



AD Logo

**AMERICAN COUNCIL OF THE BLIND'S
AUDIO DESCRIPTION PROJECT**

***AUDIO DESCRIPTION GUIDELINES
and BEST PRACTICES***

September 2010 – A Work In Progress

Version 3.1 – Joel Snyder, Editor

"The American Council of the Blind, through its Audio Description Project, believes it is critical for knowledgeable users of description to establish these guidelines / best practices for audio description as it occurs in a broad range of formats: television/film/DVDs/downloads, performing arts, visual art and other areas. Only in this way can we be certain of receiving a consistent, high-quality product, developed in a professional environment."

Kim Charlson, Vice-President, American Council of the Blind

Chair, Audio Description Project Committee

August 2009

"The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter--it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

- Letter by Mark Twain to George Bainton, October 15, 1888

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PREFACE

These Guidelines/Best Practices have been gathered / developed and are an ongoing work-in-progress by the ACB's Audio Description Project chaired by ACB's Vice President Kim Charlson. The word "gathered" is used since the work here is not, by and large, new: it is a "review of the literature," a culling of material that exists in documents that are widely available. Generally, those documents are not the result of scientific research. But they reflect and in turn these Guidelines/Best Practices are based on many years of experience with audio description in a wide range of contexts.

The Guidelines/Best Practices are intended to be overarching in nature, i.e., they are written to apply to audio description generally no matter the subject being described or the particular format or genre in which description is used. There are, of course, significant differences in describing media as opposed to developing a tour for a museum exhibition. Consequently, we have developed sub-sets of these Guidelines/Best Practices that focus on Performing Arts, Media, and Visual Art.

An initial draft of this document was reviewed by the public on a wikidot.org web page throughout June 2009 and was discussed in depth at the Audio Description Project Conference in Orlando, Florida, July 6-8, 2009. This version of these Guidelines/Best Practices was reviewed by a Guidelines Committee including Kim Charlson, ACB's Vice-President and Head Librarian, the Perkins School for the Blind; Fred Brack, webmaster, www.acb.org/adp; Thom Lohman formerly of the Described and Captioned Media Program; Rick Boggs of We See TV; Bryan Gould of WGBH; Lisa Helen

Hoffman, Audio-Description Consultant, Trainer and Patron of Audio-Description Services of LHH Consulting; Deborah Lewis, CEO, Arts Access Now, founding member, Audio Description Coalition; Nina Levent, Art Education for the Blind, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Christopher Gray, immediate past president of the American Council of the Blind; and Joel Snyder, Director, Audio Description Project) and will now be posted on the web for further input from anyone interested via a wikidot.org page. The committee will monitor and review all contributions and our goal is to have a final version made public by mid-2010.

Finally, we want to credit with a large measure of appreciation the original source material on which this document is based. The material includes:

- Art Education for the Blind's "Making Visual Art Accessible to People Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired"
- Audio Description Coalition Standards and Code of Conduct (the ADC Code of Conduct is reprinted, with permission, at the end of this document
- "Audio Description Techniques" by Joe Clark (Canada)
- "Audio Description: The Visual Made Verbal" by Joel Snyder from The Didactics of Audio Visual Translation, edited by Jorge Diaz Cintas, John Benjamins Publishing, London, England and on-line course for Fractured University

- Described and Captioned Media Program “Description Key” (developed by DCMP and the American Foundation of the Blind)
- ITC (Independent Television Commission) Guidance on Audio Description (U.K.)
- National Captioning Institute Described Media “Style Guide”

DEFINITIONS

Audio Description (AD)

Audio Description (AD) is a tool for people who are blind or have low vision that provides access to the visual aspects of theater, media, and visual art—and any activity where images are a critical element. Using words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative, describers convey visual information that is either inaccessible or only partially accessible to a segment of the population. In addition, description may also benefit people who prefer to acquire information primarily by auditory means and those who are limited—by proximity or technology, for instance—to accessing audio of an event or production.

The Audio Description User / Patron

The principal patrons of audio description are people who happen to be blind or have low vision. Who are “the blind”? They are *not* “the blind.” They are individuals -- housewives, scientists, artists, business people ... or, of course, any of us who happen to develop vision loss.

People who listen to audio description are unique individuals living with some degree of vision loss as the result of a wide range of causes. Most at one point had all or some of their sight and now they may have only peripheral vision, they may see only shapes, light and dark, colors, movement, shadows, blurs, or “blobs” -- or have “tunnel vision.” Most users of description are not totally blind; indeed, only 1-2% of the legally blind are

congenitally blind (blind from birth); others are adventitiously blind or developed total blindness later in life. Only 10% know Braille.

The American Foundation for the Blind reports that 25.2 million Americans have vision loss (i.e., have trouble seeing even with correction or are blind). While description was developed for people who are blind or visually impaired, many others may also benefit from description's concise, objective "translation" of the key visual components of various art genres and social settings. Audio Description is an "Assistive Technology"; it is meant to enhance, not replace the user's own powers of observation.

Audio Describer(s) / Describer (s)

The person responsible for developing the description to be voiced. As Canadian writer Joe Clark makes clear, describers and voicers serve the audience and the production, not themselves. He explains: "You're not providing descriptions to show off your vocabulary or to highlight your beautiful voice. You work for the production and the audience. A certain self-effacement is required." Background in the medium or genre being described can also be helpful.

Voicer (or Voice Talent)

The person who voices the description (in some cases, often in the performing arts, the describer also is the voicer).

The Consultant (s)

The Consultant is a person who is blind or visually impaired, an individual who has experience in the use of audio description, and who has the ability to analyze the descriptions. The Consultant's role is to ask questions and assist in the creation of descriptions so that a sufficient amount of information about the visual details is included in concise and accurate descriptions. The Consultant offers written suggestions for description delivery so that they flow and dovetail with any existing spoken portion of the subject being described.

CORE SKILLS

This section is intended as an over-arching set of guidelines, applicable to audio description in whatever setting, genre or format it occurs. Later sections provide more specific techniques for the following areas:

- Performing Arts (Theater, Dance, Opera)
- Media
- Visual Art / Exhibitions

THE BASICS

The audio describer is part journalist, faithfully relaying the facts:

WHO

Who is in the image? What do they look like?

- Age

One doesn't see someone's age unless the individual being described is wearing a button that proclaims, "I'm 60!" What does he/she look like? Those are the characteristics to cite, the things you see that prompt you to think that the individual is a certain age. In some description formats, of course, time is of the essence, and short-cuts include: In her late forties; in his sixties; pre-teen; teenage.

- Hair/Build/Clothing

Cropped brown hair; long blond hair; red-headed woman; slim; tall; stocky; dressed in a white pantsuit; wearing a blue floral dress; in a bright red sweater; the tuxedoed "Bond."

- Relationship

Mother, father, son, brother-in-law, etc.—but take care to only specify if it is known.

- Characters / People

Describe individuals by using the most significant physical characteristics.

Identify ethnicity/race as it is known and vital to the comprehension of content. If it is, then all main characters' skin colors must be described—light-skinned, dark-skinned, olive-skinned. (Citing the race only of non-white individuals establishes “white” as a default and is unacceptable.)

WHAT

To a certain extent the describer's choices of what to describe are based on an understanding of blindness and low vision:

- Go from the general to the specific—start generally, creating a context, then move to details to enhance understanding and appreciation. Provide visual perspective as appropriate and as time allows. The initial information presented about a scene will create a foundation in the minds of the audience members;

- Use of color—the ITC Standards explain: “Most visually impaired people have at some time seen colours and either retained the visual memory of colour or can remember the significance and impact of a particular colour. ... People who are blind

from birth or from an early age cannot ‘see’ colours but they do understand the significance of a particular colour by its association. They may not ‘see’ green, but the colour of flower stalks, leaves and grass, which people can touch and smell does mean something.” When asked about the perception of color, a congenitally blind audio description user in Oregon recommended reading Mary O’Neill’s “Hailstones and Halibut Bones,” a children’s classic of poetry and color.

- Inclusion of directional information—whether on a screen, a stage, or in front of an exhibition, some AD users will “see” if you tell them *where* to look. In addition, directional “pointers” can help AD users organize the information they hear, i.e., going from top to bottom, right to left, clockwise, etc.

- Describe what is most essential for the viewer to know in order to understand and appreciate the image being described.

- What’s happening? What actions are most important for a clear understanding and appreciation of the image(s)?
- Describe expressive gestures and movement (resist any temptation to convey what you may feel is inferred by them, such as an emotional state).
- The oft-referenced “first rule of description” is to “Describe what you see” or W.Y.S.I.W.Y.S. – “WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU SAY”

What is the critical visual information that is inaccessible to people who are blind or have low vision? Some have already been noted: key plot elements, people, places, actions, objects, unknown sound sources not mentioned in the dialogue or made obvious by what one hears.

Example: Mention who answers the phone—not that the phone is ringing. It's not necessary to describe obvious sound cues. At times, the source of a sound may not be clear—a description may be appropriate. Indeed, let context be one of the deciding factors in whether to describe sounds. For instance, if the scene is set in an underground cave and a telephone rings, it would likely be important to include “a telephone rings” in the description, as the mere fact that the phone is ringing in such a seemingly odd locale would not typically be contextually relevant, and may be jarring or confusing to the viewer if left undescribed.

- Specificity creates images in the minds' eye to a far greater degree than a general reference. It is more interesting to hear of the items in a mound of clutter if time permits than to say, “The attic is cluttered.” In other words, be specific when time allows. If at all possible, don't crunch separate events/images into a single item and provide detail when describing media like a photograph. For example: A series of images: a tidal wave seen from above and below sea level; a shark, its teeth bared, veers in a swift 180o to the right; an octopus shoots a dark mist at a predator before being snatched away. If an image is a photograph—is it color or black-and-white?—what size? Is the woman in the photo simply smiling or is she wearing a broad grin? how many? (5 men, 6 airplanes) position? (He comes up behind her. A car turns left.)

