ACCESS:LARP

Guide to Writing Accessible Documents for LARP

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Introduction

Documents and written materials are ubiquitous in LARP from the first time you pitch an idea online to the secret plot documents characters dig up in game. They are a vital tool in communicating OC and IC information to players and characters, as well as when working with other crew members.

However, there are a range of disabilities and conditions that can affect a person's ability to read or understand written information. This can range from vision impairments and blindness through to cognitive impairments and specific learning disabilities. Making sure that your documents are accessible means that you can be sure that your material is viewed and understood by the widest range of people. It means more players and more fun for your players once the game has begun.

As with all accessibility, there are some things you can do which serve a broad audience and can be done with relative ease. Then there are those adaptations you may need to consider to meet individual access needs. It is good to be aware of what those adaptations might be in advance so that when faced with an access request or a player who has difficulty with documents, you have an idea of the access options you can offer.

Always keep in mind the crucial phrase:

Accessibility is not about making the game easier for disabled players it is about making it no more difficult than for other players.

General advice

Some of this can be found in the original Guide to Accessibility, however here we are going into more detail. There are some guidelines which can apply across different types of documents and should be kept in mind as you are producing anything with text.

- Try and keep fonts consistent and avoid overly decorative fonts.
  - Stick to the usual word doc type fonts (i.e. Time New Roman/ Cambria, Arial/Calibri).
- Make sure your text is large enough to read: aim for the equivalent of 12pt or larger.
- It is generally better to left-align paragraphs rather than fully justify them, as this can distort the letter spacing.
  - You may wish to adjust the letter spacing in order to improve legibility
- If you can, change the background colour to something off-white (very pale blue or yellow often works).
- Avoid the use of large blocks of italics, all-caps, or underlined text.
- Pay attention to paragraphs and punctuation.
  - Make use of bullet points and small blocks of text for important information.

Example:
Kate is dyslexic and struggles to read black text on a white background. The pale blue website of Game X is easier for her to read and means that she can take in more information.

Initial pitch, website and booking

This is the first place that you start communicating with your potential players. It is important that information about your game is accessible to them so that they can decide if they want to play and can then book.

- Websites should have clear text so that it is easy to follow.
  - Put important points and a summary near the top.
- Avoid flash and images or of text (such as info graphics).
  - Text reader software can not "read" images.
- If you can, check to see if the site and/or text is compatible with text readers
  - Most mainstream site building and blogging packages are suitable, but if you are unsure, you may need to do a little research.
  - Have information available in a word or PDF document if players need particular software or need to be able to read the document on a different device.
- Consider colour blindness and common colour combinations when highlighting important info.
  - Blue and green and red and green are the two most common issues.
- Consider how a website will look if printed - images should appear with good contrast if they are printed in black and white.
- Where websites use images, these should always have alt-text if there is important information on them.
  - Give cosmetic images blank alt-text so that unnecessary information does not get fed to accessibility software or confuse users with reading difficulties.
- Make sure forms are laid out clearly and questions are clearly indicated.

Example:

Mario is registered blind and the booking form is not compatible with his text reader. The Organisers are able to provide him with a large print printed copy as well as a word document version. Mario is now able to book.

Player briefs

Player briefs are those documents that are given to players before a game and may give more information on the game, setting or their character. They can be important documents for making sure that a player is prepared for the game. As well as the advice above there are more specific things to cover. These are often emailed or made available to individuals or smaller groups, so there is more of a chance to tailor to specific needs.

- Consider what formats a person may need: Large print, different file types etc.
- Visual impairment and cognitive issues mean you can sometimes not notice you've skipped onto a different section if it's not clearly labelled.
  - Consider numbering sections and using nested headings to help keep track.
- It may be beneficial to split a large document that covers several topics in to smaller individual documents.
- Give these to players as far in advance as possible so that they have the time needed to read the properly.

Example:
Charlie struggles to read long documents due to fatigue issues and is worried about not being able to take in all of their characters information. The Organisers have broken the document up into several small sections with clear headings. They have also put in a summary which states which sections are most important. This helps Charlie break it down into manageable chunks.

Lammies, ribbons and other markers

Many games have mechanics that involve identifying special items or information in game by attaching some sort of tag. This is often a small laminated card (a "lammie") a ribbon, a written tag or similar. They often include text in order to convey the relevant details to players. In order for these to be effective, players need to be able to read and understand them easily.

