THE BRAILLISTS FOUNDATION

USING BRAILLE AS A PRESENTATION TOOL, PART 2

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Matthew Horspool: This episode of Braillecast Extra is made possible thanks to a grant from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. For more information about the Trust, visit its website at wcmt.org.uk.

Welcome back. Coming up, Using Braille for Public Speaking, recorded on Tuesday, 16th February 2021 and introduced by Dave Williams.

Dave Williams: Hello and a very warm welcome back to the Braillists Foundation, our regular Tuesday evening Master Class session, taking place each Tuesday at 7:30pm. This week we will be exploring the topic of using Braille for delivering presentations, so public speaking, if you're a great orator or maybe you've got that first speech lined up, you never know when you might be called on to do a best man speech or delivering a eulogy, so it's an important skill to be able to have and how can Braille support you in that endeavour. Well, as ever, Holly Scott-Gardner will be guiding us through this subject and of course taking your questions as well.

A reminder, of course, the session will be run in line with our moderation policy. So, we would ask that you remain on mute unless invited to do otherwise. On moderation duties this evening is Ben. Good evening, Ben.

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

Dave Williams: I'm very, very well, sir. Good to have you as always. Thanks very much for your moderation and at the appropriate time you'll advise everybody on how they can raise hands and how the moderation works. Hopefully most people are fairly familiar with that process by now.

So that's it for introductions. Just a reminder that the Braillists Foundation is dedicated to promoting Braille, more Braille is pretty much our strapline, so we do this in a number of ways. On Thursday evenings we have our regular weekly book club which now has been subdivided into an intermediate and a more advanced group so if you were thinking that the book club perhaps wasn't for you, maybe now's the time to give it a try because there are different groups available. That's from 6pm on a Thursday. On Friday we have our open forum where we can take your questions and have a catch-up just before the weekend gets underway. Monday evening, continuing apace next week will be week seven of our Braille for Beginners course and that's at 7pm. All the information about that and all Braillists events is on the Braillists website, braillists.org/events. Don't forget you can join our forum, Braillecast is our podcast and we're also active on social media @braillists on Twitter and you'll see us popping up on various Braille-related Facebook groups as well.

That's pretty much all from me, Dave Williams, the Chair of the Braillists Foundation. It now gives me great pleasure to hand over to our leader of all things Braillists training, Holly Scott-Gardner. Good evening to you, Holly.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Hi, Dave, thank you for your introduction. I'm really excited to be back teaching this second part to Braille for presenting and public speaking.

So, last week there were many of you who joined us to learn about using Braille to deliver presentations but specifically with various pieces of software such as PowerPoint and Google Slides.

We're going to build on that today and look at actually handling the public speaking side of things. So, maybe you don't have a presentation to go along with it that has any slides. What you're doing is getting up on a stage or in front of a room to make a speech, and how do you do that as a blind person. And we're going to focus very heavily on Braille, both hard copy Braille and using a display but I'm also going to talk about some general tips for being a blind public speaker because I think these things are all very much related. It's all about being comfortable on that stage and being comfortable making your speech and managing any equipment you have with you.

I will, unlike last week, take some questions throughout the session. I will split it into different topic areas and then take questions after each one and I'm just going to hand over to Ben to explain a bit about how you can ask your questions.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Great. So, there are a few different ways to raise your hand in a Zoom meeting for anyone who isn't familiar, depending on what platform you're using. If you're on Windows, you can press Alt-Y; if you're on Mac, it's Option Y; if you are dialling in on a telephone, that's star and nine; or if you're on an iDevice like an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch, you can find the More button in the bottom-right of your screen and then press the Raise Hand button from there

For anyone who hasn't been to any of our events before, we try to give people a little bit of warning if we're going to come to them, just so that you don't get caught off guard. So we'll say, "First we're going to come to Holly and then after Holly, we're going to come to Matthew," just so that everyone knows what order will be doing the hands in.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Great. So we're going to start this session by talking a bit about writing your script. You could say this is a point of contention or debate. Do you write a script when you deliver a speech? Now, some people will say, "No, no, I don't write a script, I just have bullet points of five things I want to include in my speech." Other people will write a word for word script. There is no one right way to prepare to deliver a speech and I think this is really important to stress that whether you're a blind person, whether you're a sighted person, how you choose to deliver your speech is really up to you and your individual presenting style.

