Tip Sheet

# Audio Description around Australia

Different areas and states of Australia provide different audio description services. This sheet outlines key AD services in the following regions:

## Queensland

## Queensland has become known for the audio description of art and live performances, including dance and live theatre. The following video gives some insight into the process of audio description within a theatrical setting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSF6C4gEsBw>

#### The Queensland Performing Arts Centre

In conjunction with Access Arts and Vision Australia, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) offers live audio description services for patrons who are blind or vision impaired.

Audio description is provided via headphones, which can be collected prior to the performance. For more details visit the [QPAC audio described performances page](https://www.qpac.com.au/visiting/accessibility/audio-described-performances/) or  phone (07) 3840 7466 (Mon to Fri, 9am-5pm) to book your ticket.

#### The Queensland Theatre

The Queensland Theatre offers audio description services for five of their productions in 2018. More information is available via the [Queensland Theatre accessibility page](http://www.queenslandtheatre.com.au/Plan-Your-Visit/Accessibility#ad), which explains that:

This service allows blind and vision impaired people to enjoy our shows by having trained describers capture in live narration – without interrupting the dialogue on stage – the action, costumes, sets, transitions, gestures, facial expressions and lighting or special effects in a performance. This is transmitted via a discreet headset/earpiece worn by the client in the auditorium. Imagine your own personal “director’s commentary” but only when there is a pause in the dialogue.

According to their website, both the **Queensland Art Gallery (QAG)** and **Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA)** offer audio-described tours which provide description of of selected artworks.

Audio description tours are available weekdays from February to November. Advance booking notice of 15 days is required. To book, contact the Group Bookings Office between 8.30am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday on +61 (0) 7 3840 7255. For more detail, please consult the [QAGOMA accessibility information page](https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/visit/plan-your-visit/access).

## South Australia

**The Art Gallery of South Australia**

The Art Gallery of South Australia provide audio described tours of their collection on the third Saturday of each month. Audio description tours for school class groups, children and teens are also available by request. Audio described tours of the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions available at other times by request. [Visit their website for more details](https://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au/agsa/home/Events/Access.html).

## Western Australia

In Western Australia, [DADAA](http://www.dadaa.org.au/whats-on/) provide live audio description for 15 to 20 major arts exhibitions and events each year.

As a non-profit organisation, DADAA promotes cultural participation for people who are blind and vision-impaired by providing [audio description for live performance, festivals and theatre,](https://www.dadaa.org.au/access-services/audio-description-and-tactile-tours/) including the [Fringe World Festival](https://www.fringeworld.com.au/), [Sculpture by the Sea](http://sculpturebythesea.com/), and hit musicals at Crown Perth and Perth Arena.

Thanks to DADAA, the Australia Day fireworks over Perth were audio described in 2018. However, there can be limited places available due to budget restraints. Only 25 audio description headsets were available at this event.

The following video provides more information about DADAA: <https://vimeo.com/175662087>

**The State Theatre of WA**

Western Australia’s State Theatre offers audio description for live performances. According the the website, it is essential patrons advise the booking agent that the audio described service will be required at time of booking tickets.

The venue also offers captioning and wheelchair access. For more information, consult the [Perth Theatre Centre’s accessibility page](https://www.ptt.wa.gov.au/venues/state-theatre-centre-of-wa/your-visit/accessibility/).

## ****New South Wales****

**Vivid Festival Audio-described Session**

[Sydney’s Vivid Festival](https://www.sydney.com/destinations/sydney/sydney-city/vivid-sydney) began in 2009 as a [festival of light](http://www.realtimearts.net/article/issue90/9396). Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2018, the Sydney Opera House event has expanded to become an annual celebration of light, design, technology, and culture. It is only fitting then that the festival offers audio-described sessions to include people with blindness and vision impairment in the Sydney Harbour extravaganza.

With [the Lighting of the Sails](https://www.vividsydney.com/event/light/lighting-sails-jonathan-zawada) of the Sydney Opera house being the cornerstone of the event, the festival is typically very visual. People with vision impairment have had to rely on their imagination — and their friends and family to describe the lights. However, in 2014 the festival made a change and began offering audio-described sessions of the Lighting of the Sails.

[Jane Armstrong](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-13/vivid-sydney-brings-light-festival-to-blind-people/8613170http:/www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-13/vivid-sydney-brings-light-festival-to-blind-people/8613170), who attended an audio-described session in 2017, described the difference to her experience and feeling of social inclusion:

‘Without the audio description and the detail that’s provided I wouldn’t be able to tell what’s happening on the sails, and I wouldn’t be able to enjoy the experience of Vivid as others can.’

People with blindness and low vision attending the festival are given more information about the displays via tactile elements such as Opera House tiles to feel what the lights are being projected on, and a miniature model of the Opera House itself.

These audio description and tactile features were part of the [Sydney Opera House’s Accessibility](https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/visit-us/accessibility.html) overhaul, a plan seeking to ‘provide barrier-free access, making the site, building and the experiences they offer accessible to all people.’ The Opera House’s accessibility measures take into account people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment and people with physical disabilities.

While Vision Australia volunteers provide the audio description of the Lighting of the Sales, audio description provider The SubStation audio-describe the light installations (Accessible Arts provided the audio descriptions from 2014 to 2016. The SubStation provided AD and text-to-talk in 2017 and 2018). They approach the task by considering both the artists’ intentions and the reality that audiences may be accessing the art and audio description in the cold  and try to keep descriptions to less than a minute. Major installations can require descriptions of 2-4 minutes, however, the descriptions aren’t synced to the installation which allows the audience to visit at their own pace. Audiences can use The SubStation’s description, the artists’ description, plus their own experience of the installation to decide on the meaning of the artwork.

Much of the artwork is purely visual. The festival’s describers focus on conveying what the installation itself looks like. Alison Myers  from The SubStation told us that although the describers try to stay neutral in their descriptions, the artist’s intention is often outlined in their blurbs, so describers  ‘try to use language that matches their intent – eg, if their installation has a nautical theme, our descriptions will follow suit. ‘

The SubStation described the 2018 installation HE’E NALU which is Hawaiian for ‘surf’ as:

‘Two undulating fences formed by sets of illuminated posts flank a footpath. The contours created by the different angles and heights of the posts resemble rolling waves. The vertical shape of the waves are created by arranging the posts in order of height, gradually rising then falling. The posts also stand at angles, their gradually increasing and decreasing steepness creating the horizontal curve of the waves. As visitors move between the waves, marine shades of blue and orange flow through the sinuous structures.’

Because most installations change in some way, The SubStation describers try to capture the nature of their visual change. Descriptions reproduce the physical nature of the changes for example, pulsing, flowing, weaving, spinning and twisting. Because most installations involve moving coloured light, the audio describers try to be imaginative with the descriptions they provide to ensure variety in the words they use. The installations are often interactive, so when necessary descriptions include details on how to interact with the installations.

## Tasmania

**The State Cinema**

In Hobart, [The State Cinema](http://www.statecinema.com.au/Page/Home) offers audio description for select films and sessions. Audio described films are marked with the AD symbol on the Session Times page. Hovering the cursor over an audio described session will also result in a pop up box stating that “Audio description for the vision impaired is available for this session.”

# WHERE CAN I GET ADDITIONAL HELP AND INFORMATION?

For information regarding the research conducted by Curtin University and the creation of this resource, please contact A/Prof Katie Ellis, Internet Studies, Curtin University: [katie.ellis@curtin.edu.au](mailto:katie.ellis@curtin.edu.au).

This research was funded by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN).

The operation of the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997*. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.