



Audio Description

An Introduction to Core Concepts

Presenters



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Audio Description

Webinar Agenda



- Why Do We Do It?
- What is it?
- Who is it for?
- Using Core Concepts
 - How to apply them?
 - What is effective?
- Afterthoughts & Resources

Why Do We Do It?

It's the Right Thing to Do

In the United States it is estimated that...

- **10 million** people are blind or visually impaired
- **1.3 million** people are legally blind
- **75,000** more people become blind or visually impaired every year
- Most people become blind later in life

National Federation of the Blind Fact Sheet
<https://nfb.org/fact-sheet-blindness-and-low-vision>

Website accessed 1/18/18

Why Do We Do It?
It's a Legal Requirement

1973 Rehabilitation Act as Amended

The Legal Details

Section 504

(CFR Part 17, Subpart E)

- Published 1987
- Effective Communication

Section 508

- Passed into law 1998, effective since 2001
- Focus on ICT (information & communication technologies)
- The Law
- CFR Parts 1194

What Is It?

A Technique

A Communication Tool

A verbal translation of the visual content necessary to understand what is being conveyed.

The “Art of Speaking Pictorially”

Describers make choices requiring judgment. Every detail cannot be described.

Required Skills

- ❑ Visual Literacy and Analysis
- ❑ Writing Skills
 - Grammar and Style
- ❑ Audio and Video Editing Skills

A Picture Speaks a Thousand Words



The Long...



A color photograph of part of the library at Sagamore Hill--Theodore Roosevelt's Home. Framed portraits of various sizes and game trophies hang on the wallpapered walls. On one side, a five-shelf bookcase is filled with hard-back books. It spans the wall. On top of the bookcase are wood-carved sculptures of animals. In front of the book case is a wood-framed rocker with black upholstery. Next to it another wood-framed Franklin-style chair with a fur animal rug, including the head, draped across its back. Next to it, a table with a decorative tablecloth, a lamp and vase of flowers are on the top and a shelf is underneath. Next to it, a floral, blue upholstered chair. Slightly behind it, a small blue upholstered chair. Behind it on the adjoining partially wood-paneled wall is a fireplace. On the mantle above are decorative ceramics. Scattered on the wood floor are several oriental rugs, one small animal rug including its head and another larger animal rug in front of the fireplace.

...and the Short of It



A color photo of Roosevelt's library filled with books, chairs, hanging pictures, wood animal sculptures, other objects, scattered rugs, furs, animal trophies and a fireplace.