- Keep information on cards concise.
  - If the item or ability has rules too complicated to surmise in a few lines, you may wish to think of other methods of communicating this information.
- Having a standardised layout is preferable, with information presented as concisely as possible.
- Consider how well text will appear in low light.
  - Will weather or light conditions affect clarity e.g. in damp weather lamination sheets may peel away and make them less legible.
- If lammies need to be attached to objects, or players are likely to have to carry a number of them on their person, consider hole-punching before issuing them.
- If using different colour ribbons to indicate objects with unusual properties, make sure that the the colours are easily distinguishable from each other.
  - Again, it's worth being mindful of common patterns of colour-blindness.
- Also note that printing onto ribbons often has a tendency to fade and become illegible over time.

Example:
Rhianna has red colour-blindness and cannot read the lammies which have black text on a red background. She tells the Organisers who start making the lammies black text on a pale blue background. Rhianna can now read the lammies properly.

IC Documents

Whilst there is an obvious desire to have documents look as in-keeping with the setting as possible, much of the above can still apply. Consistency and accessibility is more important than "authenticity" - as such, select one or two fonts that are easily legible for IC documents to be written in. There is no point spending time and energy making unique IC documents if your players can not use them due to vision or cognitive impairments.

Fonts, typefaces and lettering are a big part of IC documents but can also be a big stumbling block for accessibility. There are links to good font examples in the Resources section of this guide.

- Choose fonts that have easily-distinguishable letter shapes.
- In particular, try to avoid fonts in which:
  - Letters such as b and d are mirror images of each other.
    - Capital I and lowercase l are indistinguishable.
    - A lowercase m is easily confused with a lowercase "rn".
    - All letters are square or otherwise blocky.
  - For "handwriting" use a font that has printed, rather than cursive letters.
  - Avoid fonts which have significant "noise" or distortion or ornamentation.
  - Avoid fonts which are italicised or try not to italicise entire documents.
  - In general, fonts which attempt to render the Latin alphabet in the style of another alphabet or writing system should be avoided.

This is a particularly poor example of English in a faux-"Japanese" font (Almost Japanese Smooth Font)

There are other things to consider with regard to the document itself.

- If you want to create IC-looking phys-reps of documents make sure to include a plain text copy.
  - For example have a stained parchment scroll with curled scratchy handwriting on,

but attach a tag or separate sheet with clear text on.

- If creating partial or obscured texts, where part of words or sentences are not clear, include an OC note that states clearly that it is a partial text, so that people with vision or reading difficulties are able to ascertain that the fault is in the document, not them.
- If writing in code or deliberately misspelling or distorting words include an OC note to this affect. i.e. "This note is deliberately nonsensical" .
- Print on off-white paper such as cream, or pale blue.
- Include descriptions of any key diagrams, illustrations or pictures.
- Consider other forms of delivering the information i.e. voice recordings, NPCs, on a computer screen, on a blackboard etc.

Example:
Liam experiences chronic "visual snow" and can not read fonts with a lot of distortion or background noise. The Organisers decide to include a plain text version with any text phys-reps, as they would like to keep the strangely stained documents in play. Liam is happy with this arrangement.

Useful resources

Ability Net: Producing accessible materials for print and online
https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/quality/documents/StandardofAccessibility.pdf

Typefaces for Dyslexia
https://bdatech.org/what-technology/typefaces-for-dyslexia/

Some good (and free for personal use) examples:
- Handwritten: http://www.dafont.com/angelina.font
- Medieval Gothic: http://www.dafont.com/augusta.font
  or http://www.dafont.com/kelmscott.font
- Typewriter: http://www.dafont.com/traveling-typewriter.font
- "Ancient" - these are almost universally terrible from a legibility standpoint; http://www.1001fonts.com/diogenes-font.html is one of the more legible fonts available.
- Most fonts which are designed to be ultra-modern or futuristic tend to fall foul of the guidelines above. Fonts which use solely capitalised letter forms tend to be better - such as http://www.dafont.com/orion-pax.font

Glossary

IC – In Character – when you are roleplaying as your character or times when people are expected to be acting as their characters. This also covers things that are considered part of the game or story.

OC/OOC – Out Of Character – When you are not roleplaying as your character, you are yourself. Times or things which are not part of the game or story.

NPC – Non-Player Character – A game character that is not played by a player. May be a limited role used to deliver plot or story.

Phys-rep – Physical Representation – an OC item that represents something specific IC. This can include foam swords phys-repping real swords or an empty bottle phys-repping medicine.

Lammie – A small laminated card that can be used to show rules, mechanics or properties of an item. It is often attached to a **phy-rep.**