- Less Is More. Description cannot and need not convey every visual image on display. Quality audio description is not a running commentary. Listeners should be allowed to hear actors' voices, sound effects, music, ambiance in a museum—or experience

silence throughout the description. Describers need to differentiate between imagery that has a purely decorative purpose, and that which is relevant to the unfolding action or greater context of the production. At the same time, the describer's judgment is critical: description should facilitate understanding as well as convey an appreciation of the image.

The ITC Standards cautions that "However tempting it is to use colourful imagery and elegant turns of phrase, clarity is the main aim of audio description. As a rule, too much description can be exhausting or even irritating. The [image being described] should be allowed to breathe from time to time, allowing [it and its] atmosphere to come through. The describer must learn to weed out what is not essential."

And Joe Clark adds (in speaking of description for media), "Describe when necessary, but do not necessarily describe."

Ask yourself: "What is most critical to an understanding (*he points to his head*) and appreciation (*his hand is on his heart*) of that visual image?"

Think: Can I visualize what's happening without becoming confused?

Feel: Did I correctly convey the emotion of the scene?

WHEN/WHERE

- Time of day (is it light or dark? Cloudy or sunny?) and location.

For example: The sun sits low over the horizon. (Is it a sunset or is the sun rising?) Often we don't know if it's a sunset or sunrise – for example in a nature program where 8 seconds of burning red sky is used as b-roll. In this example, the image needs to be described (briefly) without characterizing it further. A *full* moon. A clock: 7:00 a.m. A city park. A 2-story brick townhouse. Under a wide portico. On a raised platform near a gazebo.

HOW

- Be clear, concise, conversational: Use “everyday” terms. Describe a technical term, *then* name it, e.g., “she bends at the knees, a plié”; limit the use of slang or jargon unless appropriate to the content/image being described. Describers are writing for a broad audience. It's advisable to use the language in the program as your guide to vocabulary, sentence structure and pacing. Consider the material—and use language that is consistent with its content, keeping in mind that correct language structure and syntax—a sort of “spoken grammar”—are important elements of any description.

- Point of View and Narrative Tense Deliver description in present tense, in active voice (e.g., “Ted breaks the window,” is preferable to, “The window was broken by Ted.”) Use third-person narrative style to show neutrality and noninterference.

- Consider your audience.

If you know that your audience is primarily young people, use simple language structure in your descriptions. Similarly, match vocabulary to the material being described.

- “We See”

Avoid telling your guests that “we see” or notice or view—it’s a given. In general, the use of terms like “a view of” or “comes into view” should be avoided. These are understood—it is a given that what is being described is within the view of the audience, and using such terms robs precious seconds from the available “quiet parts” during which description can be inserted.

- Vary Verb Choices

How many different words can you use to describe someone moving along a sidewalk? Why say "walk" when you can more vividly describe the action, as appropriate, with "sashay," "stroll," "skip," "stumble," or "saunter"?

- Definite/Indefinite Articles

Use “a” instead of “the”—a sword, instead of the sword, unless there’s only one sword. If the sword has already been introduced, it becomes “the” sword.

- Pronouns

Use pronouns only when it is clear to whom or what the pronoun refers.

- Multiple Meanings

Identify words that have multiple meanings; be sure that the intended meaning is conveyed.

- Interpretive [TL] Adverbs/Gerunds: -ly words and -ing words: Suspiciously, furiously, nervously. Ask yourself: “What is it that you see that prompts you to think that he/she looks suspicious, furious, or nervous? Instead: “raises her eyebrows”, “clenches her fists”, “twists a napkin”. “-ly” words should be used sparingly, only if timing leaves no other option. For instance, there are cases with “hurriedly” or “quickly” might be used appropriately in a described passage. Use “-ing” words in phrases, not as continuing present tense, e.g., “Stomping up the stairs, he...” instead of, “He is stomping up the stairs.”

- Objectivity

The best audio describers objectively recount the visual aspects of an image.

Subjective or qualitative judgments or comment get in the way—they constitute an interpretation on the part of the describer and are unnecessary and unwanted.

Let listeners conjure their own interpretations based on a commentary that is as objective as possible.

So we do not say "He is furious" or "She is upset." Rather, "He's clenching his fist" or "She is crying." Rather than "It's a dream." or "She dies.", the objective describer might say: "Through a white mist, Joan runs through a field." or, "His head lolls back and his eyes close." Describers must differentiate between *emotion or reasoning* (which requires an interpretation on the part of the observer) and the *physical characteristics of emotion or reasoning* (which are more concrete and allow description users to conjure

their own interpretations) and prepare their description with this important distinction in mind. For instance, instead of “Johan likes the chocolate milk,” say, “Johan sips the chocolate milk, then licks his lips.

- Metaphor/Simile

Describe shapes, sizes, and other essential attributes of images by comparison to objects or items/areas that are familiar to the intended audience.

For example, is the Washington Monument 555 feet tall or is it higher than fifty elephants stacked one on top of the other? Or almost as high as two football fields are long. Thus, we try to convey our descriptions with a kind of “inner vision” that results in a linguistically vivid evocation of the image being described. There aren’t any elephants or football fields there—but you may evoke them in order to convey a particular image (the height of the Washington Monument). Yes, a contradiction of the describer’s “first rule”—Say Only What See—but it works in certain instances because it evokes the essence of what is being described. Descriptive metaphors and similes are best when they are immediately relatable to the viewer (everyday objects) and/or the image itself. Examples: the small snake is as long and thick as a pencil (or possibly an earthworm), the machine is size of a refrigerator, the puma is the size of a large dog.

- Labels

Since the ultimate goal is an image created in the minds of our constituents, *avoid labeling* with an interpretation that is inevitably unique to you, the describer.

Indeed, “labeling” – “naming” is not *describing*. Labels lead us to pigeon-hole and we tend to then dismiss the thing we see. For example, a ballet dancer doesn’t simply “plié” (see discussion of “Jargon” in the Media section). He or she bends at the knees.

- Censorship

Within the constructs of quality description, describers must convey *all* of the visual elements of the material being described. Describers must not censor information for any personal reason such as their own discomfort with the material or a political belief, i.e., describers must relay objectively the visual elements of nudity, sexual acts, violence, etc. Our constituents have the right to know the critical visual material that is evident to sighted people and we have the obligation to convey that material. If a describer feels that describing particular material will make him/her uncomfortable, s/he should not accept this assignment.

VOICING

We make meaning with our voices.

Some studies suggest that within face-to-face spoken interpersonal conversation the majority of content is communicated non-verbally, either through gesture and facial expression but also through a variety of speech and oral interpretation fundamentals:

Pronunciation - Enunciation - Breath Control - Volume

Pause - Inflection - Pace - Tempo - Phrasing - Tone

- Pronunciation

Prepare in advance and/or use transliterations to indicate pronunciation. Learn the proper pronunciation of foreign names and words used in a production. Narrators' voices must be distinguishable from other voices in a production, but they must not be unnecessarily distracting, as with recognizable celebrity voices or inappropriate accents.

- Enunciation / Word Rate

Speak clearly and at a rate that can be understood.

Generally, a rate of 160 wpm (words per minute) is an acceptable pace. Try speaking descriptions to yourself to make sure they flow casually.

- Consonance

Vocal delivery should be consonant with the nature of the material being described. The voice should match the pace (including word rate, noted above), energy and volume of the material. Allow the performance to set the tone and rhythm of the description, remembering that the performance, not the describer, should be the focus. Just as the describer should not assume a detached, lecturing or clinical tone, the describer should not attempt to project him- or herself into the performance as another performer.

Example: The language and delivery to describe a fight scene would differ from that used to describe a love scene.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION GUIDELINES/BEST PRACTICES

PERFORMING ARTS

THEATER

- Suspension of Disbelief

With most performing arts, the describer should allow listeners to participate in the “willing suspension of disbelief” by describing in terms of the story rather than the theatrical experience. Avoid stage directions—stage right, house right, and downstage.

- Jargon

Avoid theatrical references or jargon, especially names for technical equipment and devices, which would draw listeners’ attention away from their involvement in the story (“break the fourth wall”) and may introduce confusing, unknown terms.

Example: Say “John [character’s name] is 6 feet tall with curly black hair ...” instead of “the actor playing John is 6 feet tall” “Susan runs from the kitchen” rather than “Susan exits the stage.” The exception to the “maintain the illusion” caution would be when the style of the production is presentational, calling attention to its theatricality. Because the production makes the audience aware that it is “watching a play,” it’s appropriate for the describer to do so as well.

- Number of Describers

Some organizations utilize a pair of describers to cover a performance. For instance, the first describer describes the performance while the second describer prepares, and

sometime delivers, the pre-show notes (and intermission notes if applicable) and serves as backup describer. A backup describer is prepared to describe the event if the original describer is not available

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- Evaluation

Give listeners a means of providing the management with feedback on the description by announcing the process at the end of the description and/or providing a Braille/large print handout where reception equipment is distributed.

- Extemporaneous Description

In addition to performing arts events, live description may be provided for live broadcast programs such as Presidential inaugurations, space launches, national disaster news coverage, etc. With no opportunity for previews or pre-show notes to provide background information or preliminary description of certain general elements, consider using some silences to describe the “big picture” rather than what is specifically onscreen. These situations (live description for a one-time event or a live broadcasts) presents a unique challenge since the describer often doesn't know what images will appear and cannot know when the pauses in dialogue will happen or how long those pauses will be. This type of description is not for the faint-of-heart and can very well make the viewing experience worse by talking over important dialogue and/or offering incomplete or awkwardly worded descriptions. That said, with practice, an experienced describer can make a live, unscripted event an accessible, seamless viewing experience for the description user.

- To Script or Not To Script

Some performing arts description producers will have a describer preview a performance (as production schedules allow) enough times to allow for the development of a description script. Others depend on one or two previews where notes are made and the describer provides description in a more “extemporaneous” manner. If time and schedules allow, the development of a script permits the careful consideration of the various fundamentals of description outlined earlier in this document. The describer using a script does not, of course, read the script without looking at the live performance; he/she must know the script well enough to use the script as a prompt and be free to describe extemporaneously when “change happens.”

