

# Accessibility in Adventure Filmmaking

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## ACCESSIBILITY IN ADVENTURE FILMMAKING

# Introduction

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Sports and adventure filmmaking is a thriving and creative culture with many film festivals and a large online audience; however, this vibrant culture is rarely accessible for disabled audiences. This open-source document created by Danielle Sellwood ([Find It Film](#)) and [Coldhouse Collective](#) aims to provide all the tools you need to start making your films and content accessible. This is an ever-changing area, and this document will be updated as required. This project has been kindly supported by [Berghaus](#).

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## Aim

To make adventure film festivals and the associated culture a welcoming place for d/Deaf, blind/partially sighted, and disabled audiences, and work to a place where all films of this genre are accessible, and all filmmakers are educated and able to integrate accessibility as part of their filmmaking process.

## What is accessible content?

In the context of outdoor and adventure media production, for this project we are talking about:

- Accessible captions
- Audio description
- BSL translation on film
- Alt text on images/gifs



# Captions for video clips and film

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Captions or subtitles are a transcription of the words spoken in a video. Accessible captions identify speakers, capture non-speech elements and are generally in the same language as the video. Accessible captions should always be open, open (as opposed to closed) captions are always on the screen and cannot be turned off.

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Captions have become widely used for much online content, however there are a few key differences when making captions as an access need. Auto generated captions do not meet these requirements, so they are fine to use as a starting point but will need considerable editing. It's preferential to transcribe your own films and create a caption track via the film editing software because, for the d/Deaf audience, captions are a significant part of their experience, and if done badly this will reflect badly on your film.

When you are in the planning phase of your film and have a budget, make sure you allocate some to have your captions done professionally, or allow budget and time to have one of your own team create them. If you are making a low/no budget film, learn to do your own captions and see it as a part of the craft of filmmaking.



## How to add your own captions

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Premiere Pro and Final Cut Pro both have caption functions that allow you to create custom captions. There are also dedicated software options such as EZTitles or Zsubtitle.

### Best practice

1. Use open captions not closed. Open captions are always open, this makes them immediately accessible (closed captions can be switched off).
2. Keep each segment short - approximately 38 characters long and over two lines if possible. Very often people combine lipreading, some hearing and reading all at the same time, so the text will be scanned rather than read like a book.
3. Try and break for a new caption where the sentences break rather than randomly, this makes it easier for lipreaders.
4. White text with a black background is easiest to read and make sure the font size is accessible.
5. Don't use a fancy font - use a simple, sans serif, like Helvetica. You might want to consider FS ME font which was designed in collaboration with Mencap, or Dyslexie font designed for people with dyslexia.
6. If there is music or non-dialogue sound describe it in brackets: [♪ Imagine by John Lennon] [ or [Loud door slamming] etc.
7. Describe the style of music, the instrument being used etc. Music is a key part of the atmosphere so it's important it is described and explained correctly. If you don't know what the instrument is, describe the feeling or mood - tense/uplifting/party music etc.
8. X-rated. If someone swears, write the exact swear word - not 'swearing'.



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9. When more than one person is speaking and especially when the voice changes during some b-roll you have two choices to indicate a new character/person is speaking: a) StageText recommends you use the same colour text with the name and a hyphen before the spoken words. b) Many digital platforms use different colours, this is only possible if you are creating the captions manually in a film editing software. It works quite well but can be a bit overwhelming if there are a lot of different people speaking and you need a lot of colours.
10. Add an emotion or volume if relevant, e.g whispered/sobbing/shouting etc.
11. Learn to love captioning and see it as a craft rather than an extra burden on your time.
12. Finally, it seems obvious, but make sure the spelling and punctuation is correct!

## SRT captions file

If you are entering the film in a festival you may be asked for a separate captions SRT file. These are essentially plain-text files that have subtitle information including the start and stop times next to the subtitle text. Once you have created your captions you can export just as an SRT file or the video with the captions burned in.

If you are sending an SRT file, let the recipient know your display preferences as their software may convert it to the standard setting. EG. You should specify: Black or dark grey background, white (or contrast colour) text, 40-50pt size etc.

**Remember:** The SRT file is only a text file to be used along with your video, it does not contain the video or audio that you are creating subtitles for.

## Resources

### StageText

Stagetext is a deaf-led charity, passionate about making the arts a more welcoming and accessible place.

