

Audio Description Tipsheet

Audio description (AD) provides visual information to people who are blind or have low vision. During the show, trained audio describers supply any pertinent visual content, telling patrons about the costumes, sets, lighting, characters, and movement on stage. In addition to offering information about visual content, audio description offers a measure of independence to people with vision loss. No longer do they have to rely on a companion to tell them what's happening onstage. They can receive detailed information from a professional describer via a headset, and enjoy the show independently.

Core Skills for Audio Describers

- Have strong writing and voicing skills.
- Use language descriptively.
- Command a large vocabulary.
- Can articulate what they see without imposing opinions, but can interpret and determine the most significant elements.
- Understand how a patron or visitor who is blind or has low vision processes information.
- Appreciate the aesthetics of theater and performance.
- Possess common sense and good judgment.

Standards in Customer Service for patrons with Vision Loss

- Audio description basics: who uses AD, what it provides to users, and how it is delivered. AD equipment instructions: where equipment is located and distributed, how it works, and how it is distributed.
- Information about blindness and low vision, and how different degrees of functional vision might impact people with vision loss.
- Disability etiquette and language that concerns patrons with vision loss, including respect for the use of white canes or service animals.
- Customer service, especially how to courteously ask patrons with vision loss if they require assistance, and how to assist patrons with mobility and orientation.
- Introduce yourself and others with you. Use a normal tone of voice.
- Use the person's name when starting a conversation so the person knows you are talking to him/her. Tell the person when you end the conversation or move away.
- Ask people if they need assistance. If they answer affirmatively, allow them to take your arm, do not grab theirs.
- Warn people of any steps or changes in level. Use directions like "left" or "right."
- When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.
- Do not pet a service animal. When walking next to a person with a service animal, walk on the side away from the animal.

Standards in Training for Audio Description

- Participants should use photos of costumes, sets, videos/DVDs of dance and theater performance pieces, and any other elements that will give them an opportunity to practice description.
- Trainees should practice using microphones and any other equipment. They should also listen to description via a receiver so they will understand what description sounds like to AD users.
- Discussion and practice of description in the actual setting. Attendees may practice during a live performance or use a video/DVD.
- Expectations: New trainees should understand what will be expected of them after completing the training. Inform them about any mentoring systems or opportunities for more practice, and tell them how they will fit into your new AD program.

Sensory Seminar

When it comes to making the arts accessible to people with vision loss, audio description is just one part of the whole experience. Sensory seminars allow patrons the opportunity to experience the feel of costumes, the sound and spatial orientation of the set, and more. Programs and theater bills in accessible formats (Braille, large print, and electronic format) offer people with vision loss the same information as other patrons.

Best Practices

Best Practices for Audio Description can be viewed in this document created by the American Council of the Blind Audio Description Project. <https://adp.acb.org/guidelines.html>