



# AWP's Guide to Accessible Literary Events

AWP hopes to provide a practical guide to making events more accessible. From readings hosted by universities to bookstore events to independent and grassroots reading series, all events help writers connect to the larger literary community. It's important that we make our events as accessible as possible to allow for the greatest possible participation in the literary landscape.

What events or organizations in your community are great at accessible literary programming? We'd love to hear about it! **Email [events@awpwriter.org](mailto:events@awpwriter.org)** with more details.

## Table of Contents:

- **Glossary** ..... **2**
- **Event Requirements** ..... **3**
- **Venue Selection** ..... **3**
- **FAQ**..... **6**
- **Event Outline Template**..... **9**
- **Event Outline Example**..... **11**
- **Handout/Supplemental Material Example**..... **17**

## Glossary:

- **ASL:** American Sign Language is a complete, complex language that employs signs made by moving the hands combined with facial expressions and postures of the body as defined by the [National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders \(NIDCD\)](#).
- **CART:** CART stands for Communication Access Realtime Translation. A captioner (CART provider) uses a court reporting stenography machine, a computer, and software to display everything that is being said, word for word according to the [Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre](#).
- **Cued Speech:** Cued speech is a visual mode of communication that uses handshapes and placements in combination with the mouth movements of speech to make the phonemes of a spoken language look different from each other according to the [National Cued Speech Association](#).
- **Disability:** The [ADA](#) defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity.
- **Invisible Disability:** An invisible disability is a physical, mental, or neurological condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities that is invisible to the onlooker. An invisible disability may take the form of debilitating pain, fatigue, dizziness, cognitive dysfunctions, brain injuries, learning differences and mental health disorders, as well as hearing and vision impairments as defined by the [Invisible Disabilities Association](#).
- **Americans with Disabilities Act:** The [ADA](#) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications according to the [ADA National Network](#).

## Glossary continued:

- **Person-first language:** Let your descriptive words emphasize the worth and abilities of the person, not the disabling condition. Refer to the person first, rather than the disability. The phrase “people with disabilities” is preferred over “the disabled” according to the document “[Choosing Words with Dignity](#)” created by the VT Developmental Disabilities Council. ([Choosing Words with Dignity](#))

## EVENT REQUIREMENTS

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### Venue Selection:

When planning an event, venue selection is perhaps the most important decision. Once you have a venue in mind, make sure it is accessible according to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Not all venue operators will know whether their location is fully accessible, so it's important to ask them specific questions.

### **Please confirm the following with your venue contact before booking:**

- Main entrances and bathroom entrances are wheelchair accessible.
- Bathrooms have an accessible stall. If the bathroom is a single room, there are handrails.
- No door is heavier than a five-pound pull.
- The venue will provide standard-height chairs during the event.
- The venue can provide microphones and appropriate speakers/ audio amplification.
- If the event takes place on an upper floor, the venue has an elevator.
- There are no barriers to accessibility from the entrance of the venue to the specific location of your event. Ask specifically about hallway width, small flights of stairs, or a steep incline.
- The venue does not use strobe lights.
- The venue welcomes service animals.

## Event Timeline:

### **Once you determine the venue is accessible, you want to make a few modifications to the event space.**

- Reserve at least two seats in the front row for those with accessibility needs.
- Remove between 3-4 chairs in the first and last row for wheelchairs.
- Make sure the aisle is at least four-feet wide and is navigable by a person with a wheelchair.
- Provide microphones for speakers and appropriate amplification for the space.
- It may be a good idea to assign someone to act as a greeter near the entrance of the venue in case someone needs assistance finding the event space.
- If you plan to use a stage for the presentation, make sure there is a ramp and sturdy handrails to access the stage.

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## Prior to the Event:

### **Prepare Event Outlines**

- Event outlines are printed documents that allow for someone to follow a written outline for the event. It may be difficult for an attendee to follow along with only verbal cues and it's helpful to have the event's structure outlined including any introductory remarks, reading material, or planned Q&As. Some events will be too improvisational for a word-for-word outline and that's okay. What is important in this case is to provide as much of an outline as possible.
- Print at least five copies in 14–16 point black font on white paper for those with disabilities. You may even consider providing a copy to every member of your audience.
- The organizer or moderator of the event should communicate with all participants well before the event to gather the required material.
- While you shouldn't question anyone's request for a copy, make clear that these copies are reserved for those with disabilities.