- Scheduling of Description

Typically, audio description is offered at one to three performances throughout the run of an extended series of performances, often one evening performance and one matinee. This, of course, limits the AD users in their flexibility in scheduling attendance at performing arts events. Some organizations ask for advance notice of two weeks or more in order to provide AD as a special request. In an effort to put the AD user on a par with any other performing arts patron, certain producers will “cast” a describer who can attend selected rehearsals, develop an AD script and be available at every performance (similar to an understudy). If no one desires the service, the describer is free to go.

For touring productions, experiments have been made with scripts that have been produced in one locale that can be shared with describers in another city. Increasingly, certain long-running and/or touring productions have recorded description keyed to lighting cues and accessed via PDAs attached to seatbacks. The descriptions (as well as captions and simultaneous translation) are available at any performance. Ideally, a describer monitors the use of these systems so that variations from the original described performance can be incorporated at any particular performance.

- Equipment

With the exception of recorded description noted earlier, audio description is delivered wirelessly via microphones (headset or steno-mask style), transmitters, and receivers with earpieces used by AD patrons. Generally, the transmissions are accomplished via infra-red (line-of-sight) or FM radio systems. FM systems can be portable and are often shared by multiple theaters. A full discussion of equipment at a venue is essential including: location of receivers; a secure system for distribution and return of receivers (e.g., leaving an ID or not); how to demonstrate the use of the receiver; what to do if there's an equipment problem, etc.). A list of equipment providers is included as an appendix to this document. [EK]

- "Stepping On Lines"

Descriptions are usually delivered during pauses between lines of dialogue or quiet moments, avoiding other critical sound elements. But since it is more important to make a production understandable than to preserve every detail of the original soundtrack, the

describer will speak over dialogue and other audio when necessary. If a description continues over dialogue, quickly finish the sentence. In most instances, a describer may talk over background music or underscoring as well as the lyrics of a repeated chorus of a song.

And, as noted earlier, it is appropriate to let pauses or quiet moments pass without a description. Listeners want to hear the performance first and the description second. The dialogue, the sounds—and even the silences—are telling the story and must be experienced.

Use caution in talking over a “song played on the radio” because its recognition by the audience and/or the audience’s hearing its content may be important to setting a mood, recalling an era, making an emotional statement, etc.

Example: Esther is talking non-stop about making a pie, but she is quietly taking a gun from a drawer. The describer may need to speak over her dialogue because the audience will hear a gunshot before she stops talking about making the pie.

Identification

Identify characters as they have been identified in the production. Introduce them by name only after they’ve been introduced in the dialogue and consistently identify people/characters by name. Use a character’s name only when sighted audience members know the name. When an unknown character appears, refer to the person by

a physical characteristic used in his/her initial description until his/her name is revealed. Once everyone knows the character's proper name, tie the name to the physical description at the first opportunity ("John, the redheaded man") and afterwards use only the character's name. (A "cast of characters" list may have been included in the program/pre-show notes; this information will allow listeners to be on a par with sighted audience members.)

Be certain to describe entrances and exits—who and where—especially when there's nothing audible to indicate someone has joined or left the scene.

Note: It may be helpful to create a list of the established names for each character for reference during the description. A list of commonly paired couples may also be useful in plays with difficult character names. Some AD users have suggested that once the material has identified a character, the describer could match the character's name with the actor's voice by mentioning the character's name just before s/he speaks. Although the describer usually doesn't need to repeat the voice identification, this might be necessary after a character has been silent or absent for a long time or if several voices are similar and it's important to know exactly who is saying what at a particular point.

Timing

Theatrical surprises should, ideally, come at the same time for all audience members. If characters' appearances or actions, hidden identities, costumes, sight gags, sound

effects, etc. happen as a surprise to sighted audience members, don't spoil the surprise for listeners by describing (and revealing) them in advance.

Example: If a character is in disguise, he becomes "the man" rather than "John wears a disguise." Use a neutral term "the figure in red" when characters are disguising their gender. If the action that accompanies a sound effect will result in a reaction from the audience, treat this as if describing a sight gag. Time the description to allow listeners to react at the same time as sighted audience members.

Example: If the audience sees something happening that might "warn them" of the possibility of, say, a loud noise, be sure to describe that action. For instance, "Pat" loads a rifle, so we know that there's a possibility s/he will fire it.

With experience, describers learn to gauge when laughter and applause have peaked and begun to die down. If possible, hold description until the audience begins to quiet. If not, speak loudly when describing over loud laughter, music or applause.

When an effect will be repeated, try to describe it the first time in a way that allows a "shorthand" reference later.

Example: In a play where characters vigorously smoke cigarettes to underscore their tension, describe the first instance as, "Mary and John light cigarettes, inhale and

exhale deeply.” On later occurrences, as listeners understand the pattern of their behavior, simply say, “Smoking again.”

Sounds

Describe the source of sounds that may not be immediately recognizable within the program but are pertinent to understanding and appreciation of the content.

Include any sound effects in the timing of descriptions, e.g., he turns away from her and she pulls out a revolver. [BANG] He falls over a desk [CLATTER].

Usually a sound effect, or the event leading up to it, is described just before it happens:

“The burglar drops his sack.” [THUD] Sometimes it can be even more effective after the action. “Waving their arms they run towards the platform...” [Chuff chuff... the sound of a train pulling away] “The train is pulling out of the station.”

- Pre-Show and Intermission Notes

Purpose—The purpose of pre-show notes is to prepare the patron by including descriptions that the describer will not have time to give during the performance. In addition to the credits on the playbill, the pre-show notes cover descriptions of the sets, with their entrances, exits, levels, placement of furniture, etc.; the physical characteristics of the characters, the roles they play, their costumes, any gestures or mannerisms they use repeatedly; dance movement; recurring staging techniques; and any props that are significant. All of these descriptions should be succinct, tightly

organized and not exceed 10–15 minutes. Most describers prepare scripted pre-show notes to be sure that they're covering everything in a coherent and timely manner. Productions with intermissions provide a second opportunity to provide additional information.

Terminology—The pre-show notes are also the place to define any terminology that might be used in the performance. In a period piece, terms of clothing or architecture might be explained. Unusual props can be defined. The remaining time before the curtain can be filled with the director's notes, articles about the playwright, the actors' biographies, the appearance of the audience, etc.

Order—Listeners are trying to absorb and remember a great deal of verbal information. Describe settings and costumes in the order they appear. As much as possible, describe each setting in the same order (left to right and top to bottom, for example).

Describe the set in an orderly manner (e.g., left to right) and limit description to the most essential elements. Describe fixed background elements first, then add furniture or large props. If the set is abstract, the appropriate use of simile may help the listener determine the shapes and dimensions of the elements without confusing the comparisons with the reality on stage.

Generally, note characters first, then the set (it may be unclear to reference the first scene in Joe's living room if Joe has yet to be introduced. Be sure to include the

relationships between the characters as appropriate.

Characteristics—Describe any characteristic actions (e.g., “bites her nails,” “takes swigs from a hip flask of whiskey.”)

Synopses—There may be a synopsis in the playbill. Just as this information is helpful to sighted audience members, sharing this information with listeners during pre-show notes may aid their appreciation of the performance and the description. Other information (director’s notes, background information, credits) must be prioritized for pre-show or intermission. In the event that the available time does not allow for the reading of important material, mention this so that the listener can read it or have it read later.

The Theater—If there’s a delay in the start of the performance or during a scene change or an emergency in the audience, describe what the sighted audience can see—a large group has just arrived and is being seated, the curtain is caught on a piece of scenery, stagehands changing the set, etc.).

In a live setting, to the extent that notices are displayed for the general public, it is appropriate to alert AD users of upcoming sound effects as they could affect service animals accompanying a patron.

Intermissions—In productions with intermissions and a great deal of information to cover in pre-show notes, consider limiting the pre-show notes to overall production information (credits, etc.) and the first act’s details (settings, costumes, characters, etc.). Then, return during the final minutes of intermission with notes to describe the second act’s details, important reminders from the pre-show notes, and, if time allows, share additional information from the playbill.

Note: At the end of the pre-show notes and at the end of the first act, tell listeners that during intermission what you will share with them so they may decide if they want to return in time to hear that information. Assuming that some of the listeners will not hear the full intermission notes, repeat the essential information during the second act whenever possible. If the new information for the second act is very brief, listeners may appreciate its inclusion at the end of the pre-show notes or while the house lights are dimming for the second act.

See Appendix A for a portion of the describers’ script for one of Access Theater’s “Storm Reading.” To view the excerpt with description, go to:

<http://www.audiodescribe.com/samples/>

DANCE

- What To Include

The Story— Essentially, all choreography can be considered to convey “a story”, e.g., a choreographer’s concept. Close consideration of the ideas behind the dance—as determined by the overall structure of the movements—will allow a describer to convey a compelling image, rather than being trapped in the repetition of a series of steps. And, of course, the sound of the movements, sound effects and the musical score (which can often include silence) must be preserved for the dance audience to appreciate and enjoy. With dance description, it’s important to find the “story” it tells: what main idea does the dancing communicate to the viewer, what is the essence of the dance? What information would be most important to allow a blind audience member to experience the performance as fully as possible, to help him follow the meaning of the choreography?

How and What—Which elements comprised the structure and themes of the choreography, and what words would most succinctly convey those ideas—the “how” as opposed to the “what”? There is a significant difference between saying what someone is doing and describing how they do it. Description is often about what a mover is doing. But to convey as much information in as few words as possible, they often need to describe how the mover is accomplishing the action. What sort of pathway in space does the mover follow? How does the shape or “attitude” of their body convey character or context? What dynamic qualities of the movement flavor its meaning?

For example, one piece might be mostly “about” spatial patterns and sequences of group clustering and scattering; the dancers’ specific movements may be less important, and their individual characteristics (gender, hair color, body shape, etc.) may not matter at all with respect to the content being expressed. In another piece, where each dancer plays a unique character, those particulars, along with various movement combinations and body attitude, can be meaningful factors.

