THE BRAILLISTS FOUNDATION

USING BRAILLE AS A PRESENTATION TOOL, PART 1

USING BRAILLE WITH MICROSOFT POWERPOINT AND GOOGLE SLIDES

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Welcome back and coming up, Using Braille as a Presentation Tool. This session was recorded on Tuesday, 9th February 2021 and was introduced by Dave Williams.

Dave Williams: Hello, good evening and a very warm welcome to the Braillists Foundation Tuesday evening Braille Master Classes, held this time each Tuesday. Tonight, Holly Scott-Gardner will be leading us in Braille and Presentations, how to deliver that killer presentation that you might need for a job interview or a presentation at work or it might be in education, a very important life skill to be able to deliver a presentation and how might Braille support you in that endeavour. So we'll be coming to Holly very shortly.

As always with the Braillists Foundation, these sessions are carefully moderated in line with our moderation policy. So we would ask that you remain on mute unless invited to do otherwise. This just enables everybody to clearly hear what's being said throughout the session.

There will be an opportunity to ask your questions towards the end of the session and I understand from our moderator, Ben, this evening, that the chat function is enabled so if you do have a question and you want to get it out there, then do post that in the chat and we will get to those in due course.

Speaking of Ben, good evening.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Good evening. How are you doing today, Dave?

Dave Williams: I'm very well, sir. Yourself?

Ben Mustill-Rose: Yes, not so bad. Really looking forward to this one actually. I say it every week but I'm in this tricky point with Braille where I feel like it would help me when I do presentations but then I only figure out or think about it the night before. So I'm really glad that we've got this session today because I think this finally might be the thing that convinces me to make the switch from speech to Braille for presentations.

Dave Williams: What we'll do, Ben, later on when we take the questions, we'll get you to just remind everybody how to raise hands. So we'll come back to you in due course and you're going to be keeping an eye on the chat window as well.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Certainly will.

Dave Williams: Thanks very much, Ben. So without any further ado, a voice that hopefully is becoming familiar to many of us over the weeks, background in education, has trained with the NFB in the United States, has become something of an advocate for many blindness related issues on social media and somebody who has been championing Braille on our behalf, good evening, Holly Scott-Gardner.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Hi, Dave, how are you?

Dave Williams: I'm well.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Great. Well, I'm really looking forward to this session. I'm enthusiastic because Braille is obviously something I am passionate about and I am really wanting to get people the skills they need to be able to use Braille in more formal settings, whether that be the workplace or academia or even if someone has an interest and they want to present on that interest, I think it's really important to have those skills.

Dave Williams: Okay. Well, the floor's all yours, Holly.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Great.

So what I'm going to do in this session is really go through everything and then open up for questions at the end. When we get there, as Dave mentioned, we'll come back to Ben and he will talk about raising hands, however if you do want to talk in the chat throughout the presentation, it's absolutely fine. In fact we encourage you to do that and leave your questions so that you don't forget them because this may take a few minutes and I don't want you to forget anything that's come up during the session before we actually get to you.

Dave Williams: Just before you get started, Holly, just a reminder for anyone who is new, the Braillists Foundation runs sessions throughout the week on Zoom. Thursday evening is our popular book club, Braille book club, where you have the opportunity to read with other Braille readers. On Friday we have an open forum where people just have a bit of a catch-up and wind down for the weekend. Then on Monday evening, continuing is our Braille for Beginners session, now with our second cohort. Then of course this time each Tuesday, are our Braille Master Class sessions.

I see George Bell has raised his hand.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We can bring George in quickly, if you like, Holly.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, we can. I do encourage us not to take too many questions at the beginning but if we have an urgent question, then we can.

Ben Mustill-Rose: I'll just bring you in now, George.

George Bell: It' s very quick actually. You seem to have chat disabled.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thank you for spotting that. We will look to enable that if possible so keep an eye on the chat.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Well, I'm going to start by talking about why you actually might want to use Braille while presenting. For some of you, this may seem quite obvious but I think there are lots of people who really hesitate, who go, "Well, I present pretty well using a screen reader. Will Braille actually bring me anything else?" And I think these are valid questions and things actually we should address before we look at how you present in Braille.

So if you're a fast Braille reader, presenting using Braille may result in a more fluid reading experience. Some people can present really well from speech and I want to acknowledge that. It doesn't have to be an either/or. You don't have to be someone who says Braille is the only way to present or speech is the only way to present. They're both valid ways.

So, some people do present very well using speech. But if you find yourself stumbling over the words a lot and constantly having to repeat yourself and check what your screen reader said, Braille may be a more efficient option for you.

It also allows you to be free of headphones and this serves two purposes. So, firstly, you might look more attentive to the audience. This is particularly the case when presenting live and when you're presenting to a sighted audience. So it is very much a perception that if you're wearing headphones, then you're not paying attention and you're not really engaged. Of course we know that's not true, because many of us as blind people are really used to the old trick of one headphone on, one headphone off, where you are actually paying attention. But for a lot of people, it can be quite difficult to actually conceptualise that when they're watching someone.

