Audio Description & Alt Text:
Making Your Visual Content Accessible

New England Museum Association
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Today's Webinar

1. Audio Description AD)))

2. Alt Text and Image Descriptions

3. Describing Aspects of Identity

4. Questions

What is Audio Description? And a little history.

- An additional narration intended primarily for blind and low vision consumers of visual media.
- Initially this started with TV, movies, theatre, dance and opera, but has now expanded to museums, sporting events and social media.
- It can be live (which consists of a trained narrator talking through the presentation, describing what is happening on the screen or stage) or written/recorded (to accompany an informational label or provided as an audio tour).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_GrYOruY7w

Another good example: "The Circle of Life" scene from the Lion King

What is the goal of Audio Description?

- AD))) makes the material accessible to people who are blind or have low vision.
- The goal is not to interpret the material for them, but rather to give them access to the visual content to be able to make their own interpretations.

Audio Description in Museums

- Tours
- Labels
- Digital Content

Example: Content Label

The Gateway Arch became a symbol of civil rights while it was under construction when activists Percy Green and Richard Daly climbed up the north leg to draw attention to demands for more jobs for black workers on the site. In this image, Percy Green is shown being arrested after the four-hour protest.

Example: Content Label

The Arch demonstration and other complaints led the Department of Justice to file a lawsuit against construction-trade unions to force them to integrate construction crews

Example: AD))) Label

This black and white photograph is 20 inches wide and 24 inches tall and depicts St. Louis civil rights activist Percy Green being arrested after protesting at the Arch.

Example: AD))) Label

Taken from a bird's-eye view, the photograph shows four white men lifting the limp body of an African American man onto a stretcher. The scene is focused in tightly on the men, revealing few details about the setting. The African American man at the center of this photograph is Percy Green. He wears dark sunglasses, a T-shirt, light pants, and a thick black belt. He appears to be unconscious or injured. His chin rests against his right shoulder, and his body is slack with his arms stretched out above his head.

Example: AD))) Label

The four men around him each grab onto one of his limbs and assume squatting stances in order to lift his body off the dirt and gravel and onto a canvas stretcher. A fifth man in a police cap stands next to the stretcher. The perspective of the photo obscures the faces of the men lifting Green; only the tops of their heads are visible. One of the men lifting Green wears dark pinstriped slacks and a leather utility belt. The belt has keys on one side, and on his other hip the end of a weapon is just visible.

Audio Description: What should I describe?

- Depends on the media! Right now, most AD))) is provided for photographs and paintings
  - Colors
  - Names of people
  - Text in the image
  - Emotions and expressions
  - Actions
  - Setting
  - Any important detail that provides context

Audio Description: What should I describe?

- Other things you might be describing:
    - 3-Dimensional artifacts
        - Size, shape, texture
    - Original, hand written documents
        - Quality of handwriting and paper, any damage
    - A gallery space
        - Format. What else is in there? What does it evoke?
    - Directional information

Audio Description: Avoid

- Long, over-descriptions (consider your delivery format)
- Your own interpretation
- Obvious details - School Bus example
- Details that are not the focus

Audio Description: other tips

- Be concise
- Be consistent (prepare an AD))) style guide for your institution)
- Plan ahead for live tours (winging it is hard with audio description)
- Know your audience: what is their schema?

Audio Description: Where to find more info

- The American Council for the Blind Audio Description Project https://www.acb.org/audio-description-project
- Art Beyond Sight http://www.artbeyondsight.org/index.php
- Kim Charlson, Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library Kim.charlson@perkins.org
  - Official AD))) training in the New England Area

Alt Text and Image Descriptions

What is alt text?

- Short, embedded (not visible) description of the image that can be picked up by search engines and screen readers
- Alt text makes the visual elements accessible
- Goal to describe and provide context for the image

How to write alt text

- Around 125 characters
- Describes the essential information about an image
- Transcribe any words within the image
- Consider: Why is this image used? What would a sighted person get from this image? That's your alt text.

Example

Does saying "red bullseye" describe the information this image portrays?

Instead write: Target logo

Does this link to Target's website? Say that too.

Where to use alt text

- Anywhere you are using images
- Website, Twitter, Facebook, digital pdfs
- Memes, gifs
- Graphs, charts, data spreads

Where not to use alt text

- Decorative objects should have empty alt text

What about image descriptions?

