

# SELF-DESCRIPTIONS

## RESOURCE FOR EMCEES

### Introduction-

Self-descriptions are one way to make events more inclusive.

- having descriptions of physical characteristics and personal identity can help people recall individuals and identify them on another occasion
- gives people present a sense of the diversity or lack of diversity of those speaking, on a panel, on stage, in the audience and/or room generally
- is a culturally conscious approach to the role MC's can play when welcoming, warming and informing audiences; as well as in who and how an event is structured and unfolds
- what you choose to describe can help your audience connect with you and understand that we're all bringing multiple identities and perspectives to the event.

### Note-

- It's not necessary to require other people to provide self-descriptions.
- It is a matter of personal comfort on what a person chooses to share.
- It is important to pay respect to the privacy and rights of everyone.
- If you choose to describe yourself during your introduction, you are taking steps to include participants that may not be able to see you.

### **Some blind or low vision people prefer not to have self-descriptions.**

*'Self-descriptions are contentious amongst the blind community. This practice has received a wide array of criticism, especially in the Blind and low vision community.'*

*Some blind and low vision people are of the opinion that it is a 'waste of time', 'diminishing and devaluing actual, useful, visual information that we could be obtaining if the person in question wouldn't be filling our ears with self-descriptions.'*

However for public-facing events integrating descriptive and useful information is one way to create a more equitable experience for blind and low vision audiences, and can be enjoyed and benefit others as well.

In the context of less formal gatherings ie. meetings or one on one situations, it is good practice to ask:

*"Who would like or benefit from self-descriptions being provided?"* followed by *"What level of description is preferred?"*

If one person, even amongst others who do not need, requests self-descriptions, they should be provided.

**Tips-**

- Be prepared
- Decide what you are comfortable saying at a particular time, and what is important to you at that particular event, in front of that group of people
- Introduce yourself with your name, role, pronouns and a self-description
- Repeat your name every time you speak
- Be concise and brief in your self-description
- Keep it to one or two sentences at most, and/or three key elements, and to important information, much like a thumbnail sketch

By describing yourself, you are in some way identifying and defining yourself, and it is thus a political and personal act. You may also choose to share other aspects of your identity, even if they are not visual aspects

If conveying self-descriptions of others ensure they are authored by that person, who has consented for it to be shared in the context, purpose and setting agreed to.

**How to create your self-description-**

Some possibilities are:

- Personal identity
- Preferred pronouns
- Age
- Disability / neurodivergence –
  - It may not be necessary to identify as disabled or neurodivergent, but you may wish to if this is something you would typically disclose in this context
  - Non-disabled people should consider if it is relevant to include that information in their description.
- Race / ethnicity-
 

It is important that this is not solely done by people from minoritised or under-represented groups. Whiteness should not be assumed to be a default.
- Skin colour-
 

You may prefer to give a visual description of your skin colour instead of, or in addition to, reference to your race / ethnicity.
- Hair / Facial hair
- Build / height
- Clothes and accessories
- Your location / position in relation to the audience and/or others things in your environment, and can include details about venue, building, or staging.

**Things to keep in mind-**

- Take context into consideration.

You may choose to share more personal information if event is more intimate, or where attendees are more familiar and known to you, where you know the culture and feel safe.

You may choose to share less information about yourself when presenting at a large event with thousands of people who you don't know.

- Make your language accessible

Speak in plain English. If using different terms, concepts and jargon, provide definition or explain.

- Vocal skills

Be aware of your tone, tempo and pace

- Be aware of your audience, interpreters and communication guides

For d/Deaf and deafblind people, interpretation can take more or less time.

- Keep it natural!

### Examples-

- ❖ *My name is ..... I'm a queer artist, pronouns are they/them. I'm in my 30's, 5 ft 5, White, Autistic and wearing a fabulous full length red gown.*
- ❖ *I'm..., hosting today's event and Producer at Midsumma, with short blonde hair and glitter-framed glasses, wearing a colourful outfit and rainbow Doc Marten boots.*
- ❖ *My name is.... she/her. I am a South-Asian singer/performer, onstage in my powered wheelchair wearing a 3-D printed pendant necklace gifted to me by mum.*
- ❖ *Hi! My name is..... My pronouns are she/her. I'm a proud disabled trans activist with olive skin and tattoos, wearing a top that has the words 'BE KIND' in bold pink caps.*

### Source & References:

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 Francois Jacobs, Vitae Veritas  
 VocalEyes UK  
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