

Earcatch:

Audio Description Guidelines and Delivery Specifications

This document contains the guidelines to which audio description (AD) must comply in order to be placed in [Earcatch](#). Earcatch reserves the right to deny audio description that does not comply with the requirements.

Earcatch offers audio description for films, series and performances, in the cinema, at home and in the theatre. At home and in the cinema, it works with audio synchronisation. For use in the theatre, a different technology was developed.

1. Basics

Audio description (AD) makes films and series accessible to visually impaired people. In between dialogues a voice describes what appears on screen. This extra explanation makes it a lot easier to follow the story line. For example, elements that are described are characters, facial expressions, location and developments in the plot.

1.1 Basic principle

Describe the most relevant and important aspects and actions in a scene. Avoid describing too much; focus on the main elements that are essential for understanding a scene. Make way for dialogue, sound effects, music and intentional moments of silence; avoid overlapping with AD.

1.2 Objectively describing facts

Characters

- In the description of a character's physical appearance, prioritise the most distinctive characteristics, such as hair, posture, height and/or clothing. Only describe the race or ethnicity of a character when it's relevant.
- Describe a connection with another character when the audience is expected to be aware of this connection.
- If relevant to the plot, describe the age category. E.g. *teenage girl*, *elderly man*.
- Only use a character's name after it has been introduced in the film through dialogue or otherwise, unless it is inevitable to use it sooner because of timing or clarity.
- Describe relevant facial expressions, movements, gestures and body language.

Time and space

- The audio description should mention the location, time and weather conditions when this is relevant to the scene and/or plot.
- Integrate timeline shifts in the text rather than using terms like 'flashback'. For example, use: *Back in the past*.
- Avoid describing plot twists before they actually occur on screen, unless there's no other option.

1.3 How to describe

- The audio description should be informative, in present tense and in third person omniscient.
- Describe as specifically as possible and avoid general terms.
- The language used should be consistent with the genre, content and target audience of the film.
- Try to vary your word choice; don't use the same words over and over again, but look for synonyms.
- Only use personal pronouns when it's clear who they refer to.
- Only interrupt music, sound effects and intentional silences when you really have to.
- Describe locations and movements from the audience's point of view.
- Only describe sequences of short extracts or stills when there is enough time; otherwise focus on the most important images.

1.4 What to avoid

- A description should always be objective and cannot censor the content in any way; keep this in mind especially when describing nudity, sexual acts and/or violence.
- Never say *We see* or *On screen you see...*
- Avoid technical film terms, unless they're relevant to the scene or plot. Elaborate descriptions of camera movement are irrelevant, but terms such as *close up* or *in profile* can be used occasionally.
- Avoid changes in style. Be consistent in your descriptions when it comes to characters' physical appearance and other visual elements.

2. Describing other elements

2.1 Text on screen

When there's text on screen, this should be described. Start the description for example with *Text on screen*, *Text appears*, *In white letters*:. You can also use a different tone of voice to clarify written text is being read out loud.

2.2 Audio subtitling (AST)

Audio subtitling is the spoken rendering of the written subtitles of a film or series. This makes foreign language dialogue accessible to visually impaired people. **In the case of drama productions, different voice talents should be used for audio subtitling and audio description.** This enhances understandability because there's a clear distinction between spoken subtitles and audio description. When the percentage of subtitled dialogue is very low (<10%), an exception can be made.

2.3 Opening sequence

All logos, text and credits in the opening sequence should be described, until the plot starts. You should always give priority to the plot.

2.4 Audio introduction (AI)

An optional audio introduction (AI) can be placed in Earcatch as an extra feature. An audio introduction is a spoken explanation containing information that cannot be integrated into the audio description due to lack of space. This continuous piece of prose complements the AD with information about characters and the context of the story. This helps users understand the plot. AI is a good option for productions with a lot of dialogue (and consequently little space for AD). An example of a production with an audio introduction is the animation film *Bigfoot Family*. In a few minutes, the user hears about the physical appearance of the characters, how they relate to each other and what the background situation is at the beginning of the film.

3. Voice

Audio description should be voiced by a voice talent/actor who does not play a part in the film or series. Speech synthesis (using a computer-generated voice) is not allowed in Earcatch.

The preferred speaking rate is 130 to 160 words per minute, but this depends on the time and space available within the original soundtrack. Variation in speaking rate can be necessary depending on the mood, action and plot of the film or series.

The voice used for audio description should be easy to distinguish from the voices of characters. The voice should never be distracting or pose a threat to objectivity by becoming an extra character.

In case of television series, the same voice talent should be used for all episodes of the same season.

4. Technical specifications

To be able to synchronise with the film, Earcatch International creates an audio hash using the soundtrack of the film or series. For film the required files need to be delivered in 24fps (unless there's only a DCP at 25fps). For television the 25fps version will do.

For the Earcatch mastering, the following audio files must be delivered:

Film:

- Original final mix 24fps continuous – interleaved WAV file (LoRo of LtRt of 5.1)
- Audio description track 24fps continuous - monophonic WAV file (-17 LUFS, -2 dBTP)

If applicable:

- AST track 24fps continuous - monophonic WAV file (-17 LUFS, -2 dBTP)
- AI track - monophonic WAV file (-17 LUFS, -2 dBTP)

NB For compatibility of films with DVD and television, a 25fps audio hash is generated automatically during the mastering. It is not necessary to deliver extra audio files for this.

Television:

- Original final mix 25fps continuous - interleaved WAV file (R128 stereo mix)
- Audio description track 25fps continuous - monophonic WAV file (-17 LUFS, -2 dBTP)

If applicable:

- AST-track 25fps continuous - monophonic WAV file (-17 LUFS, -2 dBTP)
- AI-track - monophonic WAV file (-17 LUFS, -2 dBTP)

For all files the following applies:

- Bitrate 24-bit, sample rate 48kHz.
- Files start FFOA.
- The audio description track only contains the describing voice (no other audio).
- Files have a clear title, including framerate, using the following format:
TITLE_ FRAMERATE_ LANGUAGE_ TYPE_ CHANNELS_ DATE
Type can be LoRo/LtRt/5.1, or AD, AST, AI. Date can be written as YYYYMMDD.

E.g.: THE_SEARCH_24FPS_EN_AD_1CH_20221230

Please note:

- In order for us to verify that the audio description track is synchronised, it is recommended to also supply a video file for reference.
- If there are different versions of a film, it is necessary to supply the corresponding soundtrack and audio description track for each version.

Note on security: The actual soundtrack is not offered in the app. Only a fingerprint hash and encoded audio description files are offered to the end user. It is not possible to listen to the audio description without watching the film itself.

5. Metadata

In order to have your production placed in the Earcatch app the following metadata must be supplied per film or per episode of a series:

- Title
- Release date
- Genre
- Length (in minutes)
- AD language
- AD voice talent
- MPAA rating
- Director
- Cast
- Film poster (jpeg high resolution)
- Stills (jpeg high resolution)

6. Delivery

The materials for films should be delivered at least 3 business days before the premiere date. In case of television series, this should be at least 3 business days before the broadcast date.

Delivery may vary per organisation and country. If your agreement is to deliver directly to Earcatch International B.V., please send all materials to info@earcatch.eu.