

# **ACCESS:LARP**

## **Guide to Accessibility**

# Guide to Accessibility for LARP

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## Introduction and overview

Most LARPs are run by people in their spare time. They aren't professional LARP companies or even professional event organisers. Hopefully they are doing their best to make a game that people can attend and enjoy.

Not every game suits every player. There are so many different genres and play styles there are going to be some that don't suit you. As a game organiser it's ok to recognise this and not try and make a game of all things to suit all people. However, you should make sure that you aren't exclude people based on things they can't change such as disability, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Having a good equality policy in place is important and should go some way to making your event accessible to people due to race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Being accessible to people with disabilities (including temporary disabilities, chronic illnesses and invisible disabilities) can take a little more than a policy statement.

In general terms:

- Include disability in your equality statement. Let people know that ableist language and prejudice will not be tolerated.
- Recognise that the perfect set piece in your imagination may not be possible if it isn't accessible
- Remember that accessibility is about more than wheelchair ramps and can vary person to person
- Keep things confidential or on a need to know basis. Your crew may need to know that a player is unstable on their feet but they don't need to know why. Limit private health information to key organisers, the first aiders and (where necessary) caterers.
- Ask your players questions and listen to their answers. They know best what will help them enjoy the event and what accommodations they need. Encourage them to contact you, ask them questions and work with players to make an event accessible.
- **Accommodations are not about making the game easier for disabled players. It's about making it no more difficult than for other players.**  
Some accommodations can be open to all players – scheduled meal times for example. However, giving a mobility impaired player a head start doesn't work if all players have the same head start.

## **Begin at the Beginning**

There is no point striving for an accessible event if your players or crew can't find the information they want and need to begin with. There are issues ranging from dyslexia, to fatigue induced cognitive impairment, to visual impairments that can make accessing event information difficult. Keeping your website or page simple and clear means you can reach more players.

- Is the information for your event well presented and available in more than one format? People may need special software to read a web-page properly.
- Wiki type sites can be easy to build but difficult for the user to navigate – pay attention to your menus and aim for having all pages accessible from a static menu (with sub menus) or home page.
- Use a clear font for the bulk of your text and be sure to separate things with headings and clear paragraphs.
- Use bullet points to make key information clear and digestible.
- Put summaries of what each section or page contains at the top of the page.
- If you want to include “flavour text” then make sure it is visually distinct and does not include information not found elsewhere. People should be able to skip flavour text without losing out.

*Example:*

*Lucy has severe dyslexia and can't read large walls of text. It can be difficult for her to identify what is critical information and what isn't and she may have to simply close the page in order not to trigger headaches or a stress response.*

*She likes the page for Event X as it is black text on a pale grey background, uses clear headings and bullet points and the descriptive text is at the bottom and in a box. She can digest the information in bite size chunks and come back to the descriptive text at another time.*

## **Signing up**

Once your player is interested, they have to send in a booking form to secure their place. Keep in mind advice from above to make the booking form clear and accessible. You can use your booking form to help determine further accommodations.

- You probably don't need to know a player's gender (character is another thing) so don't ask for it unless it is somehow essential. If you really must ask a player's gender, include options for non-binary people.
- Ask for dietary requirements – encourage players to list intolerances, allergies and special diets and to label them as “intolerance”, “allergy” or “preference”. This information can be passed on to caterers or passed on as necessary.
- Ask for “injuries, health issues, other allergies and disabilities” this information will guide you in preparing your event and making sure it is accessible and can also be available to designated first aiders in case of emergency. Let your players know that this information will be confidential.
- You may want to ask about triggers and phobias depending on the nature of the game. This may shape how you run the game or what information you give to players.

*Example:*

*Hayden is mildly allergic to strawberries and severely allergic to shellfish. He notes this on his form. The organiser of Event X, passes on this information to both the caterers and to first aid in case of exposure. The organiser also asks other attendees to ensure shells are not part of their costume or set dressing.*

## **Food and Catering**

Food and drink can be very important to the well-being of your players. Whether it is managing blood sugar, timing medication or a special diet, how you cater an event can have a big impact on a lot of players.