I think, whilst typically I would say, do what's best for you as a blind person, and I really stand by that, I think it's also important to consider the audience and how engaged they will be if they can see you wearing headphones, particularly if you're presenting in a context like a job interview where you really want to make your best impression possible and whether rightly or wrongly, you're going to have to contend with those kinds of misconceptions.

There's an advantage for you though as a blind person in not wearing headphones and that's that you're better able to read the room. Now, we tend to think of reading the room as something you do by looking but I don't think that has to be the case at all. There's a lot you can gather about your audience by listening to them. Are people fidgeting around? Do you hear chairs constantly squeaking? Do you hear people constantly playing with their phones? And actually if there's a large number of people, particularly if their phones aren't on silent, you'll hear that very distinctive clicking sound as they're texting. Well, we do know that in this day and age, being on your phone, again it doesn't necessarily mean that your audience aren't paying attention. For all you know, they could be taking really comprehensive notes and that is something to consider. But I do think that by not wearing headphones, you get this really good sense of the room and there are these cues in the atmosphere that you can pick up on. Are people really engaged with me? Or do I feel like maybe I need to change the tempo of my presentation a bit? And that's something I've found, when I'm not wearing headphones, I'm really able to do that.

Another advantage for you as a blind person is that you can play audio and video content without having to change the output of your screen reader. So, if you do choose to present with both Braille and speech, I definitely recommending changing the output of your screen reader, or the audio output so that it goes to your headset and the media goes to your speakers. I also recommend wearing only one headphone or investing in bone-conducting headphones. So what I mean by all of this is that what you want to ensure is that if you are using speech, then your audience isn't hearing the speech, especially if you have speakers connected so that you're also sharing an audio clip or a video. So, what you can do in your screen readers is you can actually change where the output of that goes. So you could set it so that your JAWS or NVDA output went to your headset and then your media player output went to the speakers. And I really recommend doing that because you don't want these things to get mixed.

Bond-conducting headphones allow you to have the best of both worlds. They sit just on your cheekbones and they do what the name suggests. They conduct sound through the bones in your face. What this means is that it leaves your ears open so that you're really able to hear what's going on around but you also get the benefit of being able to hear your computer.

So if you're someone who finds that presenting using both speech and Braille is advantageous, then I would definitely recommend investing in bone-conducting headphones. As a blind person, they are a worthwhile purchase anyway because you can do things like listen to GPS when you're out and about travelling and still keep your ears open. So they serve more than one function in your life.

So that's a brief overview on why you might want to use Braille when you're presenting and some of those tips and tricks for getting the most out of it.

I'm going to talk very, very briefly about some available presentation tools and what I mean by this is pieces of software that will allow you to create and view presentations, those pieces of software you will use to actually write your presentations and then to display the slide show.

A number of pieces of software can be used to write presentations and this session is going to focus on two of them, Microsoft PowerPoint and Google Slides. Other options are available such as Keynote which is made by Apple and which you can access on Mac or on iOS devices. However with limited time, I chose to focus on only two pieces of software and I did choose these for strategic reasons.

It's also worth mentioning that you can write a presentation in something like Markdown which would negate the need for presentation software at all. I'm not going to go into how to do that or why to do that, however later on in our series of Master Classes, I am going to deliver a session on note taking for other people and I'll be talking quite extensively about Markdown in that session.

You can also choose to present without a visual aid for the audience and this tends to take place in more public speaking settings and I'm going to talk about that next week.

So, which out of these two pieces of software should you use, between Google Slides or Microsoft PowerPoint? Well, we can't tell you which one you should use to create your presentation because this will depend on a number of factors, such as the technology available to you and your own needs. You might also find that the situation dictates the software. For example, in an academic or workplace setting or where you're working on a group project, the software package may have already been decided in advance.

It's best to know how to use both of these tools, in my opinion, though you're likely to develop a preference for one over the other.

So, what's the difference between Microsoft PowerPoint and Google Slides? Well, firstly the most obvious difference is that they're made by different companies. PowerPoint comes as part of Microsoft Office and Slides is part of the Google suite of products, so if you've heard of things like Google Docs, Slides comes along with that. As Microsoft Word is part of Microsoft Office, so is PowerPoint.

If your workplace or academic institution uses Office 365, you should be able to get access to PowerPoint. Google Slides can be accessed using your Google account. Google Slides is a free web-based tool. All you need to access it is a Google account which most people will have or can create easily.

In contrast, to use PowerPoint most effectively, you'll need to purchase Microsoft Office, though as mentioned getting access to Office 365 through a workplace or academic institution is fairly standard.

The advantage of Google Slides is that as a web-based tool, you can access it from anywhere. If you're using a library computer, you only need to log in using your Google account and access the web and you can access all the presentations that you've been working on as well as group projects.

Presentations are also arguably easier using Google Slides because it's really set up for these projects where you're working on them with a team, so you can add people to the slides, and it's the same with Google Docs and Google Sheets, which is their spreadsheet tool. You can work on these presentations online and it synchs really easily.