The Audience

- People who are blind
- People who have low vision

Others That Benefit

- People with other disabilities, such as dyslexia
- Family
- Friends

The Audience

General Characteristics

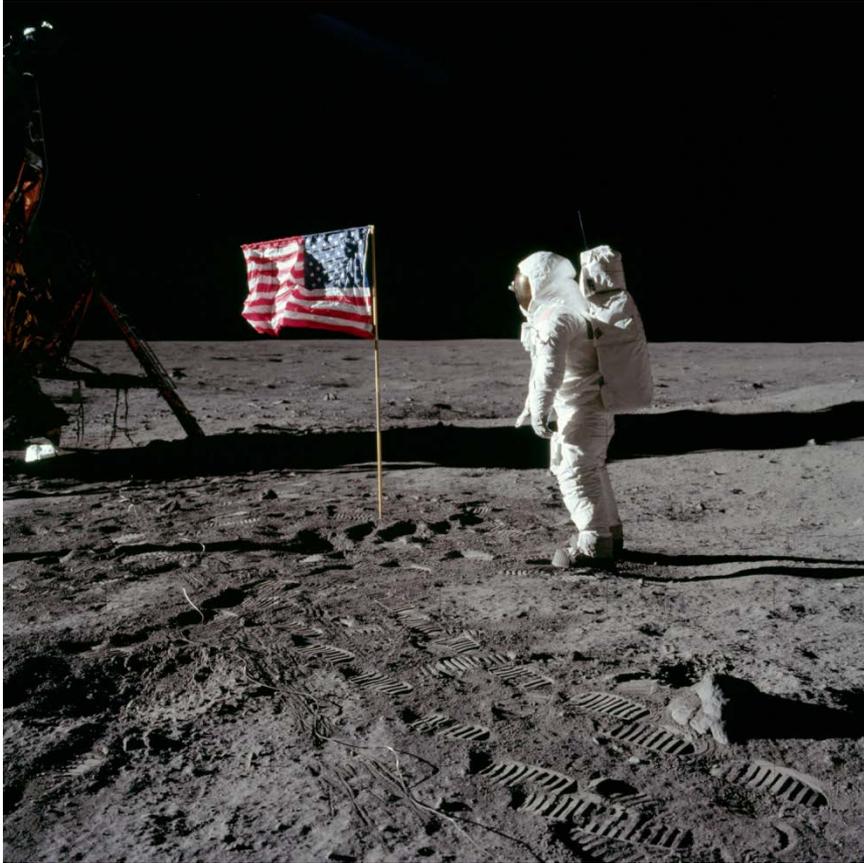
No Functional Vision
and
Low Vision

The Audience

General Characteristics

Congenital
and
Adventitious

Visual Memory



Iconic Images
Age of Onset



The Audience

Popular Culture Points of Reference Based on Age of Onset

Before

- The Beatles
- John Wayne
- Wilt Chamberlain

After

- Beyoncé
- Brad Pitt
- Tom Brady

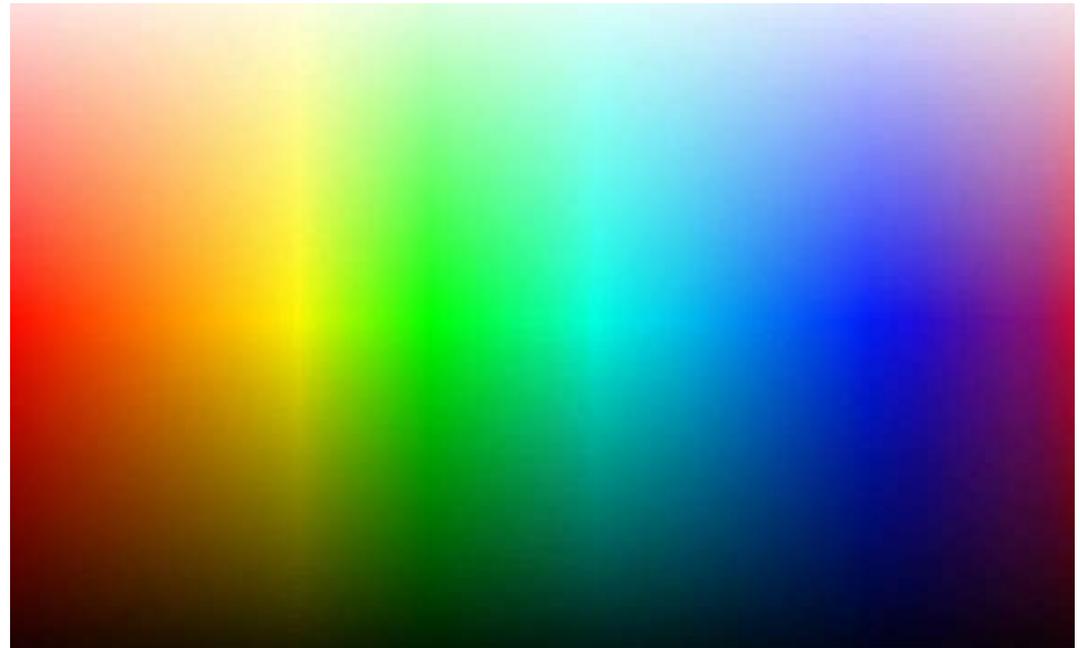
The Audience

Prior Experiences



Color

- Visualization
- Knowledge
- Education



Terminology

It's OK—Everyone uses these words!

