

Note: For the most recent version of these exercises, visit tinyurl.com/Y85WF9M5

Alt-Text as Poetry

Writing prompts + Discussion questions

Writing Exercise 1: Warm-Up

This is designed to be a warm-up so don't worry about getting things right — just write down whatever pops into your head.

1. Pull up the image that corresponds to your breakout group from [this folder](#). (Group 1 should use image 1, group 2 uses image 2, etc).
2. You and your group should work with the same image, but as you follow the next steps, write your own responses rather than doing so collaboratively. We suggest this because it is helpful to surface the ways we all see and interpret images differently, and how that impacts our approach to image description. Later, you'll share your writing with your group, compare and contrast what you wrote, and discuss.
3. List things (objects, people, stuff, nouns) that are present in the image or related to the image.

Aim to write 5 words, but if you are on a roll, write as many as come to mind.

4. List descriptive words or adjectives that describe the image, a part of the image, or your response to it. How does it make you feel? What associations do you have?

Again, aim to write 5 words, but if you are on a roll, write as many as come to mind.

5. When everyone in your group feels ready, share your writing and discuss with your group:
 - Are there words you all wrote down?
 - Are there words on someone else's list that surprised you? Or made you notice something about the image?
 - Any other general thoughts or things you noticed about the process?

Note: This exercise is adapted from
Audio Description as a Pedagogical Tool
By Georgina Kleege & Scott Wallin
Published in Disability Studies Quarterly

Writing Exercise 2: Subjectivity and Audience

Many people have advocated for describers to be as objective as possible, allowing the person engaging with the description to make their own subjective interpretation.

However, there has been a lot of push back on the idea that objectivity should be a central goal of description. Objectivity is an incredibly elusive concept — where is the line between fact and interpretation? Do we say “smile” or do we say “lips turned up at the corners”?

The pretense of objectivity plays into existing power structures. “Objectivity” often validates the perspective of white, cis men while marking other perspectives as “subjective.”

Furthermore, it is unclear if an “objective” approach produces quality descriptions. Trying to be an objective writer often leads to language that is precise and technical. The resulting writing can be difficult to understand, or starkly contrast the tone of the image.

1. For this exercise, you’ll need a photo that you’ve taken. If you have a smartphone, it’s probably easiest to pull up a photo there — it can be the last photo on your camera roll or the last photo you posted to social media.
2. Describe this image as though you are a complete stranger who has stumbled across it for the first time. Pretend that you’ve never seen it before and have no context for the image.
3. Describe the image again, this time from your own perspective, as though you were describing it to your best friend.
4. Share your writing and discuss with your group:
 - Are the descriptions you wrote similar or different? In what ways?
 - Is there anything you noticed when writing in those two different modes?
 - Do you like one description better than the other? Why?
 - Is there a middle ground between these approaches?

Writing Exercise 3: Structure, Length, Priorities

1. Pull up the image that corresponds to your breakout group from [this folder](#). (Group 1 should use image 1, group 2 uses image 2, etc).

A reminder: you and your group should be working with the same image, but as you follow the next steps, write on your own rather than responding collaboratively.

2. Write a single sentence to describe the image. The sentence should capture whatever you think is most important about the image.
3. Now write a second sentence about the second most important thing in, or about, the image.
4. Write a third sentence about the third most important thing.
5. Share your writing and discuss with your group:
 - Did you and your group members structure your description in similar or different ways?
 - Are there things your group members prioritized that you don't think are as important? Or vice versa?
 - Any other things you noticed or thought about when you were writing?

Writing Exercise 4: Identity and Representation

1. Describe yourself as you are today in 3–5 sentences. What would be important for your group to know if they couldn't access visual information about you? If it is helpful to work from an image, take a quick selfie and describe that.
2. As a group, select a headshot from [this folder](#).
Again, you and your group should be working with the same image, but as you follow the next steps, write on your own rather than responding collaboratively.
3. Describe the person in the headshot in 3–5 sentences.
4. Find the corresponding description for your headshot in [this document](#).
This description was written by the person in your photo.
(All these headshots are from [disabledlist.org](#), a directory for creative disabled people. Everyone featured on disabledlist.org was asked to describe their own headshot).
5. Discuss with your group:
 - Chat about the process of writing these descriptions.
 - Were there things you felt comfortable describing about yourself that you didn't feel comfortable describing about someone else? Or vice versa?
 - In disability spaces, people are often asked to self-describe images of themselves. What are some pros and cons to this approach?