Having said all of this, one of the major downfalls of Google Slides is that many companies will expect you to send them a PowerPoint file. So if you're going to deliver a presentation at work and you need to put it on a work computer or let's say you're going to deliver a presentation somewhere else, maybe you're a fund raiser and you produce presentations, often they'll require a file which is compatible with PowerPoint and whilst you can output from Google Slides to PowerPoint, it can often really alter the formatting and make it really visually unappealing. So you end up having to go into PowerPoint anyway to do a lot of the work to clean that up. So, it's really worth bearing in mind.

Also PowerPoint is a more robust tool. It's certainly more well established and you've got a much wider range of options available to you. I personally prefer PowerPoint but whether that's because it's better or because I'm more used to it is up for debate.

I'm very used to receiving PowerPoint presentations in an academic context so I'm really used to reading them, navigating them, building my own, so that's probably why I've developed a preference.

As a blind person you can absolutely use both of them.

I'm now going to look at the process for creating presentations in firstly Google Slides and then moving on to PowerPoint and we'll go through the creation process to viewing the presentation.

Now, to explain how I'm going to do this, I am actually going to talk quite extensively about the keystrokes you'll use for this and you might think, well, why are you talking about keystrokes when we're talking about doing this in Braille and the reason for this is that these keystrokes are very standardised whereas how to reproduce them on your Braille display is not necessarily.

So some displays will have thumb keys. Some will have extra navigation keys. Some will have cursor routing buttons. Some will have all of these things and some displays will have none of these things and others will have a somewhere in between. You might find a command on a Focus display might be different to an Orbit, for example, and I can't go through every single one.

What I am going to do though is talk about the keystrokes you'll use on your computer so as a proficient Braille display user, you can then replicate those keystrokes on the display that you have. I decided that that was the best way of doing this, considering the audience we have and the diversity in equipment and operating systems.

I have produced a handout which you don't need to follow along with this session but it will be available on our website and I encourage you to look at that because it will go in more depth into the specifics of these commands.

So, creating and viewing a presentation using Braille with Google Slides is quite simple. Firstly though you need to open Chrome and navigate to the address bar and the reason I say, open Chrome, is because to use the Google suite of products most effectively, you need to be on a Chrome-based browser so you'll be looking at Chrome or Edge and out of those two options, Chrome really is the best one.

When you're in Google Chrome, navigate to the address bar and I use Alt-D to do this and you want to type in "slides.new". What that does is that opens up a new Google Slides presentation so you can start building your presentation.

To view Google Slides most effectively, there are some settings you're going to need to tweak, particularly if you're a JAWS user. So, to do this, you're going to want to hit JAWS key and F2 and navigate to the Setting Centre. Then go to web/html settings and navigation. You want to make sure that smart navigation is turned off and document presentation mode is set to simple layout and now save those settings and close the Setting Centre.

When you're in the new presentation, you can enable and disable Braille presentation mode by pressing Ctrl-Alt-H. Funnily enough, I actually recommend you disable this and that may sound strange as I'm really talking about using Google Slides with Braille but I've actually found when Braille presentation mode is enabled, it's more of a nightmare to use Slides.

What you'll find now is that you can tab through your presentation. Before you do that, I would recommend choosing one of the very simple layouts, so you can choose Dark mode for example or Light mode, both of these are really simple presentation layouts. Just hit Enter on one of those.

Then you can tab through. You'll hear Title and you can immediately start typing. So you can either type using Braille keyboard entry on your Braille display or using the QWERTY keyboard on your computer.

Once you've typed in your title, you'll want to press Esc, to get out of that text field. Otherwise you'll try tabbing and it will just add tabs into that text field, which is something that you don't want to do.

You'll press tab and find the Subtitle field. Much like the Title field, you just start typing and then to exit that, hit Esc.

This first slide is really used to introduce your presentation. It has the title and the subtitle, so you may want to write, for example, the name of your presentation and then the subtitle, your own name, or you might write the name of it and then the name of your workplace, whatever is appropriate for what you're doing.

To insert a new slide, you want to press Ctrl-M. Now, this new slide will automatically appear and it's going to look slightly different from that first slide. So, instead of just having a Title and Subtitle, it has a Title and body. The body is where you'll want to input more lengthy pieces of text, your bullet points. So in the Title field, you'll want to put the title for that first slide and then in the body field, you'll want to start typing those bullet points.

Now, what I will say, is that again you can tab to these fields or use the appropriate command on your display, start typing and then hit the Esc key to get out of that.

To start your presentation, you'll press Ctrl-F5 and what this does is it starts it in Slideshow format so that if you're presenting live, then people can see your presentation and this is what you'll do when you've built your presentation. You'll keep pressing Ctrl-M to add all these slides until you're done and then you can press Ctrl-F5 to view it.

The text will display on your Braille display and it's really easy to access then. You can use arrow keys to move between slides and the tab key to move between different parts of the slides, from the Title to the body. Ctrl-F5 will take you out of the Slideshow and back to editing mode.