I find that I do different things in different situations. When I'm delivering something like this which is, in a way, a form of public speaking, I actually have bullet points that I refer to, to ensure that I've covered everything I want to say. When I'm delivering something like a keynote speech, I might actually write out the entire script and read it, usually off a display, though not always, it depends on what I have available to me.

This is something that you can make a decision on based on what setting you're in and who you are as a person and what you feel most comfortable doing.

But, if you do choose to write a script, there are several ways in which you can use Braille to do it.

I personally always choose to write my presentation script using electronic Braille. So, I'll write it on a Braille display paired with a computer or I might write it on a stand-alone display or Braille notetaker and the reason I do this is because very, very rarely is the first thing I write what I end up with. Usually I write something and it's okay, not horrible and then I read through it and I think that whilst it's not horrible, it's also not very good and I need to make changes or when I read out this sentence, it doesn't flow very well or even I might think something like, "Well, I like these two points but they definitely need to be swapped so the second point actually needs to come first." And the real advantage of drafting your script using electronic Braille is that you get all the advantages of Braille, being able to proof-read, really being able to sit down with your thoughts and delve into what you're writing in a very personal way but you also get the advantage of being able to edit it very easily.

When trying to edit hard-copy Braille, absolutely possible. You could put another sheet of paper in a Perkins or in your slate and stylus and while you're reading through your original script, you could take notes and say, "Oh, on third paragraph, change point A and replace it with this," and then rewrite the whole script with those changes implemented. Absolutely possible but far more time-consuming than editing electronically. Some blind people will disagree with this. Some people really find the whole process of drafting by hand in hard copy and going through that really long process is an important part of their planning for the script and I don't want to say that that isn't correct, because I think, again, it's very personal. It's almost like novel writing. You'll find that some sighted people who write books will write, even now, in notebooks and they'll have all these notebooks all over their house that they write their novel in and other people will write their entire novel on a computer. I think that is what it comes down. As a writer, there isn't actually a right way to write, which is an interesting sentence to say.

So it's up to you how you do it but I would definitely recommend, if you're unsure, start with drafting using electronic Braille and if you're finding it really isn't working for you then absolutely go to hard copy, because you're just going to have all this flexibility with editing and that's something I really value in writing this script. I go to deliver the presentation and I always make sure I rehearse my presentation or my speech multiple times and I'm always changing things. I'm always thinking, "Well, actually this doesn't work very well."

When it comes to actually delivering the presentation though, if I'm using a script, I try to make sure I have it in hard copy. This isn't always possible. In October of 2019, I delivered a speech at a blindness convention and I used a Braille display to deliver that speech and why I used a Braille display was because I wrote the speech the night before I delivered it and I didn't have a Perkins or a slate and stylus with me so I was limited by effectively the technology I had available to me. Did it work? Absolutely. It went off without any problems whatsoever. But, as we know, technology can fail and unfortunately does fail far more often than we would like it to. So, one thing I find really, really important is if possible to have a back-up copy of my speech written out in hard copy Braille and if possible I'll read from that copy. That means that I'm not relying on a piece of tech that could fail.

I also have a horror story about delivering a speech at the university where I was using a Braille display paired with my phone and I wasn't very comfortable with this configuration. I didn't like the display I had. I could count the number of times I'd used it on one hand because I didn't like the display. I didn't like pairing it with my phone and how I'd paired it and the app I was using to read from, and every time I reached the end of the page, it just wouldn't automatically flip to the next page and I had no idea what command I needed to press to get it to flip because I'd just written this very, very quickly and thought, "Oh, I'll be fine, I'm a good tech user, no problem whatsoever." It was a disaster and all I could think was, "Well, if I'd actually had these notes in hard copy, whether it was notes or the full speech, this would have been far less painful." As it was, I just had to go with what I knew was in my speech and try to wing it and there is something to be said for that. Everyone makes mistakes, everyone has technology failures or experiences, embarrassing things. It's not just you, it's not just because you're blind. Sighted people go to deliver speeches and they spill their coffee on their notes before they go up on stage or again, they're reading off a computer and their computer runs out of battery or something else hideous happens. It's part of what you expect as a public speaker, at some point in your career, it's going to go wrong and a lot of how this turns out in the end is up to how you handle it. You can either cry or shout or throw a tantrum, or you can laugh it off or come up with a very calm alternative and I would definitely recommend the latter. There's no point in being angry or upset. It doesn't get you anywhere, it actually increases your stress levels and the truth is nobody likes to watch you fail. Nobody wants you to fail, unless perhaps you're a politician, and then we maybe get some satisfaction from it. But in general nobody wants to watch you make a mistake and so the audience are really rooting for you and they want you to do well.