- “Look”
- “See”
- “Read,”
- “Watch”
- “View”

Audio Description

Applications and Delivery

Media

- Video
- Exhibitions
- Touchscreen Interactives

Live

- Performances
- Personal Services

National Park Service

Audio Description Core Concepts

Applying Core Principles to Audio Description Scripting

Six Concepts

1. Use Plain Language
2. Translate Accurately
3. Stay Focused
4. Structure the Information
5. Limit Jargon
6. Be Concise But Detailed

Core Concept One

Use Plain Language

1. Use common words and terms
2. Use a diverse but precise vocabulary
3. Avoid generic words
4. Don't be unnecessarily poetic

Plain Language Examples



- Strolls, Struts, Walks
- “Hiker walks on the trail”

Plain Language Examples



- “Azure” vs. “Blue”
 - “A bright blue cloudless sky”
- Tundra vs. Land— “land” may be too generic, “tundra” is more specific—stay tuned for more under “Limit Jargon”

Core Concept Two

Translate Accurately

1. Describe tangible, visible features and actions
2. Strive for objectivity
3. Avoid information not visually present or obvious
4. Avoid subjective adjectives and personal impressions
5. Avoid describing media techniques

Translate Accurately Examples



- “It smiles” verses “Its happy”
- “Smiles” describes the action, “Happy” creates a judgement

Translate Accurately

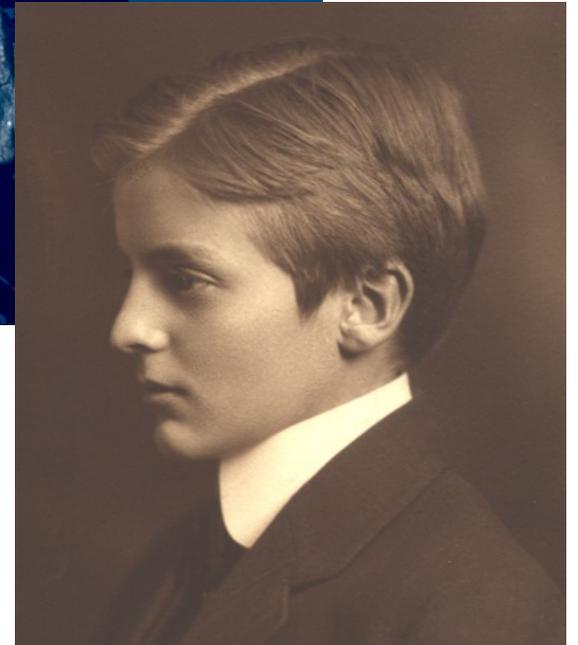
Avoid Personal Impressions



“Soldiers train in the sweltering hot desert heat” Is “sweltering hot” and “heat” accurate or personal impressions?

Translate Accurately

Vantage Point



- “Walking toward us...”
- “From above...”
- “Facing left...”

Core Concept Three

Stay Focused

1. You can't describe it all, select what is most relevant
2. Don't force the listener to guess
3. Avoid repeating visual information
4. Don't add description just because there is time
5. Avoid description based only on personal interests
6. Use culturally appropriate language to identify physical characteristics

Stay Focused Examples



- “Roosevelt’s library brimming with books, furnishings, decorations and animal trophies.”
- The animal trophies are what in part makes this library unique and it contributes to the story of Theodore Roosevelt.

