

Case 10: Whose job is it to fix the blocked route?

A construction detour sends Sami toward stairs on her way to a city workshop, and her bus comes in 12 minutes.

On your own Read What happened. Underline where the detour sign points. About 4 minutes.

Your role: You're the one who writes down the corner, the time and the sign before Mateo posts. **New skill:** Report a problem to the office responsible.



Sami, Jordy and Mateo plan with picture cards on a whiteboard.

What happened

It is Tuesday, 4:05 p.m., at the corner of Elm Street and 4th Avenue. Sami is on her way to a free community workshop run by the city's parks department. It starts at 5. Sami uses a manual wheelchair, and her bus comes in 12 minutes. Mateo is with her.

The curb ramp on the northeast corner is blocked by construction fencing. A sign reads "SIDEWALK CLOSED AHEAD. PEDESTRIAN DETOUR." Its arrow points to a path that begins with a flight of stairs. That detour does not work for Sami.

Mateo already has the sign on video, and his first idea is to post it. Sami asks whether the video gets her on the bus. It does not, so Mateo puts the camera down. He checks the other corners for a ramp while Sami looks up the next bus stop.

Later, they want to report the corner to the city. Mateo wonders whether the city is breaking the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). First, they need to know what one video can show and which office is responsible.

Your question: Whose job is it to fix the blocked route, and what should Sami and Mateo tell the city?

Key terms

On your own Read each key term and its example. Then write your first guess in the box. About 4 minutes.

Program access Program access is an ADA rule that a city's services, taken as a whole, must be usable by people with disabilities.

En español: acceso a los programas

In this case: The city runs the workshop. Program access asks whether Sami can reach and join the workshop, not only whether one ramp is open.

Barrier A barrier is something that blocks or limits a person from taking part.

En español: barrera

In this case: Fencing blocks the curb ramp at Elm Street and 4th Avenue, and the detour points to stairs. The flyer gives no way to request access.

ADA coordinator An ADA coordinator is the staff member a government names to handle disability access questions and complaints.

En español: coordinador de la ADA

In this case: Mateo plans to send the city's ADA coordinator the corner, the time, the sign and one question, if Sami agrees.

Who is involved



Sami

Trying to catch her bus to the workshop

"The sign says detour. The detour starts with stairs. So, no. Twelve minutes."



Mateo

Filmed the detour sign

"I had the sign on video before I even thought about it. Sami asked if that gets her on the bus. Fair. Camera down."

Before you look at the evidence, whose job do you think it is to fix Sami's route?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reading passage

Program access and the ethics of reporting a barrier

On your own Read the passage. At each Stop and think box, pause and answer the question in your head or with a partner. About 6 minutes.

Words to know

- **Program access:** Program access is an ADA rule that a city's services, taken as a whole, must be usable by people with disabilities.
- **Barrier:** A barrier is something that blocks or limits a person from taking part.
- **ADA coordinator:** An ADA coordinator is the staff member a government names to handle disability access questions and complaints.
- **Claim:** A claim is a statement that something is true. You can check a claim with evidence.
- **Jurisdiction:** A jurisdiction is the place or area where a particular government or rule has authority.

The story: A detour that excludes

At 4:05 p.m. on a Tuesday, Sami, 23, and Mateo, 22, reach the corner of Elm Street and 4th Avenue on the way to a free parks department workshop that begins at 5. Sami uses a manual wheelchair. Her bus arrives in 12 minutes. The northeast curb ramp is fenced for construction, and the posted pedestrian detour begins with a flight of stairs.

The case opens with a small ethical sequence that many well-meaning allies get wrong. Mateo has already filmed the sign and offers to post it. Sami asks whether posting gets her on the bus. It does not. He stops filming, checks the other corners for a ramp and lets her look up the next stop. She is clear about consent. The ramp and the sign are fair to film. Filming her requires asking, and not in the middle of a missed bus. The advocacy can wait until the person most affected has what she needs.

Your role is to write down the corner, the time and the sign before anyone posts. That record is the raw material for everything that follows.

