

Addressing Ableism in Technology

Jerry Price, Assistive Technology Program Coordinator,
and John Owen, Director,
Of the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled

Defining Ableism

“Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or the other.”

-Leah Smith, “#Ableism”, Center for Disability Rights,
<https://cdrnys.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/>

Defining Ableism - 2

“Ableism is not just physical barriers and stereotypes, it is also not including disabled people in your campaigns, in your conversations, in your planning.”

-Bri Scalesse, fashion model, writer and disability advocate

(As quoted in Parade Magazine:

<https://parade.com/1232975/stephanieosmanski/what-is-ableism/>)

Defining Ableism - 3

Inclusion starts with . . .

A cool aesthetic

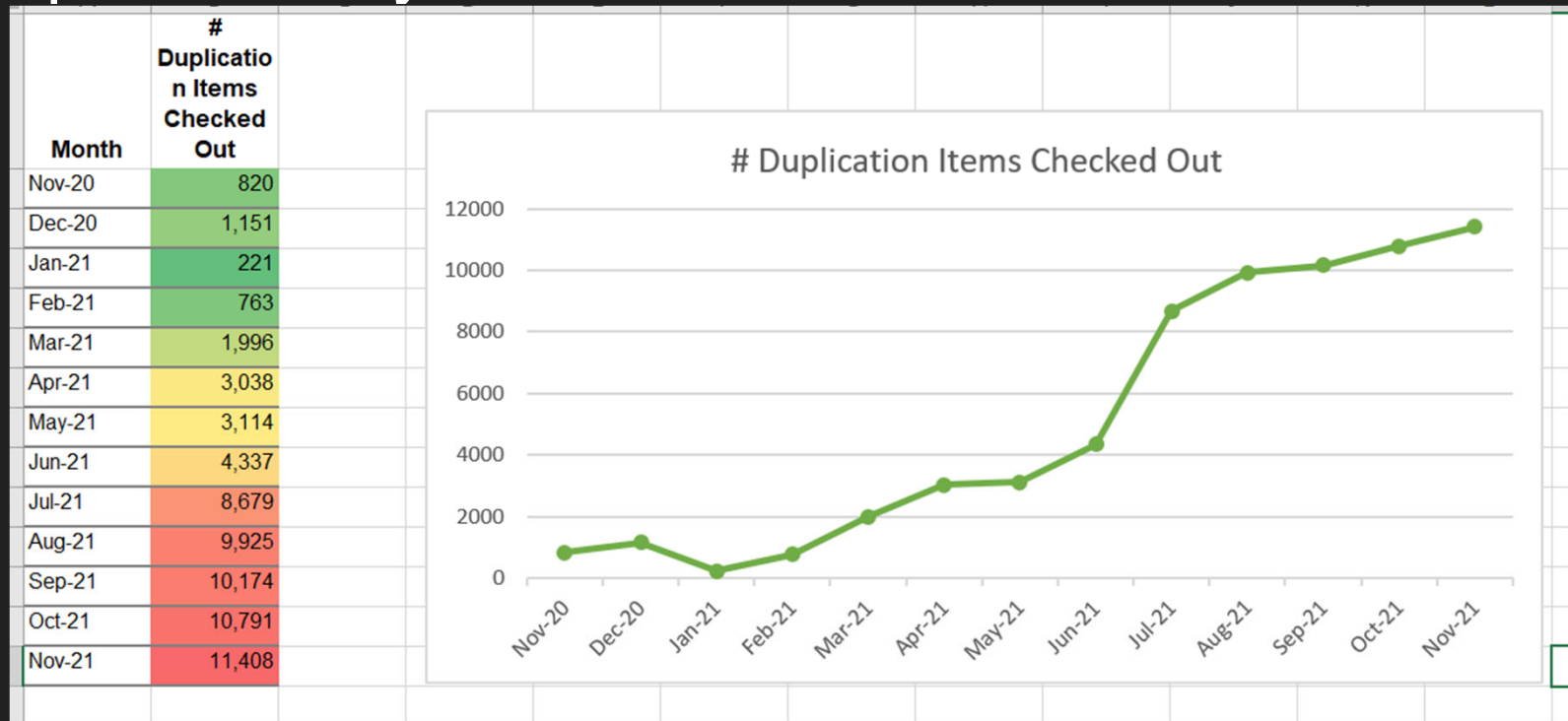
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHw_noYsGI4&t=4s

That could use some inclusion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynH4HSGcY6I>

Ableism examples and myths - 1

Example 1: “As you can see here” or “This chart shows.”



