
**Information technology — User
interface component accessibility —
Part 21:
Guidance on audio descriptions**

*Technologies de l'information — Accessibilité du composant interface
utilisateur —*

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) form the specialized system for worldwide standardization. National bodies that are members of ISO or IEC participate in the development of International Standards through technical committees established by the respective organization to deal with particular fields of technical activity. ISO and IEC technical committees collaborate in fields of mutual interest. Other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO and IEC, also take part in the work. In the field of information technology, ISO and IEC have established a joint technical committee, ISO/IEC JTC 1.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of document should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO and IEC shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation on the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the WTO principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: [Foreword - Supplementary information](#)

The committee responsible for this document is ISO/IEC JTC 1, *Information technology*, SC 35, *User interfaces*.

ISO/IEC 20071 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Information technology — User interface component accessibility*:

- *Part 11: Guidance for alternative text for images* [Technical Specification]
- *Part 21: Guidance on audio description* [Technical Specification]

Introduction

This part of ISO/IEC 20071 provides audio description developers and practitioners with guidance in creating effective content describing audiovisual material in an auditory-only modality, the style or manner in which audio description is delivered, the audio description script and script time cues, in relation to the original content. The circumstances to which audio description applies include recorded video, broadcast and broadband television, cinema, live or recorded drama, museum and art gallery exhibits, heritage tours, news, and comedies. Some of this content is static and unchanging, some is dynamic, some is expressed in a visual modality alone, and some in a combination of visual and auditory modalities.

An example of mainstream use of audio description techniques can be found in sports commentary. It can be enjoyed by diverse audiences and uses personalities, emotional expression, and reaction to content to express qualities of the original content.

Audiovisual material is produced for people who can see and hear. It is also typically produced in a specific language for a particular audience. Translations of the original auditory content and associated audio description can be provided in different languages. Providing audio description and translating into other languages can be beneficial to diverse users in diverse contexts, including persons who are blind or persons with low vision, persons with learning difficulties or cognitive impairments and, in the case of translation, persons who need the content to be in another language. Translating subtitles and other on-screen text and providing those in auditory form can also be beneficial.

Producing audio description can be thought of in a similar way to language translation in that it involves several kinds of subjective decisions, for example, the use of vocabulary, tone, speed, intonation, and expression. The accuracy and quality that audio describers or script writers can achieve is determined by matching the factors above with the requirements of the original content.

The creation and delivery of audio description based on the guidance in this part of ISO/IEC 20071 is not intended to interfere with or change the meaning of the original content, or the freedom of speech, expression, or opinion of rights holders.

A further benefit of providing audio description can be the raising of awareness of barriers experienced by blind persons and persons with low vision and other beneficiaries in accessing audiovisual content. The use of this part of ISO/IEC 20071 can also help embed universal and inclusive designed media content production practices in educational programmes (such as film, theatre performances, museum and art gallery exhibits, and other media).

Information technology — User interface component accessibility —

Part 21: Guidance on audio descriptions

1 Scope

This part of ISO/IEC 20071 provides recommendations for describing audiovisual content in an auditory modality for use in recorded video presentations, broadcast television, cinema, live or recorded drama, museum and art gallery exhibits, heritage tours, news, and comedies, regardless of the language and technology being used to transmit and present the recorded or live audiovisual content.

NOTE 1 There are many secondary users of audio description, but the primary and intended users of audio description are blind persons or persons with low vision and their friends and family.

This part of ISO/IEC 20071 provides guidance on the subjective nature of creating audio description.

It also provides guidance for audio description developers (script writers, voice narrators, and organizations or groups responsible for delivering audio description) in faithfully and accurately representing audiovisual content.

NOTE 2 It might not always be possible to provide an equivalent experience due to limitations in the amount of time available for audio description depending on the content being described.

This part of ISO/IEC 20071 applies to describing audiovisual content and does not consider the devices or transmission mechanisms used to deliver the content or the audio description. These devices include, but are not limited to, televisions, computers, wireless devices, projection equipment, DVD and home cinema equipment and other forms of user interface technology. Therefore, this part of ISO/IEC 20071 does not consider transcoding files for the various video outputs.

NOTE 3 Technical matters of transmission and distribution are covered by other International Standards (e.g. MPEG standards and other technical international standards such as IEC 62731).

This part of ISO/IEC 20071 provides guidance on how to approach user preferences, available styles and flexibility in approaches to audio description.

It does not apply to static images contained in electronic documents (see ISO/IEC 20071-11 for guidance on text alternatives for images).

