

VISUALLY IMPAIRED VIEWERS: guidelines for commissioning editors and producers

These guidelines suggest ways of improving access to our programmes for visually impaired viewers. Ofcom sets a quota for audio description, which, by providing additional narrative, assists visually impaired viewers' understanding of the programme. But it is currently only added to a small proportion of our programmes. Deaf and hard of hearing viewers are well served by subtitling, but visually impaired viewers ask us why we do not take a few simple steps to improve accessibility for them. There are a number of things we can do.

1. INFORMATION ON SCREEN (including annos and trails)

Wherever information is displayed on screen, communicate key details by voice. With more complicated graphics - eg maps, technical illustrations - try to communicate at least the central message verbally. In all programmes try to avoid the use of captions to set the scene or provide additional, update or "what happened next" information. It is particularly frustrating for a visually impaired viewer to follow a documentary, only to miss out on a vital fact in the final caption.

2. IDENTIFYING CONTRIBUTORS

Where contributors are identified by captions, try to name them verbally on first appearance. A person's title or role can also be significant as it establishes credentials. If this is unduly cumbersome - eg short news reports, or compilations of vox pops - try to ensure that enough verbal information is conveyed for the material to make sense to a visually impaired audience.

3. FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONTRIBUTIONS IN FACTUAL PROGRAMMES

If foreign language contributions are subtitled, but not audibly translated, they are inaccessible to visually impaired viewers. There may of course be compelling editorial reasons to subtitle, eg to convey the emotion of a speaker giving personal testimony. Also, if foreign language contributions are dubbed and not subtitled then we need to ensure that closed-caption subtitling is available for deaf viewers – in practice we subtitle around 85% of our output, over 90% in peak. When making decisions on dubbing and subtitles, please try to consider the needs of viewers with sensory impairments.

4. GRAPHICS AND TEXT

Some people with visual impairment can make out graphics and text if they are composed carefully. For example:

- use colours which achieve a good contrast between foreground and background
- best foreground colours are green, yellow or white; avoid pure blues, reds and magentas
- use large clear fonts, ideally without serifs
- try to avoid graphic sequences which are out of step with simultaneous verbal information
- a useful test of clarity is to spot-check in monochrome.