What I will also say, is that with the Braille mode off or disabled, it's really easy to navigate this way and I found it the most effective way of doing it. Definitely sounds counterintuitive disabling the Braille presentation mode but it's worked very well for me. There's a really great video on YouTube actually where an assistive tech trainer goes through how to do all this and you get to hear their speech going through it and I have included the link to that video in the handout. The reason I didn't do this myself today is because I thought, well, you'll probably want to go at different speeds and be trying it out as you go through the video. So actually having a YouTube video that you can go along with is a really good resource. It didn't make sense to recreate something that's very concise and works really well. So that resource is listed in the handout which will go up on the Media page.

Using Google Slides is fairly simple. It can be a bit frustrating if you're editing the presentation along with other people at the same time. I'm not sure there's necessarily a perfect work-around for this. It's unfortunately one of those things. It's in some ways much easier to visually see a screen update than it is when you're using a screen reader and as your Braille display is driven by the screen reader, there's not an awful lot you can do about that, beyond keep working away to using Google Slides until you get used to it.

Creating presentations in PowerPoint is surprisingly similar. You'd think, given that they're made by different companies, the process would be wildly different but it's actually not. Yes, there are differences and I'm going to go over these but luckily many of the keystrokes are the same or similar so that saves you a lot of a headache and this is an advantage because, as I said, it's really best that you feel comfortable using both these pieces of software because you never know what the expectation will be in the workplace or in academia or just for fund-raising, for example.

If you're familiar with Microsoft Office or Windows, creating presentations in PowerPoint is a fairly painless experience. By connecting your display to your computer, you'll be able to read any text displayed on the screen without having to change too many settings, so this is a relief. You can also input text using Braille keyboard entry.

When you open up PowerPoint, you'll be presented with a choice of themes and anyone who's used Office will be really familiar with theirs. You open up, whether it's Word, whether it's PowerPoint, and it comes with this screen where it will say Blank or it might give you various different templates. I always tend towards caution and I use the Blank presentation template. I do this as some of the themes have more questionable results than others and as a screen reader user, some of them are more accessible. Also, some of them visually look quite interesting but interesting isn't always the look you want and as a blind person it's best to be, I would say, minimalistic, or that is my personal preference.

I would highly recommend choosing the Blank template particularly if you're experimenting with your Braille display because there's way less to deal with so you can really get down into the meat of how to access it using Braille and then work on building in all those extra features.

Much like in Google Slides, the first slide you open has a centred Title and a Subtitle. So when you're on the Title, you can start typing and then hit Esc to navigate out of the text field. So this is all very familiar. Again, you use tab to get to the Subtitle and fill it in and then make sure you hit Esc to get out of it.

One nice tip for using PowerPoint is that if you've already filled in those text fields but want to get back into them to edit them, you can hit F2 and it will open up the edit box. So if you tab to where the Title is and hit F2, it will open up that text field and you can edit the Title. This is really useful because what you don't want to do is start hitting backspace or start typing, accidentally delete what you've already written if all you want to do is change one character. So that F2 will take you into that text field without actually changing anything.

It's also a useful command because you can use that F2 command in Excel, for example, and edit a cell, so if you've written a very long number and, again, you just want to delete one character, hit F2 and it will take you into that cell. So useful whether you're working with presentations or spreadsheets.

Again, very familiar command, use Ctrl-M to add a new slide and as you'll remember, this was the command used in Google Slides. This is really useful because you don't have to remember too many commands and if you're like me, the fewer commands you have to remember, the better. It definitely makes for a more painless experience.

Again, the second slide looks slightly different from the first one, so again, as with Google slides, it has a Title and then what's called an Object field. So in the Title, as I mentioned with Google Slides, you'll write whatever you want the Title of that slide to be and in the Object field, you'll write your bullet points. In PowerPoint that Object field, once you go to edit it, it already has bullet points in there. Now, that can change, depending on what layout you use and what options to change. I'm not going to go into all those options because this isn't really a session on the ins and outs of PowerPoint itself, but needless to say, there is a lot you can change.

To navigate between slides when editing, press Page Up and Page Down. Again, how you do that may look slightly different depending on the display you're using.

To start the slideshow, you'll want to use F5 and the view for these slides when you're in Slideshow mode, I think it's really nice as a Braille display user. You can simply arrow through the content or read it on your display using some keys. So to move between slides in Slideshow mode, again you can use Page Up and Page Down. There are different commands you can use to move between slides and the Microsoft website has a whole list of all those keystrokes.

One thing I do want to mention is that there are different view modes which can be activated in PowerPoint and it pays to know what these are so you can choose the most appropriate view mode for the situation you're in. So when editing, you'll be using what we call the Normal view and that is just when you can tab around and when you can fill in those fields. I've already mentioned viewing the presentation as a slideshow and you'll want to do this if you're presenting on a large screen to an audience. So what Slideshow mode does is it occupies the whole screen and so when you're delivering the presentation to an audience, you really want them to be able to see all of those slides and the content on those slides and so Slideshow mode really is the best option for that situation.

Presenter view can be activated using Alt-F5. Unlike the Slideshow mode, this doesn't occupy the whole screen and it has several different options as well. It's best to use when your audience have their own copy of the presentation or where you're using it for your own reference only. So let's say you're in a situation where actually you're not displaying the presentation on a screen, you sent out that presentation to your audience in advance. They're viewing it on their own computers, you may want to use Presenter mode. Now, what I will say about this, is I personally found Slideshow mode way less cluttered so even if I'm reading the slides myself, I tend to use that mode. However, Presenter mode does offer some interesting features, such as a timer, so if you want to time the delivery of your presentation, you might want to check out some of those features.