<https://www.stagetext.org>

### StageText article

Making an art out of digital subtitling: <https://www.stagetext.org/news/making-an-art-out-of-digital-subtitling/>

### Vulture Magazine

Article on creative captions for Stranger Things: <https://www.vulture.com/2022/07/stranger-things-subtitles-captions-team-interview.html>



## ACCESSIBILITY IN ADVENTURE FILMMAKING

### Examples

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In all these examples, note the short two line sentences, simple font, and dark background.

#### Identify the speaker

When someone starts speaking, especially if you cannot see the person, type their name before the text. Also do this if a second/third person starts to speak.

Many digital platforms use different colours to indicate two people speaking.

In this case (right) the colours of the Charity's branding is used.





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### X-rated

If someone swears, write the exact swear word. Don't write 'swearing'.



### Music

Describe the style of music, the instrument being used etc. Music is a key part of the atmosphere so it's important that it is explained.



### Sounds

Describe all the sounds, weather, nature and noise created by each are important indicators of a situation.





# Audio description

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Audio description (AD) is a form of narration that uses the spaces between the words spoken in a film or performance to describe key visual elements and describe what is happening. In this way, it is an important means by which the full experience of a programme, film or live performance can be conveyed, allowing greater participation, engagement, and access for blind and partially sighted audiences.

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Audio description can be live, this would be at an event/the theatre etc., and is usually accessed by a direct feed to a headset. For film and video content it is created via a dedicated audio track within the film file.

This is a constantly changing and improving field, for example, there are projects looking at how to integrate AD at pre and postproduction stages. There is a huge benefit to this because it makes the process easier and creates a better result. Examples include having the subject describe what they are doing, i.e. “I’m just shaking out my trail shoes

to make sure there is no grit in them.” In the editing phase, consider leaving space in the audio for the AD, especially at the beginning or change of scene so that there is room to describe it adequately.

When you are in the planning phase of your film and have a budget to manage, make sure you allocate enough money to have your AD done professionally – this is more specialised than captions and you may find it easier to outsource. If you are making a low/no budget film, learn to do your own AD and see it as a part of the craft of filmmaking.

## ACCESSIBILITY IN ADVENTURE FILMMAKING

### Screening your AD film

YouTube and Vimeo don't yet support AD in a toggle on/off format, so, for the moment, you'll need to export a separate AD version of your film with the AD track "baked in" to the main film audio - adjusting levels to ensure people can hear the AD. If screening your films in venues with hearing loop systems (at film festivals etc), they may request the film as a Digital Cinema Package (DCP) which enables them to play to AD track to viewers wearing special headsets whilst watching the main film.

### Through Audio Description (AD)

Audio description that runs through the film alongside the original soundtrack.

### Audio Introduction (AI)

An AI is commonly used in theatre and increasingly in film to introduce the characters and setting and give a synopsis of the plot or storyline. This is particularly useful if there is limited room in the film itself (due to a lot of narration or dialogue). An AI can be anything up to 10 minutes, depending on the length of the film.

## Resources

### Vocaleyes

Vocaleyes believe that blind and visually impaired people should have the best possible opportunities to experience and enjoy art and heritage. Their mission is to increase those opportunities, make them as good as possible, and ensure that as many blind and visually impaired people as possible are aware of them, and that the arts and heritage sector know how to create them, and welcome blind people as a core audience. <https://vocaleyes.co.uk>

### FutureLearn

Creating Audio Description: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. An online course by Royal Holloway University and VocalEyes. <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/creating-audio-description-for-equali-ty-diversity-and-inclusion>

### Newsazi

Article on Netflix's Bridgerton Audio Description: [newsazi.com/bridgerton](https://newsazi.com/bridgerton)

### North Sea Connection

A fantastic example of AI by RTE as part of the promotion for the drama North Sea Connection: <https://youtu.be/W7pINDe-Ryc>