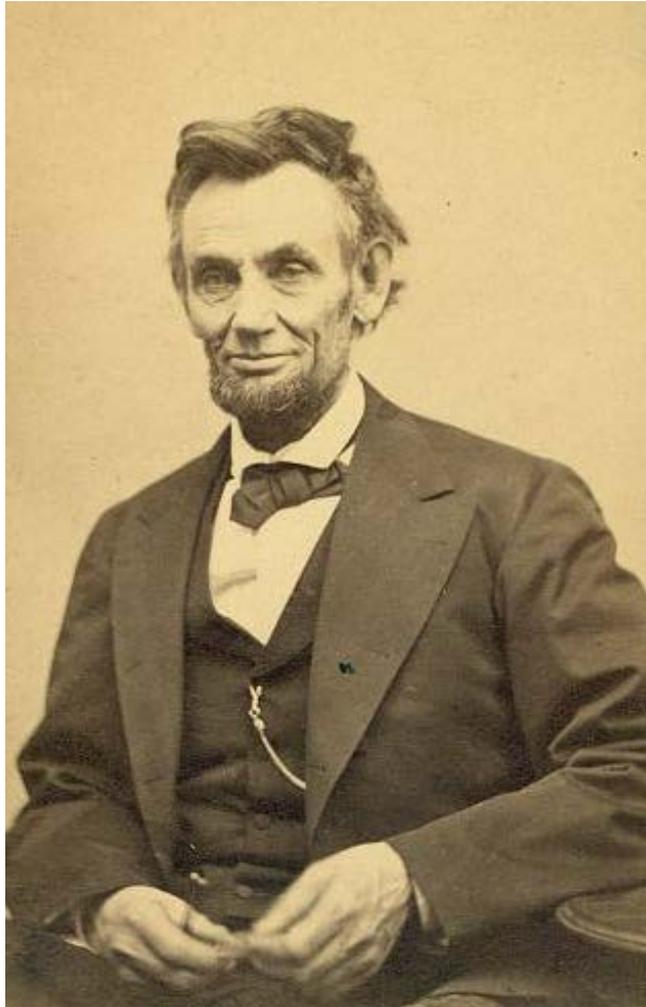
Stay Focused On the Message



- Based on the message, what is most important-- the landscape, clothing and/or activity.
- Don't focus on details of personal interest.

Stay Focused

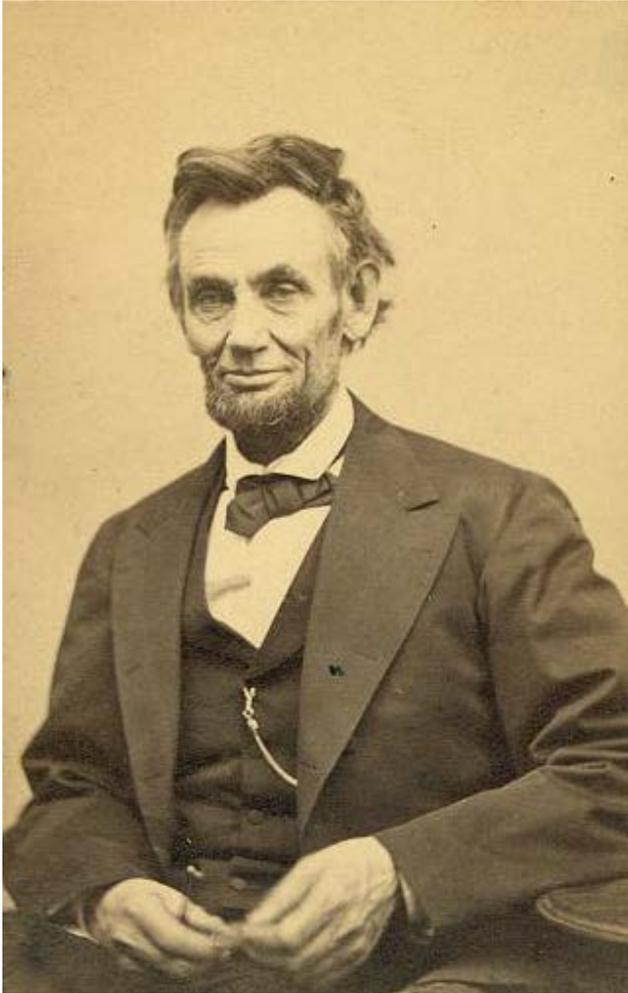
To Say It or Not



President Lincoln is a well recognized individual. Don't make people guess who he is by only describing his physical features.