❓ Stop and think. Why is an answerable question often more effective than an accusation?

From observation to an answerable question

Mateo's instinct is to ask whether the city is breaking the Americans with Disabilities Act.

From observation to an answerable question, continued

Framed that way, the question is a **claim**, a statement that something is true that can be checked with evidence, and the evidence cannot carry it. One video establishes one fenced ramp and one sign on Tuesday at 4:05 p.m., posted since Monday. It does not establish whether an accessible alternative exists, how long the closure will last or how the city manages its program elsewhere. Mateo reaches that conclusion himself. He cannot call the whole route illegal from one corner.

The route map and flyer extend the analysis. Sami's trip has five stages, and the workshop entrance and room have not been checked. The flyer, "Free Community Workshop Series ... All welcome! Questions? Call the front desk," offers no information about accessible entrances or how to request access. A **barrier** is something that blocks or limits a person from taking part. The fence is a physical barrier, and the flyer's omission may be an informational one.

Program access is an ADA rule that a city's services, taken as a whole, must be usable by people with disabilities. The standard is structural rather than site-by-site. It generally does not require every older building to be accessible, and a city can meet it by relocating a service. Existing buildings and new construction are treated differently. What the standard does require is that the program, from information to arrival to participation, work for disabled residents.

The Case 9 concept of **jurisdiction**, the place or area where a particular government or rule has authority, identifies the responsible party. The city runs the workshop and controls the street. An **ADA coordinator** is the staff member a government names to handle disability access questions and complaints. Mateo's report is built to be answerable. It gives the corner, the time and the sign, then asks one question: is there an accessible detour, and how long will this stay blocked? It is sent only with Sami's agreement.

 **Stop and think.** How does program access differ from a rule that every building must be accessible, and why might the law choose that design?

Law, history and professional norms

The Department of Justice's guide for city governments explains Title II program access, curb ramps during street work and effective communication (U.S. Department of Justice, updated February 24, 2020). The law's history is inseparable from stairs. In the Capitol Crawl on March 12, 1990, activists climbed the Capitol steps to dramatize exclusion, and the ADA was signed that July (HISTORY, July 24, 2020). The protest was associated with ADAPT, which began as Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transit (Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, March 1, 2015).

Implementation remains contested. Advocates continue to press the MTA over broken elevators that block subway routes (amNewYork, March 24, 2025). A North Bronx station is set to get elevators nearly a decade after an ADA lawsuit (THE CITY, October 3, 2025).

Law, history and professional norms, continued

A federal audit found that little was known about compliance in ADA paratransit services (GAO, November 15, 2012).

Professional codes frame the duties on each side. ASPA asks public administrators to “respect and assist all persons in their dealings with public organizations” (ASPA Code of Ethics, 2013). NPPA asks visual journalists to “be complete and provide context when photographing or recording subjects” (NPPA Code of Ethics, no date listed). For lawyers, the ABA’s model rules require a basis in law and fact before bringing a claim, and they call for learning the facts first (ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, 1983, as amended). A report sized to its evidence meets all three standards.

 **Stop and think.** When does documenting a barrier become exploiting the person who faces it?

Sources

Real source | U.S. Department of Justice | February 24, 2020

The ADA and City Governments

Real source | HISTORY | July 24, 2020

When the ‘Capitol Crawl’ Dramatized the Need for Americans with Disabilities Act

Real source | Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities | March 1, 2015

The Capitol Crawl

Real source | amNewYork | March 24, 2025

Elevator advocates push for better subway accessibility

Real source | THE CITY | October 3, 2025

North Bronx Subway Station to Get Elevators, Nearly a Decade After ADA Lawsuit

Real source | U.S. Government Accountability Office | November 15, 2012

ADA Paratransit Services: Demand Has Increased, but Little Is Known About Compliance (GAO-13-17)

Real source | American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) | 2013

ASPA Code of Ethics

Real source | National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) | No date listed

NPPA Code of Ethics for Visual Journalists

Real source | American Bar Association (ABA), Center for Professional Responsibility | No date listed

ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct

Look at the evidence

On your own Read each document. For each one, write what it shows and what it leaves out. About 8 minutes.