There's this very helpful list of keystrokes available on the Microsoft website and I've included those in the handout. Those keystrokes really cover everything, from creating the presentation to viewing it to all the different things you can do or for some things such as move between slides, there are multiple keystrokes you can choose from.

There's a few things to remember when creating presentations and some of these might sound like they have nothing to do with Braille but actually they do.

So making accessible presentations is really important because if you need to share them with an audience, you want to make sure that they can access it. This is particularly true if you're emailing your presentation out as a file. So both the Google suite of products and Microsoft Office allow you to add alt text to any images you've included in your presentation. This is important for accessibility reasons but it will also help you when presenting in Braille. So, one thing I always say is that it's not only important to think of how you can make your content accessible to your audience but also to yourself and I think sometimes we cut these corners and go, "Oh, it'll be fine, it'll be fine, I don't need to do this," and then actually you end up having a big headache later because you really should have build them in from the start.

So, if there's no alt text, you'll have to remember what images you've included in your presentation and where they are. Whereas if you add alt text, you can read those descriptions on your Braille display. And this is a really good thing to remind people of because actually alt text descriptions aren't displayed on screen, so if you don't want your audience to be able to see them, if you're presenting to a sighted audience and you've included some really nice pictures, and particularly if your presentation's very picture-heavy, you don't necessarily want your audience to see those long text descriptions but you want to see them. So having them as alt text is really helpful because you can sneakily read them on your Braille display and your audience doesn't see them. That means they get this really nice visual experience and you also get this very accessible experience. This is something I found really helpful myself because it means I'm not having to mess around trying to switch between the presentation and my notes and trying not to push things off the screen but my audience doesn't necessarily see all of that extra information I have.

So, the most important thing I would say to be aware of is that using a Braille display with these products requires you to be comfortable with the commands used on your display and I have mentioned this already but it's worth setting these out as different displays won't necessarily handle them the same way.

Alternatively one other thing you can do is still use your QWERTY keyboard and just put your Braille display in front of it. So if you're using your laptop, you can have your laptop and your display in front of it or you can plug in a keyboard or use a wireless keyboard. What this means is if you're really comfortable with the QWERTY keyboard commands but less so with the Braille display commands but you still want that Braille output, then you can use those standardised keyboard commands on your QWERTY keyboard and still read in Braille. This is actually something I really like to do because I would say I'm a very efficient user particularly of Windows using a QWERTY keyboard. I cannot use Windows proficiently with a Braille display. I don't like it particularly. I love having Braille output so I love being able to read in Braille. That's something that's very important to me but actually navigating my computer using a Braille display is fine and I do it and I can do it but I know these keystrokes really well. So actually I can use my QWERTY keyboard and get Braille and to me that's the best of both worlds. There's no shame in doing that. There's no shame in mixing and matching your technology and saying, "Well, I prefer doing it this way in this situation and then I prefer just the Braille display in another situation."

Also, if you really aren't comfortable handling the technology, you might be in a position to have someone else move between the slides for you. This is where you'll verbally control the presentation so you'll be speaking and you'll say, "Next slide," and the person will click the next slide for you. Now, you should still know how to navigate through the slides using your display but it's worth mentioning that it isn't just blind people who sometimes have someone else controlling a presentation for them. Particularly in group projects, one person is responsible for managing the transitions between slides and the other presenters just give them a nod or in the case of a blind person maybe verbally tell them when to move between those slides. It's totally okay if you want to do that. The most important thing is that you find a solution which is effective for you.

Finally I'm going to talk about one thing that concerns me as a blind person and I'm sure concerns many of you which is how do I know my presentation is on screen and displaying correctly. Whilst this isn't specifically a Braille question, I think it's a concern that's shared by many blind people and it really deters us from delivering presentations and actually if we're going to get the most out of it, we need to know how to do this.

This is partly why I tend to use the Blank presentation theme or the more simplistic theme in Google Slides because I can guarantee that it's going to be minimalistic and that I'm going to have fewer problems with it not displaying correctly.

It's good to keep bullet points on presentations short and slides less overwhelming but designed to be a visual aid and it's okay to have a large number of slides but with each one having a smaller, more manageable amount of content. So this will prevent a slide from appearing cluttered and I know this is something I really had to adjust to as a blind person because I could write all this content and I didn't think it looked particularly cluttered and then people would go, "Whoa, that's a lot for a slide." So, again, always err on the side of caution. I'll write a few bullet points and then maybe start a new slide.

So, for context, I sometimes receive presentations as a university student that have over 40 or 50 slides. This is fairly typical and I was shocked at first. This did really highlight to me that it's okay to have less content on each slide and make that content more valuable and have a greater number of slides.