Be Selective—As with any genre (theater, media, opera), visual images in dance—multiple moves in several shapes and on varied levels—can occur in quick succession and even simultaneously. Dancers do not always perform in unison! Again, a description that attempts to convey *everything* will convey nothing well. The specifics of each move are less important than the overall patterns created by their combinations thus creating a style (tap?, African? modern?), concept (a particular idea?) or “the vision,” if you will, of the choreographer.

- Knowing Dance

Some believe that it is helpful for the describer to understand the foundation of the dance styles being viewed or immerse him/herself in the vocabulary of “the dance.”

Take care—

a) a describer need not have deep knowledge or even enjoy every subject he/she describes—most important is keen observation of the movement and *movement patterns* and a vocabulary that allows its verbal expression in clear and vivid terms;

- b) jargon or labeling are “short cuts”—it’s quicker and easier to say “plié” than “a bending of the legs at the knees.” But its first use must accompany the actual description to accommodate listeners who have no prior knowledge of ballet terminology, for instance. It may be that in a live, performing arts context, pre-show notes can be used to introduce certain vocabulary for selected movements and then those words could be used during performance; the describer makes a judgment with respect to what language is within the realm of “general knowledge”, e.g., choreography, ensemble, and the use of these words will help couch descriptions within the genre;
- c) in the words of Paul Valery: “Seeing is forgetting the name of what one sees” As noted earlier under “Core Skills,” labels—for movements, terms, jargon—take us a step away from truly looking at the particular image or movement: it’s a plié, yes, but what’s the nature of this particular plié?!

The score

Consider how the range of movements interacts with any accompanying score. Be certain to time description to empathize with choreographic intent, e.g., an increasingly furious swirl that is in consonance with the crescendo of a drum, culminating with a loud crack! How disappointing it would be if the describer were speaking “over” the artists’ carefully crafted ending.

Brevity

Use as few words as possible, vivid word, words that evoke specific and clear images. Is it a jump? How high? A swirl? A twirl? Are arms and legs akimbo (define) or simply pointed to the side like the limbs of a tree (use of simile)?

Resist the temptation to assume that, without dialogue (in many, but not by any means all) dance pieces, you have more time within which to describe! Extra verbiage invariably complicates and confuses. But occasionally description of sound has its place when its origin could be a mystery (a slap on the ground or a knee, a hoot, etc.).

If the dance performance includes a music score, allow the listener to enjoy it: constant step-by-step description can become tedious and even obscure the emotive meaning of the dance. A summary, based on careful viewing of the choreography, is appropriate (e.g., The fairy is transformed into a dragon with glittering green scales. She hovers above the forest of thorns at Sleeping Beauty's palace, circling her claw-like hands as if casting a spell.)

Scenic elements

Again, as with other formats, dancers' appearance and costumes, scenic elements and props, also can inform the overall and the particular effect of the performance and must be noted according to the describer's judgment.

Musicals

Musical theater offers particular challenges and opportunities—lyrics must be respected but the pauses between refrains or repeat choruses provide precious seconds within which description may be inserted.

For example, “The Chava Ballet” in *Fiddler on the Roof* provides an opportunity to highlight movement characteristics of individuals and plot elements (each daughter leaving her family) that reinforces an understanding of character and the narrative. Be certain that the visual images that convey these important points are described with vivid language and specific image-evoking words and metaphors.

Touch

As with any performing art experience, describers do well to borrow the “please touch” attitude of the best museum educators who incorporate tactile and other sense experience within access programs. Pre-show backstage sensory (tactile) tours help audience members become involved with the performance, exploring props and costumes, and even dancers bodies!

Experience

Finally, allow dance audiences to discover the visual image by experiencing it in their own bodies. Explore the potential for establishing pre-performance workshops led, ideally, by a member of the dance company or its staff along with the describer. Once again, this is a technique that is often employed by our colleagues in museums—what better way to understand the image of a tall obelisk (once more, the Washington

Monument?) than to *become* that structure, stretching high? A plié becomes known not simply as an intellectual concept but as an activity that is a part of ones own body; a “time step” becomes associated with the movement and sound of ones own feet and will be immediately recognizable in performance.

See Appendix B for a vocabulary list of words related to movement.

See Appendix C for a portion of the describers’ script for one of Axis Dance Company’s pieces: “Dust”, choreographed by Victoria Marks. The script is designed to be spoken while the movement occurs; viewing a tape of the piece, you would notice that much has been left unsaid in order to focus on communicating mood, theme and choreographic structure, while leaving aural space for the impact of the musical score. We invite you to test the description by having it read aloud to you. To what extent does hearing the dance allow you to see?

To view the excerpt with description, go to: TBD

OPERA

Surtitles

Opera, even when sung in English, requires that someone read the surtitles projected above the stage. Generally two describers, a male and a female, are employed--one to read the translations, the other to describe. The contrast in voices allows the listener to discriminate between the two functions. The process is something like using two sign language interpreters to shadow-sign dialogue in a play. A splitter on an infra-red transmitter that can accommodate *two* microphones is often helpful; for FM transmission, the splitter and a plug-in transmitter may be required.

The surtitle voicer need not identify the soloist who is singing (indeed, that would be distracting and unnecessary) but he/she should use subtle shifts in vocal tone to convey shifts between character. Since the text on the screen can change quickly, the surtitle reader, steering the libretto through the performance, generally has “right of way”!

Ensemble singing can present a unique challenge: Mozart included many scenes in which everyone simultaneously sings ... a different text! Although there are surtitles, they are confusing even to the sighted audience since they may or may not identify who is singing what. In this context, it is helpful to identify which characters are singing and allow listeners to rely on a pre-show plot summary (see below). One solution to the overall problem of reading the copious amount of language represented by the surtitles (the entire libretto!) is to abridge the text, leaving out all but the most essential dialogue. An advance copy of the surtitles is extremely helpful in this regard.

Respect the Music

As has been stated with respect to description in general: our constituency uses our service as a tool to achieve an end—greater access to the arts, in particular. The users of description are in an arts setting *to experience the art form*--not to hear the describer. Description is in service to the art form and to the user and to the client who may employ the describer.

Similarly, arts attendees come to the opera to hear the music, especially the singing, and experience the opera's visual spectacle. It's critical then that the describer respect arias and strive to limit description to orchestral passages. The reader, of course, still has to convey the text. In nineteenth-century opera, aria texts are relatively short and entail much repetition; the reader's role can be minimally disruptive in those cases. Repetitive phrases or pauses can be used to provide description or convey text. It's helpful, though, to wait a few moments to allow singers to "establish" a chorus or recitative (sung dialogue generally in the rhythm of ordinary speech with series of words on the same note). By contrast, for Wagner and later composers, much opera leaves no sharp distinction between arias and recitative

Knowledge of the Genre

As discussed in earlier sections, an understanding of a particular genre can be helpful, particularly with respect to overall flow and styles or traditions. An over-emphasis on jargon can be counter-productive. With opera, however, there are special reasons to

spend time becoming familiar with the production's score and libretto. Knowing the score (in opera, as well as life and in baseball!) will help the describer know in advance when there may be available passages for insertion of description or the reading of surtitles. Also, the insertion of description into short passages of instrumental music—sometimes only a couple of measures—could require that the describer “count beats” and prepare a description that doesn't overflow into the singing and the reader's translation.

A typical example (and one solution) noting the importance of coordinating action with brief instrumental passages involves *Madame Butterfly*. In a scene during which Butterfly shows her scant possessions to her husband-to-be the American navy officer Pinkerton, she names each object, and shows Pinkerton an oblong package, which she does not unwrap but places near her household shrine. The package contains the dagger with which her father committed seppuku (honorable suicide) and which Butterfly will use similarly at the end of the opera. The describer has exactly six beats of orchestra music to describe that package and where it ends up (*without* undue emphasis!). Solutions include simply describing the wrapped package without relocating it until the intermission notes for Act 3. However, since sighted opera patrons always receive a plot synopsis in their printed programs, there is no suspense as to what happens next—this will be true for patrons using description if the synopsis has been read aloud. If so, the describer might simply say, “Butterfly shows the wrapped dagger.” Even so, to retain the mood and the opera's dramatic elements, it may be best

to proceed as though the listener does not know the plot, a solution that is more in keeping with AD guidelines for spoken drama.

Finally, most opera productions have relatively few technical or dress rehearsals and a limited number of performances. Thus, describers may have fewer opportunities to preview the work before the described performance. To augment the few rehearsals and performances available for previewing, look for every opportunity to become familiar with the opera and timing critical to preparing description: read the libretto, listen/read the score, watch a video of another production of the same opera—keep in mind, however, that the describer’s obligation is to convey the images involved in the particular production being presented. Take care to focus on the production at hand (at eye?). As with other genres, it may be possible to work with a production company to increase familiarity of costumes, set pieces and even directorial elements. The company may have access or education staff that can assist. Indeed, it may be possible to attend a *sitzprobe* (a seated rehearsal which brings together singers with the orchestra)—adjustments to the score for the particular production will be evident at this rehearsal and will inform the describer regarding time frames available for description.

Pre-show notes

As with spoken drama, pre-show notes provide an opportunity to provide description and information available to sighted patrons in a more relaxed time frame. For opera, the plot synopsis from the printed program is read—this information is available to all

patrons and is in no way “special” material for AD users. The reading of a plot synopsis, however, can involve a fair amount of time: it’s wise to communicate in advance with AD users so every effort is made to arrive well in advance of the start of the opera.

Pronunciation

Pre-show notes should include the pronunciation of all character names or other possibly unfamiliar words and names that appear in the text or the program (e.g., composer and conductor names). An excellent model for pre-show notes is the format developed for Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts. Pioneered by Milton Cross in the 40s, these introductions to each act of an opera are first-rate examples of an important element of opera description—before there was opera description.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION GUIDELINES/BEST PRACTICES

MEDIA

Please note: It is highly recommend that describers of "media" also read the guidelines that pertain to theatre and opera (above). Many of those same situations one finds in the performing arts are portrayed on the "small screen" and the "silver screen."