## How to create AD

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1. Watch the film a couple of times, make some notes on any questions you may have around specifics like location, specialist equipment or terminology. Assess the space/pauses where the AD will fit in, a heavily narrated/scripted film will have minimal AD, so you may want to make your AI longer.
2. Have the key characters fill in a self-description questionnaire. They should describe hair and skin colour, build, age range, and anything distinctive or interesting about their appearance. (Asking them to do this themselves saves any awkward conversations).
3. Prepare a first draft of your script, AI and AD.
4. Do a test run of the AD to check how it fits, then make adjustments.
5. Once happy, if necessary, send the script to the director for comments and any edits.
6. Record the AI and the AD script. The AD recording should start at 00.00 in line with the film so that it is easy to place in the film timeline. The AI can be either a separate clip or added before the film starts alongside a still.
7. Double check that it all fits correctly alongside the film audio. Lower the music or background sounds so that the AD can be heard clearly.
8. If possible, have the AD checked by a VI/Blind person. Make amends if necessary and re-record.
9. Export an AD version of your film for YouTube/Vimeo platforms to sit alongside your standard version (hopefully it won't be long until these platforms allow AD files to toggle on/off).
10. Festivals may request a Digital Cinema Package (DCP) format to work with hearing loop systems. There are several software packages out there to do this, eg DCP-O-Matic - and there are lots of tutorials online to assist.

## ACCESSIBILITY IN ADVENTURE FILMMAKING

### Best practice

1. Create an audio introduction, this is a good way of describing main characters and visuals before the film starts. It helps set the scene and adds a richness that may not be possible during the film. It also prevents overloading the audience during the film.
2. Describe diversity. For the sighted audience, how someone looks, their ethnicity, skin colour and hair style are all important in telling a story, especially if there is a cultural context, so all these attributes must be described. This is particularly important where the default for a character is a white man - i.e. in climbing and outdoor adventure. (See page 10. Point 2).
3. Describe the detail, if there is space in your script then this might include the style of architecture, specialist equipment or a cloud formation.
4. Get creative with colour description. Some of your audience will not have a reference of colour shades, so combine with an association, i.e. strawberry red, teal blue or safety orange.
5. X-rated, describe what you see. If there are scenes that are sexual or gory, describe that, don't censor.
6. Integrate AD into the dialogue where possible. This may not suit your style of film, but if there is the opportunity to build AD into the script then try, this could simply be someone describing what they are doing, i.e. A runner putting on their shoes could easily describe this process while they are doing it, you may find this brings a richness to your script that benefits everyone.
7. Think about the voice you use to read the script and how it reflects your film, think about the style and level of detail that is appropriate, think about the culture you are portraying and make sure it is all in line i.e. if the film is about teenage skate girls, have a young woman narrate the AD. Ultimately this is all about giving blind/VI people the same experience and enjoyment as the rest of your audience.
8. Only describe what can be seen by a sighted person, don't fill in additional information that you as a filmmaker know - say what you see, build the story, do not give spoilers.
9. If you are creating a series (where the same narrative continues), make sure the AD is read by the same person. This is a particular irritation for blind/VI people because the describer becomes like an extra character to them, so if this voice changes from episode to episode, then it is really jarring.
10. View AD as an artform and give it as much care as you would with any other aspect of your filmmaking.

# British Sign Language (BSL)

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Sign Language is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression, and body language used mainly by people who are Deaf or have hearing impairments. Within Britain the most common form of Sign Language is British Sign Language (BSL). BSL has its own grammatical structure and syntax, as a language it is not dependent, nor is it strongly related to spoken English. BSL is the preferred language of more than 150,000 people within the UK (2021).

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## Deaf or deaf?

The word deaf with a lowercase d is used to describe or identify anyone who is severely hard of hearing. Deaf with a capital D refers to people who have been deaf all their lives, or since before they learnt to talk, they are pre-lingually deaf. It is an important distinction because Deaf people tend to communicate in sign language as their first language. For most Deaf people, English is a second language and understanding complicated messages in English can be a problem.

## Creating BSL for your video

If you have a contact who is fluent in BSL, great, you can make a video of them translating the audio in your film and add it to the corner of the video. If not, use a specialist company who can create a professional video for you.



## ACCESSIBILITY IN ADVENTURE FILMMAKING

### Best practice

1. The signer needs to be visible. Sign language relies on facial expression and body language to effectively communicate. A good rule of thumb is to make sure the overlay of the translator takes up at least 1/4th of the width of the video to ensure their movements are clear. Similarly, make sure not to cut off any of their movements by cropping too tightly. Most signing will occur from below the waist to above the head, and at least an elbow width to each side.
2. Find a placement on the screen where the signer won't block significant visual elements, whether that's on the right side of the screen, the left, towards the top, or towards the bottom. Ideally, this location will be constant throughout the video. If there are also captions, be sure not to block those, either.
3. Maximise space by using a green screen tool. By using a green screen (or any single-coloured background), you can include only the signer when adding the overlay to your video, therefore blocking as little of the original video content as possible.



