

ACCESSIBLE CONTENT BEST PRACTICES GUIDE FOR DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS:

DESCRIPTIVE VIDEO
CLOSED CAPTIONING
INTEROPERABILITY AND CONVERGENCE
HARMONIZATION
MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT
END USER INTERFACE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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Overview

Best practices are fluid and intended to inform standards, however practices change over time due to technology, expertise and other factors. This document reflects best practices as of the date of publication and will be updated and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Descriptive Video Best Practices

Preface

Video description should offer equivalent access to film, television and online content in multi-platform environments for people who are blind or have low vision.

The purpose of video description is to support and reflect the entertainment qualities of the content through description of the visual stimuli and style conveyed.

Video description is ultimately a creative process regardless of style, implementation or quality. Not all visual content can be described thoroughly and decisions must be made regarding what is important to describe, the vocabulary used, timing and method of delivery - this is a creative process.

If possible, video description should occur within the production process rather than external to it. If it cannot occur within the production process, it should be overseen by a member of the creative team.

Diversity of approaches is encouraged and respected to reflect the diverse nature of film, television and online content.

Stylistic descriptive approaches are encouraged to consider the history, logic, and tangible rules that govern genre and sub-genres. Diversity of directorial styles should also be conveyed in descriptive decisions where possible.

Online/asynchronous environments offer the opportunity to lift some of the limitations that broadcast or synchronous environments experience.

Video Description Guidelines: General Principles

Visual elements necessary to understand and enjoy the entertainment experience are

described. Visual elements that are often overlooked by describers include title and end credits, subtitles and captions. Commercials and online content that stand alone or serve to support a program should also be described.

The process of creating video description is a creative act and subjective. The describer will have to make choices when describing. These choices should ensure that video description users are able to understand and enjoy what is occurring visually onscreen.

Opportunities for redundancies that clarify comprehension and enjoyment should be considered where possible. For example, a playful musical motif is associated with a particular bubbly character personality.

The style of description should be consistent throughout a project. For television, it is not required that the same describer describe every episode of a show, but the description style should be maintained.

The describer should be identified at the beginning of the program to eliminate confusion.

Description should only occur during non-dialogue pauses; description should never occur over dialogue, musical numbers or sound effects unless absolutely necessary.

Common well-known sounds such as a ringing telephone, barking dog, or a car horn usually do not require identification/description unless the sound is out of context or is coming from an unknown source.

Describers should ensure that elements important to the narrative are described before additional details are provided. If time allows, the describer can include additional descriptions about the setting, a character's physical appearance and/or clothing to enhance the experience.

Alternative Extended Described Video

Stop motion

Here are three commercials with stop video allowing for extended description. Also demonstrates speech synthesis.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/AccessForEveryone#p/u/3/wsIDV1iXV0Q>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/AccessForEveryone#p/u/5/nayR58PQvO8>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/AccessForEveryone#p/u/6/sMHQeyWUomQ>

YouTube Channel: Accessforeveryone

Described Video

Live

A successful narrator for live descriptive video should be as well-grounded in the people and places that are likely to crop up as possible, and be familiar with the general technique of described narrative writing so that they can improvise well and instantly recognize what a visually impaired person needs to know.

Depending on the length of the program, describers should alternate every half hour or so in order to keep fresh. However, for the purposes of continuity, that describer who is not “on-air” should remain in the booth/location to assist by suggesting what needs describing as it crops up, or in identifying people and places in real time. Ambient sounds may prove a challenge, so it is important that a technician in the control booth be assigned. The technician could also play a key role in occasionally pointing out description or provide names of who is appearing on camera. Key to live description is advance research and preparation. Knowing the names of the main on-air characters, as well as locations and other items that may require descriptions, e.g. regimental uniforms ahead of time, is a consideration for live descriptive video.

Some challenges are working around music of the event, as well as the constant running commentary. Remaining calm is key - if one is interrupted by a commentator or the 'soundtrack' of the event, one must simply wrap up what one is saying and not cut off in mid-word or get flustered. Given the real-time non-scripted nature of this activity, it is challenging and describers who are chosen to narrate live descriptive video should have a strong background as descriptive video writers.