Stay Focused

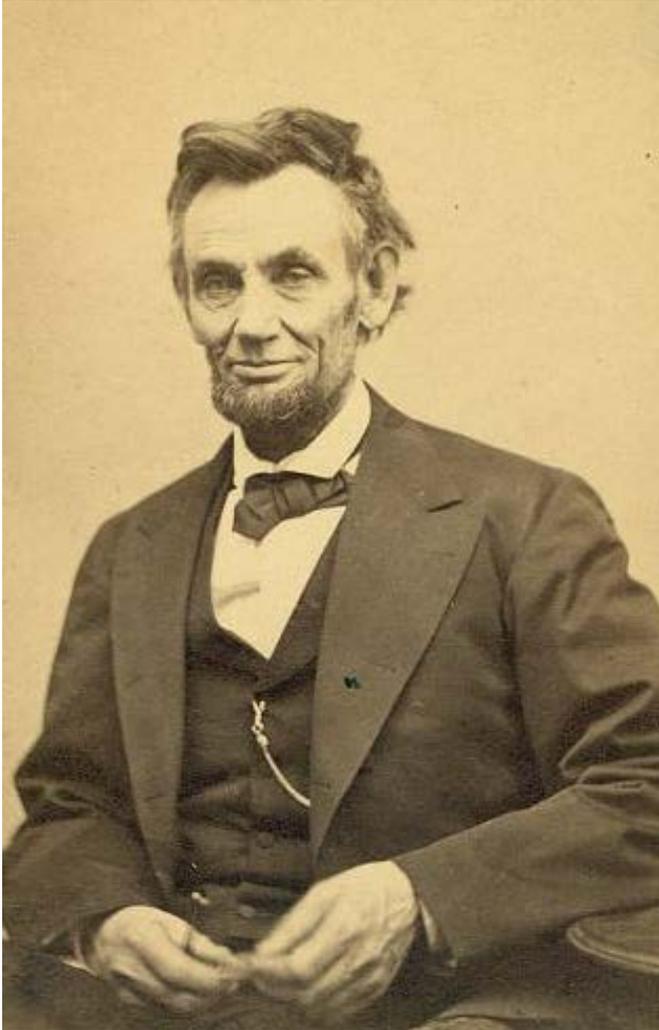
Don't Repeat



- The original media:
 - “Photo caption: Abraham Lincoln, circa 1865. Photographer, Alex Garnder”
 - Film narration: “In 1865, President Lincoln was beleaguered.”
- Focus on additional details: “Black and white photo of a seated Lincoln.”

Stay Focused

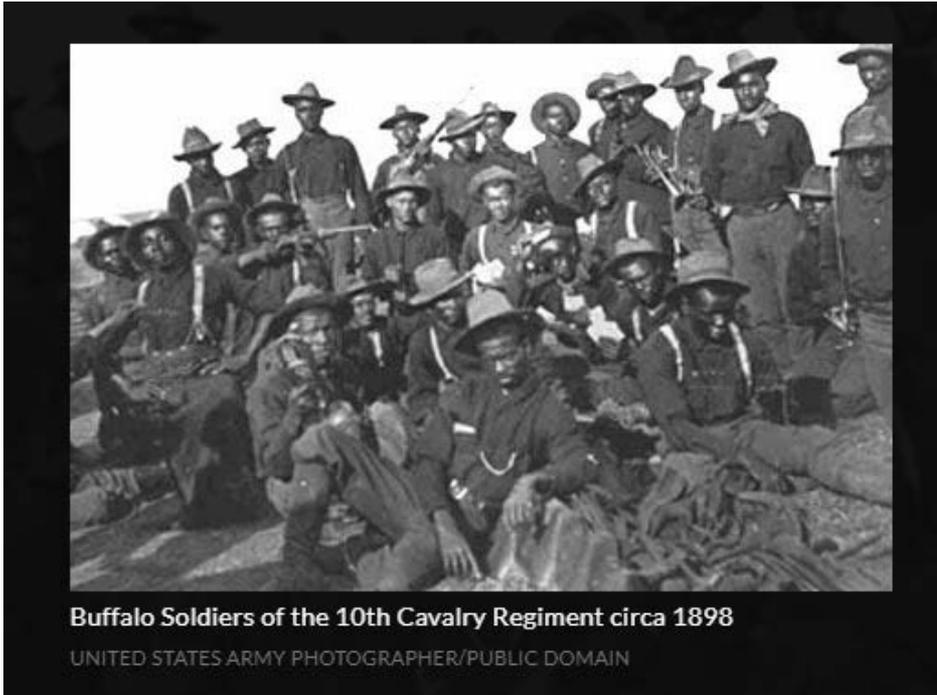
Related to Age



- If exact age is known, say it.
- If exact age is unknown, give a range, but try to be accurate.

Stay Focused

Related to Race and Ethnicity



- Caption: Buffalo Soldiers of the 10th Cavalry Regiment circa 1898.
- Description: Photo: A group of twenty-seven African American soldiers outside posing for a picture, some seated, some standing.

