# Audio Description (AD)

## What is it

Audio description, or AD, is a spoken track broadcast alongside content providing a blind or partially sighted person with a description of any visual elements of a program. Audio describers speak in gaps in the dialogue, describing body language, expressions, and movements, making the programme clear through sound.

UK broadcasters must provide AD on at least a tenth of their content, but the larger channels often have it on over a third of their content. Channels tend not to use audio description for live programs because this is due to it being much harder to do, but there are a few live shows that have AD. AD is available on some level via broadcast television, catchup services, video on demand, showings in cinemas, and performances in theatres.

## Setup

Televisions with audio description often have an AD button or accessibility shortcut on their remote control and will usually have an audio description setting in the menus. Once turned on you'll continue to hear the AD on programs that have it until you switch it off again.

Streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime will often have audio description as an option in a language menu. AD is usually turned on and off for your account, so if you turn AD on and use it to watch a program on another device, it will play AD if the program and the device supports it. Some services, such as BBC iPlayer, have a separate version of the content with AD built-in, so you must choose the audio described showing when you select a program to watch. These services often have an audio description category to choose from.

Streaming services are available on many different platforms, including web pages, smartphones, tablets, and smart TVs, but AD availability varies across devices. Whether a program has AD depends on the programme, the service you're using, and the platform you’re using it on.

AD in cinemas and theatres are available via a headset, these are collected before going to your seat.

## Use

AD is typically used when watching broadcast TV in the UK, watching catchup TV through services such as iPlayer, watching Video on Demand services such as Netflix and Disney+, or going to the cinema or theatre. It describes any part of a program or show you would miss if you can’t see it to enable you to understand and enjoy content that would otherwise be inaccessible.

## Verdict

Without AD, a blind person can miss out on various storylines and plots, as the physical actions can be just as significant as the dialogue. Different things like facial expressions and body language contribute to taking the story forward. AD paints an audio picture of the onscreen content, helping blind or partially sighted people enjoy and experience television programmes and films just as sighted people do.

## Further Resources

* **rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-home-and-leisure-television-radio-and-film/television**
* **rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-home-and-leisure-television-radio-and-film/audio-description**

Updated: October 2023

End of document.