- Image descriptions are longer than alt text and describe more details
- Can be about the length of a tweet (280 characters)
- What to describe and what not to describe similar to that of AD)))
  - Just more concise

Facebook
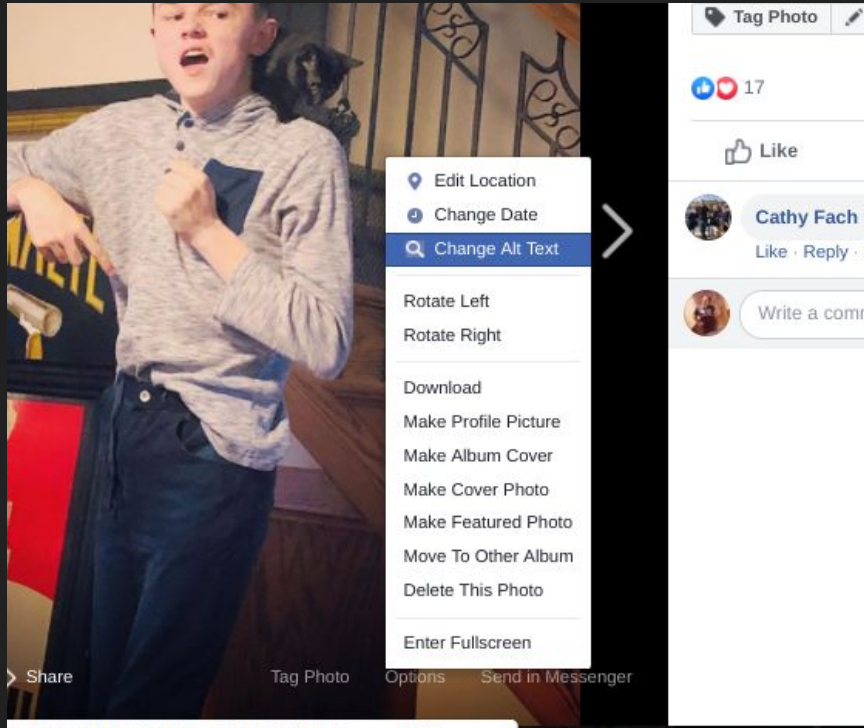
- Facebook alt text can be changed under 'options' after posting the photo or with 'edit photo' while posting

Example from Facebook

- Generated alt text: boy, outside, beard
- I embedded alt text here and added in an image description

Twitter

● You must first enable image descriptions under Settings > General > Accessibility
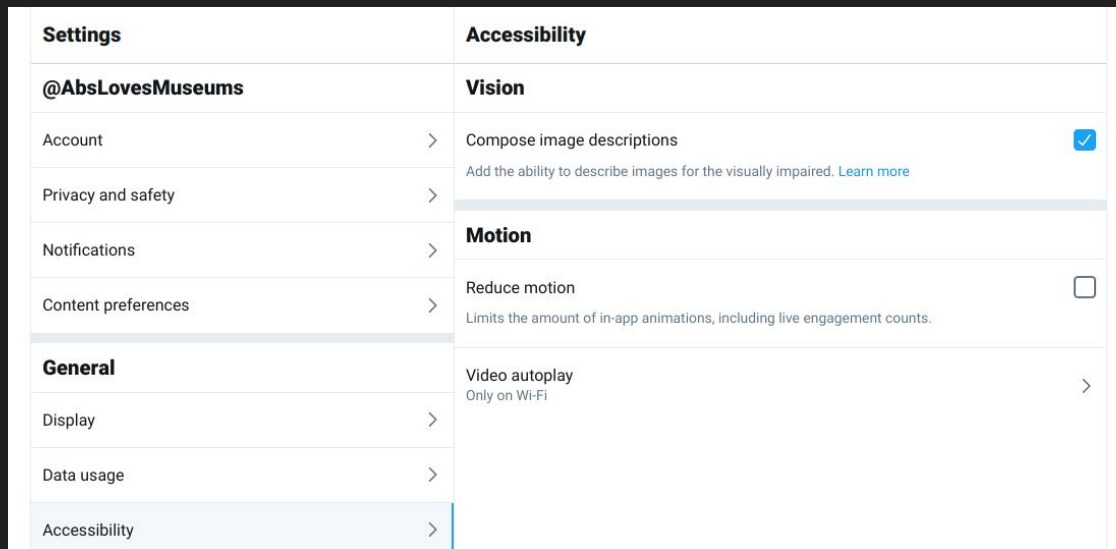
| Settings		Accessibility	
@AbsLovesMuseums		**Vision**	
Account	>	Compose image descriptions	☑
Privacy and safety	>	Add the ability to describe images for the visually impaired. Learn more	
Notifications	>	**Motion**	
Content preferences	>	Reduce motion	☐
General		Limits the amount of in-app animations, including live engagement counts.	
Display	>	Video autoplay	>
Data usage	>	Only on Wi-Fi	
Accessibility	>		

Example from Twitter

Twitter

- You can see that the image has 'ALT' in the bottom left corner of the photo, indicating that you added alt text.

