# Writing Audio Descriptions

Guidelines to ensure all relevant visual cues and/or nonverbal communication, and contextual information are captured.

## How to Describe Your Audio

Following these guidelines will help make writing audio descriptions a natural part of planning and filming any video.

### What to Include

Focus on what the listener needs to know that is being communicated visually, including people in the video and background visuals that impact the video's message. You should include:

- Names of All Speakers
- When People Come onto the Screen and When They Leave
- Facial Expressions
- Action or Movement
- Scene or Setting Details

### Incorporate visual information into audio while filming.

Have your subjects identify themselves and their surroundings (rather than only showing their name on screen). This way, anyone—whether they are visually impaired—will know who is speaking.

### Try to add descriptions between natural pauses.

As much as possible, audio descriptions should occur between the natural pauses in the original audio, such as between dialogue. The descriptions should enhance rather than detract from the existing content.

### Prioritize information based on the time available.

If there are few natural pauses, try to work in the most important information based on the time available while still using complete sentences. If there is no time to add crucial information, you can add it before and after the video as necessary.

**Make descriptions clear and concise.**

- Speak in the present tense and describe action as it unfolds.
- Use gender-inclusive language (e.g., police officer instead of policeman).
- Use plainspoken language and avoid technical terms.
- Don't start your description with "we see."

**Match your style, tone, and pace to the video.**

Audio descriptions should enhance the information presented in videos, not detract from it. If what you have to say doesn't fit in the natural pauses in the video, consider using extended audio descriptions.

# Standard vs Extended Descriptions

Standard descriptions fit within the natural pauses of your original audio. Extended descriptions pause the original video, adding extra audio time to give you space for the necessary descriptions.

**Standard Descriptions Pros and Cons**

- Best for videos with enough pauses to accommodate the amount of visual information that must be described.
- Works well for content with frequent pauses or small amount of details.
- If timing is off, it can be hard to understand overlapping audio.

**Example: Frozen (2013) Trailer with Standard Audio Descriptions**
Here, the narrator seamlessly fits the visual descriptions between the natural pauses in the dialogue.

# Extended Descriptions Pros and Cons

- Best for videos without enough pauses to add narration or with a lot of visual information to communicate.
- Can accommodate content with few or no pauses.
- Allows source video to be paused to create room for lengthier descriptions with no audio overlap.

**<u>Example: Digital Accessibility Video with Extended Audio Description</u>**

Here, extra space was added before and after the video to accommodate narration-heavy content with few natural pauses.