Stay Focused Related to Color



- Two reenactors at Belle Grove Plantation.
- Color is critical to the story. The man is wearing a blue uniform. He is a Union soldier.
- “A dark blue union uniform”

Core Concept 4

Structure the Information

1. Establish the “big picture,” then prioritize
2. The first descriptor establishes emphasis
3. Provide a consistent order
4. Avoid forcing the order when it does not work

Structure the Information

Example



Robin House—Lincoln Home National Historic Site

“A two-story yellow wood-sided house with a covered front porch. Three windows with shutters face front on the second floor. Two windows to the left of the door are on the first floor. From left to right, a white picket fence spans the photo. Trees in the background.”

Structure the Information

Emphasis and Detail

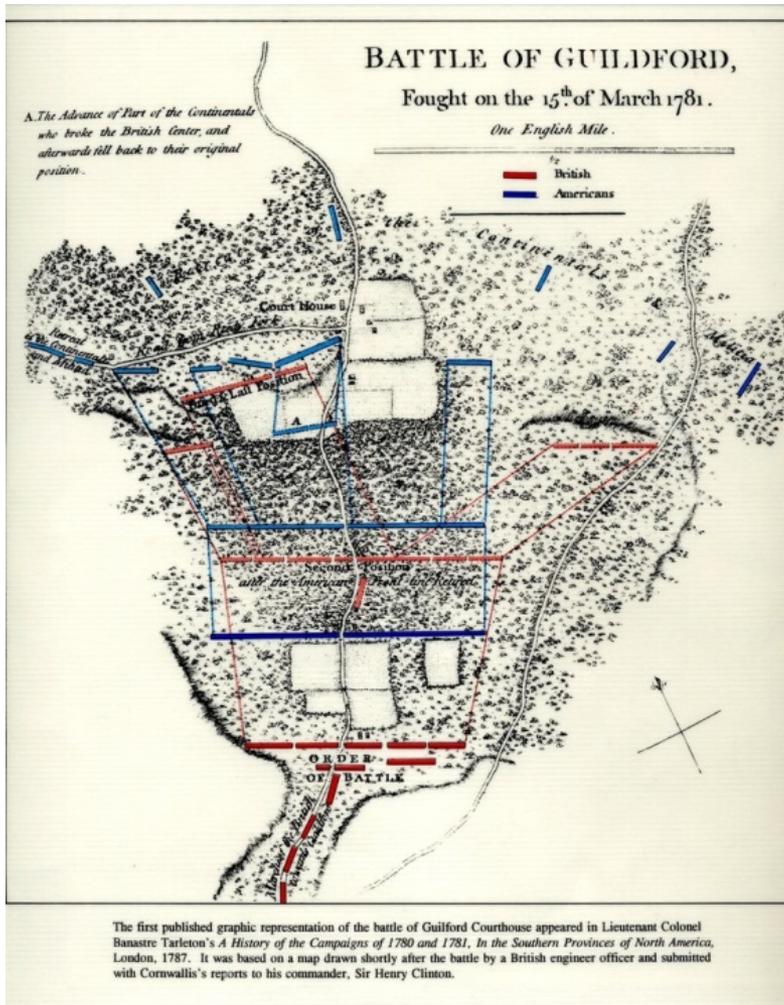


Robin House—Lincoln Home National
Historic Site

- What if the description started with the fence? How would this change the emphasis?
- What you say first establishes emphasis.
- Go from big to small.

Structure the Information

Orientation and Direction



- Orientation may also be part of the story—north, south, etc. The top of this map has a northwest orientation.
- Only British troops are in the south and bottom of the map.
- Orientation is a contributing factor to the story.

Core Concept Five

Limit Jargon

(Scientific and Specialized Language)

1. Use when helpful or necessary
2. Use in conjunction with additional description
3. Avoid when not easily understood or explained

Limit Jargon



- “He walks across the land.” vs. “He walks across the tundra.”
- In addition to “Tundra,” “rugged,” “rolling,” “land...”
- “He walks across the rugged, rolling tundra.”

Core Concept Six

Be Concise But Detailed

1. Include unique contextual details that contribute
2. Give enough description for further inquiry
3. Avoid being too brief
4. Don't provide repetitive or irrelevant details.

Remember the Library?



“Roosevelt’s library brimming with books, furnishings, decorations and animal trophies.”

- Animal trophies add contextual detail
- “Furnishings,” “decorations,” “animal trophies.” These descriptors provide the information necessary to ask for more description.