So, I think if you do experience technology failure, it's okay to just brush it off, if you think you can make a joke out of it, do. If you think you can actually hide it and not let the audience know it happen, do that as well. You have options.

It's worth thinking about, "What will I do in these situations?" The truth is however you can never actually predict how your tech is going to fail. You think you've prepared for all eventualities. You haven't. So, I do advise hard copy Braille or preferably both because, again, you could have your Braille display nice and safe, on a strap, hanging over your shoulder, for example, and then you spill your coffee on your hard copy notes so actually you have to go back to your display. So, it could go either way.

Related to this is using cue cards. Cue cards are something to be used when you don't want the entire script written out but you do want a text-based prompt. This is particularly useful if you're delivering a speech and you just want some bullet points and you want them in a certain order. If I'm not speaking from a script, I really like to write down any statistics I'm going to use because inevitably I'm going to forget them. They're the one thing I'm going to forget. How many percent was it or how many people did this or in what year did this happen? So I try to note down those really important things that I think I'm never going to remember. Maybe what I'll do is at the top of the card, I might jot down the first point I want to make and then a couple of things relating to that. So, let's say I'm talking about blindness and employment, I might talk about how the employment rate for blind people is lower than most disabled people and then what I might do is write down the number of blind people in employment, the number of disabled people in employment, the number of non-disabled people in employment. So, then, I'm not writing down everything I want to say but what I do have written down is those really important things that I need to make sure I include in my speech.

How to produce cue cards if you're a blind person, because surely having a handful of cards and trying to read them is a nightmare? Absolutely. So, lots of sighted people will just have their cue cards and they might lay them out and I find that doesn't work for me because what I do is I go to read one of the cards and then I accidentally knock the rest of them out of order or I slide one too far and it falls off the table and then I have to go and try to find it and it just becomes a nightmare. So, I like my cue cards either to be in the form of an A4 sheet of paper with just bullet points in order or I like to put my cards in a small ring-binder.

So, in the session I led on Using Braille for Languages, I talked about the RNIB address book and the RNIB address book is this very small ring-binder that comes filled with small pieces of Braille paper which are on fairly thick card stock and this is perfect for using as cue cards. It's in a small binder, it's not huge, so not the size of A4, by any means, so you can easily keep it in your bag and put it on a small space but it does have these cards in and, again, you can flip them over so you can put your cards in order and then read from them like that. So I really advocate using this if I'm going to use cards because it's the perfect size and it works really well.

Now, you can either write these cards on a Perkins Brailler or using a slate and stylus. I tend to go the slate route, just because I don't own a Perkins Brailler. So, again, it's all about what tech you have. You can write your cards out on a display first, edit them, get all your points in the order you want them and then put them down on paper. This is another option. So, you don't have to start all of this, because one thing I'm precious about is not wasting my paper, particularly when I've got decent quality card for Braille. So I might write down all my points first, get them in the order I want, look over them and make sure I've got everything I want to say and then produce my cards.

I'm going to open up now for any questions.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Just a quick reminder while we wait for people to raise their hands. If you do have a question, you can raise your hand by pressing Alt-Y on Windows, Option Y on the Mac, star-nine if you're dialling in on a phone or if you're on an iDevice, you can press the More button in the bottom-right of your screen and find the Raise Hand button.

We've got a couple of hands raised so we're going to Neva [ph] and then after Neva, we're going to come to Alan Dyte.

Neva: Thank you so much. I have a Focus 14 and I pair it with my iPhone and I'm wondering if you could advise me on apps that are friendly with the Focus 14 and the iPhone for writing out a script and/or making my cue cards or my bullet points. A secondary question, in the RNIB address book, are they 3.5 by 5?

Holly Scott-Gardner: I would say for notetaking, the actual notes app on your phone works quite well. I have used it with displays and I find it's sufficiently basic to not be a headache but it does enough that you can make lists and things like that in it so I would actually go with that.