- You can't describe videos, GIFs or go back and describe after tweeting.
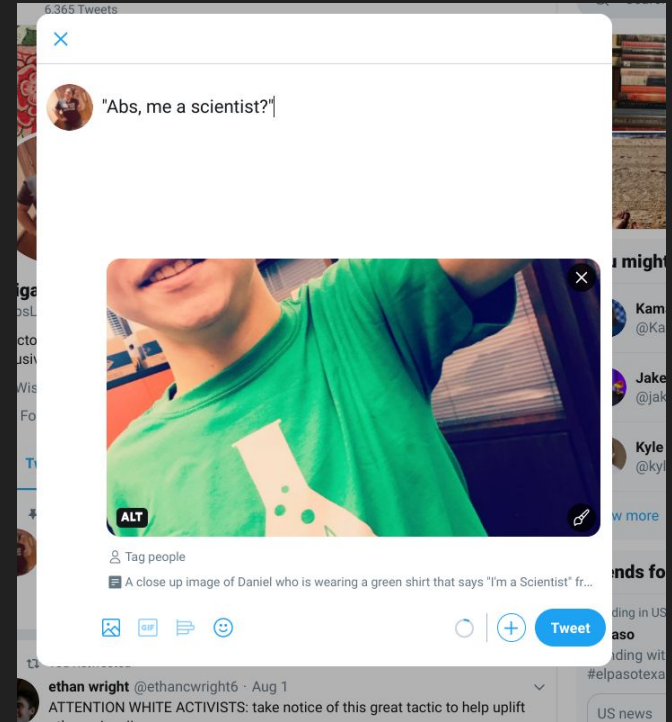
Instagram

Add alt text while posting the image under Advanced Settings during final step of the post

Can add in after posting by clicking the three dots on top right of the photo and editing the photo
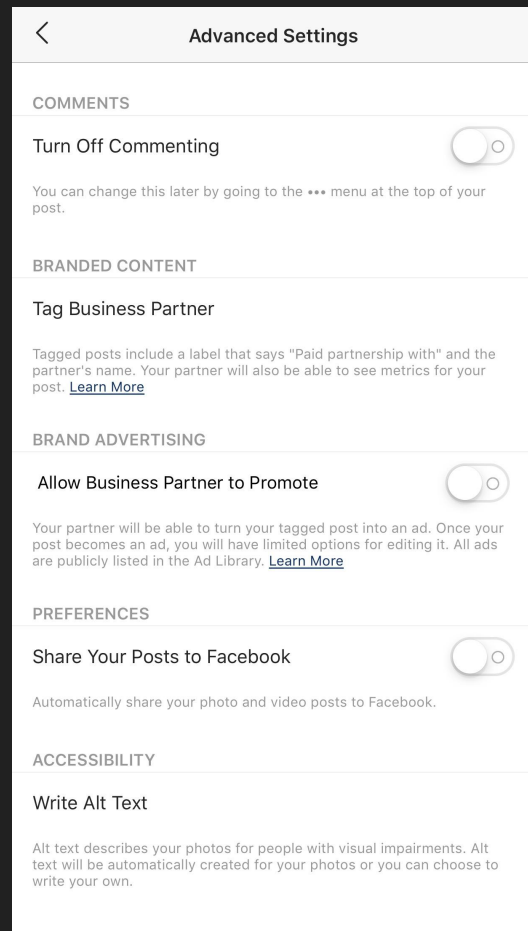
Test It Out!

Smartphones have excellent accessibility features. Try out the voiceover feature on an iPhone to better understand what screen readers will read.

Example:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1IENZ6NrsxQgRDvpB3nakDTZgrKsRUTyz

https://youtu.be/RnIuwfDeWCI

Ready to do it?

- Consider a style guide
  - Everyone in your organization should be writing at similar lengths, detail levels and with the same voice
- Know your audience
  - Vocab, age, expertise, etc.
- Make writing alt text/descriptions a formal part of your process
- Just get started!

Describing Aspects of Identity

Describing Identity

- Best Practices are still being developed and adopted
- Current practice is to only identify race, gender, and other aspects of identity when:
  - It is known
  - It is important to the context and interpretation
- But this raises problems and questions: Who decides what is essential for interpretation?
- Be consistent

Questions?
Contact Us

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