You can use screen reader commands to check the format of your text. So, for example, in JAWS and NVDA you can use the Insert key of course and that will tell you about the font. So that means you won't have accidentally put something into Bold or right-aligned your entire presentation by accident without realising. I recommend being really familiar with these screen reader commands because they will save you a whole lot of headache later on.

Having images is absolutely more tricky, as I've said, in terms of how you know as a blind person what those images are. Use the alt text because that will save you some hassle when you're presenting. But there's just no way as a blind person to know if the image is centred perfectly or if it's been overly compressed or if it's falling off the screen. Unfortunately the only solution really is to work with someone who can give you visual feedback. If you're a disabled student, you're absolutely entitled to this kind of support through the SA and likewise in the workplace, this might be some support you receive through Access To Work.

If you're creating the presentation for something like a fund-raising event, you could use Be My Eyes or Aira and these are both visual interpreting services. Be My Eyes is actually free and Aira is a paid solution and they work slightly differently. This isn't a product endorsement for either of these products but more of a mention that they exist and it's something to explore if you're a blind person who finds you're solo-delivering a lot of presentations.

You could also consider jumping on Zoom with a friend or colleague to test the presentation in advance or using TeamViewer so that they can view your screen

It's also worth remembering that when you're reading your presentation in Braille, if you're using Unified English Braille as your Braille output, you'll be able to gain certain information about the format of that text, for example, is it in bold, is it in italics, is it in all caps? And I would recommend being very conscientious of that and paying attention to it because it can tell you a lot about your presentation and particularly if you're on a slightly larger display, you'll be able to see things like if you're text is centred. However be aware this isn't always reliable because sometimes displays can do interesting things with wrapping text.

So we are actually at ten past and we have 20 minutes left and I now want to open up to the chat and for any questions.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thanks for that, Holly. That was really informative. I think that's a great example of how you could in theory just Google all of this stuff but it really helps to hear from someone who's actually done it before. I know that I've learned a lot.

So, what I thought we'd do if it's okay with you is I'll talk a little bit about how to raise hands, just in case anyone doesn't know. We'll also go to some really interesting questions we've got in the chat, just to give people a bit of time to raise hands and then we'll go to their questions.

Holly Scott-Gardner: That sounds great.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So, we've got a few very good questions in the chat.

Is there a way to stop everyone from hearing your screen reader when you're presenting virtually? I find that when I use Zoom everyone can hear JAWS but not if I use Google Meet or Teams and I don't think I'm doing anything differently.

Holly Scott-Gardner: So, yes. It really depends on your system settings. So, sometimes, for example, in Zoom, and it really depends on the context of what you're saying, if you're screen sharing, then you might have it set actually for your desktop sound to come through. So you might want to change that. Now, this can be tricky because you might actually want your desktop sound to come through, if, as part of your presentation, there's a video. I mentioned this at the very beginning but I do recommend that you set your screen reader output to something very different from the rest of your desktop output and that might involve, if you're using a headset for all of these, something like Virtual Audio Cable which starts to get into more complicated sound settings but I can expand on that in the handout if that would be helpful because I do think that's a good point about presenting virtually.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Definitely important in today's environment.

Now, I just remembered that I didn't actually give the instructions to raise hands so I'll just quickly go through that now. If you'd like to raise your hand for a question, you can do so by pressing Alt-Y on Windows, Option Y on Mac, star-nine if you're dialling in via phone. If you're on an iDevice such as an iPhone, iPad or iPod touch, if you press the More button at the bottom right of your screen, you'll find the Raise Hand button and we will come to your questions very shortly. We've got two more questions in the chat and then we'll go to raised hands.

Next question: Will Braille read you a picture slide and if not, how do you describe a picture slide if it was given to you at the beginning of the presentation?

Holly Scott-Gardner: So, yes, there's two layers to this answer. If you're building the presentation yourself, what I really recommend is when you add that picture, use the alt text feature and I didn't go over in this the specific keystrokes for doing that, however they are on the handout. So what alt text or alternative text is, it's not viewed by a sighted person but, yes, if you're using a display, you will be able to access it. If you receive a presentation from someone else and they have chosen not to include alt text, unfortunately there isn't a lot you can do about that as a blind person, beyond using some kind of auto image recognition software like Seeing AI, and interestingly in Microsoft they can auto-generate alt text with sometimes good results, sometimes not so great results. But that is an option. Otherwise unfortunately you just have to ask the person delivering the presentation to describe the image they've included. It really depends if you're building that presentation yourself or have the capacity to edit it, yes, you can make it so that Braille will access that alt text. If someone else hasn't chosen to do that, unfortunately you just have to ask them for a description.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thanks for that, Holly. I agree that the Microsoft auto-generated alt text can be slightly interesting sometimes, not always accurate and the other interesting thing that you sometimes find is that if people don't include alt text, you sometimes get the time that the photo was taken so that's a great way of figuring out whether someone's done a presentation at the very last minute or very early in the morning or late at night.

One more question from the chat for now, then we'll go to hands. We've got a good few hands raised now.

From your experience, is it imperative for a totally blind person to have sighted assistance when presenting slides to a sighted audience and is it recommended to do so when lecturing on a topic which requires slides that the blind person could never see?