## During the Event:

- If you do hire an interpreter for the event, it may be helpful for them to review your outline and reading material in advance so they may best prepare.
- See [Event Outline Template](#) and [Event Outline Example](#) for more information.
- **Publicize Accessibility Request Contact Information**

You will want to publicize your event, and with that, you should include contact information for those needing to request accommodation. It is appropriate to set a deadline for these requests so that you have enough time to make the requested accommodation, like hiring an interpreter. You may want to set the deadline 72 hours (3 days) before the event. Try to be flexible with requests made after that deadline.
- See the **FAQ** for more information.
- As people are arriving, announce that event outlines of the event are available for anyone who may need it. You may distribute all of your copies or you may not distribute any, depending on who is in your audience.
- At the start of the event, make sure to introduce all speakers in the order that they are sitting.
- **Use microphones at all times.** Do not assume your voice can carry as some in your audience may require amplification.
- It is not appropriate to ask “does anyone really need me to use the mic?” This type of remark may alienate someone who does need that accommodation.
- If you have a Q&A during the event, make sure to repeat all questions into the microphone.

## After the Event:

Did you host an event and use this guide? We'd love to hear how it went! Email [events@awpwriter.org](mailto:events@awpwriter.org) with feedback.

# FAQ:

**Q: What if I can't tell if a person asking for accommodation actually has a disability? Can I ask them to verify their disability?**

**A:** No, do not ask if someone has a disability or question the use of accommodations. Please assume that someone using these accommodations is using them appropriately. Be aware this person may have an invisible disability.

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**Q: Who pays for requested interpreters?**

**A:** The organization hosting the event is responsible for providing and paying for ASL, CART, or Cued Speech interpreters. AWP recommends that these services be included in programming budgets.

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**Q: How do I know if someone needs an interpreter?**

**A:** When publicizing the event, include contact information for accessibility requests. Who to contact about accessibility requests or concerns should be readily apparent on all pre-event publicity materials or posts.

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**Q: Why are there so many options for interpretation? Why can't we just hire ASL interpreters across the board?**

**A:** Not all individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing “speak” the same language. ASL is a form of language, and many people who communicate through ASL may not have the reading comprehension or speed necessary to utilize CART. Similarly, most individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, especially late-deafened adults and those who lost their hearing after learning speech, read lips and rely solely on CART and captioning in group settings. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution when dealing with communication access. The consumers should be allowed to pick the accommodation that best meets their individual needs according to Captioning Activism & Community according to [CCA Captioning](#). (taken from CCA Captioning)

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**Q: How do I find an ASL provider?**

**A:** Here are some resources to help you find and hire an ASL interpreter:

- [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.](#)
- [Purple Communications](#)
- [Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center State-by-State Resources](#)

# FAQ continued:

**Q: How many ASL interpreters do I need?**

**A:** It depends on how long your event is and how many people have made interpreter requests. Interpreters generally can only sign for around 30-45 minutes before needing a break. If your event exceeds this time, you will need two interpreters who can take turns throughout the event.

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**Q: How do I find a CART provider?**

**A:** Check out the [National Court Reporters Association website](#). Click on Find a Professional and enter your search criteria.

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**Q: How do I find a Cued Speech interpreter?**

**A:** To find a Cued Speech Interpreter, check out the [National Cued Speech Association](#)

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**Q: What's the difference between an Event Outline and a handout? Aren't they the same?**

**A:** An Event Outline is generally reserved for members of your audience who need or want to follow a written text or outline of the event. These should be provided at all events.

- A handout or supplemental material above and beyond an outline is optional. You may want to provide a handout that gives more information on the topics being discussed or you may want to distribute promotional material. If you are planning on distributing a handout, make sure to have a number that can be accessed by those with disabilities.
  - For someone who has a brain injury or vision impairment, it may be difficult for them to access a handout that has graphics and small font. When creating an accessible handout, include all the same information as the original, but exclude graphics and colors. Make sure the accessible handout is printed on white paper and has 14-16 point black font.
- You could also forgo a handout that is not accessible altogether and generally distribute an accessible version.
- See [Accessible Handout Example](#) for more information.

