Describing images 5: Accessible images

Guidance from UKAAF

UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF)
Because format quality matters
Why format quality matters

"When organisations send me information in formats that I can read myself it allows me to be independent, feel informed and appreciated - just like every other customer."
End-user

"Producing consistently high quality accessible formats helps us to maintain our reputation, to gain new customers and to retain existing ones."
Transcription agency

"We are committed to ensuring that our customers with print disabilities receive the same information, of the same quality, as everyone else."
Service provider
Who is this guidance for?

This guidance from the UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF) is primarily aimed at those within education or the workplace who are providing images as part of course materials, their business or presentations. It will be particularly useful in helping to create effective descriptions for blind and partially sighted users. It should be used if materials being provided contain images, or have been adapted with the images removed.

The 'Describing images' series

This guidance is part of the 'Describing images' series. The series consists of five guidance documents. This fifth document (G017) explains in more detail how to describe different types of accessible images. If help is needed with describing a different type of image then the relevant guidance document should be referred to:

1. General principles (G013)
2. Charts and graphs (G014)
3. Maps, maths and tables (G015)
4. Photographs, illustrations and works of art (G016)
5. Accessible images (G017)

This guidance document includes information on:

- Which images to describe
- How much detail to include
- How to structure a description
- Templates to help you structure your own image descriptions
- How to describe different types of accessible images.
These guidelines are appropriate for image descriptions in the following formats:

- Print
- Electronic files such as Microsoft Word documents or PDF
- Audio files (such as DAISY)
- Web pages
- E-books
- Presentations
- Accessible images

These guidelines have been updated in collaboration with the Open University (OU) and are an update of the 'Guidelines for describing visual teaching material' (2004). Additional content has been produced by Claire Jones, Assistant Development Officer, (RNIB Centre for Accessible Information) and Emir Forken, Programme Manager, (OU).

Disclaimer

This guidance may include references to external websites, services or products for which UKAAF accepts no responsibility. This information is given without any representation or endorsement of those websites, services or products.
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1 Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the Open University (OU) for agreeing to release these valuable guidelines.

Special thanks to Mary Taylor (OU) to recognise her long-standing commitment to making learning materials accessible to blind and partially sighted students and additional thanks to Emir Forken (OU) and Jeff Bashton (OU) for their contributions, feedback and support.

Many thanks to the team in RNIB’s Centre for Accessible Information, particularly Sarah Home for her support and guidance and Caroline Walker, Alan Waller and Martin Fuller for taking the time to source images for use in this guide. Also Mary Steiner and Andrew Homer for their comments and Sarah Morley Wilkins for overall support.

Thanks also to Alan Waller who has kindly allowed some of his paintings and illustrations to be used in these guidelines.

Thanks also to Paul R. Lynch (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR), University of Birmingham) for his help and support and Philip Jeffs (RNIB) for helping to source images from the RNIB photographic archives.

2 Introduction

By obtaining these guidelines you are demonstrating your commitment to helping people with a print disability to read your materials if they find reading standard print materials difficult or impossible.

This guidance concentrates specifically on materials suitable for blind and partially sighted people - such as large print, audio,
braille and electronic file formats. However, others with a print disability, for example with dyslexia or motor-difficulties, may also find such materials necessary.

The provision of accessible information is a key requirement of the Equality Act which service providers must follow, but good customer service and business practice includes communicating with your customers and staff in ways which meet their reading needs. By providing accessible format materials, you not only demonstrate your commitment to equality and inclusion, but also increase your reach and customer base. It therefore makes good business sense.

This guidance will help you and your organisation to incorporate good practice into your business and provide good quality accessible format materials in a timely and appropriate way.

3 About UKAAF

The UK Association for Accessible Formats (UKAAF) is the industry association whose mission is to set standards for accessible formats that meet end-user needs through:

- development, delivery and promotion of codes, standards, and best practice for the production and provision of accessible formats
- consultation and collaboration with transcribers, service providers and users of accessible formats.

