Get the Facts: Audio Description

How do we ensure everyone can fully experience and enjoy our exhibitions, shows, museums, blockbusters or public lecture series?

Audio description unlocks opportunities for people who are blind or have low vision to participate equally in arts and entertainment experiences.

People with age-related sight loss sometimes stop going out to the theatre and other events. This service may allow them to continue enjoying an important interest with family and friends.

“The audio describer was terrific. I so enjoyed the opportunity to experience the audio description. Thanks so very much for your efforts to make things accessible to our group. From my point of view, you made our group feel ordinary, which is a fairly unique experience.”

– Dew Lewis, Statewide Vision Resource Centre

Download the Get the Facts: Audio Description factsheet to learn how audio description can unlock the exciting world of the arts for people who are blind or have low vision.

# Audio Description (AD)

A number of major art galleries, museums, live theatres and cinemas offer at least one audio described show or exhibition tour within a season. Galleries and museums may also provide self-guiding devices, similar to smart phones, which describe art or museum exhibits to individual visitors who are blind or have low vision.

## Cinema

Many cinemas provide audio described films at designated showings. Audio description is embedded in the films. Patrons can hear the description through a headset which is given out when tickets are purchased. More information is available at Media Access Australia.

## Television

In 2020 ABC and SBS TV are offering 14 hours of audio description daily

## Live theatre

A number of Melbourne live theatres and companies regularly offer audio-described shows. A trained Audio describer transmits a description of the visual elements of the performance through a radio transmitter. The audience has a receiver device and earplugs or headphones These include the Malthouse, the Melbourne Theatre Company, The Victorian Opera and the Australian Opera. There are links to their access pages at the end of this fact sheet.

## Art Galleries and museums

The Audio describer is usually in a more direct role, describing exhibits to visitors, usually on a designated tour of an exhibition. Currently, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) offers audio-described tours on request and at other times. Other art galleries are just beginning to offer them. The NGV has recently produced an innovative online, audio described experience of artworks from the NGV, during the Covid 19 crisis.

# How to arrange an audio described events or exhibtion

* Include funding for audio description in your planning and budget.
* Set a date for the audio described event (Currently the practice is to offer one or two audio described performances/events in a season).
* Any instructions on booking or collecting audio description equipment should be included in your booking information.
* Check that your technical set-up is compatible with the transmitter equipment
* Audio describers can describe from within the auditorium or from a separate room where the event is relayed to them on a video.
* The audio describer decides about their best location in a theatre.
* In a gallery or museum, the audio describer is in direct contact with patrons.
* Promote your event through the usual channels as well as disability networks.
* Use the audio description symbol so that visitors can see at a glance that the AD service is available.
* The audio describer attends a dress rehearsal, early performance or tour to become familiar with the production.
* The audio describer brings radio transmitters and earpieces to the event, if not provided by the venue.
* Some people using audio descriptions prefer to use their own earpiece.
* A smartphone application for cinema audio description is available to serve the same purpose

# Useful Links

Audio description services

[Description Victoria](http://www.descriptionvictoria.com.au/) is a private, fee-paying service used by a number of major Melbourne venues, to describe live performances, exhibitions and sometimes film.

[Vision Australia](https://www.visionaustralia.org/community/events/audio-description-services#:~:text=Audio%20description%20(AD)%20offers%20people,or%20other%20arts%20related%20productions.) offers limited access to trained, volunteer audio describers. This is a free service. They also list audio described events.

[Media Access Australia](https://mediaaccess.org.au/about/captioning-audio-description-and-transcription-suppliers) — A list of suppliers and their details

## Venues and companies offering regular audio descriptions.

[Malthouse Theatre](https://www.malthousetheatre.com.au/your-visit/access/)

[The Melbourne Theatre Company](http://www.mtc.com.au/your-visit/access)

[The Victorian Opera](http://www.victorianopera.com.au/accessibility)

[Opera Australia](https://opera.org.au/accessibility)

The [National Gallery of Victoria](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/plan-your-visit/access/#information-for-visitors-who-are-blind-or-have-low-vision) offers audio described tours on request and at other times

## Other useful links

[A guide to audio descriptions on Zoom](https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology/blog/using-zoom-video-conferencing-platform-provide-people-visual-impairments-instant)

[Innovative approaches](https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/Xl4vMxIAACMANfC3) to audio description in the UK

Media Access Australia ,[audio-described DVDs](https://mediaaccess.org.au/tv-video/dvd-and-blu-ray)

[Streaming services and apps](https://www.3playmedia.com/2018/03/12/5-video-streaming-services-doing-accessibility-right/) with audio description

[Vision Australia](http://www.visionaustralia.org/about-us/events), audio described event calendar

[Choose Art](https://chooseart.com.au/become-a-promoter/) — You can advertise captioned events on this accessible arts directory