General:

- Audio description for film, broadcast television and DVD is scripted and recorded on an audio track that is either mixed with or is separate from the material's soundtrack. Typically, description is mixed with the original program audio prior to broadcast or on a DVD and included as a separate audio track. This allows the original soundtrack to be ducked in and out to accommodate description that may step on the occasional line of dialog or musical score. Often, in a movie theater, the description will exist on a distinct track so that its volume can be controlled separately. Describers write complete, accurate descriptions that generally will fit precisely [JS] during the available pauses between dialogue or critical sound elements.

- Read the script aloud at the rate it will be read for recording to verify its timing.

- Allow listeners to appreciate the media's score without interjecting descriptions. Only interrupt for vital, timely information that must be described during the music. It's

important for describers to be mindful of the film's overall aural structure (including its sound effects), well beyond simply the dialogue (see dialogue, discussed below).

- As with other genres, the narrator's voice should be "in consonance" with, should complement the material—it should be distinct from the voices of the characters and/or the program's narrator and mixed to sound as natural to the work as possible. The description serves the production and should blend into it.

- Sometimes a describer will describe what's about to appear because there is no pause available for description when it does appear (*foreshadowing*). In this way the describer also "prepares" the listener for what is about to happen. For instance, the current image (a waterfall) and its sound may not be "in sync" with the description: "A NASCAR racetrack with a dozen cars circling the track." It may be that a line could be preceded, on occasion, with "next" or "in a moment." This alerts viewers with low vision that the racetrack isn't onscreen at present.

- Similarly, on occasion there is no silent opportunity to describe something essential to listeners' understanding while that specific visual image is on the screen. The describer may need to omit a less significant description of what's onscreen in order to interject the critical description.

Identification

As with other art forms, characters in film and video may be introduced but unnamed until identified within the film. Use a significant physical characteristic to describe / identify the characters. In the case of non-dramatic or educational material, particularly work that is designed for young viewers, it may be acceptable to identify individuals as time allows and in keeping with curricular objectives.

Note: The relationships between characters may not be apparent, but in dramatic productions, in particular, conveying information about these relationships is the filmmaker's responsibility—not the describer's. Refer to these relationships only after they have been revealed within the context of the media.

Dialogue

If a description is essential and a pause is minimal, the describer may have to step on the first syllable or two of dialogue or narration. This often occurs when the “next voice” must be identified so listeners will understand the speaker's vantage point. It is acceptable to “cover” dialogue when the original soundtrack begins with dialogue that is, in the context of the overall production, relatively inconsequential (“Uh ...”, “Er ...”, “Hmm ...” etc.). This is especially true of educational/training productions where appreciation/enjoyment of content (while still important) is secondary to the stated learning goals of the program.

Scene Changes

Scene changes can be confusing particularly when the soundtrack does not indicate a change. Simplicity is always a guide: “In the bedroom,” “At the police station,” etc. Actions, characters, and details can be confusing if we don’t know where we are. When there’s a change of place, start the description with the location (“general to the specific”).

Example: “In their bedroom, John and Mary embrace tightly and kiss on the lips.” The preceding scene took place with the whole family gathered around the dining table and nothing on the soundtrack indicates we’ve changed locale.

On occasion describers use the word “now” or “next” to indicate a change of scene. Because there will be many opportunities that seem to call for the use this word, use it only when absolutely necessary—*its use should be limited*.

As time permits, describe montages of images, but be succinct and clear. Similarly, a series of still images, such as those often used during a documentary interview, can be summarized by highlighting several significant images being discussed by the person or people being interviewed when the images are relevant to the content.

Passage of Time

When describing certain passages of time, such as flashbacks or dream sequences, describe the visual cues that let the audience know there is a flashback. Once the

convention is established, it can serve as a “shorthand”, saving time if it reoccurs (usually this visual convention is accompanied by an auditory cue). For younger audiences, it is sometimes impractical to use describing conventions that one might use for adults. In some cases, it is necessary to explicitly tell the audience what is happening rather than describing the action (e.g., flashback or dream sequence).

Address time shifts (flash backs or visions of the future) in relation to the character, i.e., tailor the description to the characters. For instance, Joe’s hair is jet-black, Mary’s skin is wrinkle-free. Or, “Lighting shifts to pale amber as George, as a young boy, sits at the family dinner table.”

Use “while” and “as” to join two actions only if there is a connection between them.

Example: “John picks up the knife as Jill turns away.”

Consistency

Utilizing the same character names and/or vocabulary throughout a production or series of productions is essential. For instance, on a longer production, often more than one description writer will work on its description script. It’s critical that the draft final script is reviewed in its totality for consistency.

Jargon

Just as a describer for a live performance should avoid theatrical jargon or references, a film or video describer should avoid calling attention to the filmmaking process.

Generally it's appropriate to avoid filmmaking jargon and reference to filmmaking techniques, e.g., "panning" or "zooms in." As with many description guidelines, practice in this area varies: some describers believe that "close-up" or "fade to black" is a simple description of what can be seen; others convey the images that are highlighted by the filmmaker without noting the camera technique, e.g., an arched eyebrow, a bee hovers at a flower, etc.

Point of View

Describe the point of view when appropriate—"from above," "from space," "moving away," "flying low over the sandy beach," etc. It is understood that a film/video/DVD is being viewed; repeated references to the screen are unnecessary. Another often-abused point of reference is "the camera." Unless there is a camera on the screen, it is improper to refer to "the camera" as an orientational guidepost (e.g., the whale "lunges forward,"—it does not "swim toward the camera."

Occasionally, the audience is directly engaged, particularly with children's material or educational productions. An on-screen character might ask the audience to "Watch me and follow along," or an instructor might ask, "Can you see what color the liquid is turning in the beaker?" In such cases, it is important for the audience members to know that it is they who are being addressed (as opposed to an on-screen character). One way to accomplish this is to refer to the audience as "you." Again, this is an area where practices differ and more discussion / research would be valuable.

Logos / Credits

Treat logos as any other image to be described and read the company name(s).

Reading disclaimers and credits at the beginning and end of films, videos and television programs is an important function of audio description. In addition, the describer should read text and subtitles. Generally, on first appearance, text or subtitles can be introduced with a phrase such as, “Words appear” or “Subtitles appear.” Subsequently, tone of voice may be employed to draw a distinction between description of on-screen action and the reading of text or subtitles. Bear in mind that when using a description convention such as “words appear,” it is important to preserve the clause (e.g., don’t say “The words, Saving Your Money, appear”—say “Words appear: Saving Your Money”).

Subtitles or on-screen text intended to translate speech (due to language differences, speech impediments, or other factors) should always be included verbatim in the description. If necessary, the original dialog and/or narration should be ducked out to avoid unnecessary confusion on the part of the viewer.

Note: Because the describer can never read as rapidly as the onscreen credits appear and disappear, the describer must “edit” this material and may include a line such as “Other credits follow.” - Often, some or all of the opening credits appear over the beginning of the action. In this situation, attempt to describe the action in sync with the material and read the credits before or after their actual appearance.

Some describers wish to include credits and contact information for the description producing company and/or name the voice talent used. Describers must be guided by the policy of the film production company or the client contracting for the description. Often time availability will be quite limited or describers are bound by certain contractual limits.

Enhanced Description

For DVDs, enhanced description can be employed to provide additional detail via a link to a pop-up window or even a link to a website.

Similarly, DVDs allow for elaboration on elements that cannot be adequately described during the body of a production, akin to pre-show or intermission notes used in describing performing arts presentations.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION GUIDELINES/BEST PRACTICES

VISUAL ART / EXHIBITIONS

Note: Much of the material in this section is adapted from guidelines posted at www.artbeyondsight.org and Art Education for the Blind's (AEB) landmark 1996 publication *Making Visual Art Accessible to People Who Are Blind and Visually Impaired*.

Audio description for visual art conveys visual images with language that often includes tactile references (e.g., size and shape). In a museum or at an exhibition of any sort, a verbal description also includes standard information included on a label, such as the name of the artist, nationality, title of the artwork, date, dimensions or scale of the work, media and technique.

MUSEUM TOURS

General:

- Audio description, often as part of a touch tour, enhances the visitor's tactile experience. It can also provide access to a museum's collection when the works of art are not available to touch. When a group of visitors includes blind, visually impaired, and sighted visitors, museum professionals or docents can incorporate in-depth verbal description into their regular tour. If a classroom teacher conducts the tour, it is advisable for educators to visit the museum or historical site first to prepare the audio description and follow the principles outlined in this document.

- An audio described tour, whether “live” or recorded, is different from the typical audio tour offered by a museum for the general public. By adding descriptions of significant visual elements, more time may be required to cover fewer elements and additional time should be allocated for exchange with visitors.

- Some museums create an additional audio guide for blind and visually impaired visitors or include extensive audio description of artworks in their standard audio guide. Sighted museum visitors report that they benefit from this practice as well. Following a “universal design” concept, exhibit designers are increasingly combining standard audio tours with audio descriptions, an “all-in-one” or “universal design” concept.

- Depending on the nature of a particular space or the design of the exhibit being described, directional information may be included enabling listeners to navigate the space independently.

For Educator or Docent-Led Tours

Audio description is used throughout an exhibition to describe displays, to respond to particular questions, and to encourage dialogue. The pace and level of detail of description can be adapted to individuals based on their degree of sight loss and their prior experience making art or looking at art.

When planning a tour, keep in mind that audio description adds time. Therefore, fewer works may be included on a tour. A general rule of thumb is to use half the number of works you would use in a tour without audio description. So it's important to carefully select the works for your tour.

Develop audio description scripts for the objects on your tour and review them with visually impaired advisors for effective language, clarity and length of the descriptions, and appropriate pace of the tour. Audio description is also an essential part of a touch tour or a tour that includes tactile diagrams or tactile elements. As audio description skills increase, these scripts will serve as guidelines, rather than as a text to be memorized.