It applies to auditory presentations intended to be transmitted or delivered simultaneously to the original audiovisual content.

NOTE 4 Limitations experienced by broadcasters or people in synchronous environments might be reduced online or in asynchronous environments.

2 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

2.1 General terms

2.1.1

audiovisual content

<audio description> visual and/or auditory element of recorded video presentations, live performances, or static or dynamic events to which audio description applies

Note 1 to entry: This generic term is used where only the visual modality might apply, for example, in art gallery or museum exhibits.

Note 2 to entry: The range of circumstances to which this term applies includes recorded video presentations, broadcast and broadband television, cinema, live or recorded drama, museum and art gallery exhibits, heritage tours, news, and comedies.

2.1.2

video (recorded)

<audio description> combination of auditory and visual content intended to be presented together in a synchronized manner

2.1.3

programme

<audio description> complete unit of a recorded or live video broadcast

2.1.4

programme category

<audio description> classification of programmes

Note 1 to entry: Some programme categories include documentary, news and information, and drama.

Note 2 to entry: Programme categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

2.1.5

genre

<audio description> classification of a film, programme, drama or an event from an artistic perspective

Note 1 to entry: Genres include, but are not limited to, history, action, horror, romance, and comedy.

Note 2 to entry: Programme genres are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

2.1.6

creative

<audio description> creation and addition of new original content to existing content

2.1.7

harmony

<audio description> natural fit between the audio description script and its delivery and the original content

2.2 Audio-specific terms

2.2.1

audio track

auditory components of a video other than audio description components

2.2.2

audio description

descriptive audio

Note 1 to entry: Audiovisual content is described in an auditory modality.

Note 2 to entry: Audio description can be used to describe sound not easily identified or sound coming from an unknown source or location.

Note 3 to entry: Audio description can also be used to describe locations, directions, and objects.

2.2.3

basic audio description

audio description provided along with the original audiovisual content without lengthening the time of presentation.

2.2.4

extended audio description

audio description provided with the original audiovisual content that lengthens the total time of the presentation or event

2.2.5

audio introduction

complementary auditory content included before the original audiovisual content begins

2.3 Language of presentation terms

2.3.1

original language

native language in which audiovisual content is produced

2.3.2

re-voicing

dubbing

voice-over

secondary audio version of a film or video produced by voice talent, translators, and dialogue writers in a language other than the original language of the film or video

Note 1 to entry: When dubbing, this is timed to match the voicing or mouth movements of animated characters or the original actors.

2.3.3

subtitles

transcription or translation of the dialogue, suitable for when the sound is available but not understood

Note 1 to entry: Specific guidance on delivering subtitles, on-screen text, and embedded text will be provided in a forthcoming addition to ISO/IEC 20071.

2.3.4

spoken subtitles

audio subtitles

spoken captions

subtitles on audiovisual content that are read aloud and spoken over the audio in subtitled audiovisual content

2.3.5

spoken subtitles with audio description

audiovisual content which is both subtitled and audio described through the narrator reading the translation after stating that a subtitle appears

Note 1 to entry: Subtitles can also be identified through alternative voicing, synthetic speech, or sound indicator.

Note 2 to entry: Spoken subtitles often use a different voice to the voice of the audio describer to avoid confusion between the dialogue and the description.

Note 3 to entry: Spoken subtitles and audio description can be available to users separately or together.

Note 4 to entry: Spoken subtitles are synchronized with the text on screen.

2.4 Audio description production terms

2.4.1

live production

production process that involves creating audio description in real time along with the creation and delivery of the original audiovisual content

Note 1 to entry: Live productions are typically experienced initially in real time, but can also be recorded for later redistribution.

2.4.2

post script/pre-production audio description

audio description considered after the script has been developed, but before the event takes place

Note 1 to entry: An example of this is the text of a play.

Note 2 to entry: This allows the script to be modified to include redundancies in audio and visual content (e.g. "Pass it to me" could be modified to "Pass my coffee, Jane").

2.4.3

pre-mixed production

content including audio description that is created and recorded prior to transmission

2.4.4

co-produced

<audio description> produced at the same time as the rest of the audiovisual content

2.4.5

post-produced

<audio description> produced after the audiovisual content

2.4.6

audio describing

delivering a script designed to meet the needs of persons wishing to have access to audiovisual content

2.4.7

voice narrator

narrator

describer

audio describer

<audio description> person(s) and/or technology by which audio description is voiced

Note 1 to entry: A human voice narrator can also be referred to as a narrator, describer, or an audio describer. For the purpose of this part of ISO/IEC 20071, these terms are synonymous and referred to as voice talent.

