

(250 word article about the future of technical communications)

How do we do better? With more people working, training, and learning from home, the tech-com industry now asks this question with more urgency than ever. Accessibility is often discussed in hard lines: audio description, subtitles, IT support, but what about more fluid barriers to access?

I know many talented, extremely intelligent professionals in STEM who, faced with lengthy, convoluted and often visually dull technical documents, are forced to play catch-up with their colleagues due to a neurodivergence such as ADHD or a processing disorder such as dyslexia. Such consumers feel there is either an attitude of apathy or ignorance towards their needs, and as someone who struggles with light sensitivity, certain video materials have left me feeling the same.

But it's not just chronic conditions that have an effect. Consider that depression has been shown to effect memory and comprehension¹, and that PTSD increases likelihood of light sensitivity². From low moods to domestic violence³, increasing strain has meant people experiencing processing difficulties have quickly become a majority. Without action the rift between communicators and their audiences can only grow.

The plus side, and yes there is a plus side, is that as a result of these trials and tribulations people are shedding stigmatisations for mental health/disorders/divergences, growing their awareness, vocabulary, and sense of nuance. This means data gathered from the same population will now likely be much more meaningful than if it were gathered only a year ago. Pursuing this data and its diligent use, is—I believe—how we do better.

Word Count: [253]

1. M, R., Z, Z., AR, G. and MM, S., 2021. Depression. Does it affect the comprehension of receptive skills?. [online] PubMed. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22772929/>> [Accessed 1 March 2021].

2. Aaopt.org. 2021. VISUAL FUNCTION, TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY, AND PTSD. [online] Available at: <<https://www.aaopt.org/detail/knowledge-base-article/visual-function-traumatic-brain-injury-and-ptsd>> [Accessed 1 March 2021].

3. Gibson, J., 2020. Domestic violence during COVID-19: the GP role. British Journal of General Practice, 70(696), pp.340-340.