Location of Live Describer

The video describer must be at the broadcaster facilities during the live event for three reasons: broadcast feed lag time in receiving the video from a remote location; audio mixing; and, sound quality at the video describer location.

However, while on-site, the video describer should be isolated in a separate space. The location of the video describer has an impact on the recording technologies used and noise cancellation requirements. It is important that the describer view and describe only what appears on TV. If he/she is viewing the entire stage/arena, and not looking at a TV, then the description may not match what is being broadcast due to camera angles, shot changes, zoom, etc.

It also may depend on the technical capabilities and space availability at each live event. A describer needs to be in a place where he/she can see what is being shown to TV viewers and be able to speak without disrupting the audience at the live event (if there is one).

Newscasts are normally easy because they are done from the same location each day. The describer can be set up in a sound-proof booth somewhere in the studio facility with a TV monitor and headphones.

A live event like a telethon or play or sports may require that the describer is located away from the audience so that his voice doesn't disturb them. Many sports facilities have media areas where the radio and TV announcers are located. The describer could be located there. Otherwise, being located off-site might make most sense.

Technical requirements

The technology requirements for described audio for live programming are similar to those required for postproduction described audio.

Different recording technologies can be employed for live description. These include "push-to-talk," stenomasks and hand held/mounted high quality unidirectional microphones; each microphone has advantages and disadvantages. Push-to-talk microphones may make a high-pitched tick each time they are activated/deactivated. A fader can be used to reduce this sound. Stenomasks are made up of a semi-soundproof housing that covers the describer's mouth or mouth and nose; the microphone is embedded within the mask's housing. This type of masks tends to result in a muffled voice and can attenuate articulation; however, it can be used on-set or in the audience with minimal disturbance.

High quality unidirectional microphones can be mounted on microphone stands so that the describer is not required to physically support it. However, standard unidirectional microphones can still pick-up and amplify surrounding/ambient sounds such as page turning or rustling, talking by others in close proximity to the describer, the describer's breathing and music.

Sound mixing and gain control will be required regardless of the recording technology used. Sound mixing allows volume level and timing to be adjusted while gain control determines the sensitivity of the microphone.

Staffing

For live description, staffing requirements are very similar. A screenwriter is not necessary as the material will be delivered live without need for a constrained script. An audio technician is required to assist with the noise cancellation and audio signal processing levels to ensure that levels between the described video and the live sound track, cut off

and microphone noise, background noise and other audio factors are mixed and filtered appropriately.

Preparation for live delivery of described video is required. First, a decision regarding the approach must be made by the production studio or broadcaster. Once that decision is made, a script is required. The script can vary from describing notes to fully prepared lines for delivery. However, it must also be recognized that spontaneous and unplanned events occur during live broadcasts and room for these must be allowed within any script.

There are a number of different approaches that can be considered, some of which overlap with post production approaches. These include colour commentary, creative team led, newsreader, and third party entertainment. Creative team led, newsreader and third party entertainment styles are outlined in the section on post production.

Colour Commentary

The widespread adoption of sports broadcasting via radio did not consciously arise out of a want to accommodate individuals with disabilities but rather to include remote participants. Radio offered listeners the ability to hear what was occurring at the event, supplemented by verbal descriptions and affective content. While audio description for the blind and low-vision tends to be highly factual, sports commentary adds an emotional element. During a sporting event, commentators rely on two different forms of talk: the play-by-play which is a verbal description of the action; and colour commentary, which provides listeners with background information and an interpretation of the action. Whereas play-by-play talk is similar to the information communicated via conventional described video, the addition of emotive elements makes the show enjoyable and entertaining way. Colour commentary is frequently used outside of sporting events for live events such as a New Year's Eve Concert and Countdown as well as Elections and Parades.

Producers of some television shows, films and web-based series are experimenting with the use of colour commentary as an alternative to conventional described video, for they believe that it not only communicates what is visually occurring but does so in a way that is entertaining and enjoyable for all, regardless of vision status.

In fusing traditional video description with colour commentary, a describer should work with and/or interview sources close to the production with the goal of understanding what it is about the piece of media that is most important to describe. When this is not possible, the describer must use the overall feel of the show and its genre to determine how best to articulate what is visually occurring in a way that complements the piece of media as a whole.