Be Concise But Detailed

Relevant and Understandable



- If the description is so brief that it is jarring, ask: Is it necessary? Is it meaningful?
- Is the content a transition or background?

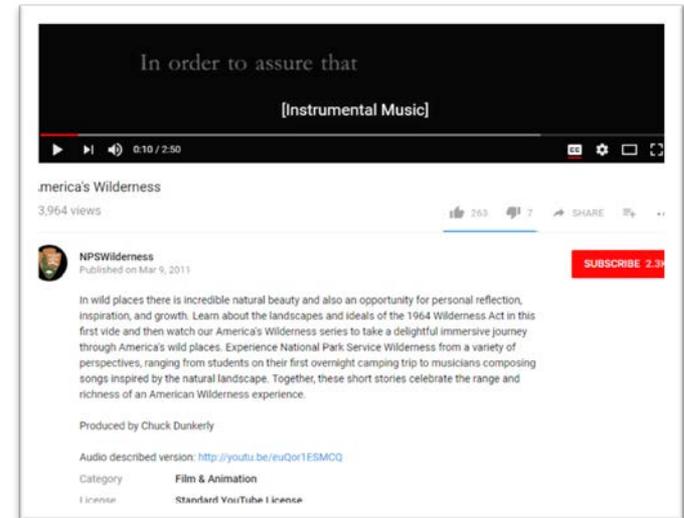
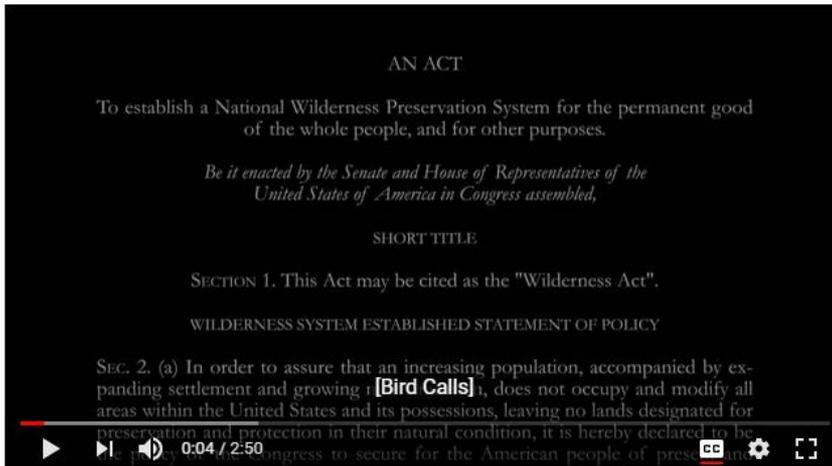
Production Considerations

Plan, Plan, Plan

- It's better to plan than to retrofit
- Think about it early and often!
- Audio description (and captions) must be planned and produced before your product is released

Production Considerations

Effective Communication



[America's Wilderness video](#)

No narration, just music and text. If you are blind or have low vision, how do you access the content?

[America's Wilderness video with audio description](#)

Production Considerations

Budget

- Contracted
- In-House

Time

- Writing
- Reviews

Production Considerations

Original Content

- Include time and space for the audio description
- Include descriptive information in the original narration or text

Narration Considerations

Professional versus Synthesized Voice

For high-end media productions, such as theater-dedicated films, synthesized voices are not recommended.

Human Voice

- ✓ Use trained professionals
- ✓ The audio description narration should be distinct and recognizable
- ✓ Create a complimentary tone and mood
- ✓ Avoid an overly dramatic, embellished tone
- ✓ Give the narrator phonetic information in advance

Synthesized Voice

- ✓ Use the most realistically sounding voice
- ✓ Check the copyright
- ✓ Adjust spelling, spacing and punctuation to:
 - improve and correct pronunciation
 - adjust the pacing

User Feedback

Ground truth your description

Resources to Get Started

- Local chapters of member organizations, like:
 - American Council of the Blind
 - National Federation of the Blind
- Lighthouses for the Blind
- State and local agencies

Sources for More Guidance

- [Audio Description Project](#)
- Use audio description yourself
 - Watch programs with and without description
 - Ask for description when you go to museums and live performances
 - Turn the SAP channel on for TV shows
- DOI Guidance



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