Access Forward Musicology
Access Guide 2026

Created by: Tekla Babyak, Diane Kolin, Sarah K. Miller

Welcome to Access Forward Musicology 2026, an online conference-unconference to reimagine access in academic musicology. We take our name and our core orientation from Elizabeth McLain's developing framework of access forward practice — an approach that centers disabled experience, refuses to treat inclusion as an individual accommodation problem, and understands leadership as collaborative care work. The conference is free, fully online, and takes place both synchronously and asynchronously. The synchronous portion takes place over **Zoom** on **Wednesday, November 11**, **Friday, November 13**, **Saturday, November 14**, **Wednesday, November 18**, **Friday, November 20**, and **Saturday, November 21**. There will also be live portions streamed on **Twitch** on **Thursday, November 12** and **Thursday, November 19**. To register, please visit the Zoom registration links under the "Program" tab of the Access Forward Musicology website. All asynchronous portions will be posted to the "Video Gallery" tab of the Access Forward Musicology website over the month of November 2026.

The following is an Access Guide for Access Forward Musicology 2026. Like the conference itself, the Access Guide draws upon Disability Studies scholarship and is the result of neurodivergent/disabled mindbodies living and working in community. We specifically would like to acknowledge the *Including Disability Virtual Conference Planning Handbook* and the *Music and Collective Access Symposium 2026 Access Guide*, as both were fundamental in the formation of this guide. By building access into the conference from the beginning, we hope to empower scholars to bring their full selves to music academia.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email us at accessforwardmusicology@gmail.com.

Table of Contents

ACCESS GUIDE 2026 1

General Information 3
Registration 3
Program 3
Recordings 3
Access Support 3
Community Guidelines 7
Conference Programming 8
For Presenters 9
Formatting 9
Descriptive Hyperlinks 11
Font 12
Color Contrast 12
Alternative Text (ALT Text) 13
Accessibility Review 14

General Information

Access Forward Musicology 2026 takes place on Wednesday, November 11 through Saturday, November 14 and Wednesday, November 18 through Saturday, November 21 on Zoom.

Registration

To register for the conference, please visit the "Program" tab of the Access Forward Musicology website for Zoom registration links.

Program

The program is located on the "Program" tab of the Access Forward Musicology website. It is available as both a PDF and a Word Document.

Recordings

Asynchronous, or recorded, presentations and recordings of synchronous, or live, presentations will be posted on the "Video Gallery" tab of the Access Forward Musicology website.

Access Support

An Access Request Form is included within each Zoom registration link. We will do our best to honor all personalized access requests. If the form is not accessible to you or if you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us at accessforwardmusicology@gmail.com.

Access Copies

Accessible copies of conference presentations will be posted on the "Access Guide" page of the Access Forward Musicology website.

Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART)

CART is a live, word-for-word speech-to-text transcription service that converts spoken language into written text almost instantaneously. CART will be offered in Zoom for the following sessions:

Word Doc - CART and ASL Availability

PDF – CART and ASL Availability

When CART is not offered, automated captions will be available.

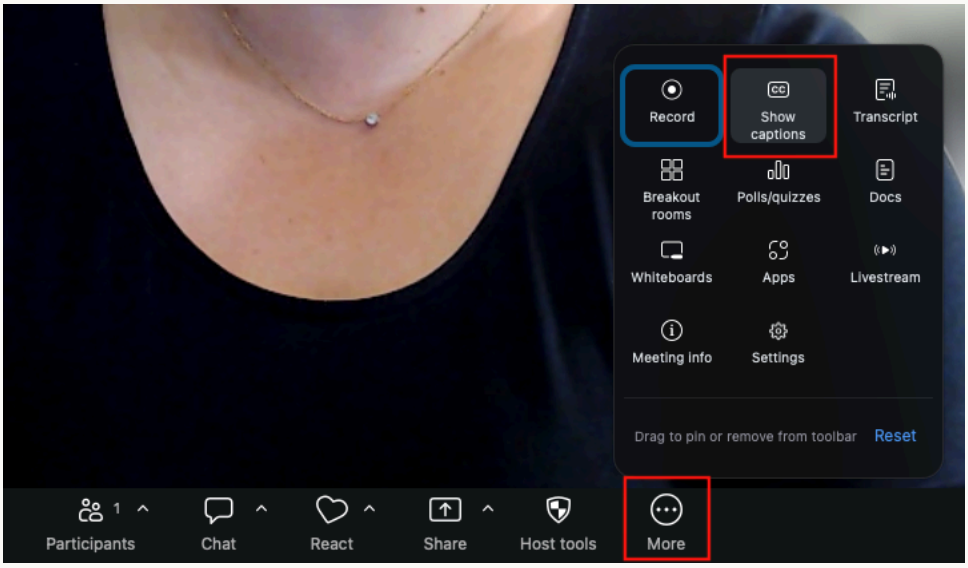
To activate CART, turn on the captions by clicking on the **Show Captions** option:

1. Open the **More** menu by clicking on the three dots at the bottom of the screen.
2. Click on the **Show captions** logo represented by the letters CC.

Once you have activated the captions, the text “Captions are on” is displayed, followed by the captions.

The bottom menu will then show the “Hide caption” icon which allows you to turn the captions off and on.

Figure 1 Activating Captions

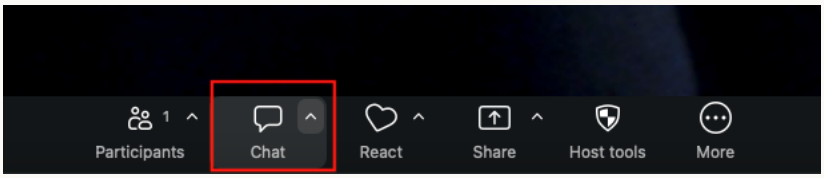


Comment Notifications on Zoom

You can access the comments section by clicking on the **Chat** button on your main application toolbar.

If the chat window is hidden and a new comment is available on the chat, a notification will briefly appear at the bottom of the window, and a red dot or number badge will appear over the Chat button.

Figure 2 Comment Notifications on Zoom



American Sign Language (ASL)

American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual-gestural language used by Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities in the United States and Canada.

ASL will be offered for the following sessions:

Word Doc - CART and ASL Availability

PDF – CART and ASL Availability

Figure 3 ASL in Zoom



The organizers will pin the ASL interpreters. Participants can choose their view by clicking on the View option panel on the top right of the application.

An option allows users to turn on and off an extra window showing only the interpreter by clicking on the “Interpretation” button at the bottom of the screen.

Community Guidelines

1. Participants can join our online sessions at any time. Please prioritize your health and well-being before deciding to participate.

2. We encourage each presenter to follow the accessibility recommendations available in the “For Presenters” section of this guide.

3. If desired, you can request additional compliments, emotional support, and encouragement. We will call for volunteers to provide compliment support in the chat.

4. Each presentation will include time to process questions. Not all questions may be answered live: some questions may be answered at a later date. Participants who want organizers/moderators to ask specific questions are encouraged to send us a list.

5. Presenters have the option of opting out of Q&A. Another option is to have a Q&A session with no critiques or feedback, focusing only on questions. Please feel free to request this during your session or ask the session chair to make this request on your behalf.

6. When asking questions, please check with the presenter before offering any feedback or suggestions for their work. Even if a suggestion is meant to be constructive, it may be triggering for people with anxiety disorders and other forms of neurodiversity.

7. Please be supportive and encouraging when asking and answering questions. This will help ensure that the space feels as safe and comfortable as possible.

Conference Programming

We have built access into the program from the beginning. Our Program Committee, which operates as a curation cohort, organized speaker proposals into cohesive conference panels. We have a strong disposition toward including as much as possible and finding the right form for each contribution. For transparency, we have included a table detailing the access supports that were implemented throughout the curation process.

No simultaneous sessions Everything will be available to everyone. No choosing between communities.	**All sessions recorded by default** Unless a presenter opts out, recordings will be made available after the event on the Access Forward Musicology website.
Pre-recording fully supported Presenters were given the option to select a presentation style that best reflects their access needs. No one is required to present live, as asynchronous participation pathways are included throughout.	**Opt-out Q&A available** Presenters were given the option to opt out of Q&A critique or decline Q&A altogether.
Compliment support Presenters may request additional encouragement in the chat as an access support.	**Free registration** No fees, no paywalls.