Timing

Timing is a very important aspect of high quality described video as talking over dialogue is discouraged. It can be very difficult to gauge the timing of described video for a live event

as it is often spontaneous and/or unscripted. It is recommended that the describer attend rehearsals whenever possible to acquire a sense of the rhythm and timing of the show. The describer should also work with production team members to understand how best to time the description of events without interfering with the show. The describer should also discuss with the team what is most important to describe, where musical interludes would occur, and the order of speaking of live performers.

Post Production

Technical requirements

The production of DV for English-language programming through a versioning house costs approximately five to six times the cost of Closed Captioning. The higher cost for description is due to the length of time it takes to produce one hour of descriptive content, ranging 3-5 days compared to a few hours for Captioning. Effectively, industry evolution of Descriptive Video in Canada approximates Closed Captioning in the early 1990's, when it took 3-5 days to caption 1 hour of programming and at a considerable cost. An investment in training, R&D for improved production software and increased demand stimulating industry growth and therefore competition, can reduce costs.

Staffing

Technical Director: A technical director transfers the program that has been sent for DV to a file format that can be used by the screenwriter. The program is then sent to the screenwriter for the creation of a DV script.

Screenwriter: A screenwriter must compile the script suitable for the DV track. It is helpful if the screenwriter first views the program without the images to determine the challenges of the program. Once the screenwriter has completed the DV script, it is then sent to a narrator/voicer and in-house producer who finish the job. Note: the narrator/voicer can be an in-house actor or other person trained in the art of video description.

Narrator/Voicer: A narrator/voicer performs the voiceover of the described program. A decision to use a male or female voice is made to compliment the program being described. For example, if the cast is predominantly male, the director may choose to have a female narrator to clearly distinguish the narrator from the production itself or a male narrator may integrate better with the style of show.

In-House Producer: The in-house producer carefully monitors the tone, inflection, cadence and other vocal factors of the narrator to ensure that they are appropriately tailored to the program. Please note there is some debate that the screenwriter should also be the in-house producer.

Sound Technician: A sound technician assembles, operates, maintains and repairs technical equipment used to record, amplify, enhance, mix or reproduce sound for films, television programs and live performances.

Equipment Required

Voice Booth:

Microphone

Monitor

Computers:

Specialized Software¹:

Video Editing

Audio production

Script Editing

Creative Team Led

In some cases, the creative team becomes involved in the creation of video description. If this occurs, it is important that the content creators consult with individuals who are blind or have low-vision to understand their needs as an audience or undertake video description training to become familiar with current practice.

While the creative team may consult with the user community on an ongoing basis, it is important that the user community realize that video description that results from the project may be markedly different from the conventional approach. This difference is a result of the creative team taking control of the description and developing a strategy, which makes the video description part of the entertainment experience.

Several examples of different video description styles that have been undertaken by creative teams include the use of a first person narrative with the main character actor as the describer, and creating a separate character for the describer and integrating this individual into the narrative. While there are no specific guidelines for this approach there are some important general considerations.

Begin the description process during the script writing phase even though details may need to be added during production and post-production.

Mix the video description and original sound tracks in same session.

Establish timing parameters during script writing and rehearsal processes. Record without strict attention to timing; small adjustments can be made to timing during post-production.

¹ There are software products on the market that are designed for the creation of descriptive video scripts and audio tracks.

Description Styles

Newsreader Style

The newsreader style of video description was developed from the tape-to-read program, where individuals would be recorded reading newspaper articles, which individuals who were blind or low-vision could then listen to over the phone or on a tape. This style is appropriate when the goal of the content creators is to educate viewers, as is frequently demonstrated in documentary films or news.

Third Party Led with a focus on Entertainment

Some third party video description providers are focusing on integrating video description users within the fictional universe. The video descriptions are usually stylistically similar to the program but delivered in the third person. For example, when describing visual actions and events for a situation comedy, the describer may take on a light-hearted tone, strategically choosing to communicate comedic visual events in a tone that is similar to the show. For a courtroom drama, the describer would aim to capture and maintain the intensity of each scene. Often trained actors are employed as video describers and are encouraged to use their talent to infuse the description with appropriate emotive characteristics.