# FAQ continued:

**Q:** What if I don't want to distribute my copyright material?

**A:** If you do not wish to give away your copyright material, you can make sure to collect the accessibility copies after the event.

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**Do you have other questions?**

Email [events@awpwriter.org](mailto:events@awpwriter.org).

**Other resources for hosting an accessible event:**

[Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities](#)

[Choosing Words with Dignity](#)

[Accessible Meetings, Events, & Conferences Guide](#)

AWP would like to thank ([AWP's Ad-Hoc Committee on Conference Accessibility](#)) for their guidance on this Guide.



# AWP 2019 Event Outline Suggested Template

This outline is only suggested – there are many ways to create an Event Outline successfully. Feel free to rearrange as you see fit or see one of the examples provided in this guide.

- 1) Event Title:
- 2) Event Description:
- 3) Event Category:
- 4) Event Organizer:
- 5) Event Moderator:
- 6) Event Participants & short bios:

## **Please read the following at the beginning of your event:**

(some of the following is AWP-specific, but feel free to customize based on your event)

## **Welcome to [title of event]. A few reminders before we begin:**

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel (identify moderator) know and a printed copy of the presentation will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

## **Opening moderator remarks and housekeeping announcements.**

- **Introduce & identify all speakers in the order in which they are sitting.**
- **Participant opening remarks, initial thoughts, or readings.**

These can be in paragraph form, a bulleted list of items the speakers would like to cover during the event, or a copy of whatever he/she plans to read.

If you are concerned about distributing copyrighted material, please make sure to gather the reading material back at the end of the event and let those using an outline know that you will need the materials back at the end of your event. You might also consider printing separate copies to attach to this overall event outline so you may just collect that portion back from the attendee using the outline.

### **Moderator questions:**

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

### **Responses of each participant to moderator questions:**

We understand this portion of the event may be more spontaneous than what can be planned for in a written document. That's okay and it's the nature of a live event. Each presenter should still be able to provide a brief written response or bulleted list of thoughts in response to planned questions.

If the conversation veers off in an interesting, on-topic, and productive way, that's okay too! The point of creating this document isn't to hamstring you into delivering a completely rehearsed discussion or reading, but to provide as much information as possible to those wanting or needing to follow along to a written text.

### **Q&A session:**

At the end of the event, there will be time for a 5-10 minute Q&A session. Please pass the wireless microphone to the person posing the question or please repeat all questions into one of the wired microphones.

# AWP 2018 Event Outline Example

## **EVENT TITLE: Sum of the Parts: Creating Cohesion from Fragmented Narratives**

**Event Description:** Nonfiction writers rely on memory, our own and others'. Yet, memory is inherently fragmented and made more so by experiences like trauma and illness. Incorporating secondary source material can enhance but complicate the narrative. Five writers who have encountered issues of memory and fragmentation personally and in working with under-represented populations discuss challenges and strategies for bridging—or embracing—these gaps and tying together disparate pieces to create a cohesive narrative.

## **EVENT CATEGORY: Nonfiction Craft & Criticism**

### **Event Organizer & Moderator:**

**Lauren Kay Johnson:** Lauren Kay Johnson is a former Air Force public affairs officer and Afghanistan veteran. She holds an MFA in creative nonfiction writing from Emerson College. Her forthcoming memoir chronicles her coming-of-age against the backdrop of war, through her mother's Army career and her own service.

### **Event Participants:**

**Heather Bryant:** Heather Bryant has published short fiction and nonfiction in *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *CURA*, and in anthologies. A winner of the *Southeast Review* Narrative Nonfiction Contest, she was Emerging Writer-in-Residence at Randolph College and teaches at Pace University.

**Judith Hannan:** Judith Hannan is an essayist and the author of *The Write Prescription* and *Motherhood Exaggerated*. She leads workshops for those affected by illness and for high-risk populations. She mentors cancer patients and is a recipient of a 2015 Humanism-in-Medicine award from the Arnold P. Gold Foundation.