Holly Scott-Gardner: This is a really great question. I don't think it's imperative. I think there are advantages to having someone check over your presentation in advance, particularly if you're a perfectionist. I am and I get very hung up about making mistakes so I will use a service like Aira because I can use that service on my own terms to check my presentation in advance and do things like checking the formatting looks okay. It's not required though and you can absolutely build a presentation, go to let's say your university, deliver it to your sighted classmates, do a great job as a blind person and not need a sighted person to be involved. You don't have to. I think a lot of this is down to personal choice.

Now, if you don't have access to those slides, it's going to be very difficult for you to present. So, if, for example, someone else has produced a presentation and then asked you to present, this is why I really advocate for having them available in Braille as well because you need to be able to see what's on those slides to refer to them, as a sighted person would. This isn't necessarily having a sighted person involved. It's just having equal access to those materials.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Good point to consider.

So we'll check in with the chat once again towards the end of the session but I know we've got a fair few hands raised now. So we're going to come to Theo first, then Claudia.

Theo: So my question is, you said that you could customise what was output where, so you could have the screen reader come out of headphones for example and the audio from the slides coming out of the computer, particularly with Zoom and stuff. How would you set that up?

Holly Scott-Gardner: That very much depends on what screen reader you're using, also what version of Windows you're using. I would hope these days Windows 10 but there's no guarantees in the world. I'm sure someone's still using XP, somewhere. It also depends on whether you need to use something like Virtual Audio Cable.

For example, in NVDA, when you go into the Settings, in the Synthesiser Settings, you can actually choose the output there for your screen reader. So you could set it to your headset and then set the default output of your computer to your speakers which would then output anything in PowerPoint, for example, to your speakers.

What I can do in the handout is link to some of the more common ways of doing this with instructions, if that would be helpful.

Theo: Yes, okay, thank you. I'm also curious to know how to do this with JAWS and then also Google Meet and Teams because I do all my lessons on Google Meet so that would be helpful to know when you're trying to share audio.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, okay.

Theo: Also, something I have to contribute is that I have Google Drive file stream installed and I have been able to create a PowerPoint in Google Drive. So you can upload PowerPoint presentations to Google Drive and they can be converted to Slides.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, this is an option for group projects. What I would do at university is I would write my own slides but I would let someone else take charge of formatting. I think people are understanding as long as you do your fair share of the work. That is a good point that there is cross-compatibility so you can output from Google Slides to PowerPoint and also you can upload a PowerPoint to Google Slides. The main concern is formatting so that's something where you've got to invest a bit of time but if it's a deal-breaker, then it's worth knowing about those things.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thank you, Theo. We've got a few more hands raised with just over ten minutes to go. We're going to Claudia first and then James.

Claudia: I know you said to make a couple of slides if you've got a lot of content and I also know that when you start writing in the slide, sometimes it can overflow because I was doing a presentation myself and somebody next to me said, whoa, it's overflowing so you'd better create a new slide to split them up. Do you have a guide of how many lines would you put in a slide? Or would you rely on sighted assistance?

Holly Scott-Gardner: So I definitely do both of these things. I really try to limit myself to only a few bullet points per slide and I try to keep those bullet points brief. If I was speaking, I might deliver a really long sentence, what I might do is just put the statistic in the bullet point and then I'll expand on that as I speak. Then once I've built my presentation, I just go through it with someone, rather than having someone with me as I build it because that would take up loads of their time, I design the whole thing and then I just get someone to quickly glance over it and make sure that there's no overflow.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to James next and then Edward Bates.

James: Thank you. I just wanted to pick up on a couple of points. First, let's talk about Claudia's point, how do you know if it's overfull. If you're using JAWS and PowerPoint, it does actually give you warnings like there are one too many lines based on the current font size. I also wanted to talk about the audio coming back through Zoom from your speech synthesizer. As this is a Braille session, I'm going to be quite candid and say, have you considered turning your speech off in the screen reader? So most screen readers do provide a keystroke to turn the voice off. In JAWS for example it's Insert and Space followed by the letter S. In NVDA I think it's the NVDA key and the letter S. Other screen readers also have keys as well to do it. So while you're presenting, turn the speech off and just use the Braille and then of course you can still use some of the screen reader hotkeys, I think, like, check the battery status or check the time or read the Window title, etc, should you wish to.

The other point about audio: headphones. Holly mentioned headphones, having a headphone in one ear if you need to, to check the speech.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Thanks for the tip about JAWS. That's definitely true. I think sometimes, certainly when I'm formatting text, whether it's PowerPoint or a Word document, I turn on far more of my speech settings than I otherwise would. I have different settings for different programs which is always something to consider.

As for using your screen reader with no speech, I do think there are cases for that and this would certainly be one because if you're a proficient enough Braille reader to be delivering a presentation in Braille, you should be able to manage without the screen reader output. And you are correct that you can still use those screen reader commands.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We only have one more hand raised now and that is Edward. And now some more hands have appeared so then we're going to come to Marcia.