Voice Synthesis

Voice Synthesis can replace the human describer voice in descriptive video. However, research indicates a preference for the human voice over voice synthesis. Voice synthesis quality has and continues to improve.

Audio Description

This is non SAP open format, e.g. telephone numbers, weather alerts, news bulletins.

General Descriptive Principles

Do not interrupt dialogue, musical numbers or sound effects, unless absolutely necessary.

Describe only what a sighted viewer can see.

Describe primarily, the least obvious and most significant visual details for the comprehension of context, plot and characters.

Only if time allows, add secondary details such as setting, clothing, physical appearance, etc, to enhance the experience.

Allow time for the listener to pause and enjoy/experience quiet moments, background noise and/or music. Description should not fill every moment.

If possible, the description script and approach should be vetted and approved by the creative team/director.

In this document, examples will be provided for third person and first person description styles for most sections. However, in some sections what is not recommended for third person may be appropriate for a first person style. Care should be taken in applying these examples to the relevant style.

Respecting the Content

The describer should not alter, filter or exclude content or images that disturb or offend them. Their role is to describe what they see and not to censor.

Logos/Credits/Titles

Titles and credits at the beginning and end of programs should be read at a normal pace without rushing. In general, although it is unlikely that there will be sufficient time to allow for the verbal delivery of all credits, effort should be made to include as many as possible.

Subtitles

Subtitles are sometimes used to provide translation when characters speak in a different language from the primary language of the show. In these instances, the describer should read the translation after stating that a subtitle appears. The recommended practice is to add a description with the sound effects at the beginning of the video if there are subtitles that the describer will be reading later in the video. This is considered to be “describing the screen real estate”.

An example for a tone indicator is the following:



A subtitled program is also one situation that may be acceptable to speak over the audio.

Signage

Signs may appear in the background, which have some relevance to the setting, plot or understanding of actions taking place. The describer should acknowledge signs, describe the content and read the message.

Example:

A road sign reads: "Caution Construction Zone"

Point of View and Tense

First person

The describer can take on the role of a character or a character describing her perspective/reflections on the events from some time in the future. In this case, it should be made clear to the audience that the describer is taking on a first person role. In using first person, the describer will refer to himself and his point of view. Past tense will be the common verb form used for this style.

Example (please note we are looking to identify a open source example of actual description to insert here)

I climbed atop the car and fought with my black-clad enemy."
We made it to the store just as the owner was closing up shop.

The nature of first person is that it is one perspective that may or may not be trustworthy.

Third person

The describer speaks from an objective point of view and should not include or reference herself in the narration.

Example

The sun rises over the city skyline
Don picks up a book and begins to read
She walks down the stairs slowly
He is sitting on the couch

Avoid (these examples may be appropriate for a first person description style)

Not: We now see Bruce entering the living room.
Better: Bruce enters the living room

Not: I notice that Ann is wearing a single glove.
Better: Ann wears only one glove.

Not: The wolf races towards us. (Note: this example would be usable for a first person description style
Better: The wolf races towards the three boys.

Identifying Sounds

Common well know sounds such as a ringing telephone, a barking dog, a car horn usually do not require identification unless the sound is out of context or is coming from an unknown source. Do not describe an unknown sound if such description will give away the plot.

Example

Malcolm is in the driver seat of his car. Another car moves close behind and the driver honks his horn and shakes his middle finger angrily.

Descriptive Verbs

When possible, use descriptive verbs to reduce repetition of common verbs and enhance to audience experience and understanding:

Example

Hold: Grasp, grip, clasp, clutch, seize, etc

Walk: Saunter, glide, hobble, march, stride, stagger, pace, etc

Smile: Grin, beam, smirk

Hold: Hug, cuddle, squeeze, clinch, etc.

Definite/Indefinite Articles

The indefinite should be used unless the article has already been mentioned, is known or is understood as the only one.

Examples

First person

Amir and I hurried down the stairs. At the bottom we discovered a slobbering, three-headed, fire-breathing beast.

