultant with lived experience of neurodivergence should be able to help you strike the right balance.



Quiet Space

The Quiet Space is located on the ground floor, near the meeting room. It should be accessible during any of the building opening hours and during events. Its purpose is to give people the space and tools with which to better sensorily regulate, whether that is to avoid or recover from sensory overload or to provide sensory input to meet a sensory need. As an artist working at Arts House, please feel encouraged to use this space whenever you need. If using the space alongside others, please keep in mind their needs and try to keep the space quiet.



Relaxed Performances

Relaxed Performances are shows with both relaxed sensory elements (low-sensory performances) and relaxed social rules. Please read more about both of those elements in this document.

In these performances, audience capacity should be capped to allow people the space to move around and remove the pressure to be next to strangers. A detailed access guide is a requirement for any event to be considered relaxed.

Relaxed Social Rules

Relaxing the social rules of an events space can help provide access to people who may need to come and go from a performance or who may not always be able to control their behaviour to be within strict, theatre-going parameters. During these events, patrons should be able to come and go, stim, tic, rock and/or pace without fear of being looked down upon by either event staff or other attendees. It is often good to have sensory regulation tools available during this event and/or make explicit that patrons are welcome to bring their own. Leaving house lights up on a low level to make sure patrons can safely navigate the space while pacing or if they need to leave is also recommended.

It might be worth considering relaxed social rules for your event if it could sustain itself through unexpected occurrences in the space. Relaxing social rules can often particularly benefit neurodivergent people, cross-cultural audiences, children and/or carers of young children so it is highly recommended that you consider this if any of these are target demographics for your work.



Tactile Tours

Tactile Tours happen before a performance and are a moment for patrons to explore and familiarise themselves with the set, props and costumes. This service is particularly designed for blind/low vision audiences and their companions and should be delivered by trained professionals.

At Arts House, Tactile Tours are often paired with Audio Described Performances and the describer often facilitates the tour. If your work would be suited to Audio Description it will likely also be suited to a Tactile Tour, especially if it has numerous set and costume pieces.



Wheelchair Access

Many parts of the building are wheelchair accessible but some are not. Please chat with Arts House so that you can work out if your work is in a wheelchair accessible space and what pathways audience will need to take to access your event.

For wheelchair access it is particularly important to make sure that any spaces people move through remain free from hazards and that pathways have a large turning circle.