

Inclusive Content Creation



Online Conference by Simone Cupid
(Accessible Media Inc.)
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This conference is part of *Interrogating Access*, a series of talks and workshops on accessibility in art and media production developed by OBORO and Spectrum Productions with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts. OBORO and Spectrum Productions acknowledge that their activities take place in Tiohtià:ke, an unceded Kanien'kehá:ka territory.

(Beginning of transcription)

My name is Simone Cupid. I'm a media accessibility specialist at AMI. Today we're here to talk about media accessibility and making accessible content.

The first thing that we have to do as any describer, is we have to tackle the societal misconception. The greatest misconception in society is that blind people don't access media. Media is comprised of a number of different things: we're talking television, film, podcasts, newspapers, commercials, all kinds of social media platforms. The societal misconception is that blind people do not use these mediums.

But by the numbers, it has been proven that 96% of adults who are blind or partially-sighted do indeed watch an average of four hours of TV a day. Now

this is just TV, so we're not talking about advertising billboards, your iPhone, or your computer tablet, we're talking about strictly the television screen. four hours a day is just slightly lower than the average sighted viewer. Blind people do access media, not to mention that everything these days happens on a screen, whether it's a digital screen off the side of the highway or the screen of the phone in your hand.

Let's talk about what Accessible Media actually is. Accessible Media is a service that was developed primarily for the blind and partially-sighted audience. It is a service that makes the visual verbal. So, as a medium, we tell stories through pictures. With this particular service, we now have to turn those pictures into verbal descriptions. So you're making what's normally visual into a verbal element. You do that by leveraging conversation, gaps in conversation, actions, sounds, music, etc.

Where do we begin?

- What is the most relevant thing to have to describe in that frame that you're looking at? If I were to take this exact moment in time, I would say that the most relevant thing that we're looking at is probably this PowerPoint presentation. Everything else is just a secondary factor that happens to be visual but isn't necessarily the point of what we're trying to look at.
- Concise: We'll talk a little more about this as we go on. What am I going to say, and how am I going to say it as quickly as possible? We have all heard the old adage: "A picture is worth a thousand words", but we only have... maybe four.
- Accuracy: We have to make sure that what we are telling our audience is accurate, because they are relying on us to be their eyes, and if we do not tell them something that is accurate, we have lost their trust. It's very important for trust between the audience and storyteller that you provide them with as accurate information as possible. We'll talk a little more about that as we go on.
- Pace: Any piece of media that you are presenting is going to have a different pace. I like to give three examples of what I mean by pace. Let's suppose you're watching three scenes of a movie. One is a war scene.

One is a love scene. And the other one is a family dinner scene. As a sighted viewer, you would not watch those three movie scenes with the exact same intended emotion. The war scene is going to have shrapnel, and blood and guts and what not flying around. It's going to be highly intense, quick-moving, loud, and is probably going to have matching music and tone. The love scene is going to be exactly the opposite. It's going to be slow and drawn-out, with matching music. It's going to be sultry, and everything is going to take time to be drawn out in order to create that mood. The family dinner scene might be a bit of comic relief, or a light-hearted moment on camera. As a viewer, I wouldn't watch those three potential scenes the same way, so as a storyteller, I'm also not going to tell those three stories the exact same way.

- We have to avoid subjective interpretation. What is subjective interpretation? That means "What does Simone want you to believe the movie is trying to tell you?" It is not my job as a describer or an accessible media content creator to tell you how to feel about my product. It's my job to create in you the feeling, the sensation, the emotion that I want to create in you as a storyteller, without having to come out and say: "I need you to feel sad right here." It's not Simone's job to watch the movie, the show, the documentary for my audience. It's Simone's job to help the audience watch the documentary.

Let's break these down a little bit. We're going to start with relevance. I'll show you a couple of different images. Specifically, what are they?

These are, specifically, Dorothy's Ruby Slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*. This is a famous piece of filmography. It's iconic, and the story could not be told without these very famous Ruby Slippers. So let us suppose that the audience watching *The Wizard of Oz* has never seen the colour ruby or red. Is it important for me to mention that those slippers are red?

In this case, it's very important to mention that those slippers are ruby red, because it is the technical name of the prop. It's the technical name of the piece of iconic filmography, and it's how it will always be referenced: the Ruby Slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*. So, whether or not your audience has ever seen ruby, red or any similar colour, it would be very important to denote that these are specifically ruby slippers.

Let's suppose that this is your image: a stop sign. Do you think that it would be important to note that the stop sign is red?

The fact that the stop sign is red is irrelevant in this case, because no matter what continent in the world you travel to, stop signs are red. They're red in Japan, they're red in South America, they're red in North America. Stop signs are always red. So unless that stop sign is blue, there's no need to say "the red stop sign." And that would be the difference between relevance and non-relevance.

"Extra superfluous prolixity" is a really long, fancy way of saying "redundancy." We did talk a little bit about conciseness, and how to get your message across in clear, quick language so that everyone can understand.

What does this phrase say? -- "The jovial poking of fun is the burden of your personal being."

"The joke's on you."

Instead of taking 11 words to say "The joke's on you," just say "The joke's on you!" Because "The jovial poking of fun is the burden of your personal being" is going to be lost on anybody. That's really all it's saying.

How about this one? "It appears to be satisfactory from a good distance away, although greatly removed from alright."

"Looks good from far but far from good."

We can say something in 20 words, or we can say it in 5. The best rule of thumb is always to say as few words as possible, get in, tell the audience the piece of information you need them to understand, and get out and let your project continue telling its own story.