Third person

Amy picks up a pen and begins writing. She drops the pen on the desk and closes her eyes. Dr. Jones is holding a scalpel. He makes a small incision and then places the scalpel on a tray.

Tricia's diamond ring is mounted inside a small blue velvet box.

Identifying Objects

When an object is first introduced, the indefinite article “a” is used. When the same object is referred to, or has already been known, named or identified, the definite article “the” is used. This helps distinguish new from known objects and multiple objects:

Examples

Sandra removes a chocolate from a heart shaped red box. She bites into the chocolate, closes her eyes and smiles.

I entered the cave bearing a sword. I saw the sword Excalibur embedded in a large stone and ran to it. I dropped my own sword on the ground and slowly withdrew the jewel-encrusted Excalibur from the stone.

Alan takes a broom out of the closet. He takes the broom with him and leaves the kitchen.

An object can be considered as known if its presence is understood as a given or common to the circumstance or setting:

Examples

Ida and George are sitting on the couch.

I light the candles on the dining room table.

She waters the flowerbeds with the garden hose.

Identifying Characters by Name

Unknown characters should be described by their prominent physical appearance or identity. Once a name is established for them, it should be used consistently. Minor characters, or those whose names remain unknown, should be described in general terms.

Example

Two men in dark suits sit in a parked car.

The heavysset man in the front passenger seat “ Hey Frank, how long are we going to wait here for Alison?”

Frank, the driver “Until I say so Marty”

“Fine, I was just asking.”

Alison, a tall well dressed woman, walks through the crowded sidewalk to the car and leans through the open window. “ Waiting long?”

When known characters first appear, they should be identified or introduced using their full name. Thereafter, the describer should consistently use the name that is most commonly used by the other characters to refer to them.

A doctor read my medical chart as Dr. Michael Hunt examined my arm while I was lying on the hospital gurney. Michael “ She appears to have multiple fractures to her arm Dr. Anderson. I have ordered x-rays.” Dr. Anderson “ She was unconscious on arrival, order a cat scan immediately.”

Raj Binder enters the classroom and approaches Consuela Singh. Raj grasps Consuela's hand and together they turn towards the children sitting at their desks.

Identifying Race/Ethnic Origin

The appearance of characters should not require that they be identified by race or ethnic origin, unless these types of identifications would provide meaningful information or insight to a sighted viewer that would not otherwise be available to the visually impaired in a similar timeframe i.e. plot development, character motivation or background.

Consider the role of a casting director. Is a character's race or ethnicity relevant to the selection and casting of roles and if so why?

Example

In a police drama series, investigators are interviewing witnesses/victims of a robbery. The actors playing the roles are Asian, Black, Aboriginal, etc. Should the describer identify the subjects' race/ethnic origin?

If sighted viewers could use the race or ethnic origin of the interviewees as clues to solving the crime or providing a better understanding of the culture or behaviour of the interviewees, then it would be appropriate to include race/ethnic origin in the description.

Example

A medical series with a large multiracial ensemble cast has doctors treating patients of various races and ethnic origins. Should the describer include this information when describing individual patients and medical staff?

In these instances the race or ethnic background of the characters may have no relevance. The rare exception might be if such information specifically relates to a plot development i.e. the patient has a disease that is specific to a racial/ethnic group.

Example

A reality show has contestants of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Should this information be included when identifying them?

If the describer thinks or has been informed by the director that this type of information is useful or meaningful to the viewer, then all contestants should be identified using these characteristics.

Terms to Describe Race/Ethnicity

Derogatory or disrespectful language should never be used unless it is part of the development of the character in a first person style.

For example, if the describer took on the role of an Indian princess from the mid-nineteenth century, the use of derogatory language when talking about or referring to

people of a “lower” class may be appropriate if that type of language is used in the original content.

It is important to remain sensitive and aware that some ethnic/racial descriptive terms accepted in western culture may differ from other cultures and do change over time.