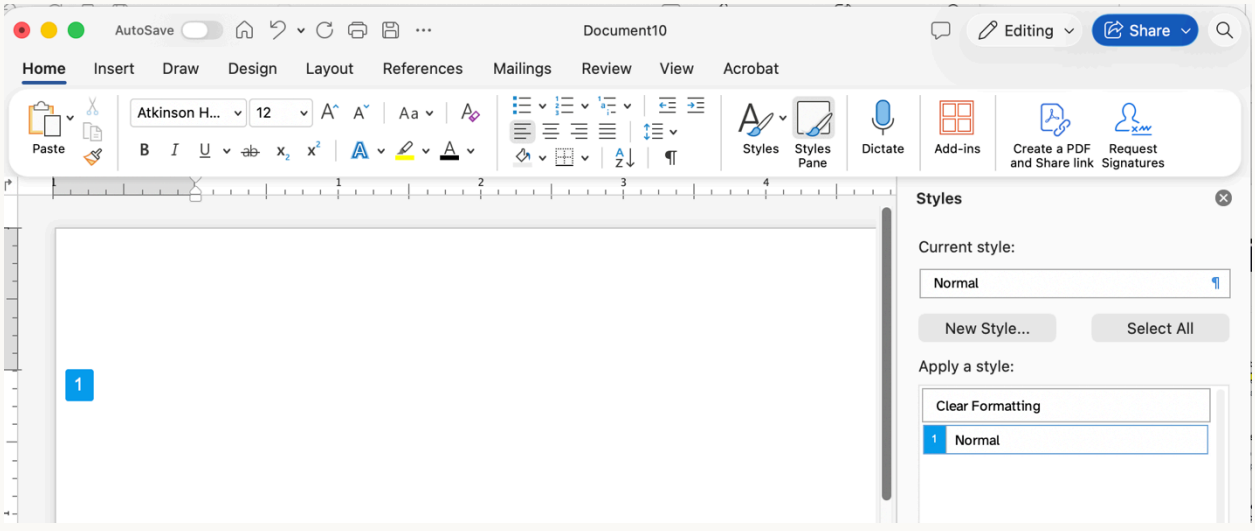
For Presenters

Presenters are encouraged to share **access copies** of their PowerPoint presentations and handouts. An access copy is a publicly-shared and widely-accessible version of a document. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provides a comprehensive list of standards for accessible digital content. Below, we have outlined a few guidelines on how to create access copies for academic presentations. Access copies will be posted to the "Access Guide" tab of the Access Forward Musicology website in the month of November 2026.

Formatting

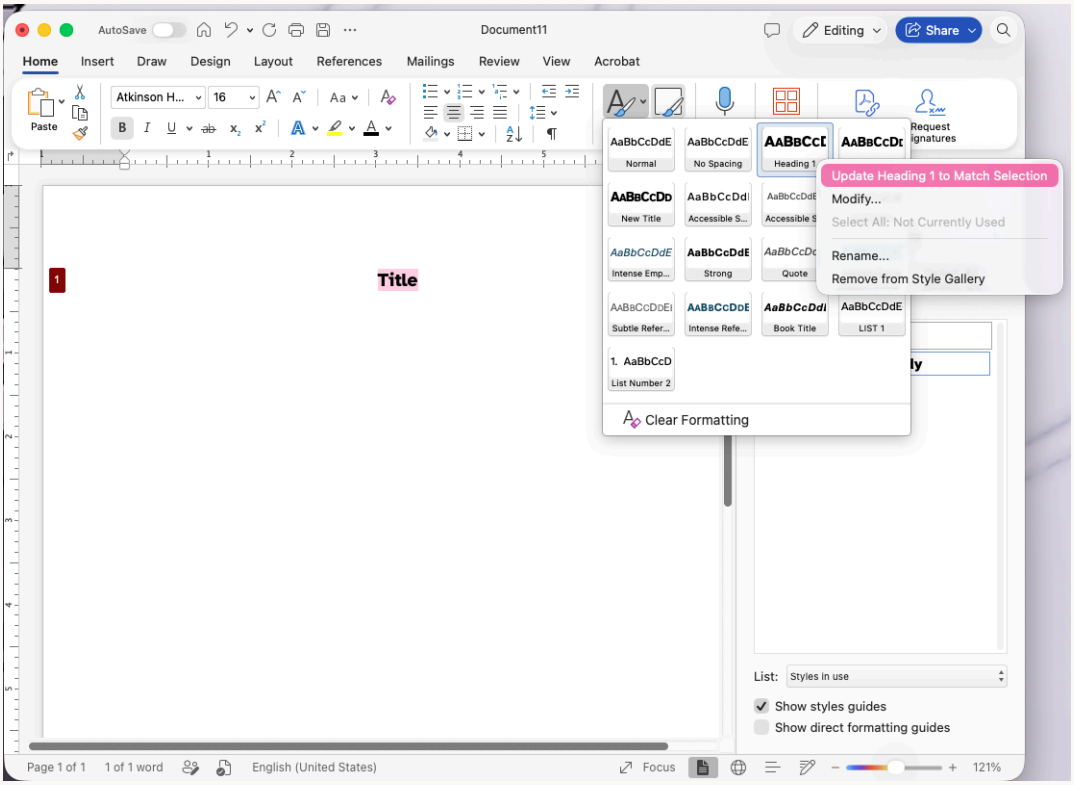
To ensure that a document that is screen reader- and keyboard navigation- accessible, it is important to label different sections of a document according to their hierarchical functions. This is helpful for those who use screen readers, because a screen reader can only navigate sections of a document if the document is tagged appropriately and assigned an appropriate reading order. Otherwise, the screen reader interprets the document as one large, continuous block of text. In Microsoft Word, the **Styles Pane** allows writers to assign heading levels to their text. The Styles Pane is located within the horizontal home bar of Microsoft Word.