Ableism examples and myths - 1a

Think differently:

- 1) Put the information in a spreadsheet or table.
- 2) Be more verbally concise and descriptive.

Ableism examples and myths - 2

Example 2: “Let’s take a poll”

- **Think differently:**

- Remind audience members about keystroke alternatives or other ways to access the poll.
- Zoom Keyboard Shortcuts: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205683899-Hot-keys-and-keyboard-shortcuts>

Ableism examples and myths - 2a

- **Think differently:**

- Zoom Best Practices: <https://www.colorado.edu/digital-accessibility/resources/zoom-accessibility-best-practices>
- Hot Keys for Google Meet: <https://support.google.com/a/users/answer/9896256?hl=en>

Ableism examples and myths - 3

Myth 1: Accommodations cost too much or are too much work.

“We didn’t write the cost of accessibility into the proposal.” or “We’ll have to go back and redo everything.”

Think differently:

- Alt text for pictures can be written into the coding.
- The “cost” of creating closed captioning actually benefits everyone.
- Make design choices with accessibility in mind: color schemes, avoiding busy-ness, sound, wording and fonts

Ableism examples and myths - 3a

- Accessible fonts:
 - Atkinson Hyperlegible Font:
<https://brailleinstitute.org/freefont>

²⁴ The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. 1234567890

- APH Font: <https://www.fontspace.com/aphont-font-f4926>

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. 1234567890

Ableism examples and myths - 4

Myth 2: Accessibility is boring

“Making things accessible means plain text in black and white.”

Think differently

If you think about accessibility in a holistic way in the original design, you can create something that is stimulating to all the senses and reaches everyone in multiple ways.

Ableism examples and myths - 5

Myth 3: People with disabilities can't do certain things

“You can't play video games!”

Think differently:

- Making video games with good sound benefits everyone
- Example: Blind Drive app (<https://blinddrivegame.com/>)
- “Voice” app: an OCR Reader created by Shalin Shah; available in the App Store.

Practical Tips

- All screen share presentations exclude people using screen reading software.
- Poor color contrasting effects low vision users.
- Cluttered screen shots cause processing issues for some people.
- Charts and graphs are often not narrated effectively.
- Color coding may be aesthetically pleasing but leaves many viewers without interpretation.

From “Can Everybody See My Screen?”, an on-demand webinar available at <https://www.tpgi.com/webinar-september-22-can-everybody-see-my-screen/>

Practical Tips - 2

- Drop key points and outline in chat. Make sure everyone has accessed them before moving into a presentation.
 - Sample intro: “I’ve put a link to the presentation in the chat so that you can follow along on your own device if you prefer. Let me know if you are able to open it and I’ll start the presentation then.”
- In promotional materials, ask if any accommodations are needed
- Send key points ahead of time which will avoid accidental skipping or rushed presentations.

Things to Know

- Tasks take time.
 - It may take longer to tap a keystroke than click a mouse. This isn't an indication of a lack of intelligence or a lack of computer skills.
- If it's not accessible now, new technology is on the way!
 - Refreshable tablets: [the Holy Braille project](#)
 - Orcam: <https://www.orcam.com/en/>
 - Lidar: <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/lidar.html>

Questions?

Contact information

Jerry Price, Assistive Technology Program
Coordinator
410-230-2446
jerry.price1@maryland.gov

John Owen, Director
410-230-2452
john.owen@maryland.gov

Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print
Disabled
415 Park Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21201
410-230-2443
reference.desk@maryland.gov

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/MDLBPD/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mdlbpd>

Blog: <https://mdlbpd.blogspot.com/>

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/mdlbpd/>

<https://www.marylandlibraries.org/Pages/Maryland-Library-for-the-Blind-and-Print-Disabled.aspx>
or <http://lbph.maryland.gov>