Neva: Okay. So the notes app is the one that also synchronises with Microsoft Outlook, correct?

Holly Scott-Gardner: Possibly. I don't have my Outlook set up to synch.

Neva: Okay, well, I'll test that out.

Holly Scott-Gardner: You could email to yourself, if not.

Neva: My second question, did you hear that? About the size of the cards for the RNIB note book.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I'm going to see if Matthew knows what the paper size is, because he is the Braille paper expert.

Matthew Horspool: I'm looking this up as we speak. If you go to braillists.org/braille/consumables, there's a huge list of these. Unfortunately the sizes are in centimetres rather than inches.

Neva: I can convert.

Matthew Horspool: Apparently the RNIB Braille indexed address book takes 9cm x 14cm, which I think might be nearly 3 x 5 but not quite.

Neva: What I've done is used the standard 3 x 5 cards that we can buy here but because they're all on recycled paper now, the quality is just terrible. But then I just punch one hole in the corner and put one of those rings you can open and close in it, to keep them together. But, thanks for that, I appreciate it.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to Alan Dyte next and after Alan, we're going to come to Marcia.

Alan: Simple question, Holly. I'm thinking of writing a script in Braille. Can you give me any guidance about lines? Should I write on every line or is it easier to read when you're giving a presentation to leave a line space?

Holly Scott-Gardner: I find that I don't necessarily leave a space between each line and I think if you're a really fluent Braille reader, you're used to reading single line spaced Braille so that should be fine. What I do tend to do though is give a line break in between paragraphs, just because it gives me that break.

I might put a space between each line if I was doing bullet points perhaps but not if I'm writing out the entire script.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Last for hands, we're coming to Marcia now.

Marcia: Thank you. On the cue cards, what I did for my last presentation is I had just a few notes that I went over with in Microsoft Word that I have in a Braille display and then I was able to say, "So this I'm going to be doing at this point, this I will be doing a second point." For example, I was giving the presentation on [UNSURE OF WORD] and taking the class through the work. Number one, listen to the whole cycle. Number two, listen to it and I would describe it as it's playing, what it's doing. Number three, comparisons. So I just did little crib notes that way so I know what sequence I was doing. Everything else was pretty much off the cuff. So then I read the translation of the work from the original German to English. I think I got an A on that too.

Holly Scott-Gardner: That's good to hear and it's definitely a way to do it. There's been more than one occasion where I've presented using my notes in Word and then with a display and I think it depends on what you're doing and the space you're in and whether you can set up a computer etc, so it is absolutely one way to do it.

Ben Mustill-Rose: That's it for now so we can come back to Holly with just over half an hour to go.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Great. So I am going to talk about setting up the space you're in and you might wonder what that has to do with Braille but I think it actually has quite a lot to do with it and it certainly has a lot to do with being blind.

I like to know something about the space I'm in when I go to present. I want to know if I'm sitting at a table. Let's say I'm in a whole long line of people who'll be called up and there's only so much space at the front of the room so we're sat in tables around the room. How do I get to where I've got to present, from where I'm sitting? So, I like to go over this before I go up there because the last thing I want is to be juggling a folder full of notes, a Braille display, a cane or dog, and trying to find my way up to the front of the room. It does not make for a pleasant or stress-free experience.

So, what I like to do, is ask first if I can explore the room before people come in. I also want to know if there is a specific pathway I'm expected to walk through. What can happen, particularly if you've got a guide dog, your dog sees a pathway and goes up that way and it's not necessarily wrong but if every other presenter has followed a specific route that's marked and you haven't, it looks a bit out of place. We can talk about whether that's wrong or not and I don't think there's anything wrong with it but if you're really wanting to blend in and deliver a really smooth presentation, I think it's very good to prepare yourself to be moving in that space first.

So that is one thing I do and I would say whilst that doesn't necessarily relate to Braille, it is part of not feeling too stressed out and there's nothing worse than just having that high level of anxiety when you haven't even started speaking.

You could also ask someone to bring you up to the front, if that's what you want. If you feel like you're carrying too much stuff or you're not confident, there's nothing wrong with that. It's about finding ways that work for you.

Once I'm actually at the front of the room, there are several things I need. I don't want to be trying to hold my display in one hand and reading with the other because that is firstly difficult, secondly your hand is going to get tired, especially if you're delivering, say, a 20 minute keynote. Your hand is going to get really tired holding that display while you try to read with the other hand.

