

Accessible Exhibition Texts For Artists

Creative Accessibility Guides



Why should we think about accessible texts?

Thinking about how to make your text accessible as an artist or curator helps visitors to engage with your work. This includes various topics, such as:

- How to communicate clearly about your work and say what is important to you.
- How to make your texts efficient, as visitors often want to see many artworks in a short amount of time.



- How to allow access for people with visual or auditory impairments, and people with learning disabilities.

Thinking about accessible texts therefore does not only make sure that visitors with disabilities have access to your work. It also helps people who are less familiar with contemporary art scenes, people of different ages, visitors whose first language is not English, and professionals who have limited time.

Type of texts this guide looks at:

1. Text about the work. (p. 3-4)
2. Artist biography and artist statement. (p. 5-6)
3. Alternative text of the artwork (ideally always included as well!). (p. 7-8)
4. Description of the artwork. (p. 9-12)

All the way down, also look at the general suggestions for formatting your text!

1. Text about the work

Language

Making texts simpler does not mean to dumb them down! Accessible writing does not mean that you cannot say complex things. Communicating clearly is always helpful, as it makes visitors and professionals alike feel curious about your work and remember specifics.

Here are a few key points to keep in mind:

- If you use complicated words or technical terms, just explain them! Just remember that when we were children, we had a vocabulary of up to 5000 words, and these are still the easiest ones for us to understand.
- Who is your key audience? For whom are you writing? It may help to imagine that you are writing for somebody who does not know anything about art. This will make your text engaging.
- Decide if you want to write in the first or third person. This will sound more intimate or more distant (both are relevant, just make a choice!).



Content

Think about what you want to say and how to structure it:

- Most important ideas come first!
- Try to identify your key message and articulate it in the first sentence.
- You do not have to explain everything. Making your text intriguing will keep visitors' attention.
- When you write about abstract themes in your work, it can be helpful to use examples.

If relevant to your work and text, add practical information. This will help to feel the audience welcome and relaxed, as the fear of doing something wrong can put them off.

Information can include details such as:

- What is the start and end time of a time-based work?
- Are you allowed to touch the work?
- Think about possible triggers and include warning texts. These should be specific but also not too detailed in order not to trigger in itself.

2. Artist biography and artist statement

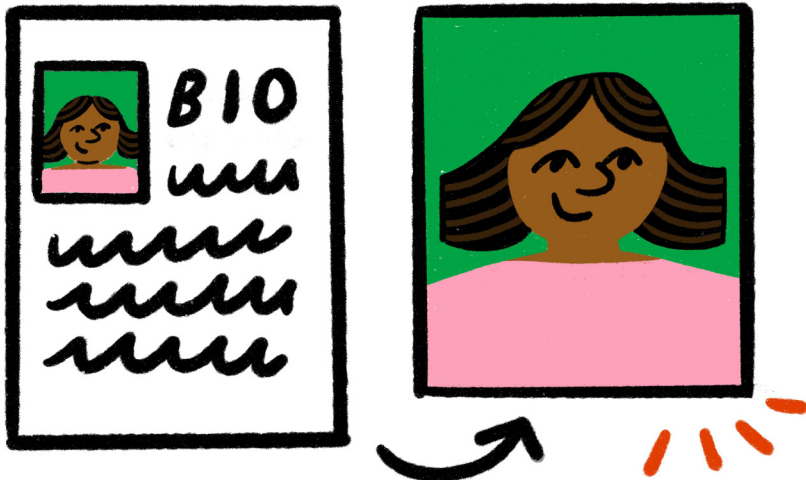
These are also often called artist bios or short CVs.

Language

Similar to writing about your work, when it comes to writing about yourself simple language will help engage readers.

Here are a few key points to keep in mind:

- It is not always asked for, but sometimes you can decide if you want to write in the first or third person (for example “I am...” or “Turf is...”). This will offer different impressions and sound more intimate or more distant (both are relevant, just make a choice!).
- Avoid abbreviations if possible and consider reducing information if you have to keep it short.



Content

Think about what you want to say and how to structure it:

- What is most important to you? Do you want to talk about medium, profession, themes or mode of working first?
- Think about who you are writing for. It is ok to have several artist biographies or statements according to the context!



