

HBO Max Joins the Ranks of Streamers Providing Audio Description

Los Angeles, April 1 – Last week, HBO Max became the latest streaming giant to add audio description to their content. They join the ranks of other huge streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, Apple TV+ and Disney+ to provide accessible content to their audiences.

For those who are unaware, audio description is a secondary audio track, which consumers can turn on and off, that narrates the scene in between lines of dialogue to help low-vision/blind viewers better understand the scene. Audio description helps blind consumers get the full experience of a piece of entertainment, similar to how captioning helps deaf consumers. With the addition of this service, HBO Max now joins other streaming services like Netflix, which has been providing audio description on all of their original content for several years.

The WarnerMedia streaming giant now providing audio description is a big win for the low-vision and blind community. HBO Max has an extremely wide variety of titles available in their library, including but not limited to content from HBO, DC Comics, Cartoon Network and TCM. From *Sesame Street* for kids, to TCM classics like *Casablanca* for adults, there is content suitable for all ages. HBO also has many shows with more adult themes such as *True Blood* and *Euphoria*. At the time of this article's publication, all of the titles listed above now have audio description available.

WarnerMedia also has pledged to improve accessibility for their low-vision and blind audiences this week by:

- Providing 1,500 hours of audio described content.
- Creating an audio description section to make it easier to find content as well as to create more awareness of audio description on their platform.
- Making the HBO Max website and application more accessible in terms of navigation and content. This includes making things more friendly to screen readers, thus making it easier for low-vision/blind consumers.
- Providing accessibility assistance and tips for people with disabilities in the HBO Max Help section.
- Training customer service representatives on how to better assist customers with disabilities, which includes sensitivity training and assistive technology.

Due to restrictions during the pandemic this past year, HBO Max announced that every Warner Bros. film will be released on HBO Max the same day as the films will be in theaters. This includes major films like *Godzilla vs. Kong*, *The Conjuring 3: The Devil Made Me Do It*, *The Suicide Squad*, *Dune* and *Matrix 4*. At the time of its premiere on the app, HBO Max's most recent film release, *Godzilla vs. Kong*, does have the option of audio description available for viewers. If the audio description track for future releases are available same-day as well, that would be a huge win for the low-vision/blind community. While some theaters do provide audio description for their films, it is not always reliable. Many consumers also may not be comfortable going to the theater as the pandemic continues. This would provide safe, accessible content in your living room.

Another big selling point of HBO Max has been the premiere of Zack Snyder's *Justice League*, a four-hour epic superhero event. For the first week of release, there was no audio description, but

as of last week, the film has audio description on both the color and black and white versions.

Currently, the audio description option is only available on iOS devices, but hopefully the rollout will continue to all devices in the near future. According to a WarnerMedia press release, “WarnerMedia will continue building on these improvements in the months and years to come. Later this year, HBO Max plans to make audio description available across all supported Internet-connected TVs. Furthermore, audio description is now being created for all new HBO and Max Original programming, and customers can expect 3,000 hours of described content to be available by the end of March 2022, doubling again to at least 6,000 hours in total by the end of March 2023.”

For a complete list of all HBO Max audio described content that is updated frequently, check out the Audio Description Project on the website for the American Council for the Blind here: <https://acb.org/adp/hbomaxad.html>.