Evidence A | Construction sign

The detour sign

The sign reads “SIDEWALK CLOSED AHEAD. PEDESTRIAN DETOUR.” Its arrow points to a path that begins with a flight of stairs. The sign went up on Monday. Mateo recorded it on Tuesday at 4:05 p.m.

Look closely: Where does the arrow point? Who could not use that path?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Evidence B | Route map

Sami and Mateo’s route map

1. Home to the corner of Elm Street and 4th Avenue: sidewalk clear. 2. Northeast curb ramp: blocked by construction fencing. 3. Bus stop: next bus in 12 minutes. 4. Bus to the parks department building. 5. Workshop entrance and room: not yet checked.

Look closely: Which stage is blocked, and which stage has nobody checked?

What it shows

What it leaves out

Look at the evidence, continued

Evidence C | Flyer

The workshop flyer

The flyer reads “Free Community Workshop Series. Tuesdays, 5—7 p.m., Parks Department Annex. All welcome! Questions? Call the front desk.” It gives no information about accessible entrances or how to request access.

Look closely: What does the flyer tell someone who needs to request access?

What it shows

What it leaves out

What is still missing from the evidence?

Notes

Key idea: program access

On your own Read the key idea and the code of ethics. Then answer the question in the box. About 10 minutes.

Program access is an ADA rule that a city's services, taken as a whole, must be usable by people with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Justice explains that Title II of the ADA covers state and local government programs and services. Program access generally does not require every older building to be accessible. For example, a city can relocate a service to an accessible place. Existing buildings and new construction have different requirements.

Access covers the whole visit: finding the information, getting there, going in, taking part and leaving. A **barrier** is something that blocks or limits a person from taking part. Sami meets one barrier at the curb ramp. The workshop flyer could be another, because it gives no way to request access. The Justice Department's guide for cities also covers curb ramps during street work.

One video of one corner cannot show whether a city is following the law. It can show what happened, where and when. An **ADA coordinator** is the staff member a government names to handle disability access questions and complaints. That office can say whether an accessible detour exists. Before you report a barrier someone else faces, ask them what they want said.

Professional standards

Real source | American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)

ASPA Code of Ethics: 3. Promote democratic participation

“respect and assist all persons in their dealings with public organizations”

In plain words: ASPA members in public service agree to help every person use public programs and services.

Question: The parks flyer says “All welcome!” with no access information. What should it add so Sami can request access?

Your answer

The flyer should add ____, so that ____.

A throwback to March 12, 1990, when activists climbed the Capitol steps to show what stairs do to access. The ADA was signed that July.



A lawsuit pushed a transit agency to add elevators, showing how the ADA makes access a public duty.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, typical of notebook paper or a document template. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

Sort the evidence

On your own Mark whether each piece of evidence supports or narrows each claim. Then write whose view is missing. About 6 minutes.

Sort what the evidence supports. Which claim can you make today, which one needs more facts, and who can supply them?

Evidence	Claim 1 The city is breaking the ADA.	Claim 2 On Tuesday, the posted detour did not work for a wheelchair user.
1 Photo: the northeast curb ramp blocked by fencing on Tuesday at 4:05 p.m.		
2 Detour sign points to a path that starts with stairs		
3 DOJ: Title II requires program access, not every facility to be accessible		

Still open

- Is there another accessible route to the bus and the workshop? Ask the ADA coordinator.

Whose perspective is missing?

Whose view is missing from these documents? What would you ask them?

The view that is missing is _____. I would ask _____.

Practice: choose a response

On your own Choose what Mateo should do and explain why. Then fix the two marked phrases. About 6 minutes.

Mateo wants people to know about the blocked corner. What should he do?