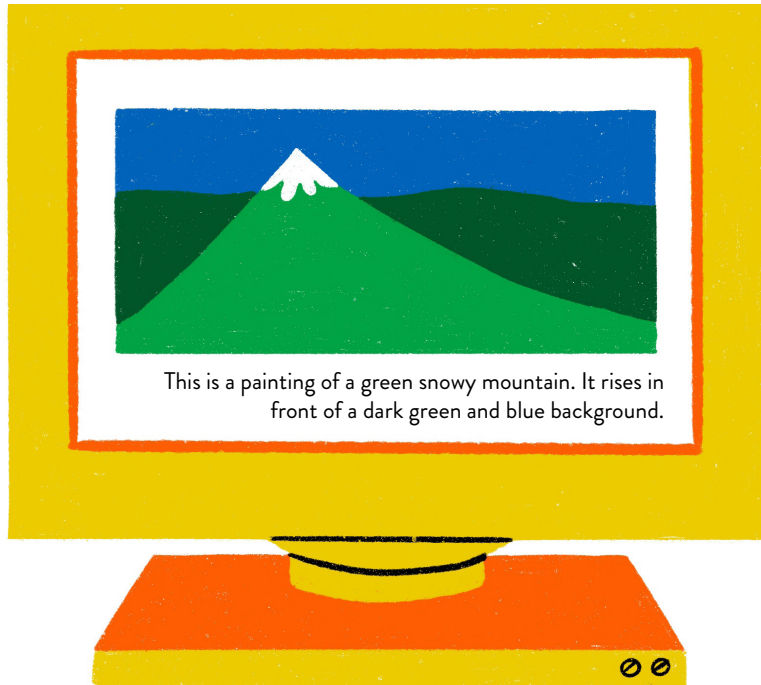
3. Alternative text of the artwork

What is alternative text?

Alternative or alt text describes an image factually in a few sentences.

This helps visitors who are visually impaired to receive information about the content of the work.

Alt texts are mostly used for digital content online, as there it can be read by screen readers and search engines. Don't confuse alt texts with image captions (which give additional information like the title or artist) or longer image descriptions (see page 9 in this access guide).



For alt text, keep in mind:

- They are only around 125 characters long.
- Describe the image factually, do not interpret it.
- Indicate the medium of the artwork. Don't start with "This is an image of", but be more specific.
- Don't simply repeat text that has been expressed in captions or other descriptions.
- Describe any text within the image.
- Avoid technical terms.

Also, Turf Projects produced a beautiful guide to alt texts which is in their digital resources, click the link [here!](#)

4. Description of the work

Descriptions are longer than alt texts. They provide more details and information than alt texts.

Descriptions can be recorded (as audio descriptions), digitally read by a screen reader or read out loud by person and thereby serve people with visual impairments to get access to your work by a person.

Language

When it comes to describing your work, try to find the balance between keeping it simple and making it exciting.

It helps to keep in mind for whom you are writing the description. Will it be read out loud as part of an exhibition? Or is it a general online provision?



- Be as specific as possible without getting too complicated.
- This is also helpful when it comes to colours: if possible, specify, for example say “cobalt blue” instead of only blue. And remember, if the terms are too technical, you can always explain them!
- When describing people, don’t assume their gender - better to write “person”, “they”, “them”.
- We are describing what we see and perceive with our senses. If you have background information because you are the artist, use that knowledge but also try to make the visual element accessible, rather than just interpreting it.

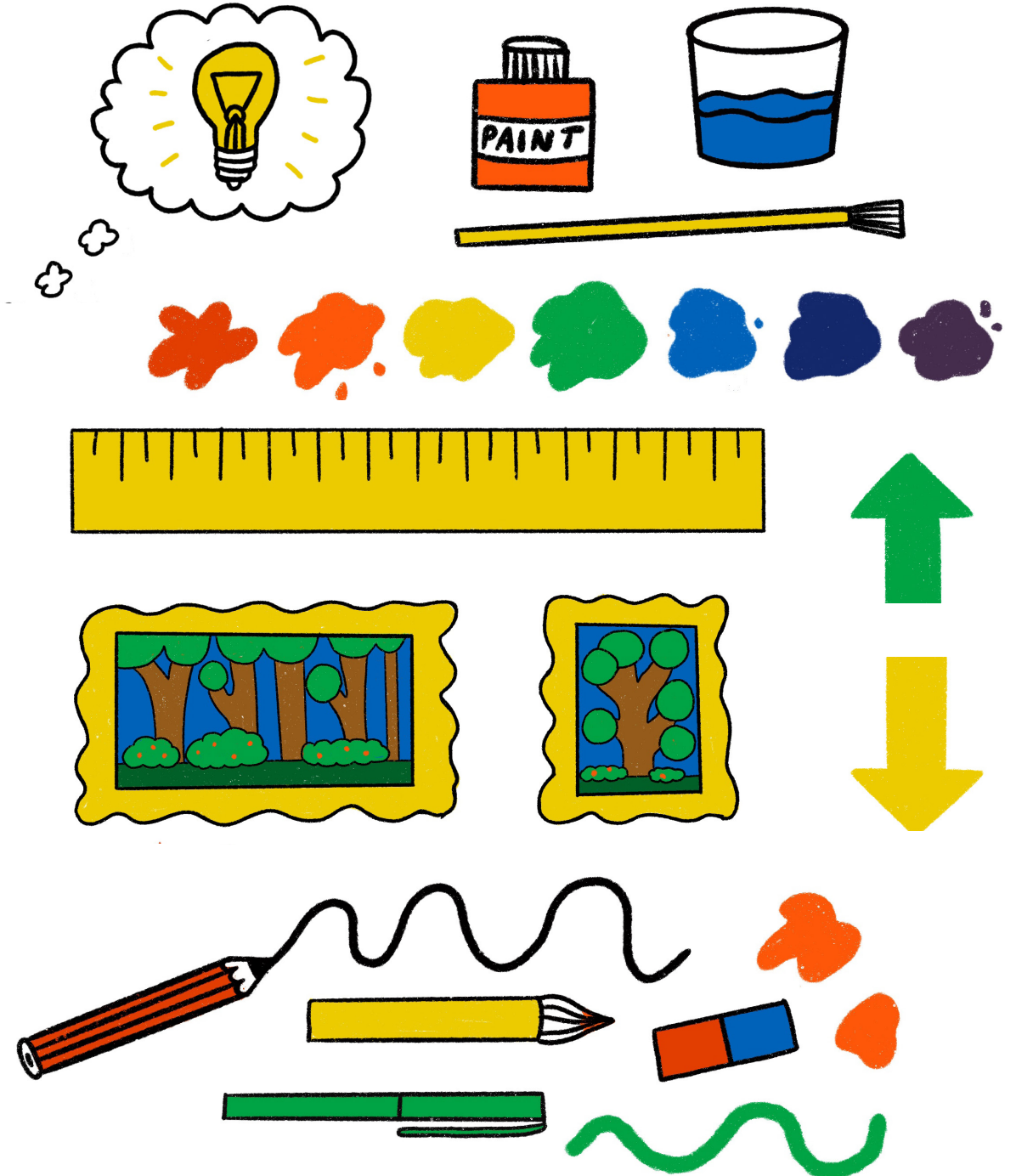
When describing people you can talk about:

- Physical features, age, gender.
- Ethnicity and skin colour: light skinned, dark skinned, olive skinned, black and white, etc.
- Identification: if it is a recognisable public person.
- Also describe what something would feel, sound, taste like. Be creative with other senses! This helps it become alive!
- Describe your imaginations, for example: we can imagine that the cat in the picture would feel comfortable on the soft cushion...
- You can use metaphors and analogies.

Content

Start with the core aspects:

- What stands out most to you?
- What is the subject of the piece?
- Sizes and scales: it might be more approachable to speak in relational sizes rather than exact measurements.
- Colour.
- Orientation: portrait or landscape.
- Use directions like right, left, up and down to describe the spatial relationships of elements.
- Medium and style.



General suggestions for formatting

Paragraphs and length of words

- Divide long texts into shorter subsections.
- Words longer than 9 characters will make people skip shorter important words, for example “not”, or numbers, for example “2” instead of “12”.
- Avoid so called zombie words! For example, rather than writing “representation”, you could say “this represents”.

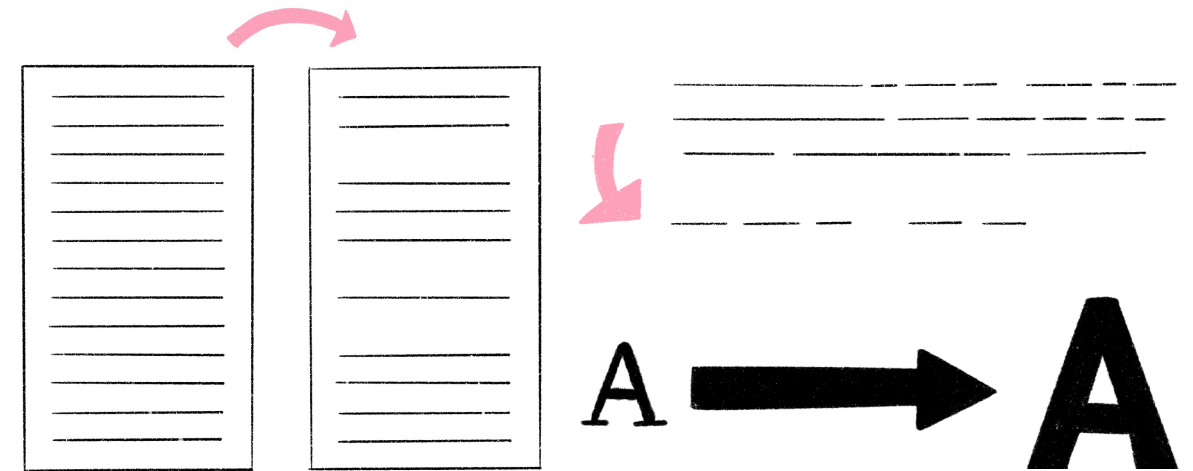
Click the [link](#) here for a fun and useful online guide to zombie words.

Sentences

- Articulate only 1 idea per sentence, and use 4-25 words per sentence. Of course some ideas might need more than 1 sentence.
- Vary the length of sentences.
- Don't start with “although” or “despite”, but with a straightforward proposition.
- Use an active voice, for examples “the artist painted” instead of “it was painted”.

For a great way to check on the readability of your sentences, click [here](#).

...And if you print any of these documents, if possible produce large prints and Easy Read documents as well!





About Turf

Founded in 2013 by Croydon locals, Turf Projects is Croydon's homegrown artist space and the first entirely artist-run contemporary art space in the borough.

A registered charity based in Croydon's Whitgift Shopping Centre, we put on free exhibitions, workshops, facilitate local artist collectives & run artist studios.

We try to make sure that everything we do is as accessible as possible to as many people as possible.

For more info or to get involved, visit turf-projects.com or email us at info@turf-projects.com



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