

Bridging the Gap: Strengthening Technical Communication for Service Dog Accessibility under the ADA

Submitted by: Madison Hogan

Submitted to: Dr. Priyanka

ENGL 4360: Studies in Composition (Writing for Equity: Social Justice in Technical Documentation)

June 20, 2024 (Revised April 1, 2025)



(Paws of War) 1

Introduction

The topic of service dogs and public access tends to be a point of tension, depending on who you talk to. If you talk to a service dog handler, they may tell you that they deal with uneducated businesses and citizens on a daily basis. If you talk to a business owner or employee, they may tell you that dogs are simply not allowed in their establishment, no exceptions. The gap in knowledge and communication between these two parties comes from the lack of information provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the lack of enforcement of these laws. If we can better-define these laws and regulations, as well as provide easier access to them, we may find less of a gap between the two parties.

At the intersection of technical communication and social justice lies an opportunity to alleviate this ongoing issue. In service dog laws, we find that there is only one webpage that tells all about the ADA, and not much else professional literature is provided. By producing clearer, more user-friendly resources—such as brochures or infographics—we could reduce conflict, enhance understanding, and foster smoother interactions between handlers and businesses. Technical communication is a much-needed service that would help strengthen and modernize the current state of the ADA information page. A designated and official visual aid that can be given to service dog handlers and business owners by the government could potentially help alleviate the stress of animals in public for both of the parties.

The purpose of this proposal is to show its readers the social justice issue between service dog handlers in public and businesses. The miscommunication errors between these two could be easily fixed with a more dedicated government program and a better, more readable piece of literature for everyone to view. More specifically, a mandatory brochure provided by the government could help this issue become eradicated. Service dogs, their handlers, and the general public could become much more comfortable existing in each other's presence. Overall, I believe that this is a very easily fixable communication and social justice issue.

Problem Statement

While the ADA establishes the rights of individuals with disabilities, including those who use service dogs, it lacks both clarity and sufficient public-facing resources. This deficiency creates communication barriers that contribute to tension, discrimination, and legal violations. Business owners may inadvertently break the law due to uncertainty, and service dog handlers face emotional stress, limited access, and repeated justifications of their rights. This proposal aims to resolve a preventable miscommunication issue through technical communication improvements.

Affected Parties

1. Service Dog Handlers

- a. **Challenges:** Service dog handlers frequently encounter discrimination or complete denial of access to public spaces and businesses. This is due to the misunderstanding about their rights as a service dog handler.
- b. **Impact:** Facing these issues can lead to increased stress and limit access to essential services.

2. Business Owners

- a. **Challenges:** Business owners can lack clarity on their legal obligations to accommodate those with service dogs. They also may not know the proper way to interact with a service dog.
- b. **Impact:** The business owner's uncertainty could potentially lead to unintentional violations of the ADA, as well as damaging their business and customer service reputation.

The core of this issue lies in the ADA's insufficient and inaccessible information about service animals. If we can create something that both handlers and business owners alike can read and understand, we could solve the divide between the two.

Literature Review

Rios, Lucia (2023) “A Lack of Awareness About Service Animals Leads to Discrimination” talks of a woman’s experience with her service dog and the negative discrimination she received while visiting a store in her community. They go over the detailed explanation of what the handler and the business owner should have known, and what would have prevented the awkward and uncomfortable situation.

ADA.gov (2022). “ADA Requirements: Service Animals” talks of the official ADA laws and requirements of a service animal, as well as what is expected of businesses.

Hawryluk, Markian (2022). “Demand for Service Dogs Unleashes a ‘Wild West’ Market” talks about the lack of regulations for training a service dog and the very little oversight that is required. He mentions the negative repercussions of this problem. He also mentions the issue of the price for professional training being extremely high, so handlers tend to owner-train, SOMETIMES leading to misbehaved service animals.

Brightman, April (2023). “ADA Service Dog Laws: What You Need to Know” explains the ADA law in detail as well as requirements, training, proof, etc. They give technical definitions of ADA’s terminology. They also speak about when service dogs are legally allowed to be denied into a public place or business. They speak on state-specific laws versus federal law, as well as the Fair Housing Act (FHA). She also provides good information about flying with a service animal and helps readers understand the difference between a service animal and an emotional support animal.

