

AUDIO DESCRIPTION IN HBBTV

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1. DEFINITION

Definition 1 _____

1.1. GENERAL DEFINITION

General definition 1.1 _____

Audio description (AD) is a service for the blind and visually impaired that renders visual arts and media accessible to this target group. It offers a verbal description of the relevant (visual) components of a work of art or media product, so that blind and visually impaired patrons can fully grasp its form and content.

1.2. AD TYPES

AD types 1.2 _____

AD is offered with different types of arts and media content, and, accordingly, has to fulfil different requirements. Descriptions of “static” visual art, such as paintings and sculptures, are used to make a museum or exhibition accessible to the blind and visually impaired. These descriptions can be offered live, as part of a guided tour for instance, or made available as downloadable files on a museum’s websites, as part of an audio guide.

AD of “dynamic” arts and media services has slightly different requirements. The descriptions of essential visual elements of films, TV series, opera, theatre, musical and dance performances or sports events, have to be inserted into the “natural pauses” in the original soundtrack of the production. AD for dynamic products can be recorded and added to the original soundtrack (as is usually the case for film and TV), or it can be performed live (as is the case for live stage performances).

EXAMPLE LIVE AD

EXAMPLE RECORDED AD

1.3. AD AND AUDIOVISUAL LANDSCAPES

The audiovisual landscape varies between countries. Therefore, AD is created differently, depending on the country.

a) AD and subtitling

In the case of subtitled films, the subtitles need to be voiced and turned into what are called Audio Subtitles (AST).
(See the AST document).

b) AD and dubbing

In the case of dubbed films, the AD track is mixed with the dubbing track.

EXAMPLE AD WITH DUBBING

c) AD and voice over

In the case of films with voice over, AD track is mixed with the soundtrack already containing the original and voice over track.

EXAMPLE AD WITH VOICE OVER

1.4. AD AND AUDIO INTRODUCTION

Some films or theatre productions require an introduction (called Audio Introductions, AI) for various reasons. An AI is a continuous piece of prose, providing factual and visual information about an audiovisual product, such as a film or theatre performance, that serves as a framework for blind and visually impaired patrons to (better) understand and appreciate particular audiovisual material. It can be created to enhance the AD of that material, or it can be made to stand alone. The AI can be recorded and made available well before the viewing of the material (on CD, via a website, etc.) or it can be delivered live, as is often the case in the theatre. The introduction can be spoken by a single voice or it can be a combination of voices and sound bites.

EXAMPLE AUDIO INTRODUCTION

2. PRODUCTION

The creation and distribution of AD is a complex process that requires the collaboration of multiple professionals from different fields: audio describers, voice talents or voice actors, sound technicians and users.

2.1. AD SCRIPTWRITING

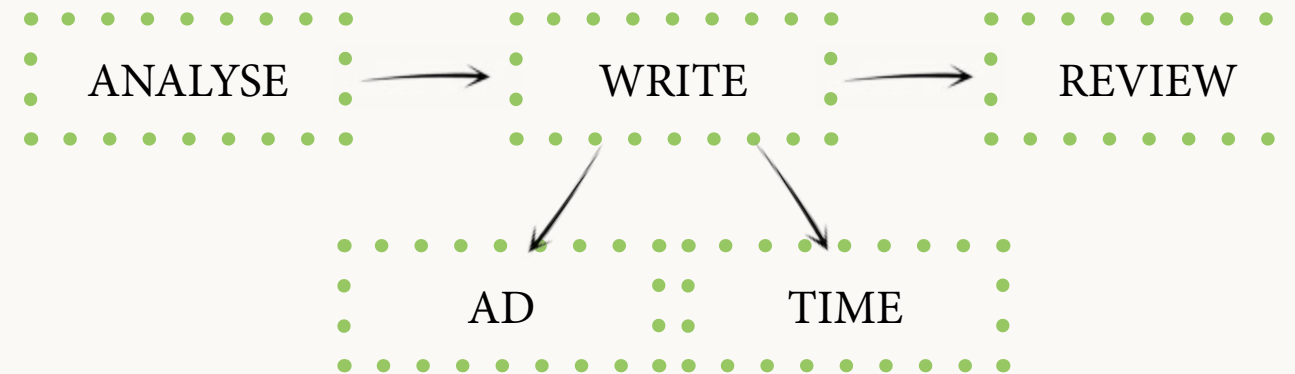
Below are the general rules related to AD scriptwriting.