When first meeting a group that includes people who are blind or visually impaired, briefly describe the lobby or meeting space. Then, so that you may adjust your tour to your visitors needs, find out more about the type and degree of visual impairment. As with all audiences, try to relate the individual's life experiences to the content in the work of art. Throughout your tour, include brief descriptions of gallery spaces through which you pass and museum architecture. You might include the size of the space, type of art, or other general information about the atmosphere or ambiance of the museum.

It is important to keep audio description distinct from information about the historical context. If your tour includes both sighted and visually impaired people, present your verbal description first. This creates equal opportunity for further discussion of historical

context, biography of the artist, or other information important for all audiences to understand the work.

One strategy frequently used during school-aged group tours could be used with all groups: elicit audience response through directed questioning. If you have an integrated class, with both sighted and visually impaired students, include everyone in the audio description process. Ask sighted students to describe elements in the work through directed questioning. This creates an engaging atmosphere and strengthens observation skills. At the end of each description, restate student responses and summarize observations.

Get feedback. After the description of the first work, ask one of the tour participants if the description is meeting their needs or if you need to make any adjustments. At the end of a tour for people with visual impairments, take the opportunity to emphasize the organization's accessibility features and programming. Create a sense of welcome and encourage a future relationship with the organization.

It is important to acknowledge that description is a relatively new access technique for museums. As a consequence, spaces using description may need to consider ways in which they can publicize these efforts in the target community—this may also include the development of incentives to encourage attendance addressing, in particular, the needs of people who are blind (access to transportation, 70% unemployment, etc.).

For Audio Guides or Audio-described Self-guided Tours

Once you have developed verbal-description scripts, adapt them to create an audio guide that all visitors can use in the galleries independently. For the user with visual impairments, incorporate verbal description with navigational and orientation cues.

When designing a tour, consider the effect of frequent physical changes in the galleries, such as chairs that are moved, deinstallations, or construction.

Museum staff who distribute audio guides to visitors should provide a short orientation on how to use the player and guide. The player should have some type of neck strap so that a user has both hands free to use the buttons, hold a tactile, or use a cane or other assistive device.

Depending on the needs and resources of a particular organization, delivery mechanisms will vary. Some choices include: audio cassette, CD, digital wands, or concealed triggering mechanisms. The last three mechanisms are digital methods that allow for layers of description and the option to choose between various exhibits.

Generally, visually impaired visitors need orientation and navigational information that can be incorporated throughout the described tour. Some tours will keep this information on a separate track or layer of the tour allowing the sighted user to skip such information.

Using cell-phone or digital wand systems or infrared or FM, systems (similar to those used in a performing arts or movie theater setting), audio description users can privately access descriptions.

Focus on the Style

The style of a work of art refers to the features that identify a work as being by a particular artist or school, or of a movement, period, or geographical region. Style is the cumulative result of many characteristics, including brushwork, use of tone and color, choice of different motifs, and the treatment of the subject. After the basic information about subject, composition, and mediums are conveyed, the verbal description can focus on how these many elements contribute to the whole. In a tour that includes several works of art, comparisons are an effective way of making stylistic features tangible.General to the Specific

Subject, Form, and Color

The basic object-label information is followed by an overview of the image, conveying the general, overall context and then proceeding to specific items. Generally, a coherent description should provide visual information in a sequence, allowing a blind person to assemble, piece by piece, an image of a highly complex work. Describe the focus—the subject—that is, what is represented in the work. For example, "This painting features a recycled Savarin coffee can filled with about eighteen paintbrushes." Next describe the composition or style e.g., brushstrokes, or stippling, for example. With

respect to works of art, include in this description the color tones and the mood or atmosphere. Many people who have lost their sight have a visual memory of colors.

Orient the Viewer with Directions

Specific and concrete information is required to indicate the location of objects or figures in a work of art. Sometimes, a useful directional method is to refer to the positions of the numbers on a clock. Most blind people are familiar with this method of providing direction. For example, with respect to a person's face, the mouth is at six o'clock. Also, when describing a figure depicted in a work of art, remember that the image is the equivalent of a mirror image. Right and left can be very ambiguous terms unless they are qualified. Accordingly, you should describe the figure according to its right or left, and always qualify this description. For example, "The woman's right hand holds a small goblet."

Clear and precise language is crucial to any good description. After the general idea of the work is conveyed, the description should be more vivid and particularized. Describe pertinent details, and focus on different parts of the work.

Art Conventions

Art terms and pictorial conventions such as perspective, focal point, picture plane, foreground, and background should always be defined for your audience. Typically, it is useful to introduce the definition or concept when the discussion turns to that aspect of the work of art.

Indicate Where the Curators Have Installed a Work

Generally, a work's placement in an institution reveals important information about its meaning, as well as its relationship to other works in the collection. Tell the listener where the work is located in the institution. Include in your discussion a description of the gallery or sculpture garden where the work is installed, and mention the surrounding artworks. Describe how the work under discussion relates to these other works, as well as to the viewer and the surrounding space.

Refer to Other Senses as Analogues for Vision

Try to translate a visual experience into another sense. Other senses, such as touch or hearing, enable description users to further construct highly detailed impressions of a work on display. For instance, refer to the sense of touch when describing the surface of a sculpture. A comparison between the rough-hewn texture of Auguste Rodin's *Balzac* (1892-97) and the glasslike finish of Constantin Brancusi's *Bird in Space* (c. 1927) can be very instructive. Or compare a Japanese tea-ceremony jar, with its irregular shape and unfinished surface, with a highly refined Chinese white-porcelain statuette from the eighteenth century. In both of these ceramic works, the degree of surface refinement is an integral part of the work's formal value, as well as of its meaning.

Explain Concepts with Analogies

Certain kinds of visual phenomena, such as shadows or clouds, may be best described with a well-chosen analogy or metaphor. To construct a helpful analogy, choose objects or concepts from common experience. In a description of Pablo Picasso's *Cubist painting Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)* (1910), you might compare the image of the figure to a shattered wine bottle whose fragments have been reassembled in different positions.

Encourage Understanding through Reenactment

Sometimes, it may be helpful to have the exhibit visitor *experience* the image, i.e., the listener could mimic a depicted figure's pose. Since everyone is aware of his or her own body, this activity provides a concrete way of understanding difficult poses depicted in a painting. Additionally, by assuming the pose, the description user can directly perceive important formal characteristics of the work, such as symmetry or asymmetry; open or closed forms; implied action or repose; smooth, flowing lines or angular ones; and the degree of engagement with the viewer.

Incorporate Sound in Creative Ways

Sound can serve an interpretive and descriptive purpose, particularly as an auditory analogue for a work of visual art. A uniquely designed soundscape can evoke the experience of a display.

Another way to use sound creatively is to provide on-site recordings of architectural spaces. For instance, a listener could hear the bustling sounds of St. Peter's piazza in Rome as he or she approaches its depiction.

Allow People to Touch Works of Art or Artifacts

Providing an opportunity to touch three-dimensional works gives visitors who are blind or visually impaired an immediate, personal experience with an original work of art. Direct touch is the best way to explore an object. For conservation reasons, however, some museums require people to wear thin gloves made of cotton or plastic. An informal poll at the Museum of Modern Art in New York indicated that most people prefer plastic gloves to cotton because the texture and temperature of the work's material can be felt.

Alternative Touchable Materials

When it is not possible to touch original works of art, alternative touchable materials can be provided. In some instances, alternative materials can provide a fuller and more complete understanding of a work because they can be touched without gloves. These auxiliary aids include three-dimensional reproductions; samples of art-making materials such as marble, bronze, clay, and canvas; examples of the tools used in various media, such as paintbrushes, chisels, and hammers; and replicas of the objects depicted in a display. Additionally, it is helpful to have a range of information available on the unique characteristics of the materials and the way in which the medium dictates the form.

Tactile Illustrations of Artworks

Most museum visitors want as much information as possible. Tactile diagrams or three-dimensional dioramas of a work of art are effective ways of making visual art accessible. Diagrams are tactile illustrations of artworks, and they are essentially relief images. They do not represent the actual object in every detail; they are intended to be used in conjunction with audio description.

Classroom Lessons / Literacy

Audio description and discussions about the work of art can be a part of a class that precedes or follows a museum visit. Teachers can incorporate verbal description of art, architecture, and design objects into history, social science, math, and other classes. Precise and organized description is one of the basic tools of effective communication. It can improve students' awareness of their environment and enrich their vocabulary.

This notion represents a relatively new application for audio description: as an aid to literacy. As you might imagine, some "picture books" for toddlers are deficient with respect to the language skills they involve—they rely on the pictures to tell the story. But the teacher trained in audio description techniques would never simply hold up a picture of a ball and read the text: "See the ball." He or she might add: "The ball is red--just like a fire engine. I think that ball is as large as one of you! It's as round as the sun--a bright red circle or sphere." The teacher has introduced new vocabulary, invited comparisons, and used metaphor or simile--with toddlers! By using description, these books (or exhibits or children's videos!) are made accessible to kids who have low

vision or are blind and simultaneously all kids develop more sophisticated language skills.

Numerous studies have shown the value of captions to children in the development of literacy. In a similar vein, a comparable benefit might be observed in children exposed to audio description. Description—with its focus on observation, clarity, and efficiency of language use—can build more sophisticated literacy in children who are blind, who have low vision and in **all** children.

Also, multisensory art books created for people who are blind or have limited sight integrate audio description, high-resolution reproductions of the images, a tactile component, and sometimes an audio component.