Use common and factual terms to describe individuals that would be understood by the majority of viewers such as:

Light brown, brown, dark brown, tan, light tan,
Light/fair skinned, dark skinned, olive-skinned
Tan, ruddy, olive, white, yellow

If the attire of a character suggests their cultural or ethnic origin, then this information should be described i.e. kilt, burka, saris, kimono, parka, etc

Use of Racial/Ethnic Descriptive Terms in Settings

There are instances where the physical location/setting are relayed visually through stereotyped images or understood cultural clues. Should the describer use ethnic or cultural terms?

Example

street scene includes many small shops with signage in Chinese and many people of Asian origin. Should the describer refer to the setting as “Chinatown”?

An open air marketplace has multitudes of stalls and exotic goods on display. The vendors and many people are dressed in traditional Middle Eastern attire. May the describer refer to this as “An Arab Market”?

Such settings and descriptive terms are currently accepted in the Western cultural vernacular. Attempting to describe the setting to a visually impaired through a collection of “descriptive clues” rather than providing an interpretation otherwise obvious to all sighted viewers, would not be reasonable.

Identifying Gendered Expression

The appearance of characters should not require that they be identified by their gender expression, unless these types of identifications would provide meaningful information or insight to a sighted viewer that would not otherwise be available to the visually impaired in a similar timeframe i.e. plot development, character motivation or background.

Example

In a comedy series, characters are typically males appearing in cross dress clothing acting as women characters (even modifying their voices to be higher in pitch). This is part of

other characterizations that is used for comedic effect. Should the describer identify the subjects' as cross dressers?

If sighted viewers' benefit from the entertainment value of the cross-dressers in a typical comedy sub-genre, then it would be appropriate to include cross-dressing in the description. (Refer to the style of comedy in Monty Python or MASH)

Example

In a drama, the central character appears first as a male until it is revealed he was born biologically female. The character struggles with society's views of gender expression in a conservative small town environment. To be accepted as a male, the character changes his voice to a lower pitch. Should the describer refer to the character as a female who is transitioning to a male?

In these instances the gender expression helps the audience in understanding character development, they should be described and continued to be described as they transition.

Terms to Describe Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer (LGBTQ)

Derogatory or disrespectful language should never be used unless it is part of the development of the character in a first person style.

For example, if the describer took on the role of gay priest from the mid-nineteenth century, the use of derogatory language, such as "homo", when talking about or referring to him may be appropriate if that type of language is used in the original content.

It is important to remain sensitive and aware that some gendered or/and LGTBQ descriptive terms accepted in western culture may differ from other cultures and do change over time.

Use common and factual terms to describe individuals that would be understood by the majority of viewers such as:

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or queer

If the attire of a character suggests their identity, then this information could be described i.e. butch, femme, masculine, and/or feminine, etc.

Identifying Disability Expression

The appearance of characters should not require that they be identified by their ability/disability, unless these types of identifications would provide meaningful information or insight to a sighted viewer that would not otherwise be available to the visually impaired in a similar timeframe i.e. plot development, character motivation or background.

Consider the role of a casting director. Is a character's ability/disability relevant to the selection and casting of roles and if so why?

Example

If the audience knows a character is in a wheelchair and that person enters the screen. Would you say that that person "rolls in" or would you say that they "come in"?

If an assistive device is central to a character's movement, it may be appropriate to include verbs that more accurately describe the character's entrance.

Example

A wheelchair rugby documentary with a diversity of cast members including amputees, quadriplegics, paraplegics and so on. Should the describer include all the different levels of diversity of the team when they are on the court?

In these instances the diversity of characters' physical abilities may have no individual relevance. The rare exception might be if such information specifically relates to a plot development i.e. one of the players has more use of his upper body and hands and this has an impact on other players' perceptions of his involvement on the team.

Example

In a show, an interpreter voices for someone who is deaf. Should the describer identify that the character is being voiced by an interpreter if she is of the same sex?

In these instances a character's voicing does not need description. In instances, however, where not describing the voicing may cause confusion, such as a female interpreter voicing for a deaf male, it may be necessary to describe the voicing of ASL.

Terms to Describe People with Disabilities, Assistive Devices and Disability

Culture/Language

Derogatory or disrespectful language should never be used unless it is part of the development of the character in a first person style.