Members of UKAAF include organisations and individuals with an interest in the provision of quality accessible formats, such as service providers, transcribers, educators, researchers, print services, publishers, and end-users.
Through its leadership and representation, standards-setting, and by fostering a spirit of cooperation between members, UKAAF ensures that the needs and requirements of end-users are understood by service providers and transcribers to help improve the quality of accessible formats.

Please see the section on "Where to get further help" towards the end of this document for more information about the benefits of being a member of UKAAF.

4 Definition of print disability

A print-disabled person is anyone for whom a visual, cognitive, or physical disability hinders the ability to read print. This includes all visual impairments, dyslexia, and any physical disabilities that prevent the handling of a physical copy of a print publication.

Source: Copyright Licensing Agency Print Disability Licensing Scheme, Guidelines for Licensees 2010.

5 Describing accessible images

Some images can be modified in order for them to be read directly by the end user. Large print images and tactile diagrams are graphics that have been adapted to enable them to be read directly by blind or partially sighted users. They will be designed in a way which makes them as easy to read as possible; so will be bold in appearance rather than highly detailed, and some features may be enlarged in order for detail to be seen.

Large print images may be read by a person using a magnifier so they may only view part of the image at a time. Tactile diagrams will have raised features that are read by the fingertips. Therefore an end-user will only be able to feel a small part of the image at one time. In both cases, it is crucial that a reader is told what the
image is along with a description in order to give a person an understanding of what is being shown. These images will be difficult, if not impossible to understand if they are not supported by a description.

Describing a large print or tactile graphic varies slightly from describing other images as it is vital that the features on the image are described in terms of how they are laid out, before what the image is about is described. Without an understanding of layout, it will be difficult for a blind or partially sighted user to put the image into context.

Refer to the document 'Describing images 1: General principles' for general guidelines for describing images.

6 Accessible image description examples

Describe features in a logical, sequential order

When describing a large print or tactile diagram, describe the features in a logical, sequential way around the image; avoid ‘jumping’ across the image. Describing features in a logical sequential way will make it easier for a person to understand how different features relate to each other.

Terminology in a description

Be aware of terminology used to navigate a person around a description. Use phrases such as ‘up the page’ ‘down the page’ rather than ‘above’ or ‘behind’ something as an end user will be seeing or feeling a two dimensional image and may find references to perspective confusing.
How much extra information to include

Decide how the image is going to be used to determine how much extra information to include. Accessible images are to be read directly by an individual; however any patterns or data that graphs show may not be apparent as they may only be seeing a small part of the image at a time. You will need to use your judgement in deciding how much information to give – the image may be used within education where an individual has to read an image and find the data for themselves, therefore a detailed description will give away any answers.

Colour in an accessible image description

Colour can be mentioned within a tactile description if it is a significant feature of an object in the image. This may be important for example when describing a tactile version of a painting and the colour helps to evoke a mood.

Keys

If a key is provided as part of the accessible image; whether large print or tactile; the layout needs to be simply described.

Describing multiple images

If there is more than one image on a page, which are of a similar subject matter (see examples four, five and eight as illustrations of this), state how many images are on a page and what they are of; then describe each image fully in turn.

6.1 Structuring an accessible image description

An effective description will have a clear structure:
1 **State what the image is:** give the title, for example 'This is an image of a zebra.'

2 **Give a brief overview of the image:** for example 'The zebra is shown from the side with its head on the right side of the page and tail on the left.' This will help a tactile reader understand what is being shown on the image so that they can understand what is being conveyed.

3 **After a simple navigation; provide more detail:** 'At the top right of the page, both of the zebra's ears can be found; down from this is its eye, down is its nostril and mouth. Moving to the left is the zebra's neck; along the top is its sticking up mane...' and so on.

4 **Give the story of the image if applicable:** Some images may need putting into context in order for them to be understood.

![Tactile graphic of a zebra](image)

**Figure 1:** Tactile graphic of a zebra
7 Accessible images template

This template follows the set structure for writing a navigation description. It lists suggestions of what to needs to be considered for each step. Therefore use what is applicable to the image you are describing. Not all points will be applicable for all images, so only use what is relevant.