- Make sure that there is always a drink available, at the very least free water, it is easy at a LARP to find yourself without your water bottle for IC or OC reasons, and being able to have a drink when you need it is valuable for everybody.
- Aim for set meal times and let players know in advance so they can manage their health accordingly.
  - If a meal is going to be late, let players know at the earliest opportunity so they can have a snack if needed – late meals can have a big impact on some player's health.
- Consider making snacks available. Some players may bring their own snacks, but providing extra is helpful and inclusive for those people who need to manage their diet.
- Make sure your caterer is aware of all allergies and intolerances. Ask how they will deal with these and make sure they are safe for all players.
- Ask caterers to make all meals as inclusive as possible so that players with special dietary needs aren't singled out by having a dramatically different meal.
- Keep special food items (i.e. gluten free bread or dairy free spread) separate to avoid contamination and to ensure a plentiful supply.

*Example:*

*Jamie has Coeliac disease and is very sensitive to gluten contamination. Event X organiser passes this information on to the caterer who says the main dishes will all be gluten free. The organiser checks with Jamie if this is sufficient. Jamie is still concerned about contamination, so the caterers and Event X organiser look at the kitchen facilities and find space for a gluten free food prep area and Jamie offers to provide their own, labelled, gluten free pots and pans to be sure.*

*Players are asked not to bring their own snacks, but are assured that snacks will be provided. Gluten free snacks are provided on a different table to other snacks to avoid contamination.*

## **The site/venue itself**

This is a tricky one because sites can vary so much depending on game. Many people with disabilities accept that not all areas of a site will be accessible – it's a frustrating truth. There are things you can do to mitigate this and still make a site inclusive, this largely involves talking to your player and thinking about where stuff happens.

- Make sure as much of your indoor space is step free or has step free access. This is essential for common and dining rooms, sleeping areas, toilets and washrooms but, you should

consider all spaces.

- If there are steps or lips in doorways then provide ramps or alternative access.
- Building access isn't just for people in wheelchairs – people with mobility problems, balance issues, chronic pain or chronic fatigue all benefit from level access.
- Do not put plot critical items or sets in rooms that can't be accessed by all your players.
- Consider the terrain and how rough or steep it is. Can your players navigate it safely? Look for alternative paths for less-able players, or make sure there is provision for changing a set piece or access.
- Consider where action and events will take place. Can your players reach them or will they miss out on things. Does your big encounter have to take place in the ravine or can it take place nearer to the main hall?
- Make sure your venue has adequate seating, and if possible a variety of seating types.
- Consider heating – temperature can affect many people's conditions. Make sure there is heating AND ventilation, that you know where heating controls are and convey to players if the venue is likely to be hot or cold so they can plan their kit accordingly.
- Look at the lighting. Does it highlight trip hazards properly? Do players with vision impairment need extra lighting? Very bright, coloured or flickering light can also be an issue for people with sensory problems such as migraines, autism, vertigo or epilepsy. Refer to the booking forms and if a player notes one of these issues consult with the player.
- Consider designating an OOC quiet room for people with disabilities who need a time out or quiet time. Keep this room quiet and free of too much sensory stimulus.
- Make sure there is an accessible toilet and washroom – large enough for a wheelchair, with handrails and a low sink. If it requires a key make sure to give the key to the player or see if it can be left unlocked for the duration of the event.

*Example:*

*Sasha uses a wheelchair. She is worried she won't be able to access things in the woods over rough terrain. The Organiser shows her the graded access path through the woods that she can use as a short cut and says that all events will take place near to this path. Other players will not have access to this path (unless accompanying her) and she doesn't have to use it if she is confident on the other paths.*

*Example:*

*Lee has epilepsy that can be triggered by fluorescent lights. The event organisers find out that their venue uses strip lighting so decide that they will bring their own lamps and use daylight bulbs to create the bright light effect they want in a safe manner.*

## **Sleeping arrangements**

If your event is overnight pay attention to sleeping arrangements. A good night's sleep can be the difference between functioning and being immobile to some players. What makes a good night's sleep can vary dramatically.