For more information please refer to the ADLAB project (<http://www.adlabproject.eu>).

2.1.1. Steps

Writing the AD script usually includes the following steps:

- a) viewing and analysing the source material;
- b) writing the AD and timing it so as not to cause overlap with the other channels of the soundtrack, especially the dialogues;
- c) reviewing the AD script while viewing the film; this can be done together with a blind or visually impaired collaborator .



2.1.2. Placement

The placement of AD should be as follows:

- a) AD should only occur during non-dialogue pauses.
- b) AD should never occur over dialogue.
- c) AD should not obscure music that is necessary to understand the story line.
- d) AD should not fill every moment. Where possible, AD should allow time for the listener to pause and enjoy/experience quiet moments, music (that is used to increase emotional resonance) and/or background noise.

2.1.3. Guidance for describers

Audio describers should make sure that:

- a) AD contains all the necessary cues to allow the blind and partially sighted audience to follow the story (elements essential to the narrative are described before additional details are provided);
- b) AD is engaging and clearly presents information in a manner that can be understood by intended users;
- c) AD style is consistent throughout a programme or throughout the programmes in a series;
- d) AD considers the history, logic and tangible rules that govern genre and sub-genre;
- e) the words selected and used for AD are appropriate to the era and genre of the original content;
- f) they make use of a background in or previous knowledge of the culture from which the content originated; where it is not possible, ADs should be evaluated by persons with a background in or previous knowledge of the culture from which the content originated, before being released;
- g) a narration style for AD is identified and followed consistently within the same piece of content, be it third or first person style.

Necessary cues	✓
Understandable	✓
Consistent style	✓
Considers background	✓
Appropriate language	✓
Same style	✓

2.1.4. General guidance

a) Description of sounds

- common well-known sounds such as a ringing telephone, barking dog or a car horn should not be identified / described unless the sound is out of context or is coming from an unknown source;
- an unknown sound should not be identified / described if such description will give away the plot.

b) Logos/Credits/Titles

- 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;
- titles and credits at the beginning and end of programmes should be read at a normal pace without rushing.

c) On-screen text

- the audio describer should acknowledge text elements, describe the content and read the message;

NOTE: Signs, speech bubbles, and other non-captioned on-screen text elements might appear in the background, which have some relevance to the setting, plot or understanding of actions taking place.

d) Describing colour

- colour should be included in descriptions as appropriate;
- it should not be assumed that colour holds no significance to blind persons or persons with low vision, or that they have never seen colour or lack understanding of the concept of colour or its cultural symbolism.



e) Describing visual effects

- camera-specific terminology may be used if it is a commonly used term in the language;
- lighting and lighting effects can be used for mood and/or symbolism;
- some dances, dance styles, or movements have specific names that should be used. When the dance is not identifiable by a specific name, a more general term can be used.

f) Identifying characters or places

- when known characters or places first appear, they should be identified or introduced using their full name;
- minor characters or places should be described by their prominent physical appearance or identity;
- minor characters or places, or those whose names remain unknown, should be described in general terms.

g) Facial/Physical expression

- terms should be used which describe emotion or reaction through facial/physical expression when they are important to an understanding of characters and plot.

h) 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.

i) Establishing place/setting/time of day

- information on view of the general setting, time of day and sometimes weather conditions, which is often provided very briefly during the opening credits or minutes of the programme, should be shared with the viewers.