7.1 Template

7.1.1 Step one: State what the image is: give the title

'This is an image of / This diagram shows / This image is titled…'

- State briefly if there are two or more images shown on a page.
- Are there any important defining features that help set the overall scene of the image or images?
- Some accessible images will have a marker that a blind or partially sighted person can use to make sure the image is the correct way up. For example, this can be a dot in the top left corner of the image. State if there is any location marker present and its position to enable a blind or partially sighted user to orientate the picture correctly before they start to read the rest of the image, for example 'There is a locator dot shown, which will be at the top left of the page when the image is the right way up.'
- If there is a border to the image, for example a dashed line; describe this, for example 'This image has a dashed line image border.'
- If there is an accompanying key, state here that a key supports this image and briefly mention the details the key covers, for example; 'an accompanying key lists all the abbreviations that are marked on the image.'
- If braille labels have been used on an image state if any particular coding has been used, for example scientific code, capitals / non capitals.

7.1.2 Step two: Give a brief overview of the image:

State what the key features are without going into detail. Give this in a logical sequence across or around the image, rather than describing features in a random order:

- If the image is mainly about people state how many there are.
- State which direction people or animals are facing – are they facing forward, to the left / right?
- If facing the side, state how many eyes are seen, as this is a key feature a blind person can find.
- If describing an animal, describe it from head to tail after stating the direction it is facing.
- If describing people, describe from head to foot.
- If describing an object state which direction the features of the object will be described; for example clockwise / anticlockwise around the image, from the centre of the page outwards.
- If there are any important features such as a scale line, or direction indicator, like a northern arrow on a map, state these here. Describe the units a scale line is marked in, for example, ‘there is a scale line marked in meters from 0-6 meters.’

7.1.3 Step three: Describe the detail in more depth

Regardless of the type of image; describe the features in more depth, following the same direction as the brief overview if possible.

- State people’s facial expressions if this is important; smiling, sad, frowning etc.
If a person's hairstyle is significant include this; for example, state if it is neat, unruly, curly, or if they have a moustache or beard.

Describe how people are dressed – include important / significant features or accessories such as jewellery, belts; shoes, boots or barefoot.

If describing an animal describe its identifying features, for example; a large / small head; long / short neck; small / large body etc.

To help establish the context of an image, it may be necessary to relate a feature in an image to something that is not shown in the diagram. For instance, example five shows the workings of an electric motor and how its brushes and their wires connect. To help put this into context it adds that these wires lead to the battery. The battery is additional information as it is not shown in the image.

7.1.4 Step four: Tell the story of the image

Once the navigation of the image has been provided, the story of the image or the data within the image can be given. Relate this back to the navigation so the features within the image can be related to and understood.

7.1.5 Note: Supporting a person reading a large print or tactile diagram

When supporting a person using a tactile diagram avoid moving their hands off the image and moving it to another part of the diagram. This will not enable them to develop any image reading skills for themselves. If you need to assist them to find an area you are describing, nudge their hands to that spot, without taking them off the page. In this way they will be able to feel and relate different parts of the image to the area you are describing.
7.2 Example one: Taj Mahal

Figure 2: Large print image of the Taj Mahal, India

[Start of description]

This is a picture of the Taj Mahal: a beautiful mausoleum built of white marble and crowned by a large dome. There is a locator dot shown, which will be at the top left of the page when the image is the right way up. It is viewed from the front so that only two of its four minarets can be seen and is bounded by a dashed line image border.

Along the bottom of the page, the Taj Mahal stands on a plinth. Left and right are two of the visible minarets. In the top centre of the page is the large central dome, and each side of this, smaller domed arches. There are windows set into arches on two levels across the mausoleum. The largest arch, in the very centre of the image, has a window with a door centred in the lower part.
7.3 Example two: Roman theatre floor plan

Figure 3: Large print image titled 'Schematic plan of a Greek theatre' based on the theatre at Epidauros

[Start of description]

This diagram shows a floor plan of an ancient Greek theatre. There is a locator dot shown, which will be at the top left of the page when the image is the right way up. It is viewed from above so the layout of the theatre can be seen. There is a key in the bottom left corner of the page detailing the abbreviations.

The plan shows the theatron; arched seating; the orchestra and thymele (altar); parodos; proscenion and skene.

