



Access2Arts

Thinking about becoming an audio describer?

What is audio description?

Audio description is a means of making the arts accessible through words to blind and vision-impaired people.

Is this role right for me?

To do this role, you will need to:

- Have a good command of the English language (written and spoken)
- Have strong vocal skills, clear and pleasant voice as well as the ability to use your voice to reflect mood.
- Have highly developed observational skills (good concentration and attention to detail)
- Have the ability to summarise information accurately
- Have a good sense of timing
- The ability to work the ability to work autonomously as well as willingness to work as part of a team
- Have an understanding or appreciation of the arts

Audio description requires you to be able to convey the important visual aspects of the story and write them effectively in interesting prose – to choose the essential pieces of information which carry the story forward for the audience member. Audio Description Association Scotland

What does an Audio Describer do?

For theatre and dance

In theatre and dance, audio description consists of three essential elements:

1. A description of the set, characters and costumes, giving the blind and vision impaired audiences information about the visual style and design of the production, information that would be immediately available to sighted people, helping to shape their experience. These 'introductory notes' are delivered just prior to the performance, and ideally will also be recorded and sent out in advance.
2. A touch tour, enables blind and vision impaired audiences to explore the set and some crucial props or costumes, enabling them to gain a fuller picture of the style of the production. Audio describers accompany patrons during the tour and they are usually joined by some of the performers, who talk about their characters. Touch tours typically take place 60 minutes before an audio described performance.

3. A description of the visual elements of the performance. This will include characters' actions and reactions, shifts in location and lighting effects. The description is delivered live, in order to accommodate the changes in pace that are integral to live performance, whether a play, a circus, an opera, a piece of street theatre, contemporary or classical dance. The describers will time the description so that it does not overlap dialogue or lyrics, taking care to describe only essential elements, and allowing the piece to 'breathe'. They will use a vocabulary and a vocal delivery that is unobtrusive and sympathetic to the production. In the hands of an expert, audio description is almost unnoticeable. The audience member uses a lightweight headset to listen to the description.

For visual arts and museums

In museums and galleries, audio description is offered in different ways. It might be a recorded guide on a handheld device, giving orientation information and descriptions of key exhibits that the blind or partially sighted visitor can listen to as they make their way around the collection. It might be a bespoke tour exploring key pieces in a collection and could involve tactile aides and handling objects.

For Moving Image

Much like live description, the visual information is inserted between the natural dialogue. The same elements of set, movement and costumes still need to be described. Video tracks may be slowed down or paused for description or lengthier descriptions to be inserted, should it be required. Video or movie description does not provide the opportunity for the vision-impaired person to access tactile items such as key pieces of set or costumes so the description attempts to cover aspects that could normally be covered in a touch tour.

How long do describers spend developing their audio description?

Audio description tasks vary greatly but on average, a describer working on a theatre show, which will have two described performances can expect to spend at least 15 hours preparing their script and resources.

'What's the most satisfying thing about audio describing a play?

Finding exactly the right word to describe a movement or an expression so that it conveys precisely what is needed. It's also a genuine pleasure to meet the audience at the touch tour and find out what they enjoy about theatre.'

Roz Chalmers

For more information or advice please contact Access2Arts' Audio Description co-ordinator Jody Holdback via email jody@access2arts.org.au
Telephone +61 (0)8 8463 1689 or 0421 333 245