Also, not all of us are as fast at one-handed Braille reading. I'm sure there are many of you who can. I'm a bit jealous because I'm definitely a two-handed Braille reader and I would not want only one hand on my display or my binder full of notes which has definitely happened before.

One option is that you can hang your Braille display around your neck, on a strap and it kind of works but it also isn't great for your posture and is a strange way to be reading it. So, what I like to do, is make sure that the room is set up with something on which I can put my display. This is actually very normal in public speaking settings to have some kind of lectern at the front of the room where people put their notes or maybe their computer if they've got one. So, it's very good to go and check that out first because height is a big thing when you're reading in Braille. If the table or stand that your Braille display is on is really high up compared to you, it's going to be an awkward reading experience. Equally, if it's halfway down your leg and you're practically trying to reach down to your knee to try and read Braille, that's not going to work either. So what you need to do is check out the height of that stand first. It's not enough just to ask if there's a stand. I've had to improvise. I've delivered presentations at university where I haven't thought about this and I've come in and I'm standing and the table in front of me is quite low and we've had to gather dictionaries from around the room and stack them up and put my display on top of it to give it the height it needs for me to be able to comfortably read.

Now, you do what you've got to do and I have absolutely no shame and I'm not embarrassed, particularly in an academic setting to ask for that sort of thing. But, obviously, if you're at a corporate event and you're expected to deliver a keynote, firstly there's probably not a whole stack of books lying around and secondly you definitely don't want to be getting up to the front of the room and having to pause and ask everyone to scramble around to find things on which you can put your display or your ring-binder.

I would also say if you're presenting from an electronic format, particularly if you have a computer involved, you really need to think about where is that computer going to go. Do you need to plug it in? If so, where can you plug it in? These are all questions that are totally acceptable to ask when you're expected to deliver a presentation. Again, particularly in corporate settings, this is very normal. The event coordinator should know the answers to all of these questions and should be able to give you a satisfactory response.

One tip I got from a blind friend who's done some presenting in his job is that he has a spare laptop battery and he carries this spare battery and it's charged just in case, because he has had experiences where he's thought his computer is charged and maybe it went on standby or something happened, the laptop dies and all his notes are gone. Now, I would argue, this is absolutely a case for having a back-up in hard copy. This particular friend would probably argue, absolutely not, I'm going to present electronically, so the nice system of meeting in the middle is to have a spare battery. I would say don't bother investing in that if you're going to deliver one presentation in your life but if your job involves a heavy amount of presenting, it is something to think about.

Another thing I would say is just making sure you feel really comfortable in that space and this comes down to the positioning of the stand or table. Make sure that you are able to look at your audience, even if you can't see them, you definitely want to be facing them. This is another thing that I always find out. Where are my audience going to be? Are they going to be directly in front of me? Are there going to be any people sat or stood around the side of the room? I try and ask these questions because I can't stand at the front of a room and know where all the audience members are, so it's really good to have that kind of information.

As a blind presenter and public speaker, it's okay to be very direct and ask a lot of questions and really insist on getting this information because ultimately it's about you being able to deliver the presentation that you need to.

So that's how I approach setting up the space. One other thing I do is, if I'm using a rigid cane that doesn't collapse, I will lie it on the floor as I speak and if I'm using a cane that folds, I'll fold it down and again I'll put it on the floor and the reason I don't fold it down and hang it around my wrist is because if I'm trying to read Braille and my cane is around my wrist, then it's bumping against the table and it's just such an inconvenience. I want access to my cane. I don't want someone to take it off me and put it somewhere safe while I'm presenting because, like anyone, I want the freedom to move around. Also if there is an emergency and we need to evacuate, I definitely don't want to be looking for my cane but equally I don't want my cane to get in the way of me actually speaking and particularly reading. So, that is another tip.

In terms of resources, I'm going to come onto some of these very quickly. Now, I would say, this RNIB indexed address book would be my primary go-to resource. The size of it is just perfect for small note cards. You can buy refills. So, let's say if you're using it for speaking and you use a lot of paper, you can buy refills of the paper at a reasonable price. You can also improvise and buy a binder yourself and buy some card stock yourself or I liked the suggestion that was given of just clipping the cards together with one ring. You can also use treasury tags and things like that. I personally find it not as much of a smooth experience but again that's me being very particular of how I like things done and I don't think everyone is that specific.