The image is dominated by the theatron; two large semi-circular shapes; these are divided up by lines representing the tiers and
steps. Towards the bottom centre of the inner theatron is a circle labelled as the orchestra and thymele (altar). At the bottom of the page is the proskенion and skene. In-between the proskенion and base of the theatron the parodos (gangway) is shown.

[End of description]

7.4 Example three: Egyptian citizens

Figure 4: Large print image titled 'Egyptian Citizens'
In this image showing Egyptian citizens, there is a man at the left of the page and a woman at the right. Both are standing and facing forwards so that all their facial features can be seen. A locator dot and title are shown. These must always be at the top left of the page when the image is the right way up.

In the top left is the man’s head, and he is smiling. He is wearing a simple headdress composed of a piece of cloth held in place by a band. Down the page are his bare shoulders and chest and he holds his arms out to the sides of his body. Around his waist he wears a simple linen loin cloth tied in place by a sash. Down from this are the man’s bare legs and feet.

The woman’s head is at the top right. She also has a smiling face, and her long hair is held in place by a simple hair band. Around her
shoulders she wears a large jewelled collar. Her bare arms are held out to the sides of her body, and she wears a bracelet on each wrist. Her full length linen dress reaches down to her ankles at the bottom of the page, and she wears plain leather sandals on her feet.

[End of description]
7.5 Example four: Stegosaurus

Figure 6: Tactile image titled 'Stegosaurus'
This picture shows two images of a stegosaurus. The top image is of the dinosaur and the bottom image is of the dinosaurs’ skeleton. Across the middle of the image, in-between the two dinosaurs, there is a scale line marked in meters from 0 to 6 meters. Both stegosaurs are shown from the side.

In the top dinosaur, its small head is down the right side of the page. It is viewed from the side, so only one eye is shown and its mouth is open. To the left of the head is its very short neck leading to a large body, standing on four legs. To the left of the page is its tail. Across the top of its body are bony plates, and spikes at the end of its chunky tail.

The stegosaurus skeleton below follows the same side view as the image above. Its small skull is on the right of the page, with its neck vertebrae leading to its spine along the top of its body and rib cage attached. It is standing on four bony legs. The tail bones are on the left side of the page. The bony plates can be found running across its spine leading to the spikes at the end of its tail bones.
7.6 Example five: Electric motor

Figure 7: Large print image titled 'Electric motor'
In these diagrams of an electric motor, there is an end view on the left of the page and a top view on the right of the page, each separated by a vertical dashed line.

On the end view there is a permanent magnet of south polarity on the left of the page. To the right of this is a large circle which has four electro-magnets around its outer edge. Inside the circle are thick lines which represent electrical wires that connect the magnets in pairs. Only the wiring connecting one pair of electro-magnets is shown. In the centre is the commutator with the axle in its very centre. To the bottom left and upper right of the commutator are the electrical brushes with wires going to the battery (which is not shown). On the far right of the page is a permanent magnet of north polarity.
The top view on the right of the page shows the commutator in the bottom right of the page with a single brush. Up from this the electro-magnets are shown.

In the end view the permanent magnets to the left and right of the page remain static. The brushes and the wires to the battery also remain static. The electro-magnets, their wiring and the commutator rotate on the axle.

The image shows the moment when the positive brush, seen to the upper right of the commutator, supplies electricity to a quadrant of the commutator. This quadrant can then supply electricity via the upper vertical wire to the electro-magnet at the top of the page. The current makes it magnetic with south polarity. This results in the electro-magnet being attracted to and rotating towards the permanent north magnet on the right of the page.

The electricity from the charged south electro-magnet flows onwards to the electro-magnet on the opposite side of the diagram, at the bottom of the page, via the longer curved wire. The lower electro-magnet becomes magnetic with north polarity because of the direction of the wiring. This results in the electro-magnet rotating towards the permanent south magnet on the left of the page.

