

Language Department
Audio-Description

Bernd Benecke
80300 München/Munich
Germany

Telephon: 0049-89-3806-6027

Telefax: 0049-89-3806-7636

E-Mail: bernd.benecke@brnet.de

www.br-online.de/br-

[intern/integration/index_blinde](http://www.br-online.de/br-intern/integration/index_blinde)

What Audio Description may do on accessibility to visual impaired people for TV, DVD, Cinema or Internet

- Contents:
- Audio-Description - what is it?
 - The History of this technique
 - An overview of Audio-Description in the EU today
 - Examples of what Audio-Description can do:
 - How visual impaired people can handle Audio-Description on DVD
 - Ways to get Audio-Description into cinema and into the internet

Bayerischer Rundfunk BR is the public radio and TV broadcaster in Bavaria, providing five radio and two TV channels. As part of the German ARD-network, BR also delivers programmes for TV channels like "Das Erste" (Germany's First Channel), "3Sat", "arte", "Kinderkanal" (children's programme) and "Phoenix".

BR offers Audio-Description since 1997.

To date, BR is the only TV station in Germany with a full-time Audio Description Editor. Bernd Benecke already started with audio description in 1989 with the first movie that was described in Germany. He worked as an audio description author and narrator for ZDF and Pro7 and, since 1997, for Bayerischer Rundfunk. He trains authors, revises audio descriptions and directs the narrating and sound mixing process.

Together with his blind colleague Elmar Dosch, he wrote the audio description guidelines "Wenn aus Bildern Worte werden" (When pictures become words).

Audio Description - What is it?

Audio description is the technique used for making theatre, movies and TV programmes accessible to blind and visually impaired people: An additional narration describes the action, body language, facial expressions, scenery and costumes. The description fits in between the dialogue and does not interfere with important sound and music effects.

The History of Audio Description

The technique was developed in the seventies in the United States. Today the Descriptive Video Service in Boston produces audio description for video and DVD and for TV channels like PBS and Turner Classic Movies. In the UK, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, produces descriptive narration for videos. All TV broadcasters in the UK must provide audio description for 4% of their programmes. The legislation foresees an increase to 10% by 2013. In France a mobile movie service is offered by the National Blind Association; described TV programmes are broadcast by arte, the bilingual Franco-German channel.

Audio Description in Germany

The first movie was described in 1989 and presented in a cinema (Hear no evil see no evil), followed by two similar projects in 1990 and 1992. The first film on TV was shown in 1993 by ZDF, followed by only one or two films a year till 1996.

(In 1995 Private broadcaster Pro7 offered a TV-movie with Audio-Description not on TV, but on three public presentations of the film.)

In 1997 **Bayerischer Rundfunk BR** was the first broadcaster in Germany to start a self-financed regular audio description programme.

Since then Bayerischer Rundfunk has changed more than 90 movies and TV-movies plus a TV series and some documentaries into "Hörfilme" (the name audio described programmes was given in Germany). In 2003 57 BR-made programmes will be aired on German television with a total of 108 hours.

BR has been presented with several awards for its work on audio description, for example with "Deutscher Hörfilmpreis" by the German Association for the Blind. We run training and continuing training seminars and courses for audio description authors in order to guarantee our high-quality standards. Bayerischer Rundfunk has also given help to other broadcasters, such as arte, NDR, WDR and MDR, in developing their own audio-described programmes.

The way Audio-Description is done at BR:

The Description is written by a team of three, one of them is blind. This follows the idea that two people, who watch the same scene will not always see the same things, so in the team they can control and complement one another. The blind member of the group will tell where he needs the description and how much and what kind of information is necessary.

This text will then be revised at BR by Bernd Benecke and his blind colleague Elmar Dosch. Finally it is recorded with the narrator and mixed into the film soundtrack.

A View on the technique:

In Germany and France AD uses the Two-Channel-Sound to transmit AD. The Stereo signal is separated into the two Mono-parts, left is the normal soundtrack, right a premix of the soundtrack with the Audio-Description. In the UK the AD is transmitted separately and mixed at the viewers home in the digital Set-Top-Box, which needs a special modul. Both ways have their pros and cons, we at BR prefer the premix which could also be used for DVD or cinema for example.

How visual impaired people can handle Audio-Description on DVD

DVD very useful for the visual impaired because there is enough space for the soundtrack with AD on an additional sound channel.

But Menu in the DVD is very unuseful for visual impaired people, so we include aspecial announcement at the beginning:

Example: Bibi Blocksberg

Other possibility: Spoken menu (Dancer in the dark)

Ways to get Audio-Description into cinema

Two ways are in use in Europe in the moment:

The UK uses the CSS system of DTS. The AD is on a special CD which is connected to the time code on the movie copy. The AD is transmitted via Infrared to head phones in the audience which could be used by the visual impaired. It is not mixed, which gives sometimes problems in adjusting the right sound level when the film has a very dynamic soundtrack (e.g. Lord of the rings)

In Germany a premix which is on a DVD is presented out of the normal sound system.

Problem: Everybody hears the AD, so this is only useful for special screenings.

Premiere is on the 16th of December in Munich with the brandnew children movie "Sams in Gefahr" (The slurb in danger). The premix can be used later for DVD and TV.