For example, if the describer took on the role of someone exhibited in a "freak show" during mid-nineteenth century, the use of derogatory language, when talking about or referring to him may be appropriate if that type of language is used in the original content.

Language used to talk about disability affects societal perceptions of disabled people. It is important to remain sensitive and aware that some disability descriptive terms accepted in western culture may differ from other cultures and can change over time.

Use commonly used terms to describe individuals that would be understood by the majority of viewers such as:

Someone with epilepsy, with schizophrenia, with down syndrome, with cerebral palsy, who is blind or has low vision, who is a quadriplegic, who is autistic, and or who is deaf etc.

Incorrect terms

Retarded, idiot, moron, imbecile, wheelchair bound, crippled, handicap, gimp.

Examples of Assistive Identifiers

Mobility: elbow crutches, wheelchairs, scooters, artificial limbs, walkers, casts, electric scooter, and wheelchair ramps.

Respiratory: breathing tubes, respirators, inhalator or inhalers, etc.

Visual/ auditory: hearing aids, TTY phones, cochlear implants, guide dogs, white canes, glasses, etc.

Others: EpiPens, catheter, feeding tube, other medical devices

Examples of Disability/ Non-Norm Identifiers

Types of disfigurements: burns, bruising, rash, scars, birthmarks, amputation, reconstructive surgery, balding etc..

Languages

Each sign language has its own name, for example American Sign Language or ASL, Japanese Sign Language or JSL, Langue des Signes Quebecois or LSQ; ASL interpreters, Braille etc.

Describing Age

Commonly used descriptive words can immediately identify the approximate age of the subject and are usually sufficient: infant, baby, toddler, child, pre-teen, teenager, youth, adult, young, middle-aged, elderly. Further descriptions could include:

A child of 8 to10 years old

A woman in her early 30s

A man in his 50s

For first person description, it is appropriate to state the age of the character:

I was 15 years old

Physical Character Appearance

Third person

The level of attractiveness of a character is a value judgment . Avoid using terms such as: beautiful, lovely, ugly, plain, etc unless relevant to the plot or genre. In general describe qualities that would allow the viewer to draw their own conclusions i.e. long shiny dark hair, large brown eyes, tall athletic build, flawless complexion, etc.

First person

A personal assessment of attractiveness is appropriate if it relevant to that particularly character. For example, if the describer takes on the character of a beauty pageant contestant, using language that describes the individual's self-assessment of her beauty (or others) is appropriate.

Attire

Describing the clothing worn by characters should be included if it helps establish characterization, role, plot development, setting, occasion, location, or the enjoyment of the genre.

Attire is often used to portray a stereotype. In these instances a sighted viewer instantly identifies the character type by their clothing .The describer could either describe the attire or the character type as appropriate for the situation.

Stereotype Examples

A comedy series has a recurring character that is a nerd/geek. Describing this character's unfashionable, outdated, and ill fitting or inappropriate clothing could help support the characterization.

A scene in a drama series has investigators enter a bar where many of the patrons are tattooed and wearing leather and chains. The describer could elect to simply call them "bikers", or to describe their attire, or both.

A person wearing a white coat over their regular clothing and carrying a stethoscope is a character stereotype which instantly identifies a doctor.

Occupation/Profession Examples

Hardhats = construction workers

Scrubs = medical staff

Dark suits and briefcases = businessmen/women

Military Uniforms = a soldier, a sailor, an officer, a general, etc.

Government Uniforms = police officer, firefighter, postal worker

Private Business Uniforms= fast food worker, courier, flight attendant

Sports Uniforms = baseball player, skier, figure skater, soccer player, etc

Religious Wear= nun, priest, minister, rabbi, imam, monk

Occasion/Setting/Activity Examples

Evening gown/tux = party, theatre, special event

Black clothing, veils and hats = funeral service

Costumes, masks = Halloween, Mardi Gra, amusement park, play.

Sweat suits, athletic shoes, t-shirts, water bottles = fitness club, runner, trainer

Bathing suits, sunglasses, large hats = holiday, leisure, beach, swimming pool.