The north polarity electro-magnet is currently connected via a vertical wire to a different quadrant of the commutator. As the negative brush contacts this the current can flow back to the battery thus completing the circuit. When this electro-magnet reaches the upper position it will be supplied with electricity again but flowing in the opposite direction so it will become an electro-magnet with south polarity. When the motor is running the pairs of electro-magnets are constantly being turned on and off by the commutator.
7.7 Example six: Mona Lisa

Figure 9: Large print transcription of the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci
Figure 10: Tactile transcription of the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci

[Start of description]

This is an image of an oil painting of a woman. It was painted in 1505. The original is fairly dark from varnish with subdued colours. There is a locator dot shown, which will be at the top left when the image is the right way up.

The woman is facing forward and shown from the waist up. Her face is pointed slightly to the left but her eyes are turned to look straight at you. Both arms are bent at the elbow and she gently rests on the arm to the right. She has dark brown hair with a hint of red. She is wearing a dark green dress with paler sleeves on her lower arms. She has the famous slight enigmatic smile.
The background is a view of a distant soft landscape comprising forests, lakes, a track and an arched bridge. It is a range of greens and blue-greens with quite a bright blue for the water.

[End of description]

7.8 Example seven: Graph

Figure 11: Large print image titled 'Mediterranean climate graph: Rome, Italy'
Figure 12: Tactile graph titled ‘Mediterranean climate graph: Rome, Italy’

[Start of description]

This line graph shows how temperature and precipitation change over a period of a year in Rome.

There is a locator dot shown, which will be at the top left of the page when the image is in the correct orientation. The graph comprises of two vertical axis on the left and right of the graph; a horizontal axes along the bottom of the graph; a series of vertical bars representing rainfall and a thick dashed line representing temperature. There are fine lines reaching across the grid which enable easier reading of the data.

The vertical axis on the left is labelled temperature and is marked in degrees centigrade, from 0 at the bottom to 50 at the top; with a marker every five degrees and labelled every ten.
The vertical axis on the right is labelled precipitation and is marked in millimetres, from 0 at the bottom to 250 at the top; with a marker every 25 degrees and labelled every 50.

The x or horizontal axis is marked in months from January to December. To allow sufficient space, the braille labels are uncapitalised.

Across the bottom of the page are twelve vertical bars showing the rainfall for each month of the year. These show a fall towards the middle of the year and rise again towards the end.

There is a thick dashed line representing the temperature found at the bottom left of the page starting at approximately 7 degrees centigrade on the temperature axes. This rises toward the middle of the year then falls towards the end.

[End of description]
7.9 Example eight: Sailing

Figure 13: Large print image titled 'Sailing: 49er class two-man skiff
Figure 14: Tactile image titled 'Sailing: 49er class two-man skiff'

[Start of description]

49er class two-man skiff

This page shows two images of a 49er class yacht. The image on the left shows the boat seen from the side. The image on the right shows the boat seen from the front with two sailors adjusting the sails. Each image has a dashed line image border. There is a locator dot shown, which will be at the top left of the page when the image is the right way up.

49er seen from the side (left)

The top of the mast (the upright pole that supports the sails) is in the top right of the image. It has two curved, triangular sails attached to it at the top: the spinnaker to the left and the mainsail
to the right. Further down the mast the foresail (jib) is attached. All the sails continue down the page.

The foresail and the mainsail have horizontal lines going across them. These represent battens: thin strips of stiff material to reinforce the sails and stop them fluttering.

The mainsail to the right is attached to a horizontal pole: the boom. The spinnaker to the left is attached to the spinnaker boom and the foresail to the deck by sheets (ropes). Down from the sails is the hull (body) of the boat. At the bottom of hull is the keel in the middle and the rudder to the right.

**49er seen from the front (right)**

This image shows the 49er from the front with the spinnaker and foresail showing.

The wind has caught the sails and the boat is leaning to the left. The top of the mast is in the top centre of the image with the spinnaker attached to it. Further down the mast the foresail is attached; only part of it can be found. Down the page are the hull and the keel.

To the right of the page two sailors are leaning out from the side to balance the sails. They are holding sheets (ropes) to adjust the sails.

[End of description]

8 Where to get further help

UKAAF assists businesses and organisations by advising how to meet the needs of customers and clients with print disabilities; providing guidance on how to source and provide quality accessible formats like large print, audio, braille, electronic file
formats and Easy Read; and helping you to understand your responsibilities as a service provider.