Walton, Moore, & Jones (2019). *Positionality* “in Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn” talks about different people’s positions and how they are treated/affected in that position. It explains how race, gender, etc. can contribute to a person’s positionality and treatment.

Research Questions/Objectives

Questions:

1. Would a literature piece (brochure) that is required to be had by business owners help bridge the gap between service dog handlers and businesses?
2. Would a more accessible/cleaner layout of information over service dogs and their rights help both handlers and business owners understand them better?

Objective: To create an informative and accessible brochure for business owners and service dog handlers. This brochure will provide a comprehensive overview of the laws and regulations pertaining to service dogs, ensuring that both parties are well-informed about their rights and responsibilities. The aim is to enhance awareness, promote compliance with legal standards, and foster a better understanding of the crucial role service dogs play in assisting individuals with disabilities.

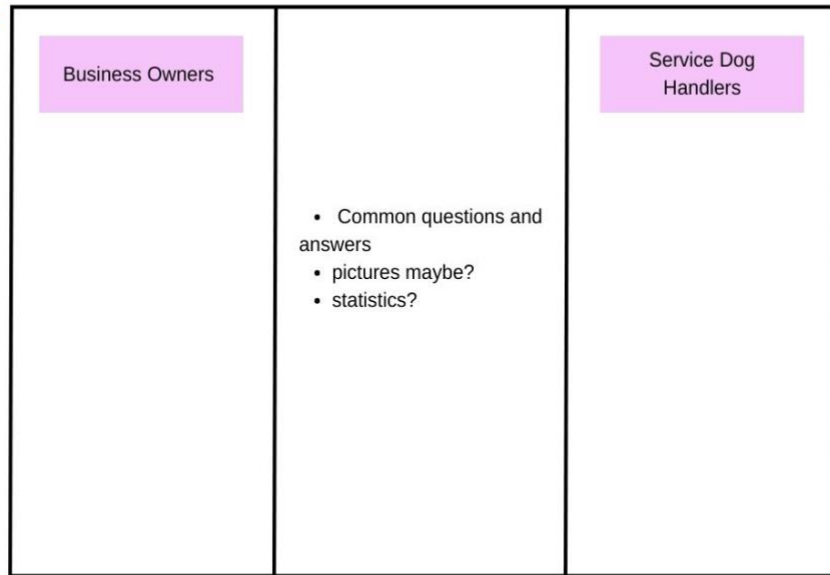
Proposed Methodology

- I. Read through existing literature
 - a. Websites
 - b. Blogs
 - c. Official govt material
- II. Interview service dog handlers & business owners over their opinions
- III. Gather data and organize for brochure
- IV. Create a clean, easy-to-read brochure dedicated to teaching both service dog handlers and business owners about ADA laws and the dos and don'ts.

Preliminary Design/Layout

Tri-fold design brochure

information for business owners to refer to
when they have questions, want to learn, etc.



Information for service dog handlers to refer to
to ensure their dog is behaving properly in public and to understand
their rights.

Annotated Bibliography

- Brightman, April. "ADA Service Dog Laws Explained (2024)." *Pettable.com*, 22 Nov. 2023, pettable.com/blog/ada-service-animal. Accessed 27 June 2024. **This is a very informative article which explains the different laws surrounding service dogs. They break down the rules and explain them in an easy-to-read manner.**
- Rios, Lucia, et al. "A Lack of Awareness about Service Animals Leads to Discrimination." *Southwest Michigan's Second Wave*, 30 Dec. 2023, www.secondwavemedia.com/southwest-michigan/features/lack_awareness_about_service_animals_leads_to_discrimination.aspx. **This article speaks on the discrimination that service dog handlers receive on a daily basis and how that affects the handlers and those who are discriminating.**
- U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. "ADA Requirements: Service Animals." *ADA.gov*, 18 Nov. 2022, www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-2010-requirements/. **This is a government-managed website that states the exact laws for service dogs, handlers, and business owners.**
- Walton, Rebecca, et al. *Technical Communication after the Social Justice Turn : Building Coalitions for Action*. New York ; London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019, pp. 63–80. **This chapter, "Positionality", explains the effects of people's positionality and how that creates different environments, producing an uncomfortable place where social justice is not very present.**