**Sonya Lea:** Sonya Lea's memoir was a finalist for the Washington State Book Award, and has been praised in *Oprah Magazine*, *People*, and the BBC. Her essays have appeared in *Salon*, *The Southern Review*, *Guernica*, *Ms.*, and more. She lives in Seattle and the Canadian Rockies, and teaches writing to trauma survivors.

**Suzanne Paola Antonetta:** Susanne Paola Antonetta's most recent book is *Curious Atoms* from Essay Press. Awards include a New York Times Notable Book, an American Book Award, a Library Journal Best Science book, a Pushcart prize, and others. She coauthored nonfiction text *Tell It Slant* and is editor of the *Bellingham Review*.

## **Opening remarks and housekeeping announcements.**

**Good afternoon, and welcome to Sum of the Parts: Creating Cohesion from Fractured Narratives.**

Before we get started, a couple administrative notes:

Matt Komatsu is not able to join us because his wife gave birth to a beautiful baby girl last week. Huge congratulations to them. We are delighted to be joined by someone whose facial hair is not quite as impressive, but her bio and perspective certainly are: Judith Hannan. You can read her bio and all the presenter bios on the AWP website.

And lastly, I'm listed in your program as Lauren Kay HALLORAN, but I shall henceforth be known as Lauren Kay JOHNSON—I'm recently divorced, and I'm taking back my name, even though it's boring, because it's mine!

Thank you all for being here. We know you have a lot of panel and book fair options, and many of you are jet-lagged and sleep deprived, and we really appreciate you spending the next 75 minutes with us. I hope you're as excited—and maybe even as baffled—by this topic as I am. This panel came about for purely selfish reasons. I was working on my memoir about my time in the military, and also attempting to weave in aspects of my mother's military service in Desert Storm and my family's military history, and put everything in a greater historical/cultural context, while also contextualizing the weirdness and foreignness that is the military and rural Afghanistan, and include excerpts from official military documents and news articles and emails and letters sent and received by myself and my mother. And I found it all very difficult and overwhelming. How could I take these disparate elements—that were all related and were all important to my story, but varied, sometimes drastically, in content, chronology and tone—and smush them together into something that resembled a coherent narrative? Plus, there was that pesky issue of memory, which I reaffirmed again and again throughout the writing and researching process to be a rather unreliable narrator. I fumbled my way through and learned a few tricks along

the way, but I'm thrilled today to be surrounded by these fantastic women, who have all encountered issues of fragmentation in their own work and in the work of students, and who have navigated, conquered and embraced it in a variety of artful ways: Judith Hannan, Sonya Lea, Heather Bryant, and Susanne Paola Antonetta.

To get us started, if you could each introduce yourself and give a brief overview of your personal experience with fragmented narratives.

## **Participant Initial Remarks:**

### **Heather Bryant:**

I'll talk about how fugitive pieces often hold a clue to the cohesion in shorter works, such as essays. For example in an essay I wrote about a visit with my father in Florida, I included a side note about red tide. When I got feedback, some said to take out that piece because the scientific language stood out and didn't fit with the whole. Instead, I made it the governing structure of the essay—interspersing these scientific facts with the story—and that's when the whole came together.

In my current project, I'm working on a memoir, *When She Was David*, about my search for my father's early identity before he transitioned and became a woman. I have these very early memories and some are on the cusp—in between or during the transition. I wrote one scene in which we went to see Ursula Le Guin together at the Planetarium in San Francisco. I couldn't remember if it was before or during the transition, so I imagined the scene. Later, I found the program with the date on it. What I'd imagined was wrong—I'd imagined my father as David, not Robyn—but the imagined scene was richer than the one that followed “just the facts.” I merged the two.

### **Judith Hannan:**

I will talk about how the things we don't remember say something about who we are and what is important. I noticed this when I wrote *Motherhood Exaggerated* and left my husband out of much of the story. I knew I had to put him in, but had to admit that I didn't always remember him in a scene even when I knew he was there. I could have manufactured plausible scenarios and dialogue, but the reader would have been fooled in to thinking my husband and I were more of a pair than we were. It is important to see how memory lapses can enhance your story. Observing how little I had paid attention to my husband's experience gave my ultimate transformation as a wife and mother greater depth.