Through our website and magazine, members will also gain access to:

- findings from public consultations and end-user research
- research and innovation in accessible formats
- information on suppliers of transcription services
- guidance and advice on standards for accessible formats
- opportunities to review and help to develop standards and guidance.

In addition to supporting service providers and transcribers, UKAAF also represents people with print disabilities. We believe that because format quality matters, end-users should have genuine input into the development of standards for accessible information. By collecting and sharing users' views with service providers and transcribers we can help them to deliver a quality service which meets users' needs.

UKAAF has a User Advisory Group (UAG) so we can include blind and partially sighted people and others with print disabilities in ongoing research and consultation on key accessible format issues.

There are many benefits of being a member of UKAAF, not least to demonstrate your commitment to quality accessible formats. For more information visit us at www.ukaaf.org.
9 Additional resources

Describing Science images

http://ncam.wgbh.org/experience_learn/educational_media/stemdx

Effective Practices for Description of Science Content within Digital Talking Books

Maths resources

AsTeR (Audio System for Technical Readings)
(http://dots.physics.ost.edu/publications/csun94.html)

A system which produces an audio format of an electronic document, including the ability to handle mathematics.

LaTeX

www.latex-project.org

Typesetting for technical and scientific documents.

Lambda


Mathematics editor using 8-dot braille. Produces linear mathematical notation.

MathDAISY


Documents can be saved in the DAISY format via a plug-in to Microsoft Word, and MathType.
MathPlayer


For displaying mathematical notation in Microsoft Internet Explorer

MathSpeak

http://www.mathspeak.org

MathSpeak uses a code which is closer to the way that maths is expressed verbally. It may be useful as an option for a more rigorous method of reading maths for audio recording. Anyone who already uses some code reading strategy should be able to pick it up. [maths and science access] The grammar rules MathSpeak use has been published


MathType


Interactive software which allows maths equations to be created and edited. Also available on the Mac.

Describing art

RNIB: Try audio describing a painting


RNIB: How people with sight problems ‘see’ paintings

10 Figure references

Figure 1: The Open University, (Year unknown), Exploring Science (S103), Block 6, page 63.

Figure 2: Open University, (Year unknown), DD305 Personal Lives and Social Policy, Book 1, Figure 2.2 page 62.

Figures 3–11, 14, 17–32, 43–56: All images are copyrighted and reproduced courtesy of Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (2010).

Figure 12: The Open University, Leadership and change (B204), Study Guide 1, page 82.

Figure 13: The Open University, Managing knowledge (B823), An Introduction to Managing Knowledge, page 48.

Figure 15: The Open University, Financial accounting (B291), The purpose and context of financial accounting and reporting, page 39.

Figure 16: The Open University, Making a difference (B830), Issues and Approaches: Integrating Practice, Learning and Theory, page 34.

Figure 20: Taylor M, (Year unknown) The Open University. Available at: http://kn.open.ac.uk/public/workspace.cfm?wpid=3550 [Accessed 15 November 2010].

Figure 33, 34, 39, 42: All images reproduced with permission from the archives of the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).

Figure 36: The Open University, (Year unknown). Illustration H Newton Blossomville Buckinghamshire [photograph], A103 preparatory material. Available at: http://kn.open.ac.uk/public/workspace.cfm?wpid=3062 [Accessed 15 November 2010].

Figure 37: Alan Waller (Year unknown), Swans [watercolour painting]. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 38: Alan Waller (Year unknown), Geometric Abstract [oil painting] Reproduced with permission.

Figure 40: Alan Waller (Year unknown), There’s gold in them thar pills! [Cartoon] Reproduced with permission.

Figure 41: Claire Jones (2010), Selfridges, Bull Ring, Birmingham. [Colour photograph] Reproduced with permission.

11 Your feedback is welcome

We would welcome your views on this guidance, any suggestions for additions, or case studies of how this guidance has helped you. You might like to share your experience in an article in our magazine 'Format Matters'.

You can phone, email or write to us - our details are at the back, or use the feedback form on our website www.ukaaf.org.

If you find UKAAF’s guidance valuable, please encourage others to join by visiting our website.
### Document reference information

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