Another resource I would suggest is invest in a small slate and stylus even if you don't love slating. If you realise at the last minute that actually you need to add in a statistic or a point that comes up or maybe someone earlier in the event says something you think is really interesting and you want to reference back, "Oh, as so-and-so said earlier today," and you want to make sure you remember that, great way of just quickly jotting down a note to put in your list of cards. So, I always carry a small four-line slate and stylus in my bag.

If you do have a Braille display and you have no choice but to wear it and present like that, you will want to invest in some kind of shoulder strap for it. I don't hang it over my shoulder, I hang it round my neck so it's hanging down in front of me so I can read it that way when I'm presenting, not ideal but nevertheless useful and certainly an option in a pinch.

Those three things are what I would say are the most important. Of course, really the most important thing is that you find a strategy that works well for you and that you work on different techniques and some people are going to plan to only ever present using a Braille display as they might not be happy reading hard-copy Braille. There are blind people with, maybe, neuropathy and they cannot read hard copy Braille but they read well particularly using something like an Orbit. So that is of course totally fine.

Develop these strategies. Think about whether your speech requires an actual full length script or whether it requires bullet points. Definitely, definitely rehearse.

Sometimes I find just the way a word is written in Braille really throws me off and this might sound a little strange but sometimes I'll be rehearsing a speech and every time I'll trip up on a word and it's because I've written it a particular way and maybe I have to change the Braille I'm using. Maybe I have to write that word out in Grade 1 or use something different.

Ultimately only you have to see this script so it doesn't really matter how you choose to write it. The main thing is that you feel comfortable delivering that speech. Using Braille is using it for yourself, not for anyone else. Be mindful of that space you're in. Find out how to get from where you're sitting to where you need to be and definitely check the height of that table or stand.

So we have about 20 minutes left. I'm going to open up for questions, chat or discussion.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Great, thanks for that, Holly. We'll just give people a bit of time to raise hands. I have visions in my mind of you frantically running around a room looking for dictionaries and it's bringing back all the memories of university presentations. For me, it's one of those things where you have one experience like that and you promise yourself that you'll never put yourself in that situation again.

We've got a few hands raised so we're going to go to Theo first and then James.

Theo: I can make notes in the Apple Notes app so I was wondering what's the easiest and quickest way to emboss those notes because they're not actually documents.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I don't know if you can emboss from iOS. What you could do is email those notes to yourself and then run them through Duxbury and emboss them. That would be how I would do it. Matthew is the embossing expert however.

Matthew Horspool: You're welcome to push it onto me but I would have just said exactly the same thing. Either email it to yourself or put in a file and put it in Dropbox or something but getting it onto a computer is the easiest answer.

Ben Mustill-Rose: There might be a slightly geeky way if you want to go all out and set up a Dropbox to do it in the middle. There's a package called Cups which is the print server on the switch that I believe may do that.

James Bowden next and after James, we're going to go to Theresa [ph].

James Bowden: I would agree, Matthew, I would always, always go through Duxbury rather than getting an embosser to do everything, especially on the layout because that layout, making sure your notes are easily readable, is vital, as Holly said

I was going to say, on the subject of lecterns, be aware that some of them will tilt and if your Braille display has thumb keys, that might be an issue just because the Braille display might actually hit the edge of the lectern and you might not actually be able to use the thumb keys.

I much prefer using hard copy Braille except when the air conditioning got in the way and froze my fingers but that's another story.

The other point with lecterns is microphones which is a whole subject in itself but you must make sure you know where the microphone is because if I suddenly do this and wander away from the mic, nobody's going to hear.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, that's absolutely true and actually your mention of microphones made me think also be mindful of what you're using because if you're using something like an Orbit to present from, you've got to bear in mind that that Orbit is a fairly noisy device and you might be best off presenting using hard copy which is going to be a lot quieter, certainly than the Orbit is. So you need to think about if the microphone is picking up that sound. Actually asking for a sound check in advance, if you're unsure of your tech situation, is wise so at least you know what to expect, if nothing else.

James Bowden: That's right. The converse is if you are using hard copy Braille, make sure you don't hit the mic with the pages when you turn them over.

