



An Introduction to Describing Images

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Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library

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Verbal description

- The process of organizing and editing information taken in visually and the verbal presentation of that information.
- The GOAL is to create a clear and comprehensive image for a person who is blind or has low vision.

Images in Books:

Deciding how and if you should translate a book illustration into words

- What information does the image convey?
- Does the information add to the understanding of the text?
- Is the information also conveyed in the text?
- If not, would the information be clearer as a text that doesn't refer to the image, or as a description of the image itself?
- Would a tactile graphic be helpful?
- If so, you will need to describe the tactile graphic, including guidance for exploring it.
- How long can the image description be? Consider the length in relation to the text. What is an appropriate length relative to the text?

Other places with images (and objects) needing description

- Social media
- Advertising materials
- Museums
- TV, Film, and Video
- Everywhere!

Different ways to structure a description

Consider the image and the context to decide

- How best to approach the description
- How to contextualize the image
- How to build a cohesive and comprehensible description
- How long the description should be

You might start with...

- An overview, then filling in detail
- The most important features, moving to the least important features
- Location, e.g. top to bottom
- Foreground to background

Verbal description: Some basics

- Look closely and at length at the image!
- Start with an overview
- Create a spatial framework on which to add details later – move around the object coherently, don't skip around
- Talk about color, if applicable
- Use common references, analogies with everyday objects, eg. “the mask is shaped like an upside down pear” or “it's the size of a double mattress” – These can be good “short cuts,” but avoid using references that could be culturally exclusive.
- Refer to/invoke other senses and sensory vocabulary
- Giving directions
 - Be clear about whose left/right (mirror image)
 - Clockface
 - Use an anchor or landmark
 - Relation to the frame or edge

Keep in mind...

- Be consistent and coherent
- Once an incorrect representation is formed, it's more difficult to change
- Use precise, specific language
- Like touch, description (language) unfolds sequentially, over time
- Language is perceived and processed/integrated as mental representations – visual, spatial, etc.
- You will have to leave things out!







Franklin W. Benson,

Now you try!

Ask yourself...

- Where do I start?
- What do I focus on and when?
- How do I know if my description makes sense?
- What should I leave out?
- How/Do I talk about color?

Questions?

Thank you!

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