



Module 4

Unit 4: Strategies

Core video transcript

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Transcript

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Hello. I'm Elisa Perego from the University of Trieste, Italy, and in this ADLAB PRO video I will give you some tips on how to implement AD strategies. This is Unit 4 (Strategies) in Module 4 ((Semi-) live or recorded AD for static arts and environments).

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As you probably already know at this stage, formulating AD entails excellent observational and writing skills, as well as the ability to select and convey a lot of information in a succinct manner.

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According to most AD guidelines, an effective AD should in a nutshell be meticulous, accurate, concise, visually intense, and at the same time usable, that is to say, clear and simple to process. This applies to all forms of AD, including AD for visual arts.

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The latter however can be defined as a sub-genre of AD, with a number of special features. To start with, AD for visual art will include art jargon and technical terms – typically frowned upon by some AD guidelines because not fully inclusive. However, can you really talk of an installation without using

this very term? Would your AD be effective and complete?

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A recent corpus-based analysis on the language of museum ADs for instance indicates that there are some repeated features or strategies typical of this genre that could be considered best practices. Let's see some of them.

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First, a museum AD will be highly informative if it uses a high type/token ratio, that is, if it is rich and varied in vocabulary use and avoids a narrow, repetitive repertoire of words.

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Informativity will also be achieved via high lexical density, expressed by the substantial presence in a text of lexical rather than grammatical words. Well-chosen lexical words such as nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs can therefore contribute to convey rich semantic meaning and should be preferred to more diluted formulations.

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As far as syntax is concerned, it is difficult to express complex art related ideas in very simple sentences. So, do not be afraid if your sentences are a bit too long. However, try not to substantially exceed the average sentence length in your language. In English, for instance, this corresponds to approximately 15-16 words per sentence.

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Let's now move to a very useful word class in AD of visual art: adjectives. Adjectives, in particular descriptive adjectives (such as “flat”, “naked”, “unfeathered”) play a major role in conveying precision and vividness to the description, as well as in offering vivid details and nuances. That's why they are used extensively in ADs.

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When a simple descriptive adjective is not enough to convey the intricacy of some artworks, English can turn to complex adjectives in isolation or embedded in heavy noun groups. Think of expressions such as “a prominent eyebrow ridge”, or “a tiny lilac-coloured footprint on a newborn baby girl's identification form”.

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Do not be afraid to use colour adjectives in your ADs, especially in art description: people with sight loss know what colour is and how to interpret it. They learn about colour in many ways, and can attribute intrinsic or symbolic meaning to different colours. Furthermore, in some circumstances, lively or bleak colours can render a specific mood that could not be rendered otherwise.

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On the other hand, let the visitor free to interpret the work of art you are describing: avoid evaluative adjectives (such as «ironic», or «beautiful») whenever possible. However, be aware of the fact that there are some circumstances where you might go against the rules. The nature, meaning and

connotation of some works of art might require very explicit interpretative expressions to enable full understanding.

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To conclude, on a more macro-textual level, you should be able to produce a logical and consistent text, forming a unified whole and with no informative gaps hindering smooth comprehension. This is not an easy task and it will require several drafts and a lot of text editing, so do not run out of patience.

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Now I'll give you a simple tip. Consider to have your AD script read by a friend who is not acquainted with the AD processes, to check whether they can follow the narrative flow of your AD text with ease as well as visualize and appreciate the work of art you described, or whether it still needs some fixes and clarifications. As for you, from now on try and read or listen to as many ADs as possible to spot good practices but also inconsistencies you should learn to avoid.

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I hope this unit has been a useful introduction to art AD strategies. If you want to find out more, I recommend you to read the chapter written by Josélia Neves in the ADLAB guidelines. Bye!

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