- Find out early if your venue has bunk rooms and what size and configuration they are (i.e. how many do they sleep).
- If the site is camping only, see if you can designate a room for indoor sleeping for those who need it.
- Offer IC and OOC sleeping options, even if your event isn't 24hr. Some people will need to

- nap during time in and they may prefer OOC to IC for this.
- Find out what bedding, if any, is provided so that people can plan accordingly.
- Make sure there are at least some power sockets available in sleeping areas – some people may use a C-Pap or similar and will require power.
- Have back-up options available. Some people's needs may change unexpectedly.
- Consider reserving bunk rooms near to bathrooms for disabled players. Additionally, bunk rooms near to the main play area might be preferred by some disabled players so they don't have to far to walk.
- Make sure rooms and beds are navigable by players in a wheelchairs or who use a walking aid.
- Consider setting up comfortable areas in IC places where players can rest easily without dropping OC.
- It can be helpful to give details of nearby and inexpensive B&Bs or hotels so that people have another option.

*Example:*

*Rose has Crohn's Disease so the organisers make sure she has a bunkroom near to an accessible bathroom.*

*Example:*

*David has a back injury that requires careful rest. He requests that a bottom bunk is reserved for him as he can't manage ladders. The organisers also move the venue sofas into one corner and leave a few blankets lying around with the IC reason that squatters were using the building before the characters arrived. This provides an IC rest area for David and others that need it.*

## **The plot**

Whilst a lot of accessibility is down to the venue itself, how you run the game is equally important. Considering your players' needs and integrating that into your plot and mechanics makes everything far more seamless and means that those with additional needs can enjoy the game equally with their fellow players.

- Consider multiple methods of solving a puzzle or dealing with an encounter or that there is variation in how encounters are solved. A game that relies solely on combat or physical prowess to get through excludes physically limited players and a game that relies on only cryptic logic puzzles excludes those with cognitive or learning disabilities.\*
- Think about your pacing carefully. Having opportunities to rest in between action is important, though you don't want too-long periods of inaction.
- People with physical disabilities may wish to play combat characters. Work with them to see how they fit into the setting and how you can bring combat to them by considering plot (pitched battles are different to snipers and traps), setting and terrain.
- In an ongoing campaign, vary the times that regular events occur so that they are available to more players – players with disabilities often have to stick to an OC schedule even during games.

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\*Not all games are for everybody and that's ok. If you are running a specifically 100% combat event then make this clear in your advertising so that people can make a choice of whether to attend. However, if somebody with a disability does enquire about your 100% combat event, then you should still consider any reasonable accommodations.

- Are there ways of giving advance notice of action and events to players with disabilities so they can prepare or time their medication – this could be an OC message from a ref or the delivery of a vision or omen.
- Think about where events happen, can you bring the plot to the players in some instances?
- If you have players with vision impairment, cognitive disabilities or learning difficulties, find out what methods of communication work best for them and include them in your plot.
  - This may mean putting messages in writing or clear type, having a ref or NPC verbally deliver a message to a player and so on.
- Props and plot items should be safe to handle anyway but think about items that can be carried one handed if you have a player who walks with a cane, items which are light weight if they have muscle weakness and so on.
- Don't put anything plot critical in areas that can not be accessed by all players. All players should have the opportunity to reach plot (that's players, not characters, characters may differ).
- Have back-up plan and alternative plots in case a player is unavailable or unable to do certain actions at a particular time due to their disability.

*Example:*

*Morgan is partially sighted and worries that ze won't be able to find key items. The organisers tell zer at the start of each "session" (i.e. morning, afternoon and evening) specific areas he can focus his search on for example, in the shrubbery, they also make sure that IC hidden items are marked with a bright ribbon - players know that only people with the "search" skill can find these items.*

*Example:*

*Clara's medication has to be taken at the same time every night and she usually falls asleep at 11pm. The Organisers make sure that no Big NPC meetings that affect her character take place after 10pm.*

## **Rules and Mechanics**

Rules and mechanics are how stuff happens in your game world – it's how we make the unreal, real. They can affect and be affected by people's disabilities. Your rules and mechanics are about how people do things, so you should make sure that they let all people do things.

