

Audio Description Information

1. What is Audio Description?

Audio Description (AD) is the art of turning what is seen into what is heard; the visual is communicated through the use of the human voice and descriptive language. Audio Description services are intended to enhance the understanding of and access to visual information primarily for but not limited to people who are blind or have low vision. The describer uses a microphone transmitter (either a headset or a steno mask), and sits in the booth or the rear of the auditorium.

Audience members pick up a small receiver with an earphone at the box office and sit in their assigned seats or anywhere in the auditorium. The describer gives a pre-show description of material in the playbill (director's notes, list of cast members, characters and other pertinent information) and describes what is in the auditorium, the audience and the set. A describer may prepare the audience member for what is to come later (when the dialogue may be too fast for description to be provided). A tactile tour allows blind patrons to tour the set or feel set pieces, props or costumes. During the show the describer tries to give concise "pictures" of what is happening visually onstage without talking over dialogue. Often the describer and patrons touch base at intermission to confirm that the transmission is working and to make adjustments – more or less or different description according to the patrons' tastes.

2. How is Audio Description provided in Minnesota?

To offer Audio Description service at a performance, an arts organization should:

(A) Obtain the services of an Audio Describer, paid or volunteer, who will see the production prior to the publicly described show. (VSA Minnesota has a list of audio describers and a sample contract.)

(B) Pick a date that does not conflict with other AD shows. (VSA has a schedule.)

(C) Reserve portable AD transmitter and receivers IN ADVANCE. (Theatres with their own equipment are Bloomington Theatre & Art Center, CSB/SJU, Guthrie, Jungle, Ordway, Orpheum/State, Park Square, Pillsbury House, SteppingStone, Theatre in the Round.) In the Twin Cities you can borrow equipment from the Guthrie Theater (HunterG@GuthrieTheater.org, 612-225-6243, fax 612-375-8721) for \$25/year. * In Greater Minnesota, AD equipment will be available for loan in Duluth, Fergus Falls and Lanesboro. Contact VSA Minnesota for contact info.)

(D) Publicize the AD date(s) by sending calendar information to VSA Minnesota. Include info in your ads, posters, flyers, etc. A mailing list of AD patrons is available from VSA Minnesota for sending postcards or large-print mailings.

(E) Work with the Audio Describer. Provide a script, access to rehearsal or early performances, discuss where the describer will sit, if a tactile tour is desired, what words the director/stage manager would use to describe movements, costumes, etc.

(G) Pick up the AD equipment at the Guthrie Box Office, 818 2nd St. S., Mpls., (* or elsewhere in Minnesota) and return it the day after the AD performance.

3. What is the Access to Performing Arts Project of VSA Minnesota?

VSA Minnesota works to make the arts more accessible to people with disabilities. Its **Access to Performing Arts Project** works with arts organizations to make shows and programs more accessible using Audio Describers or American Sign Language interpreters; making reduced price tickets available; providing resources (ADA Access Plans, etc.); and publicizing accessible performances via e-mail, voicemail (612-332-3888 or 612-706-1456 ext. 4), brochures, and in several media and websites (www.vsamn.org/calendar, www.accesspress.org). Assistance for paying describer/interpreter fees and reduced-price tickets has also been provided by VSA arts and United Arts, but is NOT currently available. In 2010-11 VSA Minnesota will conduct two new projects to promote access services to potential audience members with vision or hearing loss. **To receive the monthly Access to Performing Arts Calendar** by email, contact Jon Skaalen, access@vsamn.org, 612-332-3888, statewide 800-801-3883 voice/tty, fax 612-305-0132, or at VSA Minnesota, 528 Hennepin Ave., #305, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

4. Audio Description resources

The **Audio Description Project**, a program of the American Council of the Blind, is a successor to **Audio Description International**, which was created to promote Audio Description services in various settings through shared information and referral, education, advocacy, and fostering the implementation/development of Audio Description. The **Audio Description Project** offers a website of resources (<http://www.acb.org/adp>), an email discussion group of current topics (sign up at <http://www.acb.org/adp/about.html>), and training opportunities.

The **Audio Description Coalition** includes trained audio describers, patrons and administrators dedicated to high quality audio description through training, mentoring, evaluation and professional development. Their Standards for Audio Description and a Code of Professional Conduct for Describers are available at: <http://www.audiodescriptioncoalition.org/>, info@AudioDescriptionCoalition.org

The **Cultural Arts Access** forum provides accessibility information and feedback, moderated by the Access office at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts which sponsors an annual Leadership Exchange in Arts & Disability Conference (LEAD) for accessibility coordinators of cultural organizations across the country.

To Subscribe: culturalartsaccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

To Unsubscribe: culturalartsaccess-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

To Post messages: culturalartsaccess@yahoogroups.com

Audio Description 5-Tape Series, created by Access Arts Austin, 2000:

Five videotapes, totaling 2 hours 15 minutes. Sold by VSA Texas,

<http://www.vsatx.org/audioBlind.html>

Art Education for the Blind –

Network (www.artbeyondsight.org/network/index.shtml) - Join discussion groups with experts, community listservs, and find programs near you

Learn (www.artbeyondsight.org/learn/index.shtml) - Explore *Art History Through Touch and Sound ONLINE* and other Web-based art courses

Teach (www.artbeyondsight.org/teach/index.shtml) - Review Disability Awareness Training, Handbook for Museums and Educators, audio course, teacher resource center, research

Change (www.artbeyondsight.org/change/index.shtml) - Celebrate annual Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month, view E-Gallery, find a mentor, amend laws, make a difference

Handbook for Museums and Educators - takes you through the process of creating accessible programming for people with visual impairments. You can apply these ideas to programs for people with a broad range of abilities to create as inclusive an environment as possible.

Art Education for the Blind, 589 Broadway, New York, NY 10012

(212) 334-8720, coordinator@artbeyondsight.org; <http://www.artbeyondsight.org/>