Figure 4. Microsoft Office, Styles Pane



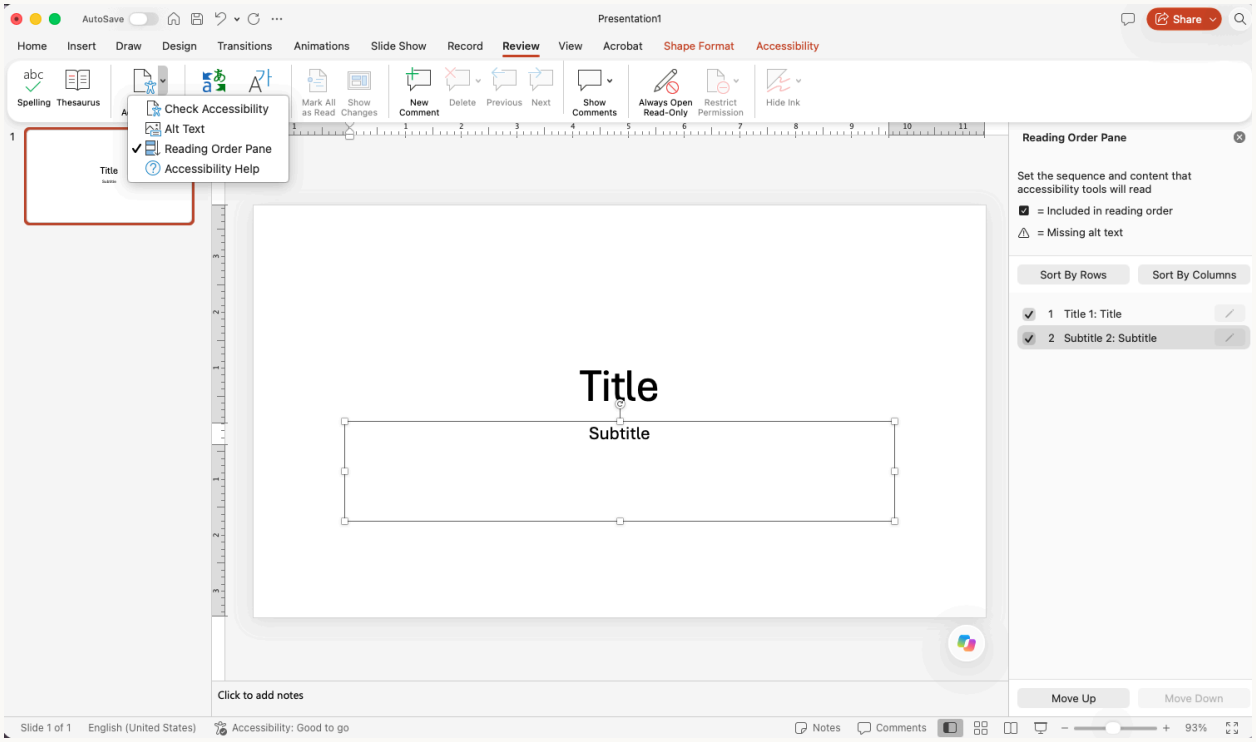
By highlighting a section of text and then right clicking (or control + click on Mac) on the appropriate style within the Styles Pane, you can maintain your document's formatting while adding the appropriate heading level tag. The following example displays how to assign "Heading 1" to the title of a document.