Holly Scott-Gardner: So it's all about where that microphone is in relation to you and your paper and everything else, so be aware of your space. The problem I often have is I'm usually coming on stage after someone who is inevitably taller than I am so I'm having to mess around with the microphone anyway but that's a height problem, not a blindness one.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We're going to come to Theresa next and then Adeel [ph].

Theresa: I have never done presentations with a Braille display because when I used to do them at university for class presentations, computers were just coming out. So I was wondering, when you have an 80 cell, but in my case I have a 44, how would you manage in reading and at the same time trying to pan to the next point of your presentation. It seems to me that would increase the stress because one would feel that the audience is having to wait. What is your experience in that sense?

Holly Scott-Gardner: So, I would say it really depends on how you're using your Braille. So if you're using bullet points, it's a bit easier because the point is just there as a prompt and then you talk quite a lot and you can be reading the next point as you're talking. Now, if you're using an actual script where you're reading the whole thing, I think you really have to be a very fluent braillist to do that. Unfortunately I don't want to say people can't do it if they're not but it is one of those things, if you're reading word for word off that script, you need to make sure you can read at a pace that is considered fairly typical of your speech pattern. So, if that is a struggle, I would definitely recommend going more towards the condensed notes form and then you can have read your bullet point and really be discussing that one as you pan and start reading the next one. It takes some practice so practice that presentation a lot so that it will feel smoother to you.

Theresa: I see. Right, thank you. Another question, if one uses PowerPoint for example for a presentation, would the slides be done using these sort of bulleted notes?

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, if you go for the standard PowerPoint design, your notes on the slides will be in bullet points and you can read them using a Braille display. Last week we did a session on PowerPoint and I will put the link for that out so everyone can access that and listen to that.

Theresa: And showing at the same time, those points to the audience?

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, exactly. The audience can see it and you'll be reading it as well and it will be in synch and it works quite well.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We've got a couple more hands. We're going to come to Adeel next and then Fola.

Adeel: You mention you use a shoulder strap for your Braille display. Where did you buy the shoulder strap from?

Holly Scott-Gardner: It actually depends on your display. I had a BrailleNote and that came with a strap on the case. Normally you can get cases with displays which will come with some kind of strap. If your case just has the hooks for a strap, you should be able to buy them from any shop that does laptop straps as long as they've got the clip that can clip into that on the case.

Matthew Horspool: Can I just add a little bit to that answer? Just to point out that when you buy a shoulder strap, it doesn't come with attachments and I make that point because I think, Adeel, you might be using an Orbit Reader that may not be in a case. The Orbit Reader does actually have two holes that are very hard to find but you will find them now you know they're there and you can just thread a piece of string or something through those holes and attach a shoulder strap to those pieces of string. That should be sufficient as long as it's fairly thick string.

Ben Mustill-Rose: So we're going to come to Fola next and then Kawal [ph].

Fola: They tried to teach me Braille when I was a child but I wasn't really interested so now I'm relearning and taking your Monday classes but I really want to learn because of the ability to use it for presentations and meetings and was thinking of buying a Braille Notetaker or something similar. I was looking at the Orbit and I wonder what you think of it.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I'm actually not an Orbit user. I have seen them. I think the Orbit is a very, very good display and certainly very affordable. If what you're wanting to do is some notetaking to pair it with a couple of devices such as a phone to read books on it, I think the Orbit is great. It's not enough for me, I want a display with more cells but actually I think the Orbit is really good for what it is.

Fola: Thank you. I heard you say it was rather noisy. Do you think that would be a problem?

Holly Scott-Gardner: That's my personal opinion. Most people are very understanding and by noisy, I don't mean it's horrifically loud, it's just you can certainly hear the moving of the dots.

Matthew Horspool: I've got one on the desk in front of me and I'll just turn it on and let you hear. That's the sort of noise you get from it. If you were doing a presentation and you put it away from the mic, it probably wouldn't be that audible but it's just something to be aware of. Other Braille displays are quieter but they're also at least double the price.

Holly Scott-Gardner: Certainly as a beginner, I think the Orbit is a good device to get your teeth into.

Ben Mustill-Rose: The other thing I'd suggest, which may be slightly in depth for someone who hasn't yet purchased one, but we did run a webinar late last year about the Orbit where our chairman, Dave Williams, who's a very keen Orbit user, walks you through its capabilities. Go to braillists.org/media, you'll find it there.

