



Module 4

Unit 8: Descriptive tours

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 define descriptive tours and guide you through the several stages required to plan one. This is Unit 8 (Descriptive tours) in Module 4 ((Semi-) live or recorded AD for static arts and environments).

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In museums, two types of AD for people with sight loss can be provided: stand-alone descriptions of artworks and audio description tours. According to literature, both types focus on describing the actual object and on emphasizing its visible details (such as size, shape, color, texture, etc.) rather than only addressing what cannot be seen, for instance history or background information.

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AD tours, however, have a value added: they are coherent itineraries, which do describe interconnected objects, but also assist people with sight loss to move from exhibit to exhibit, helping them to orient throughout the museum space via clear and short instructions.

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Planning an effective descriptive tour is a challenging process, one which

involves the ability to observe, but also the time to interact with several people. The whole process can be broken down into various stages. Let's see them briefly.

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We will start with stage 1, visiting the museum. You might need to go back several times, and visit the exhibition with internal staff, with external experts, and also with blind patrons who will give you crucial feedback on their requirements. When in the museum or on a heritage site, take your time, take some pictures, and take notes of your first impressions: these words will turn out to be very useful when writing your AD text.

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After the visit, you'll be able to initiate the complex decision-making process of choosing the source text. This is stage 2. But, what is exactly a "source text" in a descriptive tour? It is not a single, self-dependent item, but a selection of interconnected objects relating to one another in a given, relevant space – the museum space.

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When choosing a selection of objects, you'll have to pick attractive, unusual, arresting, meaningful objects; those which best represent the museum exhibition's narrative and scope, and are more appropriate to clear and vivid descriptions (or, just in case, tactile reproduction).

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Starting from your meaningful selection, during stage 3, you shall plan a

coherent itinerary including objects sequenced in such a way as to convey a story and hold the visitor's attention. The tour should be entertaining, but not too long: the span of attention of museum visitors is limited!

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At this stage, stage 4, think whether to go for an enriched descriptive tour, by adding for instance a haptic dimension to it via the introduction of Braille or relief writing, tactile drawing boards or maps, replicas or bas-reliefs, etc.

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Before moving to the AD writing process, you will also need to do a lot of research. This is stage 5. Try to exploit internal museum libraries, or use specialized literature, get hold of specific exhibition material (such as catalogues, captions, brochures, etc.), and talk to people: you can interview art experts and museum curators to gather focused information on your selected items.

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Let's now move to stage 6. Now you can draft your AD text. Remember to plan it first, then write and edit it as many times as necessary. Judge, rehearse, polish, prune away unnecessary details, and decide what is allowed to remain, just like in film scriptwriting. Remember that in AD less is always more.

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If you produce a descriptive tour, you'll also have to take care of the adequate orientation of the prospective visitor. You can do so by giving precise, factual

and succinct orientation instructions, but at the same time do not forget to assist and encourage the visitors verbally, as well as to make them feel comfortable and supported, but free. Do not put pressure on them: there's no rush when visiting a museum.

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Once your draft turns into a final AD script, try and get feedback from people with sight loss. If possible, plan a piloting session with them followed by a structured reception questionnaire. And discuss the final version of your descriptive tour with museum curators. Feedback will be invaluable and will have to be incorporated in your script. Only at this moment can you fine tune your script and eventually finalise it for audio recording.

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Remember that if you have to deliver live AD tours, an annotated outline including keywords will be enough for you to successfully sail along a museum with your visitors.

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I hope you have learned something new about descriptive tours in this ADLAB PRO video. Bye!

Creation of these training materials was supported by ADLAB PRO (Audio Description: A Laboratory for the Development of a New Professional Profile), financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnerships, Project number: 2016-1-IT02-KA203-024311.

The information and views set out in these training materials are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

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