Figure 5. Assign Heading 1 to Document Title



A similar effect can be achieved by using one of the pre-existing template options in Microsoft PowerPoint. To ensure that your presentation flows sequentially, visit the **Reading Order Pane** under the **Check Accessibility Tab** in the horizontal **Review** bar. This will allow you to drag text into the correct order.

Figure 6 Reading Order Pane in PowerPoint



For more detailed instructions on how to manipulate heading levels and reading order, we recommend the following resources:

1. Microsoft, “Make Your Word Documents Accessible to People with Disabilities” Link
2. Microsoft, “Make your PowerPoint Presentation Accessible to People with Disabilities” Link
3. Northeastern University, “Creating Accessible Documents (Microsoft Word)" Link
4. American Library Association, “Useful Digital Accessibility Resources” Link

Descriptive Hyperlinks

Screen readers can skim a document for links in a similar manner to how they skim a document for heading indicators. Make sure that your links are descriptive, allowing screen reader users to understand the destination of the link in the absence of surrounding document context. (See WebAIM, “Links and Hypertext” Link).

Font

PowerPoint presentations should include a highly legible font. We recommend the **Atkinson Hyperlegible Font**, a free, highly-legible font created by the Braille Institute. To download the font, visit the Braille Institute, "Read Easier with Our Family of Hyperlegible Fonts" Link.

Color Contrast

It is important to maintain color contrast between background and foreground objects on PowerPoint slides. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines recommend a 3:1 contrast ratio (See Web Content Accessibility Guidelines Color Contrast Link). To ensure high color contrast, it may be helpful to utilize a color contrast checker. WebAIM, a digital accessibility organization, provides a free, online color contrast checker (See WebAIM, Contrast Checker Link).

In addition to color contrast, please consider the following rules.

Presentation Visuals

- Please use an off-white background with black text for all PowerPoint slides. This allows for high color contrast, while removing triggering color combinations for those with sensory sensitivities.
- Reduce visual clutter. Leave plenty of "white space" (empty background areas) on your slides, so the screen isn't overwhelming or hyper-stimulating. Please limit the amount of text on each slide to no more than six lines, whenever possible.
- Warn your audience if your presentation or embedded video contains sudden bright flashes, unexpected visual shifts, or fast motion (when it cannot be avoided). Give a verbal or written warning to the audience beforehand so photosensitive viewers can look away or close their eyes.

Avoid Flashing/Strobing Content

- Avoid any flashing lights, rapid color inversions, or high-contrast strobing effects. As a general rule, limit any flashing or pulsing to fewer than 3 flashes per second (or avoid it entirely).
- Avoid tight geometric patterns, alternating black-and-white stripes, or checkerboard motifs, which can cause visual strain or trigger seizures.

Animations and Transitions

- Avoid busy, fast, or disorienting transitions like checkerboards, blinds, flash, or random bars. Stick to simple cuts, fades, or no transitions at all.
- Minimize moving elements. Do not use auto-playing animated GIFs, rapidly spinning shapes, or bouncing text that draws intense, erratic focus across the screen.

- Keep animations slow and purposeful. If you use animation effects, make them subtle, slow, and non-repeating. Avoid loops that run continuously in the background.

Alternative Text (ALT Text)

Alternative text is a written description of visual materials. It is helpful to include ALT Text of all images and/or visual materials within a conference presentation. The Official US government website on accessibility lists the following guidelines for writing helpful ALT Text:

- Alt text should be short and to the point.
- Alt text should communicate the same information as the visual content.
- Alt text should refer to relevant content provided by the image, rather than simply describing how the image looks.
- Alt text should not contain any extra or unnecessary information, and should not repeat information that is already provided in the text.
- Alt text must be in the same language as the main content. For example, if you translate an English document into Spanish, you must also translate the alt text into Spanish.

(See Section508.gov, “Authoring Meaningful Alternative Text” Link)

We also encourage presenters to give aural descriptions of all visual materials showcased during their presentation.

Accessibility Review

This conference is aspirational. We will not always get it right, and we commit to naming our failure points and moving through them together with collaborative transparency. The “unconference” spirit runs throughout everything we do: the shape of the event is not fixed in advance, and we trust participants to help us make it what it needs to be. We invite you to share your feedback through the anonymous Access Forward Musicology Accessibility 2026 Review Form, which will be posted at the close of this event.