Edward: Good evening. Thanks for the presentation, Holly. I've got a quick point about when you're actually presenting the presentation. I know you said that you could set timers for how many seconds you get between each slide. Could you just explain that a bit more because I'm thinking if I'm presenting something, I don't want to jump forward without me having any control over it? Do you have to actually manually input those time settings or is that set in the presentation anyway before you start presenting? Does that make sense?

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, it makes sense. So that is actually when you're using PowerPoint in Presenter mode. This is not an ideal mode if you're putting your presentation on a big screen. It's more timers that you can use to practice your presentation and time yourself delivering it and then it has this helpful built-in timer so you can look at how many minutes it took you to deliver your presentation. And you can absolutely disable that timer as well. There's a pause button on there so you can just pause that. I wouldn't recommend using that mode if you're actually delivering your presentation if it's on a screen. You really want it in Slideshow mode at that point so that it's in full screen and when it's in Slideshow mode, it doesn't automatically move it or have a timer.

Edward: Okay, thanks very much.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to Marcia next and then we have a few questions in the chat.

Marcia: Thank you very much. This presentation could not come at a better time as this afternoon at 4 my time, I've got to actually give a presentation to a class on musical description and theatre and how it all comes together.

I was wondering, number one, where could I grab those handouts, particularly in light of the PowerPoint stuff.

Holly Scott-Gardner: The handouts will go up on our website. However what I'm going to do quickly is paste in the chat a link to the PowerPoint commands so that you can at least access those quickly.

Marcia: Okay, so that would be Alt-H for the chat, right?

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, and that link is in there. So that gives you a list of keyboard commands when using PowerPoint and it's a really handy list.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thank you, Marcia. Lots of comments in the chat thanking you for such a great presentation and thanking people for the tips.

George Bell notes that he knew a Braillist who actually had presentation notes in a small A5 booklet of Braille.

Interesting question from Carla: Is there a way of giving presentations in Team? I would like to turn my speech off and read it in Braille.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Personally, I have found giving presentations in Teams an absolute nightmare. The best way I've found is to ask whoever's delivering it to drop me the file, which they can fairly easily do on Teams and then I can open it in PowerPoint and follow along. I know that's not the greatest answer but that's the workaround I've found. I'm using Teams exclusively at university and I find Teams completely baffling and not as robust as most Microsoft products.

Ben Mustill-Rose: I'm more of a Zoom person than Teams. But my understanding is that with Teams, if someone shares a presentation as opposed to their screen which may also contain the presentation, that is meant to be accessible, however it's that old chestnut of accessible versus usable.

If someone shares a Google Slides presentation, what are the keystrokes to edit it? This is for a student who's using a BrailleSense Polaris and JAWS.

Holly Scott-Gardner: So I'm assuming you're using your BrailleSense as a display rather than as a standalone device because that will change things. So I found that when someone shares it with me, it actually just opens it up in editing mode, though what you have to make sure is that that person has given you permission to edit it. If not, what you can do is save that document as a copy to your Google drive and then you'll be able to edit it.

Ben Mustill-Rose: I think this may be our last question from the chat. Apologies to anyone that we didn't get to.

Are there documents to show you how to make accessible PowerPoints out on the web or do you have to get help from a specialist organisation and if so, who?

I guess this is about making PowerPoints that are accessible if a blind person wants to consume them.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, so this is a really good question and actually this is another reason why I really value Microsoft because all these documents are available in their Help section of the website. So if you actually look on the Microsoft Office website and their Help system, you can find documents on producing accessible presentations, including how to add alt text, adding captioning, things like that and so I will put the links to those specific ones in the handout but they are available on the website. They're free to access and they're produced by Microsoft so the beauty of this is that they stay up-to-date because Microsoft reflects the latest changes to Office in these documents.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Thanks for that, Holly. I believe we managed to get through everyone and once again, many thanks for all the incredibly kind comments in the chat.

Right now, we'll hand over to Holly and Dave to wrap things up.

Holly Scott-Gardner: So just briefly, I want to say thanks to everyone for coming along. I'm really glad so many of you found it informative. If you do have more questions, you can email help@braillists.org and they will get forwarded on to the relevant person. This will go up on our Media page at braillists.org/media. Next week we'll be continuing with the presentation theme but we'll be talking more about public speaking settings, so where you don't have slides to go along with it, you're standing up and delivering a speech. So how do you produce cue cards in Braille? How do you actually set up the room to manage using a Braille display or your folder of notes? All these kinds of things that you need to think about as a blind public speaker. So I'll be going over all of those next week at the same time.

Dave Williams: So that email address again is help@braillists.org. If you want to carry on the conversation, you can of course join the Braillists Forum which you can find from the braillists.org website, braillists.org/forum. We're on Twitter, @braillists. If you would like to avail yourself of a copy of the handout that will accompany this evening's session, that will be available on our media page, braillists.org/media.

Thank you very much to Ben Mustill-Rose for moderation and to Holly Scott-Gardner for your presentation on presentations this evening. It's been very informative.

We look forward to next week's session which will be taking presentations to the next level and focusing on public speaking.

Book club's back on Thursday, open forum on Friday, Braille for Beginners on Monday.

From all of us here at the Braillists, take care and until next time, bye for now.