j) Animated characters/objects vs real actors

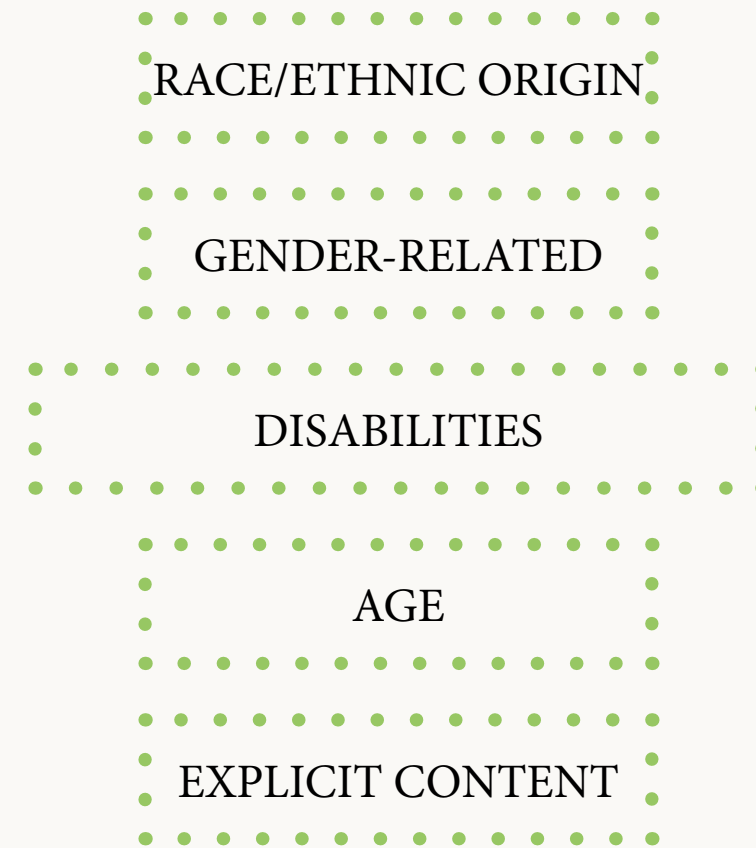
- an animated character or object should be identified as being animated.



2.1.5. Political correctness

The audio describer's role is to describe what is seen and not to censor. The audio describer should not alter, filter or exclude disturbing or offensive content or images. If for example, the original script uses coarse language, the AD script should adopt similar coarse language.

- a) Race/Ethnic origin
- b) Gender-related
- c) Disabilities
- d) Age
- e) Explicit content



2.2. AD RECORDING

AD recording 2.2 _____

2.2.1. Female vs male AD

The voice of the AD narrator has to be clearly distinctive from the other voices in the video. Therefore, a male or a female voice may be chosen for reading the AD script.

EXAMPLE FEMALE AD

EXAMPLE MALE AD

2.2.2. Human vs artificial AD

Speech synthesis can replace the human narrator in AD; however, research indicates a preference for the human voice over voice synthesis. The quality of speech synthesis is determined by its similarity to the human voice and by its ability to be understood.

AD recording 2.2 _____

EXAMPLE HUMAN AD

EXAMPLE SYNTHETIC AD

2.2.3. AD mix

It should be recognized that AD might be recorded (by users if not also by producers), regardless of whether the video program was live or pre-mixed. The volume of the AD should have a good balance with the volume of the content audio.

AD recording 2.2 _____

EXAMPLE GOOD MIXED AD

EXAMPLE BAD MIXED AD

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the user tests carried out within the framework of the HB-B4ALL project (<http://www.hbb4all.eu/>), the following general recommendations for AD production have been made that enables listeners to follow the film.

Case Type	Recommendation
Films/programs where male voices are in the majority	Deliver AD with a female voice
Films/programs where female voices are in the majority	Deliver AD with a male voice
Films/program with a mix of voices (male and female)	Deliver AD with a male or female voice, possibly different from those in the original film soundtrack
Feature films	Deliver AD with a human voice
Documentary films	Deliver AD with a human or a synthetic voice
Films/programs for bilingual audiences	Deliver AD in the same language as the language of the film (e.g. film in Catalan with AD in Catalan; film in Spanish with AD in Spanish)
Foreign films with subtitles	In case subtitles are recorded as audio subtitles, use a voice different than the one used for AD, e.g. if AD is already delivered with a female voice, then audio subtitles should be delivered with a male voice and vice versa, or if AD is already delivered with a female voice, then audio subtitles may be delivered with a female voice, but different than the one used for AD
Films with dense dialogues	Complement AD by audio introduction containing additional information that allows to follow the film
AD style	Deliver AD with a style that matches the style of the film; not necessarily objective and flat