



HOW TO CREATE AUDIO DESCRIPTION OF ARTWORKS

General Objective

This practice sheet aims to illustrate how to create a good audio description of artworks to promote inclusion. In this practice sheet, you will find:

- ✓ An introduction to the usefulness of audio description for inclusion
- ✓ A presentation of some existing resources

You will need:

- ✓ a computer with internet access
- ✓ an audio creation programme
- ✓ digital artwork from which to create an audio description

Challenges and issues

To make our society more inclusive, we need to make everyday activities easier for all citizens by breaking down differences. More inclusive education requires new ways of supporting teaching activities to overcome the barriers that make differences insuperable for some. Using an audio description to accompany a cultural activity, in this case, a work of art, can help stimulate learning and creativity, promoting inclusion, especially for those with specific learning difficulties.

Audio description to accompany the viewing and study of a work of art is an increasingly widespread feature in art, history and science museums for gallery exhibitions and virtual exhibitions on websites. **Verbal description uses words to represent the visual world, to help people form mental images of**

what they cannot see or understand from a first view. Using the technique of verbal description can make works of art accessible to all people and promote inclusion. If an inclusive audio description helps people engage and remember, it deserves public attention as a valuable tool for creating enjoyable and impactful experiences.



Adaptation

Let us start by listing some valuable tips to follow when writing an adequate description. Before writing a verbal description of a work of art, the first thing to do is **to gather information** about the artist, the style or school of art, the opinion of art critics, and the criticism of its audience. 'The basic rule is that the verbal description should not be about your opinions. Still, on the contrary, you should filter out all helpful information and synthesise it' (Snyder, 2010).

Tips: it can be very stimulating to interview and record an artist if this is possible, adding the audio clip to the verbal description. Even a recorded telephone conversation can be used as an audio clip for inclusion in the report. Hearing the artist's voice creates an immersive connection for the listeners, thus promoting inclusion.

For a figurative painting, you need to describe the point of view the artist has given to the viewer, who is now your listener. When using phrases such as "left" or "right", **explain whether you are referring to your point of view as a viewer of the painting or to the point of view of the subject in the picture.** As the verbal



description continues, it is essential to remember that you are progressively building an image in the listener's mind.

For the description of objects and figures within paintings, it may be helpful to **make comparisons in human terms**. To verbally describe something, sometimes the best way is an analogy to something in life that the listener might know or have experienced. Whenever possible, reference should be made to style and technique and how this technique influences the viewer's experience.

It is also essential to always remember that you are writing for a listener, not a reader, as the latter may re-read a word, a sentence, a paragraph.

Furthermore, a listener does not know what comes next and cannot go back and revise what they have just heard, so the aim is never to leave any doubt about what you want to explain.

When writing the audio description, **one should not use complex writing with a complex vocabulary**, as the listener wants basic information to facilitate understanding of the work. A verbal descriptive essay is **writing for the ear rather than the eye** and has basic principles that differ from traditional writing. We can summarise the basic rules of writing for a listener in 3 simple tips:

1. Use simple sentences, as they are direct, and each one facilitates a connection with a thought or image.
2. Use active verbs, as passive voice is weak writing for both the eye and the ear but is particularly annoying to a listener.
3. Write as if you were communicating verbally and not for a reader; choosing the language to use in audio descriptions is easier.



After clarifying the basic concepts of audio descriptions, let's see how to create your own to make artworks more inclusive:

1. Watch the artwork all the way through

This will give you a reasonable basis for writing your description. As you look, find the essential details, and then note how much time you have to work with it. Then, write your description accordingly.

2. Write your description

Look at the artwork and start writing a few words to describe what you are seeing to form your audio guide. As you write, try to make sure that your words convey the observation object. Avoid making your audio description too long as it will interfere with the listener's comment. During your narration, try to be meticulous in your description while remaining concise, and don't forget to recall any critical elements that appear in work.

3. Record your voiceover



Once you've completed writing your piece, it's time to record your voiceover. Use a microphone and record the description of the narration in a clear voice. The atmosphere of these voiceovers is more concrete than excited, but as

always, try not to sound like a robot. Note, keep an eye on your pace and make sure your descriptions are within the range of the listener.

4. Get your audio file into your post-production software

Once you have your audio descriptive narration (AD), bring the audio file into your favourite post-production software; we'll provide some good examples below. Then, add the AD narration to the displayed work. You may need to adjust the audio description volume here and there to ensure that the narration can be heard clearly.

Practical examples and inspiration

Let's start with an example of a description for an audio guide of a work of art. How would you rate this opening sentence in a verbal description of the painting?

The Mona Lisa is an oil painting on wood by Leonardo Da Vinci in the Louvre Museum, Paris collection.

This is efficient and concise writing, direct to the reader, easy to read and re-read, but not so easy to listen to and retain. Therefore, giving the facts individually, in sequence, starting with the essential points is better.



The title of the painting is The Mona Lisa.

The artist is Leonardo Da Vinci. It is an oil painting on wood.

It is in the collection of the Louvre Museum, located in Paris.

For paintings and sculptures, it is essential to give the listeners the dimensions of the work, specifying whether they are precise dimensions or approximations.

The sculpture is 18 cm high. It stands on a pedestal about 1 meter high.

The painting is a rectangle of about 70 cm high by 50cm wide.

It is best to quickly summarise the content and style of the painting or sculpture before going into detail.

It shows a central female subject (the Mona Lisa), with a natural landscape in the background. The natural elements extend horizontally across the painting from left to right.

Sometimes, you can suggest that the listener use their body to feel a particular shape or understand a figure's pose in a painting or sculpture.

To understand the pose of the Mona Lisa in Da Vinci's work, try this experiment: Stand up straight and imagine that the painter is standing right in front of you. Then, keep your head forward while turning your shoulders to the right about 45 degrees—your right-hand cross your left hand, which is resting on a wooden armrest of the seat.



To create your audio description, many description tools are available on the web;

YD YOU DESCRIBE [YouDescribe](#) results in a free accessibility tool to add an audio

description to your YouTube videos. So it gives everyone the chance to add a description to an existing video and allows visually impaired viewers to check it out right away.



verbit^Y

[Verbit](#) allows video content to be adapted to blind and low vision audiences. Pupils with an equal chance to enjoy the content by assuring that all video materials are accessible with audio descriptions.

Additional Resources

- The Art Beyond Sight Institute web site offers an PPT titled Verbal Description Training that focuses on how to use Verbal Description during group tours and how to integrate it into the interactive nature of live presentation with blind or visually impaired museum visitors.

Accessible at: <http://www.artbeyondsight.org/mei/verbal-description-training/writing-verbal-description-for-audio-guides/>

- Joel Snyder, (2010). American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project: Audio Description Guidelines and Best Practices. Version 3.1

<https://docenti.unimc.it/catia.giaconi/teaching/2017/17069/files/corso-sostegno/audiodescrizioni>

- Mandy Redvers-Rowe, (2017) Audio Description: An Artform in its own right.

Accessible at: [Audio Description: An Art Form In Its Own Right - Disability Arts Online](#)

- Tutorial: Make Your First Text-To-Speech Audio Description in 5 Minutes

Accessible at : <https://youtu.be/4qGXXdpALxY>

- Description of the Free Audio Description Tool YouDescribe

<https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/resources/free-audio-description-tool>