- Consider implementing a non-com rule – a rule that means people who can not be involved in combat can avoid it safely OC. These rules should still involve the player IC. Be aware that some players who start off combat safe may have to become non-com later in the game due to health reasons. Know how this should work.
- Hard skills are popular and common – hard skills are things you can actually do OOC that are used IC. You may need to find a way of balancing this for disabled players so that areas of the game aren't shut off.
- It is helpful to have printouts of core rules available for players to check mid game, especially for those with cognitive or learning disabilities. Post them on the back of toilet doors or in bunk rooms.
- Lammies, cards or sheets with explanations of specific skills that players with those skills can carry on them are helpful.
- Keeping mechanics and rules simple benefits everybody especially players with disabilities.
- Make it clear to all players that OC mobility aids are not to be moved, hidden or tampered

with at any point. You may need to find some way to distinguish between IC costume items and OC mobility aids.

- Allow some flexibility in rules that require specific actions so as not to exclude people with mobility issues.
- Think about your Time in and Time Out times. Do they give people a chance to recover and prepare for the event without too much rush?
- Are your OC Man Down calls sufficiently different to your IC calls for a medic.

*Example:*

*Chris has EDS, he is finding it difficult and painful to bend over patients who are lying down in order to use his medic skill. The organisers make an allowance so that the patient can be seated instead of lying down. This allows Chris the option of sitting next to his patient to apply the medic skill.*

*Example:*

*Rima is partially deaf and is worried she will not hear spell vocals properly. The Organisers decide that all spells will be accompanied by throwing a coloured beanbag at the target – the colour relating to a specific effect. Rima is satisfied she will now know when she has been hit by a spell.*

## **Costume and Kit**

Personally I like clear costume guides. I think this helps create a setting, especially a fictional or historic world, as well as helping to form character and aid in recognition. Costuming can be limited for everybody by time, money and skill. People with disabilities may face other limitations.

- Provide setting and costume information as early as you can – people with disabilities may need longer to make or assemble their costume due to physical or cognitive limitations.
- Make sure your costume briefs aren't too rigid and offer a number of variations of style – some people may have difficulty dressing, or sensory issues that limit what they can wear.
- The concept of aspirational kit, or kit that is evolving can be helpful as it allows people to start off with a basic layer and then embellish as they are able.
- If you have rules regarding armour or heavy armour, consider that these may have to be modified to accommodate a person's disability.
- Understand that IC footwear is not always available to people with specific mobility or medical needs.
- Remember that mobility aids can't always be changed to fit with a costume.
- If you can, include mobility aids in any “look and feel” photographs or costume guides.

*Example:*

*Jay uses a wheelchair and is playing a combat character. The heavy armour rules state that the full torso must be covered in addition to legs or arms and helmet and the armour should be plate. This is not compatible with sitting in a wheelchair. The Organisers agree that Jay can wear a chest plate instead of full torso covering and that their modified grieves are suitable.*

*Example:*

*Hayley has to wear special footwear due to a muscular/skeletal deformity. She is worried it won't look right with her costume. The Organisers include “practical footwear” in their costume guide and stress that OC practical footwear is always acceptable.*

## **Timekeeping!**

Time keeping is pretty important to a lot of chronically ill and disabled people. As mentioned in the plot and food sections, many people have to operate to a certain schedule. This may be taking medication at specific times or intervals, eating at certain times, monitoring their activity levels, or important in managing issues like PTSD or coping with autism.

- Some people may not be able to wear a watch for health reasons (pain, skin sensitivity etc).
- You may want to make a point that anachronistic timepieces, including mobile phones, will be overlooked if used discretely.
- Consider having an IC clock or timekeeping method in the main play area available to all players.
- If not knowing the time or a distorted passage of time are a part of your setting then talk to players who have indicated illness or disability and work out a suitable OC or IC solution.
- Consider having things happening at set times to act as markers i.e. lunch will be at 12:30. There will be an NPC arriving at 5PM.

*Example:*

*Game X is an altered reality game with shifting timelines. The IC time does not match the OC time. John needs to take medication at set times. The organisers agree that John may use an alarm on his mobile phone (set to aeroplane mode) to notify him. They ask if the alarm can be set to quiet and vibrate to minimise disruption. Other players are instructed to ignore it.*

*Example:*

*Dina needs to measure her insulin every hour but doesn't have a watch suitable for her innumerate character in this post-apocalyptic setting. The Organisers decide that sounding a gong every hour fits with their setting. The gong can be heard across the site.*

## **Downtime systems**

This part is inspired by LARP blogger Encounter 21 on tumblr, who recently made a post about downtimes. These systems need to be carefully planned anyway, but there are some extra considerations regarding accessibility.

