Commissioning **accessible** video

The essentials you **need** to know

Office for Disability Issues

HM Government

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Introduction

This guidance is aimed at communications staff who commission films and would like to ensure that whatever they produce reaches the widest possible audience.

Why should my video be accessible?

To ensure that your film is accessible to all disabled people, you may decide to include additional access options. The most common access options to add are subtitles, British Sign Language or audio description.

Don't let these extra features discourage you from delivering information through video – it can be particularly effective for some groups of people, such as people with learning disabilities.

If you don't consider disability, you could miss around 18% of your audience.

What makes video accessible?

In order for video to be understandable, the viewer must be able to see and understand the action and hear the audio track. A well-produced film ensures that these elements work in balance. If your viewer is unable to understand one of these channels you will not be able to deliver your message.

However, video can be made accessible to the widest range of people by ensuring a few simple features are delivered effectively. Most online video players will support the options outlined below. However, for an example of best practice implementation, see the ODI Accessible Media Player at **www.odi.gov.uk/player**

Think about accessibility at the beginning

Above all, think about accessibility at the beginning. By briefing your producer correctly at the start of your project, you will save time and money later. Even if you're not sure which access options you want to include, the producer can create your product bearing certain principles in mind.

When commissioning accessible film, you may consider it unnecessary to prioritise any accessible features, particularly if budget is tight. However, incorporating them into a well-planned video should require minimal additional budget or time. Integrating accessibility features later in the project will substantially increase the cost and may require further post-production work.

Please note these guidelines are intended to supplement the COI cross-government standards published at **www.coi.gov.uk/guidance.php?page=188** Although ODI works closely with COI to ensure our guidance is current and appropriate, the implementation of COI guidance should always take priority.

Accessibility features for video

It is much cheaper and easier to specify accessibility features in the commissioning brief than to commission them separately at the end of the process.

In general, three features will cover access needs for the majority of disabled people:

1. Captioning

2. Audio description

3. British Sign Language (BSL)

However, if your film is addressing a specific disabled audience, you should always identify whether further accessibility features are required by your audience.

Captioning

'Captions' are a literal transcript of what is being said in the film. 'Subtitles' can include a degree of abridgement or interpretation. The terms 'captioning' and 'subtitling' are used largely interchangeably within the UK. When preparing a brief, using the correct term will ensure there is less likelihood of confusion later in the production schedule.

If you plan to deliver your video online, captions must be provided to meet level A Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.0 (WCAG 2.0)[1].

1   WCAG 2.0 Guideline 1.2 Time-based Media: Provide alternatives for time-based media, **www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/#media-equiv**

Open and closed captions

- Open captions: The viewer has no control over open captions. They will appear whenever the film is played. Open captions are sometimes referred to as 'burned-in'.

- Closed captions: These are delivered alongside the video through a separate channel or file. This means they can be turned on and off or even customised according to viewer preference.

Closed and open captions have passionate advocates on both sides.

Supporters of open captions rightly point out that they do not require any input from the user, so are always guaranteed to appear.

However, the ODI recommends closed captions in most instances. They are more versatile, and the appearance of open captions can be difficult to read if the dimensions of the film are adjusted (for example, when switching between embedded and full-screen sizes on a website).

Commissioning closed captions

When commissioning closed captions, you should request captions are made available as a tt-xml (timed text xml) file (unless your agency advises otherwise). This format is supported as a W3C standard recommendation for online use[2]. Timed text files can also be used to automatically generate transcripts of your film.

Before filming begins, ensure the director and editor of your film knows you are, or plan to, implement captioning. You should advise them to leave the bottom third of the screen free of information to avoid captions clashing with other text (for example, logos or speaker names).

2 Timed Text Markup Language (TTML) 1.0, **www.w3.org/TR/ttaf1-dfxp/**

Audio description

Audio description is an additional audio track that describes and gives context for essential visual information. This allows people with visual impairments to better understand your video.

Audio description can be delivered as a separate audio track that plays alongside the original video (in the same way as a commentary on a DVD). It can also be delivered as an additional identical film, with the voiceover 'embedded' within the film itself. ODI does not recommend delivering a single video with an embedded description track since this can be distracting to viewers unaccustomed to it, and may detract from additional, less important visual information contained within the film.

Since audio description is intended to deliver equivalent information you may wish to offer the track additionally in an audio-only format (for example on CD, or as an mp3 download or podcast).

If you plan to deliver your video online, an audio description track must be provided to meet level AA conformance of WCAG 2.0[3]. (Level AA conformance against WCAG 1.0 is the current minimum government standard.)

Introducing audio description at a later stage

ODI recommends commissioning an audio description track directly from the production company, along with your film. If you do not wish to at this stage, then there are steps you can take to reduce the expense of commissioning one later.

- State in your brief that you may be implementing an audio description track at a later date. This will not make a minimal difference to the final product, but it will significantly reduce, or even eliminate, the risk of requiring a re-edit.

- Specify that your video should not consist of continuous narration or distracting music.

- Request periodic cutaway or establishing shots to allow the audio description to fit around dialogue or to fully describe important features.

3 WCAG 2.0 Guideline 1.2 Time-based Media: Provide alternatives for time-based media, **www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/#media-equiv**

British Sign Language (BSL)

BSL is usually the most expensive of the main accessibility features to introduce, but it is also the one that can be easiest to deliver independently. BSL is a language with its own syntax and grammar, so it is usually also accompanied by open (burned-in) captions to support the signed interpretation.

If you plan to deliver your film online, sign language is only required if your website conforms to the highest level (AAA) of compliance against WCAG 2.0[4]. However, it should be considered essential if your audience is likely to include a significant proportion of deaf people.

Commissioning a BSL track

- You, or your supplier, should always approach a specialist sign-language production company, who will be able to advise on best practice. Avoid trying to create a BSL track unless you or your supplier has extensive experience.

- ODI does not recommend superimposing the signer directly over the film, since this can obscure important visual information. Instead the dimensions of the film should be slightly reduced, with the signer standing against a background that will not distract the viewer.

- Sufficient contrast should be made between the signer and the background.

The ODI Accessible Media Player

ODI has also developed an accessible media player. This allows disabled users to switch access options on and off. Government departments can use this player on their website. Email ODI to find out more: **odi.communications@dwp.gsi.gov.uk**

Watch a film about the accessible media player on the ODI website: **www.odi.gov.uk/player**

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4 WCAG 2.0 Guideline 1.2 Time-based Media: Provide alternatives for time-based media, **www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/#media-equiv**

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About ODI

The Office for Disability Issues leads the government's vision of achieving equality for disabled people. One of the ways we do this is by supporting civil servants to include and represent disabled people in your work. We provide strategic advice, share tools and help you develop new skills.

More information

Contact the Communications team in the Office for Disability Issues for further advice or information. We can help you improve the inclusivity and accessibility of your communications.

Email **odi.communications@dwp.gsi.gov.uk** with your contact details and a brief description of your query.

This publication is also available in audio and Braille. If you would like a copy in either format, please contact us.

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