### Resources

#### British-Sign

Online courses and information about BSL.  
<https://www.british-sign.co.uk>

#### SignHealth

SignHealth works to improve the health and wellbeing of Deaf people. Their work is varied and aims to promote easier access to healthcare and information.  
<https://signhealth.org.uk>

# Alt text for social media

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**Alt text is a written description of an image or gif (not video), it is designed for blind or partially sighted people to help them access the visual elements of content.** Alt text is read out loud by a screen reader. This is a technology that can be a game changer for disabled people, but only if everyone knows about it, respects it and does it properly. Note: Alt Text has existed since the 1990s.

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## Best practice

1. Prepare your social media as usual. If you've chosen an image to accompany your text, now is the time to write the words that describe it.
2. **Keep it concise.** Up to 140 characters is best practice but use your judgement. If the image is complex you may want to add more to give a fuller description, or less, if it is a simple image. **Read it back** and ask yourself if what you have written adequately describes the visual, if it doesn't then try again. The more times you do it, the easier and quicker it becomes.
3. It's not good enough to simply repeat the tweet or Instagram words for the alt text because the screen reader will already have read that. It's also not ok to just write one or two words that say what the image is but not actually describe it E.g. Football Poster
4. It's unnecessary to start alt text with "image of", "photo of", etc. A screen reader will recognize the file as an image and let the user know for you. However, if it's a painting, graph or a poster, or something that makes it visually or culturally different, then this should be stated.



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5. **Provide context.** The key to effective alt text is to provide an accurate and specific description of the image. Try to describe the atmosphere or feel of an image, is it upbeat? Nostalgic? Miserable weather? etc.
6. There are differing views over describing colour because some people can see colour and others not. To get round this it's nice if you can describe a colour by linking it to another sensory experience like, raspberry red or sandy yellow.
7. If the image is a meme or a funny response to something that is happening culturally, make sure that this is explained. Blind people enjoy a joke as much as the next person.
8. Add the brand or film name, location, or any other relevant information you can to help the image reach your target audience via search engines.
9. **Describe diversity**, state ethnicity or skin colour, if someone is a wheelchair user etc. See the AD section for more on this.
10. **Don't get too smart** and use alt text for anything other than what it was intended, this is a sure-fire way to alienate a whole community and it's not a good look! Manchester United Football Club recently did this by posting an image of a player with the caption 'Read the ALT text'. The alt text read, "Who's the greatest player in the Premiere League? It's you Juan, Juan, Juan..." Manchester United faced considerable backlash.

11. Add your image description to the end of your post as well as in the Alt Text box, this ensures all who need it can access it (especially Instagram and FB where you have space).

12. **Enjoy the process**, don't view alt text as a chore. If you believe in equality, then you should be doing this as standard.

**Tip: It's helpful if you type the alt text outside of the app so you can amend, re-use, cut and paste etc. across different platforms.**



### Example

Image Description: "Leo Houlding, white male in mid thirties is wearing a bright red helmet and jacket and blue trousers. He is climbing a granite crack with bare hands hundreds of metres up on the face of Mirror Wall, a granite rock face in Greenland. Well below him, there is a small snow covered glacier that flows into a wide valley glacier covered in rocky moraine"



## How to add Alt text on Twitter

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### Using the mobile app:

1. When you add your image click on the +ALT sign at the bottom.
2. Write (or paste) your alt text. Click done.

### Using a desk or laptop:

1. When you add your image, select “Add Description” below the image. Or you can click on the “Edit” button on the bottom right of the photo, and then go to the “alt text” section.
2. Write or paste your text. Click done.
3. You can edit this before you post it live by going to the Edit button, selecting “alt text” and making your changes.

**Don't forget:** Add your Alt Text/Image Description at the end of your post too if there is room.



### Example

Alt Text: “Three expedition tents are pitched outside a small hut in the snow at night time in winter. The Skies above are clear and full of stars. Two of the tents are lit from inside and there is the silhouette of a low mountain range in the distance”

## How to add Alt text on Instagram

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Instagram functionality is not as good as Twitter, yet arguably more important since it is an image-led platform. The bad news is that you can't add alt text to a 'story' and even on posts there's nothing visible to show it has alt text (as on Twitter).