**Sonya Lea:**

Since I was reconstructing my relationship narrative after my husband lost his memory, identity, and connection to language expression, we devised methods that helped us reconstruct our story, and to help me understand his perceptions of his life events. These included each of us writing while remaining physically apart, using kinesthetic experiences to enhance his recall (walking, touch, music, food), and using marijuana to facilitate his access to long-term memories. I also took a deep dive in my memoir into investigating the nature of memory and identity, eventually making contact with memory researchers at USC and others. These are aspects that I work with in most of my students, who have PTS, brain injury, and suffer losses and institutional betrayal.

If there was a surprise for me, it was how my memory was biased in favor of cultural expectations, and I had to throw these off to write a vulnerable and clear story. In other words, writing was excavation, mostly past the desire to be seen in a way that's validating for caregivers, and that discovery allowed me to become more subversive.

**Suzanne Paola Antonetta:**

I've been writing a lot lately about the shock treatment I got as a young teenager. I have written about it before, but I've never gone at it from the angle of memory--how shock, much more in use, & more powerful at the time, destroyed memory, & that was considered a "curative" factor by many doctors. One doctor even wrote that it was a good thing, because with the patient's memory wiped out, clinicians could fill it with any memories they wanted the patient to have. It's an incredibly weird sense of the therapeutic.

I also might take a few minutes to address the fragmented experiences of those I work with at a juvenile detention facility, how I work to bring them through this process of recovery & also honoring what you don't remember, the reality of a fragmented life. Since two of us work with at-risk populations, that could be interesting.

## MODERATOR QUESTIONS:

1. Patricia Hampl describes “personal history, logged in memory,” as “a sort of slide projector flashing images on the wall of the mind.” Lidia Yuknavitch likens memory to “retinal flashes.” In the words of Mary Karr: “For all of memory’s power to yank us back into an overwhelming past, it can also fail big time—both short term (the lost vehicle in a parking lot, the name at the tip of your tongue) and long term (we made out in high school?).” The women here have written about receiving electric shock treatment, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress, debilitating illness, incarceration and other traumas that impact the integrity of memory, as well as how it is shaped by cultural expectations. But even without these outside influences, in memory’s purest form (if that exists?), is there such thing as an authentic linear narrative arc?
2. And a follow-up: Can memory—or lapses in memory—be more important than the facts of what actually happened?
3. In nonfiction, there’s a push and pull between “truth” and engaging narrative. I think we’d all agree that writing would often be easier if we could make things up—for the sake of narrative arc or narrative flow. What role does imagination play in your work? How do you resist the impulse to fill in the gaps and make it neat? Is there ever a situation where it’s okay to make things up?
4. You have all incorporated disparate elements into your writing—scientific facts, research and reportage, official documents such as legal or medical records, secondary sources, your own memory and imagination. What strategies have you found to help weave these elements together into a cohesive narrative? What leads you to favor one element over another?

# #AWP19 Keynote & other Featured Presenters



The keynote speaker is Colson Whitehead, Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning author of *The Underground Railroad*. The official conference schedule will be available online mid-October, 2018.

To view the most up-to-date list of featured presenters, visit the **Featured Presenters** page on our website. A complete list of conference events and presenters can be found on the **2019 Conference Schedule** on the AWP website.

## Registration

All attendees must be registered to attend the conference and you can **register** on our website! Once you register, you will receive an email with your unique registration code that you will need to pick up your registration materials onsite at the conference, including your registration badge, your #AWP19 tote bag, and a full conference schedule.

### #AWPTips

Arrive in Portland on Wednesday, March 27 and pick up your registration materials *before* the Thursday rush! Registration is open from 12 noon to 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 27. Expect longer registration lines on Thursday morning.

## AVOID THE RUSH, PICK UP YOUR REGISTRATION MATERIALS EARLY!

Registration opens Wednesday, March 27, 12 noon to 7:00 pm



"The AWP conference is the greatest gathering of writers, publishers, and magazine editors in the United States. The conference allows writers to break out of their isolation and come together every year to discuss their craft and celebrate their art. Our profession would be a great deal poorer without it."

—Pablo Medina, Graduate Program Director, Department of Writing, Literature and Publishing, Emerson College, and the author of *Cubop City Blues*



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