

CREATING A VERBAL DESCRIPTION: Best Practices and Exercises

VARIETIES OF VERBAL DESCRIPTION

- Live and in person, describing an object or space
- Supplementing a touch tour, tactile graphic, or other multi-sensory element
- Recorded for a website, audio guide, or app
- Live or recorded, describing a performance
- Describing a film or video

BEST PRACTICES IN BUILDING A VERBAL DESCRIPTION

- **These are only guidelines, NOT a template!** - Every object or space will be different and require a customized approach.
- **Include essential information** - What is it? How big is it? What's it made of?
- **Have a system or strategy** - Top to bottom? Left to right? Foreground to background? Around the clock? And don't forget to communicate your framework to the person to whom you are describing, so that they can build a mental picture as you speak.
- **Go from the general to the specific**
- **Describe what you see, not what you know**
- **Be the eyes, not the brain!**

LOOKING EXERCISE

Try this with any new object or space you may want to describe. It's a great warm-up!

- Look for **5 seconds**. What three words come to mind?
- Look for **15 seconds**. What stands out?
- Look for **30 seconds**. Now what do you notice?

EXERCISE: CHOOSING AN APPROACH

- Use the **Looking Exercise** to become familiar with what you want to describe. Make notes!
- What are the **key visual elements** of the object, image, or space? These are the things you want to be sure to include somewhere in your description.
- What are possible systems or frameworks around which you could build a description? What will you say first? How will you organize those key visual elements?

EXERCISE: WRITING A VERBAL DESCRIPTION

- Work through the **Looking** and **Choosing an Approach** exercises.
- Use all you've learned to draft a verbal description. Remember, this will NOT be a script!
- Try it out! Partner with a friend or colleague and listen to each other's descriptions. Were you able to create a mental image for the other person? You can even try this over the phone!
- Get as much feedback as you can, and revise your strategy based on that feedback.

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

- An alternative or addition to a full-blown verbal description
- Useful in mixed groups, large groups, or groups when you do not know if someone is visually impaired
- Add extra visual phrases to what you usually say
- Embrace the adjective!
- Include specific directions, points of orientation, locations, quantities, etc.
- Those who don't need this extra information will not object, but those who DO will have a richer experience