Relationships

In most instances, unless the relationship between individuals is known, it should not be specified. However, certain relationships would be obvious or inferred to a sighted viewer because of cultural stereotypes i.e. a young woman holding an infant would often be described as a mother, a man throwing a ball to a child would be described as a father, an elderly person holding a baby, or playing with a small child might be called a grandparent. If the true nature of the relationship is unknown, the describer could use terms such as: motherly, fatherly, grandfatherly, etc. to describe such individuals.

Establishing Place/Setting/Time of Day

A view of the general setting, time of day and sometimes weather conditions is often provided very briefly during the opening credits or minutes of the program. This information should be shared with the viewers. Even in a recurring series, where many viewers may already know the primary location, confirmation, weather and/or the time of day establishes context and possible relevance.

Examples

Third person

Sailboats of all sizes race through the harbour, sails furled.

A full moon shines on Boston General Hospital

A crowded sunny beach, children frolic at the shoreline.

First person

Daytime in the city, heavy snow fell as cars moved slowly in clogged traffic.

On my street, my neighbour's son was riding his bike and delivering newspapers in the rain.

Describing Colour

Including colour in descriptions as appropriate is recommended, particularly when colour is associated with certain attributes i.e. white for purity, green for nature, red for passion, etc. It should not be assumed that colour holds no significance to the visually impaired, that they have never seen colour or lack understanding of the concept of colour or its cultural symbolism. However, a describer should consider word choices for colour that also contain a textural element where appropriate.

Examples

The ballroom is lit with fire.

The word "fire" in this example represents the colours of red and yellow but also has textural properties of heat or warmth.

My gown trimmed in gold.

The word gold used in this example can be understood as a colour but also has textural properties of being heavy and soft.

Facial/Physical Expression

Using terms which describe emotion or reaction through facial/physical expression is important to an understanding of characters and plot.

Examples

Either - John gives an evil smile as he escapes in his car.

This example adds extra unnecessary words “gives an evil smile” where one word is sufficient.

Or – John sneers as he speeds away in his car.

Ok – Andrew loves his shiny red bike.

In this example, the emotion is expressed directly without describing the action.

Better - Andrew smiles widely and strokes his shiny red bike.

In this example, the action is added and benefits the description.

Ok - I was shocked by Peter’s words and moved away.

This example adds extra unnecessary description referring to the words, which would have been heard.

Better – I recoiled from Peter in shock.

This example uses the word “recoil” to indicate the action resulting from “Peter’s words.”

Ok- I was enraged; I wanted to fight with Alex.

Better- I glared at Alex, my fists clenched.

Descriptive Video Digital Distribution

Preface

There are existing standards for the digital distribution of descriptive video. However, as of the date of this publication, most ATSC television manufacturers do not include the necessary receiving device. Further, over the air Digital DV transmission currently requires the viewer to re-map their digital receiver. Ironically, this is nearly impossible for sight-impaired person.

ATSC Digital Distribution Standards

ATSC PSIP A/65, AC-3 descriptor -PMT entry for Descriptive Video. It points to a separate audio stream to carry descriptive video (it really is an audio program).

ATSC PSIB A/65, AC-3 data stream has a descriptive video pointer to point to a separate audio stream to carry descriptive video.

Possible ATSC Standards for future innovation in accessibility

Audio part of the ATSC A/53 ATSC Digital Television Standard (ATSC A/53, Part 6:2010, "Enhanced AC-3 Audio System Characteristics"). This standard and the one on "Service Multiplex and Transport Subsystem Characteristics" (ATSC A/53, Part 3:2009) mention that there is provision in the standard to support associated services for visually and hearing impaired (section 6. MAIN AND ASSOCIATED SERVICES of A/53, Part 6:2010, more specifically paragraphs 6.3 and 6.4; and paragraph 6.8.3 ISO-639 Language Descriptor of A/53, Part 3:2009).

MPEG-7, formally named "Multimedia Content Description Interface", is a standard for describing the multimedia content data that supports some degree of interpretation of the information meaning, which can be passed onto, or accessed by, a device or a computer code. MPEG-7 is not aimed at any one application in particular; rather, the elements that MPEG-7 standardizes support as broad a range of applications as possible. You can find an overview at <http://mpeg.chiariglione.org/standards/mpeg-7/mpeg-7.htm>