- ☐ **A** Post the video with a caption saying the city is breaking the ADA.
- ☐ **B** Send the ADA coordinator the corner, the time, the detour sign and one question, if Sami agrees.
- ☐ **C** Skip the report if Sami finds another bus stop that works today.

Why I chose it

Improve a draft

A student's first draft

1 The city is breaking the ADA. There is construction blocking the ramp and a wheelchair user I know couldn't get to the bus. We were standing there for like ten minutes trying to figure out another way and the sign just pointed to stairs. My friend almost missed her workshop because of it. This is discrimination and completely illegal. Nobody even cares about this. You need to **2** fix every ramp in the neighborhood right away or we will post the photos everywhere.

Rewrite each marked phrase so it says only what the evidence supports.

Rewrite phrase 1

Rewrite phrase 2

College

Your task

On your own Read the steps. Fill in the planner boxes before you start your draft. About 12 minutes.

Write a memo to the parks department about its workshop series. Report what Sami’s trip showed, summarize what the Department of Justice Title II guide says a city program must do and recommend two changes. Add a revised flyer that tells people how to request access.

Use: Case documents: the detour sign, the route map, the workshop flyer and Sami’s and Mateo’s statements. Real sources: the Department of Justice guide “ADA Update: The ADA and City Governments.”

You’ll make: Memo, 300—400 words, plus a revised flyer of 60—100 words

Time: 75 minutes

- 1 Complete a route audit of Sami’s trip: find, get there, enter, take part, leave.
- 2 Separate what the sign, the video and the map show from what they cannot show.
- 3 Summarize what the Department of Justice guide says a city program must do.
- 4 Choose two changes the parks department can make.
- 5 Write a memo of 300 to 400 words on the Your draft page.
- 6 Rewrite the flyer in 60 to 100 words so it says how to request access.



Prefer typing? Scan to open the online workspace.

What we observed

What the evidence cannot show

[illegible][illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

On your own Write your draft in the boxes. Use your planner from the page before. About 30 minutes.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Revised flyer, 60 to 100 words

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Check your work

On your own Answer the Check your work questions and mark your level in each rubric row. Then write one change you made. About 8 minutes.

Does your memo report observations with the place and time and no legal conclusion?

☐ Yes☐ No

Does your summary match what the Department of Justice guide says?

☐ Yes☐ No

Are both recommendations within the parks department’s control?

☐ Yes☐ No

Does your revised flyer say how to request access and whom to contact?

☐ Yes☐ No

How your work is scored

Mark one box in each row.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Evidence	☐ No location or time.	☐ General description.	☐ Specific location, time and observation.	☐ Specific observation plus what remains unknown.
Reasoning	☐ Declares a violation.	☐ Mixes observation and conclusion.	☐ Separates observation from legal question.	☐ Connects observation to program access and asks the right office.
Audience & purpose	☐ Threatening or vague.	☐ Polite but no clear request.	☐ Specific, answerable request to the right office.	☐ Request plus how to report future issues.

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Revision	☐ No change.	☐ Tone only.	☐ Adds specifics and removes the legal conclusion.	☐ Explains how each change helps the city act and respects Sami.

I changed ___ because ____.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Questions to discuss

On your own Write a short answer to each question. Then finish My take. About 10 minutes.

1 Which barrier on Sami's trip would a photo miss?

2 What is the difference between recording a barrier and making Sami the content?

3 Construction is temporary, but the detour affects people now. What should a city do to keep routes usable during repairs?

My take

My claim: ____.

The best evidence is ____, because ____.

Someone who disagrees might say ____.

[illegible]

Talk about this case at home

Case 10: Whose job is it to fix the blocked route?

In this case, construction blocks a curb ramp on a young woman's route to a city workshop, and the detour points to stairs. Your student studied what one video can show, then wrote a question for the city office responsible for access.

Questions to talk about

- 1 Who in our town takes care of sidewalks and curb ramps?
- 2 What details make a report to the city easy to act on?
- 3 Why should you ask someone before you post a video of them?

Nobody needs to share personal stories or private information to talk about this case.



See the case online.