**27th Annual Minnesota Autism Conference  
Speaker Guide**

This guide will help you to prepare for the conference and ensure that your presentation meets our accessibility guidelines. If you have any questions, please reach out to Maura at mmcdonald@ausm.org.

**Speaker Registration**

Speakers may register for the conference at a 50% discount. To take advantage of your discount, visit <https://ausm.org/minnesota-autism-conference-speaker-registration/>to register.

**Plain Language, Captions, and Accessibility**

As part of ensuring accessibility at the conference, we ask all our speakers to use plain language to the best of their ability. In general, this means speaking at around an eighth grade reading level. If you use any acronyms or jargon please define them. From Forbes, “The most obvious reason to use Plain Language writing is to make important information and ideas more accessible to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and others with disabilities affecting reading, comprehension, and other cognitive functions.”

Check out these guides for more information about plain language and how to speak in an accessible way:

* <https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/use-plain-language>
* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2020/10/22/plain-language-writing---an-essential-part-of-accessibility/?sh=30d9acfc7935>

We also ask all presenters to turn on auto captioning in Powerpoint. Learn how here: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/present-with-real-time-automatic-captions-or-subtitles-in-powerpoint-68d20e49-aec3-456a-939d-34a79e8ddd5f>

If you are not using a Powerpoint presentation, we ask that you use the placeholder slide we have included. Simply open it in Powerpoint, turn on captions, and give your presentation. This will allow you to use the auto caption feature of Powerpoint without creating a presentation. You will need to enter the title of your presentation into the slide.

Please note that we have a variety of individuals in the audience, including autistic participants. You may have audience members sitting on the floor, standing in the back, or meeting their sensory needs in another way. We encourage our participants to have a comfortable experience. Of course that also includes our speakers! If you need to bring fidgets, wear sunglasses, sit, walk, or use another strategy to make presenting accessible, we welcome you to do so.

**Language, Neurodiversity, and Stigma**

AuSM approaches autism from a neurodiversity lens. We ask that our presenters be mindful of this in the way that they speak while presenting. Please see our website for guidance around person first vs. identity first language and functioning language: <https://ausm.org/about/policies-initiatives/>

A few specific pieces of guidance: there’s no need for you to use language like “special needs,” “differently abled,” or any other euphemism. Disabled is not a bad word, and we encourage our presenters to use it. We also ask our presenters not to use any language that promotes the idea of curing autism. Our community has let us know that this is not their preferred approach and that it increases stigma.

**Reminders**

* If you have any handouts or you will be using a Powerpoint, please send your materials to Maura McDonald at [mmcdonald@ausm.org](mailto:mmcdonald@ausm.org) by April 8, 2022.
* If there are any books you will mention during your presentation that you would like included in the AuSM Shop, please send them to Maura McDonald as soon as possible.

**PowerPoint Guidelines:**

* Use large font so that it is easily visible (at least 24 point). Simple sans serif fonts (Arial, Calibri, Verdana) are easiest to read.
* Colors should be high contrast. Avoid white or light fonts.
* Don’t overcrowd your slide. Bullet points are very helpful.
* Keep graphics simple, legible, and labelled. No moving or flashing images.
* Text should not overlap images.
* Use closed captioned videos if you are showing a video.
* Provide a caption or alternative text for all images. ([instructions)](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/add-alternative-text-to-a-shape-picture-chart-smartart-graphic-or-other-object-44989b2a-903c-4d9a-b742-6a75b451c669)
* Preview your slides in grayscale. Attendees often print in black and white.
* Text should not have watermarks or images behind it.

**Double-Check before you present:**

* I have spell checked and proof-read my slides.
* My presentation matches my description.
* I have shared information about my presentation and invited others.

**When You Arrive**

**Please arrive a minimum of 20 minutes in advance of your presentation.**

When you arrive, check in at the registration table. You’ll be directed to the room in which you are presenting. A volunteer will be monitoring the room and introducing you. Check in with them so they know you have arrived. An AuSM staff member will visit each room in advance of the presentation to ensure that all technology is working. A projector will be set up in the room with a VGA or HDMI cord. You are responsible for providing your own laptop with a copy of your presentation or communicating with Maura in advance if you do not have a laptop. If you need a converter dongle, you are responsible for providing it. There will also be a microphone set up for you.

**During Your Presentation:**

* Stay on track. A common complaint from attendees is that the presentation did not match the description.
* Fill your talk with illustrations and examples
* When you use graphics, please describe them out loud for visually impaired attendees.
* Speak slowly and clearly. Face the audience, do not cover your mouth, and do not block the screen.
* Repeat questions and comments from the audience.
* Define acronyms when you first use them. Avoid jargon and slang.
* If you are playing a video, provide a brief description first.
* Give a significant wait for participants to answer if you have asked them a question.
* Each presentation should remain within the allotted time for questions/answers. It is critical to stay on schedule so that attendees may move between sessions as needed.
* Be conscious of the make-up of your audience. We have a wide variety of attendees, including family members, educators, professionals, and autistics. Be aware of how you’re speaking about groups that you don’t belong to. Avoid making issues an “us vs. them,” and focus on what we all want: to improve the lives of individuals with autism.
* Whenever possible, we encourage our speakers to make their presentation interactive. People learn best when they are involved: ask questions, provide exercises, or give activities to involve your participants.

**Accessibility Checker**

The Accessibility Checker tool in PowerPoint is useful for finding missing alternative text and other common accessibility issues. Before finalizing your presentation, run the Accessibility Checker to make sure your presentation is easy for people of all abilities to understand.

**Windows Users**

To run the accessibility checker in Windows, select File > Info. Select the Check for Issues button and choose Check Accessibility.

**Mac Users**

To start the accessibility checker in Mac, select the Review tab, then choose Check Accessibility.

In Windows and Mac, the Accessibility Checker sidebar will appear to the right. The checker presents accessibility errors (e.g., images with no alternative text), warnings (e.g., unclear link text) and tips (e.g., check slide reading order for slides with custom content). Selecting an item in the report will highlight the issue within the slide. Information about the issue, and instructions on how to repair it, will also appear at the bottom of the sidebar.

Thanks to the Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin for information on Accessibility Checkers.