Digitized Historical Images

Increasingly, audio description is being used to improve access to digitized historical images, such as old photographs, held by libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions. As these institutions continue to add large numbers of digitized historical images, they are discovering that audio description not only greatly improves the accessibility and meaning of these images for individuals who are blind or who have low vision, but also that the general population appreciates these perceptive, carefully crafted descriptions. One example of how librarians are embracing audio description is

the Audio Description Illinois project (<http://www.alsaudioillinois.net/>)

You may access a range of examples of description for visual art at:

www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/acs-verbalssamples.shtml. Another site showcases

the usage of audio description for architecture and public art. Go to:

www.nybeyondsight.org. [NL]

APPENDICES:

A— Audio Description script for “Storm Reading,” by Neil Marcus, produced by Access Theater

B—A sampling of vocabulary for dance description from a Laban Movement Analysis perspective

C—Audio Description script for “Dust,” dance choreographed by Victoria Marks

D—Annotated audio description script for excerpt from the feature film *The Color of Paradise*

APPENDIX A

Audio Describers' Script for a Live Theater Performance (segment)

To view the excerpt with description, go to: <http://www.audiodescribe.com/samples/>

NOTE: Cues/original script material in **BOLD**; descriptions preceded by ">>."

>>Watercolor patches on a white screen -- from the left, a deep orange brush stroke, a
>>thin blue stroke, bordering an area of yellow at the right, with white at the bottom.
>>Against this bright background, a hand in silhouette emerges from the bottom. It
>>disappears. Now, the shadow of a man's head in profile. Unfolding his body slowly,
>>Neil Marcus rises. He steadies himself, gaining the control needed to stand upright.
>>His full silhouette rises upward -- his legs form an upside-down **AV@** shape in black
>>with his right foot pointed in, toward his left. More of the background images come
>>into view -- at left, a dark blue; at the top, on the right, a rich green.

(real time)

>>Neil's left arm, his hand clenched in a fist, bursts upward -- his right arm is thrust
>>across his body, pointing to his left. They remain posed, still, in silhouette against the
>>bright watercolor images, as titles appear: Access Theater's Storm Reading,
>>a drawing of a dense cloud at top, a thunderbolt striking the "O" in Storm.

>>The audience area lights fade to black.

>>Now, Neil, in a motorized wheelchair, sports a full but neatly trimmed beard, black
>>hair, and wears a blue turtleneck and brown slacks -- in the center of a small stage in
>>front of a light blue backdrop.

NEIL

People are watching me. They're watching me all the time...

>>Stage lights rise to full revealing large blue-lit panels circling the stage area. Katie, a
>>tall brunette in a flowing lavender dress, joins Neil from the right and signs as he
>>speaks.

.

NEIL

**They're watching me even when they're pretending not to watch. They're
watching to see how well I do this thing called human.**

>>Neil's right leg is extended, pointing out to the audience. Neil stretches his body to
>>the left, carefully phrasing each word.

MATTHEW

**People are watching me. They're watching me all the time. They're watching me
even when they're pretending not to watch me.**

>>Matt emerges from the rear of the audience area, light blue shirt, black pants, tall,
>>blonde, bearded.

They're watching me to see how well I do this thing called human.

>>At left, Matt joins Neil and Katie.

Every dream I ever had, came true.

>>He kneels.

The person I never thought I was or could be, I am.

>>Matt and Neil turn sharply to the audience.

>>Lights fade.

(in darkness, over applause):

>>Lights rise -- Neil, Matt, and Katie are at right.

MATTHEW

I come in contact with a variety of people during the course of a week:

"Conversation ... with a museum guard."

>>Pulls a guard's cap from back of Neil's chair and steps to left of Neil.

Hey... Champ. How ya doin'? Hey, have you seen the museum before? Huh?

Have you seen the exhibits? Oh no, don't get up.

>>Pushes Neil back in his wheelchair.

Have you been outside yet? You can't break anything outside. No, no, no, don't get up.

>>Jabs at Neil again.

Have you seen the first floor? The second floor? Huh?

Hey--

>>Matt looks to the side of Neil's chair.

What are you doing with these handcuffs, huh? Got a pair just like 'em. No, don't get up.

>>Another push.

Hey, you come back and you ask for me.

>>Matt removes his guard's cap.

MATTHEW (TO AUDIENCE)

"Conversation with a lady in the grocery store."

>>Matt tosses the cap in a basket on the rear of Neil's chair. He and Katie mime

>>pushing grocery carts in a circle at right.

Hi. Oh uhh... can I help you? I'd be glad to help you... or should I mind my own business?

NEIL

Okay.

MATTHEW

Well!! I'll mind my own business then!

>>They push their imaginary carts off to the left.

>>Lights fade except at left where Katie and Matt reenter. Matt carries a laundry

>>hamper.

MATTHEW

(TO AUDIENCE) "Conversation with a guy in the laundrymat."

(TO KATIE) Oh... still damp.

>>He mimes adding quarters.

Oh, well.

He turns to the right and spots Neil.

NEIL

Hi.

MATTHEW

Hi, uhh, ^

>>Matt looks away and then back at Neil.

Uhh. Whoa, not too close now.. Uhh, you... you come here a lot?

NEIL

Oh yeah, I do.

MATTHEW

Yeah, yeah. I always wait 'til I run out of clean clothes... yeah, before I uhh, come here ...to do my laundry... yeah. ^1

>>Neil nods vigorously, his eyes wide.

MATTHEW

Ohh... uhh, you uhh... well you

>>Matt turns away and back again, awkward ... puts hamper on floor.

... you get into any trouble lately?

NEIL

Oh, not really.

MATTHEW

Yeah, me neither. You know actually, life's been quiet for me too. Yep, just doin' my laundry.

What are you doing?

>>Neil rises with small box, right leg extended.

What are you doing?

>> Kicks Matt's laundry hamper.

Hey! Do you want some help? Of course you do. Here we go big guy.

>>Matt picks Neil up from behind, twirls with him in his arms, and sits in Neil's chair,

>>Neil in his lap.

I got ya. I got ya. Here we go.

>>Matt jumps up, Neil resumes his seat, but Matt reaches for Neil's box, falling over him

>>as Neil struggles to retain it. Matt gets the box

MATTHEW

I'm gonna help you whether you like it or not!

>> In Neil's face, then he mimes operating a vending machine.

Okay, what do you like one cup or two?

NEIL

One.

>>Matt glances at Neil.

MATTHEW

I think you need two. There you go.

>>He mimes pouring soap in machine.

We're going to work this one out me and you. We're going to work it out together, huh.

>> Neil rises and grabs the box.

Oh, a little attitude huh. I like that. So uh, what's your name?

>>He bends over close to Neil. As Neil responds, his right leg is stiff and pointing

>>almost straight up and then to the right.

NEIL

Neil.

MATTHEW

Well, Herbert,

>> Neil winces, mimes voicing "Herbert?" to the audience.

I only have 2 pairs of pants. But a dime for 5 minutes in the laundry. Let me tell ya that's a...

NEIL

What a bargain, huh?

MATTHEW

Yeah, right. Uhh...

>>Matt looks away.

Well... uhh ...see you in a month or two.

>>Matt and Katie leave hurriedly to the left.

APPENDIX B

A sample word list, organized from a Laban Movement Analyst's perspective (Rudolph Laban—1879-1958—codified systems for notating dance: “Labanotation” and “Laban Movement Analysis” or LMA):

Vocabulary for Audio Describers: Locomoting

VERBS INDICATING LOCOMOTION (TRAVELLING THROUGH SPACE)

Category #1: Some basic verbs that denote a specific Body Action

WALK, STEP, RUN, JUMP, HOP, SKIP, LEAP, GALLOP, TURN

These words tell what the mover is doing. Describers need to be succinct, but also specific. To convey as much information in as few words as possible, they often need to describe how the mover is accomplishing the action. What sort of pathway in space does the mover follow? How does the shape or “attitude” of their body convey character or context? What dynamic qualities of the movement flavor its meaning? The describer needs to choose concise wording that will capture the primary elements, communicating to the listener the most essential visual cues.

Below are some verbs meaning “locomote” which contain modifying information about the “how” of the movement.

Category #2: Movement Dynamics

(The main idea in the locomotion is seen through the mover's use of dynamic factors:
flow, time, force and focus.)

The locomoting movement is mostly "about" Flow (releasing or containing):

FLOW, PROGRESS, STREAM, SURGE, YIELD, EASE

STIFFEN, RESIST, TIGHTEN

The locomoting movement is mostly about Time (quick or sustained):

RACE, FLY, DASH, TROT, DART, ACCELERATE, HUSTLE, RUSH, ZIP, SPEED,

HASTEN, SCURRY, WHIZ, STROLL, LINGER, LOPE, HESITATE, SAUNTER,

DECELERATE, DALLY, MOSEY, DAWDLE

The locomoting movement is mostly about Force (strong or light):

STOMP, CRASH, THUD, TRUDGE, PLOD, CLOMP, LUMBER

FLUTTER, TIPTOE, FLIT

The locomoting movement is mostly about Focus (direct or diffuse):

THREAD, HOME IN, TREAD, TRAIL, TRACK, FOLLOW, WANDER, WEAVE,

EXPLORE, SURVEY

Many locomoting verbs contain ideas combining two or three of these factors within the
category of movement dynamics. For example:

(Time and Force) BARRELL, STAMP, MARCH, FLUTTER, BOUNCE, PLOD

(Flow and Focus) ROAM, WITHDRAW

(Force and Focus) LUNGE, STABILIZE

(Time and Flow) MOBILIZE, CAVORT

(Time and Focus) PRANCE, WAVER

(Flow and Force) SURGE, MINCE, DRIFT

(Force, Time, Focus) FLOAT, POUNCE, GLIDE, FLING, GRIND, FLIT, PRESS

(Force, Time, Flow) FLAIL, CAREEN, BURST, STAMPEDE

(Time, Flow, Focus) TRANSPORT

Category #3: Space (Spatial Direction or Pathway)

(The “main idea” in the movement is where it goes and how it navigates through the environment.)

ENTER, APPROACH, ARRIVE, CIRCLE, NAVIGATE, CIRCUMNAVIGATE, SIDLE, STEP, WEND, MEANDER, STRAGGLE, ZIG-ZAG, ANGLE, WANDER, SPIRAL, ORBIT, FOLLOW, FORGE, SLIDE, TRAVERSE, EVADE, INTRUDE, PURSUE, CHASE, TURN

Category #4: Body Shape or Attitude

(The main idea is contained in the mover’s way of forming their body shape in relating to the environment as they locomote.)