We're going to come to Kawal and then Alan.

We can't hear you, Kawal. We'll try to come back to you.

We're going to come to Alan Dyte again and then Jean.

Alan: I'm a totally blind person and I worked for many years in the BBC. I used to give talks weekly. After I'd done a few of these, one of the senior producers came up to me and asked me how much I could see and would I be upset if he told me that I wasn't paying enough attention to my audience and I should find out how long the rows of seats are in front of you and move your head from side to side, not continuously like a robot, but make sure the audience get the impression that you're looking at some of them all the time. He said, if you can perfect that, it's not only good for you and your presentation but you will look so much better on the television.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I think that's true, and learning about body language as a totally blind person is really important and one thing I'll always do is if something I say prompts laughter, particularly if that's from a particular section of the room, I'll look over to them and smile and things like that to make sure I appear more physically engaged as well. I do think we have a tendency to stand very, very still at the front of a room and we don't want to overly move, as you say, but it's getting that balance between not being frozen and not moving too much. So that's a great point.

Alan: Absolutely, yes, because once I started doing it, I found so much benefit.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Great to hear from your experiences, Alan. We're going to come to Jean next and then we'll try Kawal again.

Jean: I noticed that we're sharing our experiences a little bit. I don't actually have a question and I think that's because everyone obviously has their own styles as has already been pointed out and we all have to figure out what works for us. But I just wanted to make an observation. I do agree with Holly that the Orbits are kind of loud to be doing presentations or recording with, but there's a lot of old Braille display tech out there that's still useful so all I'm saying is that people should not necessarily feel like that they have to go for the newest and greatest thing. Some people have old notetakers that they don't really use anymore and they're willing to part with them for a pretty low price and you can still use some of those things for things like presentations. I have a BrailleNote MPower and it's one of the 32 cell ones with the QWERTY keyboard and I really like it for presentations because it's portable, it's a single unit and you can put it around your neck or you can put it on a table or something. It has arrow keys so you can zoom around in your file and find text really quickly. I do podcasting and I used to do more personal presentations and I like to use that thing because it's so self-contained and the Braille is really solid and it has little thumb keys that your finger just naturally falls on when you get to the end of a line, so it advances nice and smoothly and quietly. So, there are a lot of old things like that, that you could still take advantage of. You can do your work on a computer and then just transfer a text file. I use Notepad for everything so I'm not fancy but it works really well. Everybody just needs to find their strategy, I think.

Holly Scott-Gardner: That's so true and actually, when you mentioned older tech, I was thinking the Apex which came after the MPower. Another good option if you can find anyone who's willing to part with one for quite a low price. Also I would second Notepad. I have no time for writing notes in anything else unless I'm actually submitting a document to someone.

Ben Mustill-Rose: We'll just try to go to Kawal again. Sorry, we still can't hear you. Holly, can we try to squeeze Finlay in?

Holly Scott-Gardner: Yes, that's fine.

Finlay: So I too use an Orbit. From my experience, they're pretty good. Yes, they are loud but unlike most displays like the BrailleNote and Focus 14, they don't have thumb keys, so if you are using a lectern which is slanted, you don't have any danger of your presentation being ruined by the thumb keys.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I think the Orbit is a bit of a thicker display so maybe it doesn't get pushed up as much at the bottom. It's definitely good to try it out.

Ben Mustill-Rose: Always good to get first-hand testimony. We don't have any hands but we have had some great questions. It's about time to wrap it up now so I'll hand over to Holly and Matthew.

Holly Scott-Gardner: I'm just going to wrap up very quickly and say thank you to everyone for attending. Next week we're going to kick off a two-parter on note taking. So I'll talk about taking notes for other people and taking notes for yourself and I'm going to cover all kinds of things in these two sessions from really how to condense your notes when you're just writing rough notes for yourself to actually using Markdown to produce nice notes for other people and being able to read them easily in Braille as well. So a very brief explanation of what's going on next week. As you're registered for this session, you can jump on next week with the same link and if you think anybody else would be interested, then pass around the registration link to them.

Matthew Horspool: Don't forget braillists.org/media if you'd like to catch up on previous recordings or the Braillecast podcast and we look forward to seeing you next week.