2.4.8

machine narrator

<audio description> technology which delivers text-based audio description

Note 1 to entry: To date, machine-based narration has not been as acceptable to persons who are blind or persons with low vision as voiced audio description.

2.4.9

writer

<audio description> person(s) who writes the audio description script

3 Framework and process considerations for audio description

3.1 General

3.1.1 Alternate names for audio description

Terms used in this part of ISO/IEC 20071 vary according to country, language, region, and type of audiovisual content. They include audio description, described video, described narrative, captioning for the blind, and others. For the purpose of this part of ISO/IEC 20071, these terms are synonymous.

NOTE In some jurisdictions, there are precise usages defined for one or more of these terms. Individuals can consult their own country's regulations for the locally appropriate terminology.

There are four different types of video language presentation: original language, dubbed, voice-over, and subtitled.

3.1.2 Motivation for audio description and spoken subtitles

Regardless of style, implementation, or quality, audio description is not only an access strategy; it is ultimately a creative process. Not all visual content can be described and decisions will be made regarding what is important to describe, the vocabulary used, voicing techniques, timing, and method of delivery. These decisions can help ensure that users of audio description have optimum access to audiovisual content thus minimizing the extent to which they are excluded from the experience.

Audio description can benefit a wider audience of diverse users beyond its primary target group, persons who are blind or who have low vision.

Reading is a complex cognitive process. Thus having subtitles read aloud can reduce access barriers and benefit various groups of people, including persons with learning and reading disabilities, persons with cognitive disabilities older people, children, and non-native language speakers, as well as persons who are blind or have low vision.

3.2 Types of audio description

3.2.1 Live audio description

Live audio description is suitable for events taking place in real time.

NOTE Live audiovisual content and associated audio description can also be recorded and later presented in recorded video form.

3.2.2 Pre-mixed audio description

Pre-mixed audio description allows careful planning and evaluation of the audio description before the delivery of audiovisual content.

- a) Where audiovisual is pre-recorded, the accompanying audio description should be pre-mixed.
- b) Pre-mixed audio description should be created as part of the production process rather than external to it.

NOTE This can involve the following:

- Beginning the description process during the script writing phase even though details might need to be added during production and post-production.
- Establishing timing parameters during script writing and rehearsal processes but then recording without strict attention to timing, as small adjustments can be made to timing during post-production.

- c) Where pre-mixed audio description was not created as part of the production process, it should be overseen or at least approved by a member of the original production team.

3.2.3 Harmonious commentary

Harmonious commentary enhances auditory descriptions with voicing techniques and aligns emotional and expressive reactions to script in conjunction with auditory descriptions.

- a) Harmonious descriptions should be used when character expression and actions are conveyed.
- b) Unlike announcers, audio describers should provide harmonious commentary that is in-line with the spirit and intention of the original audiovisual content.
- c) In blending traditional video narration with harmonious commentary, a narrator should work with and/or interview sources close to the production with the goal of understanding what it is about the audiovisual content that is most important to describe.

NOTE Harmonious commentary is frequently used for live events such as sports events, a New Year's Eve concert and countdown, as well as elections, parades, festivals, Olympic ceremonies, and theatre performances.

3.2.4 Extended audio description

- a) Extended audio description techniques may be used to allow the presentation of more information than could be presented using basic audio description.

EXAMPLE 1 A video is identified as being audio described in advance of its commencement.

EXAMPLE 2 The characters who will participate in the narration of a video that is audio described are introduced.

NOTE 1 Levels of importance, including recommendations for the types of content that are suitable to be placed in extended audio, are discussed in 4.4.

- b) Extended audio description may involve one or more techniques for presenting additional information to users including the following:

- 1) stop motion: stopping a video while continuing description to provide additional time for audio description;
- 2) video slowdown: slowing down the presentation of a video to provide additional time to insert audio description;
- 3) audio introduction: added information is included before the event starts, offering complementary information.

NOTE 2 Extended audio description is only possible with content that is recorded because its use extends the playing time of a video presentation not just before or after the presentation (as during live presentations), but during the presentation itself (by pausing or lengthening the video to include more audio). This could include videos that are broadcast and recorded by the user for later playback.

3.3 Creating audio description

3.3.1 Narrator preparation

The narrator should have the following:

- a) good native language skills;
- b) the ability to articulate;
- c) a prior knowledge of radio drama, story-telling, and timing techniques (including emphasis, pauses, and sentence phrasing or shaping);