ADVANCE, RETREAT, WRIGGLE, CRAWL, WRITHE, OOZE, HOBBLE, WIGGLE, WADDLE, PARADE, STRUGGLE, ENTWINE, TANGLE, SHAKE, SHIMMY

Combination Verbs

Of course, many locomoting verbs combine ideas from the above categories:

(Space and Dynamics) DIVE, HURTLE, LURCH, SCOOT, SASHAY, SWOOP, FLEE, BLUNDER, STALK, PLUNGE, SKIM, STRIDE

(Space and Body Shape) LEAN, LIST, SLITHER, SCUTTLE, SIDLE

(Space and Body Action) SLIDE, STUMBLE

(Body Shape and Dynamics) JERK, SLINK, STRUT, STUMBLE, SCOOT

(Body Action and Dynamics) TWIRL, WHIRL, TRIP, MARCH

(Space, Dynamics, Body Shape) SNEAK, CREEP

APPENDIX C

Audio Describers' Script for a Live Dance Performance (segment)

To view the excerpt with description, go to: TBD

DUST

By Victoria Marks

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DESCRIBERS:

This dance is structured to employ many types of contrasts. Examples include....

Visual contrasts: light/dark, warm tones/cool tones, patterns/full light, one or two dancers/large group.

Sound contrasts: nature sounds/music, quietness (serene sounds)/active (agitated) sounds.

Choreographic idea contrasts: stillness/mobility, passive/active, initiator/follower, intensity (seriousness)/lighthearted busyness, isolation/interaction.

Note that the activeness/passivity, stillness/mobility of each dancer at any given choreographic moment is not based on who's in a wheelchair/"disabled" or not.

Sometimes the choreographer purposely turns that around.

DESCRIPTION Descriptions delivered in real time.

1

A small pool of light reveals a woman lying still, face down. From left, a second woman drives her motorized wheelchair into the light.

2

She pauses next to the prone woman, then reaches down to lift the woman's shoulder and change her pose.

3

The woman in the wheelchair continues to pose the other, moving one body part at a time. The woman on the floor moves only as she is molded, holding each new shape.

[SLIGHT PAUSE]

The mov-er steers her wheelchair to gently nudge the mov-ee onto her back.

4

The passive dancer on the floor is softly pulled and pushed, her head lifted, her back lightly touched, to bring her to sitting. The wheelchair presses into her from behind; she slides to a crouch, then a squat. In stages, her partner stands her up. The standing woman now turns her head—on her own—toward the wheelchair dancer. Light fades to black.

5

Light comes up. The standing woman faces a new dancer. She who was passive is now the initiator. One press of her forefinger against the other's breastbone sets off a cascade of movements. The first backs away and watches as the new dancer flails and dangles, drops to her knees, her elbow, then splays onto her back. Lights fade out.

6

The circle of light comes up. A new dancer stands beside the splayed woman, slicing the air with sharp arcing arm movements. The splayed woman lifts her head, as the other gazes upward. Light fades to black.

[PAUSE, MUSIC CHANGES]

7

Full stage lights up. From left, a man and woman, in time to the music, prance and dip forward. They are met, from right, by a dancer motoring her wheelchair on, dragging another who hangs on to its back. Now dancers converge and scatter busily all over the stage—two drive wheelchairs, five are on foot. Greetings, hugs, taps, re-groupings. Dancers wave, bump, tease, chase, shove, lean, flop onto and roll or climb over each other, scurrying and whizzing playfully from place to place.

8

Now, as lights begin to dim, the dancers spread across the stage and slow to stillness, pausing in tableau. Lighting creates an uneven geometry of shadows slashing across the floor.

In unison, the dancers begin to turn slowly in place. Now all are seen in right profile.

9

Now their backs all face us.

10

[CHIMES]

11

The dancers continue their slow-motion rotation.

12

Now all are in left profile

13

At left, suddenly a wheelchair dancer sweeps her arm up and circles her chair to the right. At this cue, a man at right spins, then reaches out to draw her to him. While some continue their slow, in-place rotation, others break rank and repeat some of the earlier greeting, reaching, running, and pushing. Each always returns to a still patch of light and rejoins the ongoing group rotation.

14

Small groups step forward, then back into place. Now all pause, in tableau again, their backs to us.

15

In unison, all look over their right shoulder then turn toward us.

16

They are still.

17

The two at right turn away.

18

The two at center turn away.

19

The remaining three turn away.

20

Steadily, evenly, all rotate to their left, to face the far left corner.

21-22

Abruptly breaking the spell, a woman dashes from right to left, slicing through the group. She flings herself to the ground, then scrambles up and races back as the others pull away from her and stride off left. She repeats the run and slide, left alone on stage. The lights have brightened and the floor pattern disappears. The lone dancer runs off as others return along her same diagonal path (from far left to close right). They are tugging, shoving, catching and lifting each other. Some push, roll and dart past others to advance along the diagonal and scatter offstage right.

23

Now all but two have exited. They pause, stare at each other, and one runs off right, leaving the other standing alone.

24

Body erect, she gradually turns her back to us...

25

...then pivots slowly on one foot then the other to complete her rotation.

26

Now she looks at us, then walks forward, gazing across the audience.

27

The light brightens on her as she bends forward, hands to her right knee, and unfastens her prosthetic lower leg. She sets it upright in front of her. It stands alone as she kneels behind.

28

Crouching, she slides left on her knees.

29

She glances at us, leans forward to peer at the leg, reaching out slowly with her index finger to poke the leg and tip it over. As she sits up, another dancer, in a separate pool of light to the left, reaches upward, arching her back, then crumples to the floor, face down.

APPENDIX D

Annotated audio description script for excerpt from the feature film “The Color of Paradise”

To view the excerpt with description, go to: <http://www.audiodescribe.com/samples/>

ANNOTATED AUDIO DESCRIPTION SCRIPT FOR *THE COLOR OF PARADISE*

- Cues in CAPS; descriptions preceded by “>>.” Time code is noted for the start of each description, followed by an indication of timing for the voicing of the following line of description.

- Annotations are at the end of the script, keyed to numerals within description text.

Note: The appearance of the character “Mohammed” is described earlier in the film.

1 01:01:36:12 00:00:10:26 --:--:--:--

>>Mohammed kneels and taps his hands through the thick ground cover of brown (1)
>>curled leaves.

2 01:01:46:16 00:00:00:23 --:--:--:--

...[CHIRPING/RUSTLING :02]

3 01:01:48:16 00:00:04:04 --:--:--:--

>>A scrawny nestling struggles on the ground near Mohammed's hand.

4 01:01:52:19 00:00:00:23 --:--:--:--

...[GASP/CHIRPING :02] (2)

5 01:01:54:19 00:00:15:00 --:--:--:--

>>His palm hovers above the baby bird. He lays his hand lightly over the tiny creature.

>>Smiling, Mohammed curls his fingers around the chick and scoops (3) it into his

>>hands. He stands and strokes its nearly featherless head with a fingertip.

6 01:02:08:12 00:00:00:23 --:--:--:--

...[CHIRPING/RUSTLE :01]

7 01:02:09:12 00:00:17:19 --:--:--:--

>>Mohammed starts as the bird nips his finger. He taps (4) his finger on the chick's

>>gaping beak. He tilts (4) his head back, then drops it forward. Mohammed tips (4) the

>>chick into his front shirt pocket. Wrapping his legs and arms around a tree trunk,

>>Mohammed climbs.

8 01:02:28:10 00:00:01:04 --:--:--:--

...[HEAVY BREATHING/CLIMBING :11]

9 01:02:39:10 00:00:17:19 --:--:--:--

>>He latches onto a tangle of thin, upper branches. His legs flail for a foothold.

>>Mohammed stretches an arm between a fork in the trunk of the tree and wedges in

>>his head and shoulder. His shoes slip on the rough bark.

[Note: Throughout this excerpt, for the most part, descriptions are written to be read “in real time,” i.e., as the action being described occurs on screen. However, in many films descriptions may precede the action on occasion. This is a useful convention – it accommodates timing required in films with a great deal of dialogue and allows description users the opportunity to know “what happened” moments before the action occurs.]

10 01:02:55:11 00:00:00:23 --:--:--:--

...[SCRAPING :03]

11 01:02:58:11 00:00:16:04 --:--:--:--

>>He wraps his legs around the lower trunk, then uses his arms to pull himself higher.

>>He rises into thicker foliage and holds onto tangles of smaller branches. Gaining his

>>footing, Mohammed stands upright and cocks his head to one side.

12 01:03:13:20 00:00:01:04 --:--:--:--

...[CHIRPING/FLUTTER]

13 01:03:18:15 00:00:10:15 --:--:--:--

>>An adult bird flies from a nearby branch. (5) Mohammed extends an open hand. He

>>touches a branch and runs his fingers over wide, green leaves.

20 01:04:01:00 00:00:00:23 --:--:--:--

...[CHIRPING :03]

21 01:04:03:04 00:00:13:04 --:--:--:--

>>He rubs the top of the chick's head with his index (6) finger. Mohammed wiggles his
>>finger like a worm (7) and taps a chick's open beak. Smiling, he slowly lowers his
>>hand.

NOTES

1 – Color has been shown to be important to people with low vision, even people who are congenitally blind.

2 – Timing is critical in the crafting of description. We weave descriptive language around a film's sound elements

3 – Vivid verbs help conjure images in the mind's eye.

4 – Description, like much poetry, is written to be heard. Alliteration adds variety and helps to maintain interest.

5 – What to include? This image is important – the adult bird returns in the next scene.

6 – Be specific-- precision creates images!

7 – Similes paint pictures!

APPENDIX E

Equipment providers (“live” description):

Williams Sound, Eden Prairie, MN; 800 843-3544; www.williamssound.com.

Phonic Ear, Petaluma, CA; 800 227-0735; www.phonicear.com.

Telex, Minneapolis, MN; 612 887-5550; www.telex.com.

Martel Electronics, Placentia, CA; 714 572-0100; www.martelelectronics.com.

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