We'll talk a little bit about accuracy and intent. We do a lot of talking with our body. We have to think about these things when we're trying to produce accessible media, because the blind and low-vision audience cannot access your body language. We have to be very cognizant about whether or not we are intending to be sarcastic. Are we intending to be literal? Are we intending to be exaggerative? If we're trying to tell those with simple

body language, the message will be lost on our audience.

As storytellers, we use many elements to tell our story.

- Logos.
- Establishing shots: Where are we in this movie? Did we go from one place to another? Where are we now?
- Perhaps it's a graphic we're utilizing to showcase what we're talking about.
- Maybe it's somebody's interpretation, or subtitles from another language that we're subtitling into English.
- Maybe it's just a lower-third identifying the speaker and their title and job description
- Maybe it's an on-screen note that's going to lead us into the next scene, and has something to do with the storytelling and the furthering of the plot line.
- Maybe it's as simple as the credits. There are a lot of things that we use in our storytelling on screen that are purely visual elements that will not work if you're making an accessible story.

They're elements that you'll need to figure out in advance, before you roll cameras, in order to make those elements accessible to all audiences. We're going to talk a little bit about using sound. Let's listen to a few sounds.

[Sound of a crowd clapping applause]

[Sound of a telephone ringing]

[Sound of a doorbell ringing]

[Sound of a combustion motor starting and revving]

As sighted viewers, if we were not in the room and I played those sound effects, we would know exactly what they were. You would not need to see a phone ringing in order to know that a phone was ringing. These are everyday, very common sounds that do not in and of themselves require explanation.

Perhaps what about those sounds may require explaining in your story is if a phone rings, and it's important whose phone rings. Is it Simone's phone that rings? It's not necessarily important that "a" gun goes off. What may be important is who pulled the gun, and who shot who.

Use your sound effects as much as possible in all storytelling: all movies, all films, all documentaries. We encourage you to do all of the same things, the only thing you have to remember is if there's an element that goes with the sound effect that is unclear in the story, that part of the story may need clarification.

Let's talk about some overall areas where you need to start thinking about accessibility as a content creator.

- You need to think about accessibility when you're writing your scripts. From the minute you decide that you have a movie, a show, a documentary, from the writing of the script is when you have to start thinking about accessibility. When cameras are rolling, it's too late.
- You have to think about your hosts, your actors, your guests, and educating absolutely everybody that's involved in the project, because only if everybody is aware and looking for the same things, and the same end result, will we have an accessible project at the end of it. If not, it's very possible for some things to slip through the cracks.
- Introducing speakers: Introduce speakers when they're going to speak. A blind audience associates my ID with my voice pattern. So to introduce me 20 minutes before I'm actually going to speak on air does them a disservice.
- Planning Text: Again, these are things that are we have to consider before our cameras roll. How will we handle our subtitles, headlines, lower thirds, websites, Twitter handles, and phone numbers? How will we

handle calls to action and credits? They have to be considered before we roll cameras.

Also, think accessibility:

- If you're changing scenes -- if we're doing a documentary about a hockey player, and we go from inside the hockey rink to the locker room, how do we translate that we changed locations?
- Portraying action: Say you're going to cover a couple of minutes of the actual hockey game. How are you going to portray it to someone who can't see the action on ice, what is actually taking place?
- Capturing B-roll: How are you going to fill in and cover your jump-cuts and all those less attractive parts of your story? Be very cognizant of the B-roll you're capturing. For example, let's say I use the phrase "amid the skyscrapers of Manhattan, New York." If I say that, my B-roll should show the skyscrapers of Manhattan, New York. Be very cognizant of capturing B-roll that tells the same story as your audio story.
- Be very cognizant of how you're going to cover things like graphics, visual jokes, gestures and body language.

Social media: Some best practices.

- Omit the www. You never need to put it in, the Internet will put it in for you. Just put in what you need to put in, and leave it at the .ca, .com, .org, whatever the tail is. Anything past that gets far too complicated for somebody who can't access a pen and paper and quickly scribble it down. Simply send them where they need to go. Hopefully when they get to that website, they will be further advised. "Please visit us at AMI.ca."
- Calls to Action: The basic rule is to say it first, spell it second, because plays on words are something that can't be visually accessed by the low-vision audience. "Please contact us at won with one dot com. That's w.o.n with o.n.e. dot com." Say it first, spell it second.

Some general tips for making accessible media content:

- Introduce your guests as they appear.
- Ensure your interviews work for radio. If you can do the same thing with your picture medium, then you've got a really good IDV accessible media piece.
- Avoid gesturing -- "See behind me"; "Take a look at this"; "Did you see that?"; "Look over there."
- Be clear who's being addressed -- "Thank you for joining us for our presentation today, and to you at home, thanks for tuning in." Be very clear when and if you're breaking that fourth wall. "Thank you for joining us in the studio today, and thank you at home." It just makes it very clear who "you" and "you" are.

Things to consider:

This, that, here, there, see, and look. None of these six words is descriptive. Each of these words is directive. They're telling the audience to do something. "See this?" "Look at that." "Come here." "Go there." You're directing them to take another action and have not filled them in on that action. So those six words are your key words to know that, as a describer or accessible content maker, you have a void to fill.

Last but not least:

Don't. Sacrifice. Creative. Storytelling.

We're still media content makers. We're still here trying to engage audiences and tell compelling stories. Please do not sacrifice the creativity of your storytelling. Just always remember to cover these few key elements so that you include every audience in your storytelling.

Thank you.

(End of transcription)

Transcription: Marie Lauzon, C. Tran. (Canada)

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