**Plain Language Executive Summary: Accessible Commercial Audiobooks Research Project**

# Why We Did This Research

The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) started this project to understand why commercial audiobooks are not fully accessible for people with print disabilities. Audiobooks are a major way for these individuals to read, yet many still lack basic accessibility features. While ebooks have improved in accessibility with clear rules and standards, audiobooks have no universal guidelines to ensure they work well for all users.

As audiobooks grow in popularity, more people with print disabilities want to access them. Libraries like CELA and the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) offer some accessible audiobooks, but people also want commercial ones because they often have better production quality, more choices, and are available right away.However, these commercial audiobooks often miss important features that help people navigate and understand them fully.

This research looked at the main barriers to audiobook accessibility and explored what users need. We also studied whether the audiobook industry can make these changes and how to balance accessibility with industry challenges.

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# Key Findings

## 1. Commercial Audiobooks Lack Accessibility Features

Most commercial audiobooks are missing key accessibility tools, making them hard to use for people with print disabilities. Some of the biggest issues include:

* **Navigation problems:** Many audiobooks do not allow users to easily skip between sections, chapters, or bookmark important parts.
* **Missing content:** Some audiobooks leave out footnotes, image descriptions, and references, giving listeners an incomplete experience.
* **Hard to find accessible versions:** There is no standard way to label which audiobooks are accessible, making it difficult for users to find what they need.
* **Limited fully accessible options:** The way audiobooks are produced does not encourage publishers to focus on accessibility.
* **Platform barriers:** Many audiobook apps and websites do not work well with screen readers and other assistive tools.

## 2. Accessibility Benefits Everyone

Our research found that improving accessibility helps all listeners, not just those with disabilities. Many audiobook users prefer features like:

* **Better navigation tools** to easily move through an audiobook.
* **High-quality narration** that is clear and well-paced.
* **Customizable options** that let people adjust settings based on their preferences, such as skipping certain sections or changing playback speed.

Just like curb cuts benefit both wheelchair users and pedestrians with strollers, accessibility features make audiobooks easier and better for everyone.

## 3. The Industry Needs to Work Together

Right now, accessibility efforts in audiobooks are scattered. Some publishers and platforms follow best practices, but there are no common guidelines. To make real improvements, audiobook publishers, distributors, accessibility groups, and technology companies need to work together.

# Recommendations

## 1. For Publishers and Audiobook Producers

* Include all content from the print book (such as footnotes and image descriptions) to give listeners all the information.
* Make sure narration is clear and well-paced, with cues for different sections.
* Improve navigation by adding a detailed table of contents and track lists.
* Provide text versions of supplemental materials, like bibliographies and indexes.

## 2. For Audiobook Platforms and Libraries

* Ensure audiobook apps and websites work well with assistive technology, including screen readers and voice commands.
* Make it easier to find accessible audiobooks by including clear labels and search filters.
* Offer diverse audiobook collections and provide training on how to use accessible features.

## 3. Industry-Wide Changes

* Create a working group where publishers, developers, accessibility experts, and users can set common accessibility standards.
* Develop clear labels and metadata so users can easily find accessible audiobooks.
* Explore how books could include both text and audio for better accessibility and respond to many readers’ requests.
* Explore technology solutions, such as AI tools that allow users to customize what they hear.

# Conclusion

Accessible audiobooks are essential for people with print disabilities, but they also improve the listening experience for everyone. The audiobook industry has the opportunity to make accessibility a standard part of production rather than an afterthought. By setting industry-wide standards, improving navigation and usability, and working together, commercial audiobooks can become a fully accessible format for all listeners. With the right investments and policy changes, we can help more readers access books, knowledge, and entertainment.