

WRITING GROUPS

GUIDANCE ON ACCESSIBILITY FOR WRITING GROUP ORGANISERS



Setting up a writing group can be hugely rewarding. They can offer a supportive environment to help develop ideas, receive feedback on your writing, and make new friends and connections. In a profession as isolating as writing, this can be vital. However, for writers who are living with a disability or chronic illness, these writing groups can present unintentional barriers that can make opportunities to develop their writing harder to access.

We asked our members from the [Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses network](#) to tell us their experiences of attending writing groups, and what they would like to see writing group organisers consider and incorporate.

This short guide is designed to help writing group organisers ensure that your writing group is welcoming and accommodating for everyone. If you're looking to start a writing group, you can read [top 10 tips](#) from *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* to get you started.

If there is anything you think is missing from this list, or would like to join the Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses network, [please get in touch](#).

What to consider before

When it comes to organising anything, be it a literary festival, an informal social get-together, or indeed a writing group, accessibility is necessary to ensure everyone feels welcome.

The venue

As writing groups tend to be small and intimate, they commonly take place in a local pub or café. This can be great for creating an informal and relaxed environment, but not always ideal when it comes to accessibility.

When picking a venue, it's important to ensure that not only does it have disabled access into the building, but it offers the following:

- Does this venue offer disabled parking?
- Does this venue have operating disabled toilets?
- Will a wheelchair or mobility scooter be able to physically fit there?
- Is the venue too noisy? Individuals with hearing impairments or who are neuro-diverse can find it difficult to concentrate in loud and overcrowded venues like cafés. If the venue offers a quiet breakout space for any individual who needs to take a break from overstimulation, even better.

The invite

It's always good to show people who are interested in attending your writing group that you want to be welcoming and inclusive. You can do this by asking attendees if they have any accessibility needs, allergies, or medical conditions that they would like to inform you of or need additional assistance with. Some individuals may also need to bring a carer with them – this is something to take into consideration.

What to consider during

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Now that your writing group is up and running, here is what to consider during the writing group itself:

- Handouts
- Food/drinks
- Regular breaks
- Long sitting periods
- Extra accommodation (i.e. chair, footstall)
- Virtual link option

If you are using **handouts**, having large text versions to hand may be a good option for those who have visual impairments. Emailing handouts in advance is always advisable.

If you will be offering **food or snacks**, checking if anyone has any severe allergies is now the norm but it is also good to keep this on your checklist.

Make sure to offer **regular breaks**. Comfort breaks are always important, but they can be essential for anyone who has any form of chronic fatigue, needs to decompress after sensory overload, or needs to visit the bathroom more frequently. Having scheduled breaks, in addition to checking in with your attendees regularly during the session, is welcome.

Some individuals cannot sit for long periods of time and need to switch from sitting to standing. Creating a supportive and understanding environment in your writing group will be helpful.

Some individuals with a disability or chronic illness may require a **footstall or extra chair to elevate their legs**. You may want to check with the venue you choose if they have one available, or agree on arrangements with the attendee.

Consider allowing people to join via **video link**. If the pandemic has taught us anything it is that it is possible to do many things remotely. Allowing attendees to join virtually from the very start, or giving them the option to switch between physical and remote attendance can be extremely helpful – especially to those who need to see how they are feeling on the day to know if they can attend physically. Zoom and Google Meetings offer closed captions for people with hearing impairments.

What to consider after

Keep checking in. After your first meeting, check in with your group, ask them how they found it and if they need anything adjusted or any additional assistance. At the end of the day, writing groups are about bringing people together, helping to improve writing skills, and should be accessible and inclusive for all.

Find out more about the SoA's [Authors with Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses network](#)