### Using the mobile app:

1. Choose, crop and edit your image as normal.
2. When you get to the page where you write the caption, tag people or add location, go to the bottom of the page and click Advanced Settings.
3. Scroll down until you find accessibility, click 'write alt text'.
4. This shows you the image or images (if you have multiple) and has a space to write your alt text.
5. Write or paste your alt text then press done and post as normal.

**Don't forget:** Add your Alt Text/Image Description at the end of your post too.

### Using a desk or laptop:

1. Choose, crop and edit your image as normal.
2. On the 'create new post' you will find accessibility under add location – click.
3. Write or paste your alt text and share as normal.

**Don't forget:** Add your Alt Text/Image Description at the end of your post too if there is room.

**Note:** Instagram claims "alt text will be created automatically for your photos or you can choose to write your own". This is unfortunately very hit and miss and often inadequate. Think about it, do you really want to leave it to a generic software to describe your image or you want to add richness and authenticity by doing it yourself?

## How to add Alt text on Facebook

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Facebook functionality is pretty good, but also slightly misleading! The bad news is that like Instagram you can't add alt text to a 'story' and there's nothing visible to show a regular post has alt text (as on Twitter).

### Using the mobile app:

1. Write your text and click to upload your image.
2. Click on the three dots to the top right of the image.
3. Click on 'edit alt text'. (this is misleading as it suggests there is something already there to edit — there is not!).

Write or paste your alt text. If your alt text is longer than 100 characters you will get a notification that says 'alt text is usually fewer than 100 characters' you can ignore this, it won't cut it short automatically.

**Don't forget:** Add your Alt Text/Image Description at the end of your post too.

### Using a desk or laptop:

1. Create post as usual and click to add your image.
2. Click 'edit' on the top left side of the image.
3. Click on 'alternative text.'
4. Here you have the choice to use generated alt text or add your own. In this case you can see the generated text (and how inadequate it is — try a few for laughs).
5. Add your text to the caption box and click the corresponding circle on the right of it.

Strangely there is no alert to use under 100 characters here, so type away. I haven't found its limit yet!

**Don't forget:** Add your Alt Text/Image Description at the end of your post.



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**Example**

Alt Text: Melanie, a white woman in her 40s with bobbed brown hair sits by the side of an indoor swimming pool. She looks sideways deep in thought.

**Example**

Alt Text: A white man dressed in khaki trousers and a check shirt wearing a scarf around his head and neck is sitting on the back of a pick up truck parked in the sand in the desert. He is holding a camera with a long lens pointed at a camel which is standing 2 metres away from him looking at the camera. In the background are the rolling sandstone mountains of Wadi Rum under a blue sky.



**Example**

Alt Text: At an indoor athletics stadium, Wilma, a strong black woman in her 70s, wearing a lemon yellow vest and cropped leggings, is poised ready to throw the shotput. An umpire in white vest looks on closely. The hall is shrouded in white safety nets.

## ACCESSIBILITY IN ADVENTURE FILMMAKING

### Additional notes on access

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1. If you are running events or a festival, have an access page on your website and let people know about your access provision. This should have any event information, online tools and a contact point. If it's a work in progress, be honest and open to hearing people's needs. The important thing is that by simply having an access page you are making people feel considered and welcome.
2. "Not about us, without us." This is a phrase used by the disabled community meaning that they should be involved in access decision making. So, please consider using disabled consultants or freelancers if you can.



#### Example

Image description: At an indoor athletics track, Dot, a white woman, in her 80s with silver curly hair and glasses, hands on hips, laughs. She is wearing a white running vest with a red stripe across the chest. Following behind is another white woman with short fair hair and a red running vest.

**Version 1.1.** Written by Danielle Sellwood of Find It Film and Coldhouse Collective. Graphic design by SeaMoor. Thanks to Berghaus for their valued support in this project.

This document (V1.2) will be updated regularly and if you have any suggestions please contact [info@coldhousecollective.com](mailto:info@coldhousecollective.com). Please go to [www.coldhousecollective.com](http://www.coldhousecollective.com) to download the most recent version.