- If you have a downtime system, keeping it to something that only has to be tackled once between games is best. People may not have the energy or ability to engage with a downtime system continually.
- Give clear guidelines on how the system works and what can and can't be done.
- Consider using a form instead of free form text. Players with cognitive or learning disabilities may not be able to engage with a free text system fully.
- You may need to provide the downtime in various formats so that specialist software can be used.
- Be prepared to receive a downtime in an alternative format if to meet a players needs.
- Do not require on going downtime communication between player characters or NPCs.
  - Do not require players to read lengthy IC documents during downtime. Uptime should not be impacted if a player is unable to keep up with fic, IC documents and descriptions during downtime.

*Example:*

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*Ffion has CFS/ME and does not have much energy between events (she saves it for events) so she can not devote a lot of time to a downtime system. Many other players are enthusiastically writing fic and IC letters. The Organisers rule that fic and letters written during DT are not to be considered part of the game and are for fun only. Only letters or descriptions submitted as a part of the official DT will have an impact on characters in uptime.*

*Example:*

*Joseph has a learning disability and struggles with reading and writing. The Organisers make the Downtime system a series of questions that only have to be answered yes or no in a tick box format. They also make an audio recording of each question.*

## **Crew**

Throughout these articles I have talked about players and organisers. There is another group to consider: your crew. Don't forget your crew. Crew members can also have disabilities which may need some accommodations. All of the points covered can and should apply to crew.

- Keep in mind when assigning roles or jobs that people's needs and abilities may differ.
- Make documentation accessible and clear.
- Make sure your crew eat and rest properly (crew management is a whole topic unto itself).
- Above all be honest about what you need and expect from your crew members. If you really need a crew member who can make repeated charges in to battle say that upfront so that people can make their own assessment as to whether they can put their name forward.
- Most crew teams have spaces for all sorts of skills and abilities,
  - Be upfront and clear about what you need so that you get the best person for the job, and that people aren't left out or worse, actually hurt, by poor accessibility.

*Example:*

*Nim would like to crew at Event X but is concerned because their Muscular Dystrophy means they aren't combat safe or able to walk far. They discuss this with the organisers who assure them that they will have a non-com NPC role and that they some of the encounters can be kept close to the crew hut to minimise walking.*

## **Rounding it all up**

This guide tries to cover as many different bases as it can but it can't cover every possible combination of event and disability. This isn't a comprehensive list but should give you an idea of how to handle most situations. It particularly doesn't go in to much detail regarding hard of hearing accessibility as it is something I have yet find good solutions to in LARP. Whilst it does include some neurodivergence it only skims over mental health disabilities. There is a separate Guide for Mental Health Accessibility as that covers some particular needs.

Additionally, this isn't a list of things that you absolutely must do every time. There are some things it can be handy to just do automatically that can help all players, but there are other things that are more tailored to an individual. Nobody would blame you for not providing a gluten free catering option when none of your players need gluten free. However, you should be prepared and know how to provide those accommodations if necessary.

At the end of the day, making a game accessible opens your game up to more players and helps you players have a more enjoyable event. Having more players and players who are happy with our event is really what we, as event organisers, are aiming for and good accessibility can help us achieve that.

## 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.

**Crew** – People involved in running the game. They may play NPCs, be referees or storytellers, or help with general tasks. Not players.

**HP** – Hit Points – A method of assigning and monitoring health or strength to a character.

**XP** – Experience Points – A method of assigning how much skill or experience a character has.

**Downtime/DT** – The time between games. Some games may have a mechanism for explaining what a character does during this period or it may be used for character advancement.

**Time In** – The point at which the game starts and things are considered IC unless otherwise stated.

**Time Out** – The point at which the game ends and things are considered to be OC.

**Calls** – Words or phrases that are used to convey a particular in game meaning. They can be IC or OC. e.g. “Man Down” is an OC call that alerts people to an injured player.

**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.