

## 4.7.10: Accessibility Matters

### Learning Objectives

- Discuss the importance of making your media accessible to the widest audience possible
- Identify techniques and tools to make visual media more accessible to your audience

When giving a presentation or writing an email you are always trying to convey a specific message to your audience; not just a portion of your audience—all of your audience. Your audience will consist of individuals who might have a variety of needs and abilities. The best way to reach the widest audience possible is by thinking inclusively and creating accessible visual media.

Accessibility means different things to different people, and an effective communicator strives to create documents and presentations that are usable by people with the widest possible range of abilities, operating within the widest possible range of situations. This means making things accessible to all people (whether they have a disability or not).

To be inclusive of all audiences, it is important to keep in mind any factors that could pose as a barrier to understanding the message. Individuals in your audience may have auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech, or visual disabilities or special needs that could adversely impact their comprehension of a message (we will discuss disabilities in Module 13: Social Diversity in the Workplace). Accessibility also benefits people *without* disabilities, for example:

- Older people with changing abilities due to aging
- People with “temporary disabilities” such as a broken leg or lost glasses
- People with “situational limitations” such as trying to read in bright sunlight, external noise such as music or a continuous car alarm, or in an environment where they cannot listen to audio

### Guidelines for Making Media Accessible

The first step to making your media accessible is to assess its **purpose** or **value** to your presentation or written message.

Consider the following questions:

1. Does your image or video serve a **functional** purpose? In other words, is it conveying non-text content to the audience? If so, you should:
  - Provide a text alternative that serves the equivalent purpose of the non-text material
  - Not use color as the only visual means of conveying information
2. Does your image serve more of a **decorative** purpose? In other words, is it primarily a design element that does not convey content? If so, you should avoid unnecessary text descriptions.

When putting a presentation together consider what your content page would look like if the images didn’t load or someone was too far away to see specific details. One way to reduce losing information or alienating an audience member is to write alternative text for each image, which would work as a replacement and provide the same service as the image. For guidelines on writing alternative text, visit this link on Images from the Accessibility Toolkit.

Another thing to consider when using visual media is what your images would look like if they displayed only in black and white. Would any necessary context or content be lost if the color was “turned off”? For example, have you ever used a black and white laser printer to print a web page? Many details of the images or text are easily lost, and that can affect how your reader interprets your data and whether they can understand the point you are trying to make. Images should not rely on color to convey information, so you must design that PowerPoint slide or image page to work in black and white, otherwise you’ll lose your audience if they can’t view it in color. If the point you are making depends on color to be understood, you may need to edit your image or formatting so that concepts presented are not lost to those who are color blind or who require high contrast between colors. Your text should also not rely solely on color to make distinctions—use bold, italics, underline or a different font to highlight the important information.

### Tools for Accessibility

Including visual media in your presentations, emails, or professional training materials can help engage the audience and help them understand the message more efficiently. Yet visual media, if not presented in conjunction with accessibility techniques and tools, can do the exact opposite and can instead alienate audience members with visual, hearing, or cognitive disabilities. Visual media,

such as graphs, charts, photographs, videos, or instructional diagrams, that do not take the needs of impaired individuals into consideration, might deny users with disabilities the opportunity to really understand and feel what you're saying.

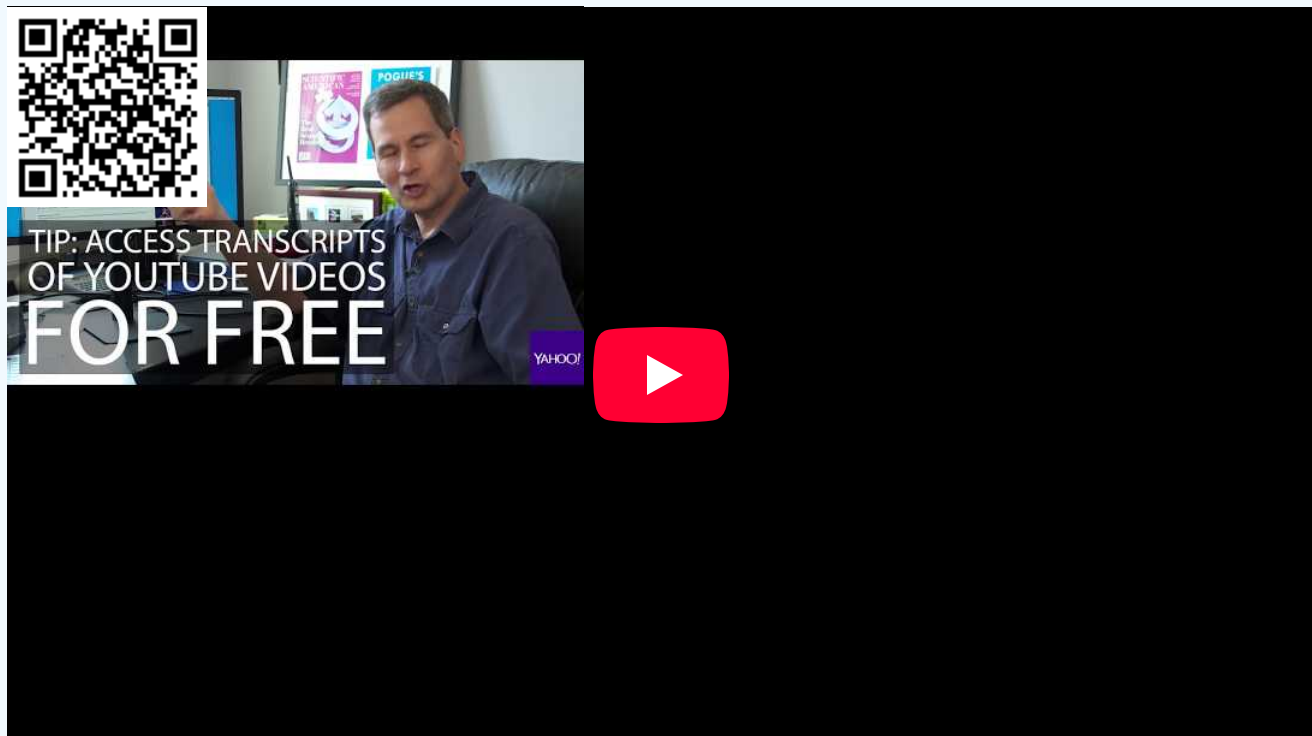
Screen readers, refreshable Braille displays and closed captioning tools are among the digital tools out there today that assist those with disabilities. When choosing visual media, a good communicator should keep in mind how their materials will be understood by people with disabilities.

### Images, Tables, Charts and Alt-Text

Images, tables and charts can be particularly challenging for sight-impaired audience members. A screen reader is a tool that will read the alt-text included with any visual media. A downside is that a screen reader can only read the verbiage provided, it cannot interpret the visual media on its own. Charts are notorious for having very limited alt-text descriptors. In the video example below the screen reader does not see an X-axis or a Y-axis. The screen reader does not recognize the numbers or data represented in a graph if they're not included as text. It will not recognize trends or provide any kind analysis. Captioning the chart can help get to the underlying point, but it certainly doesn't allow the sight-impaired audience member to study the data and arrive at a conclusion.

#### ✓ Watch It

Watch this video to experience a screen reader ineffectively describing charts and graphs that have not been made accessible. Unfortunately, this is a typical experience for a screen reader user:



### Video

Often, our hearing impaired audience members need additional assistance in comprehending what's going on in a video. Voice-over narration and music are among the things that convey information and feeling to a hearing audience member but will go undetected by the hearing impaired.

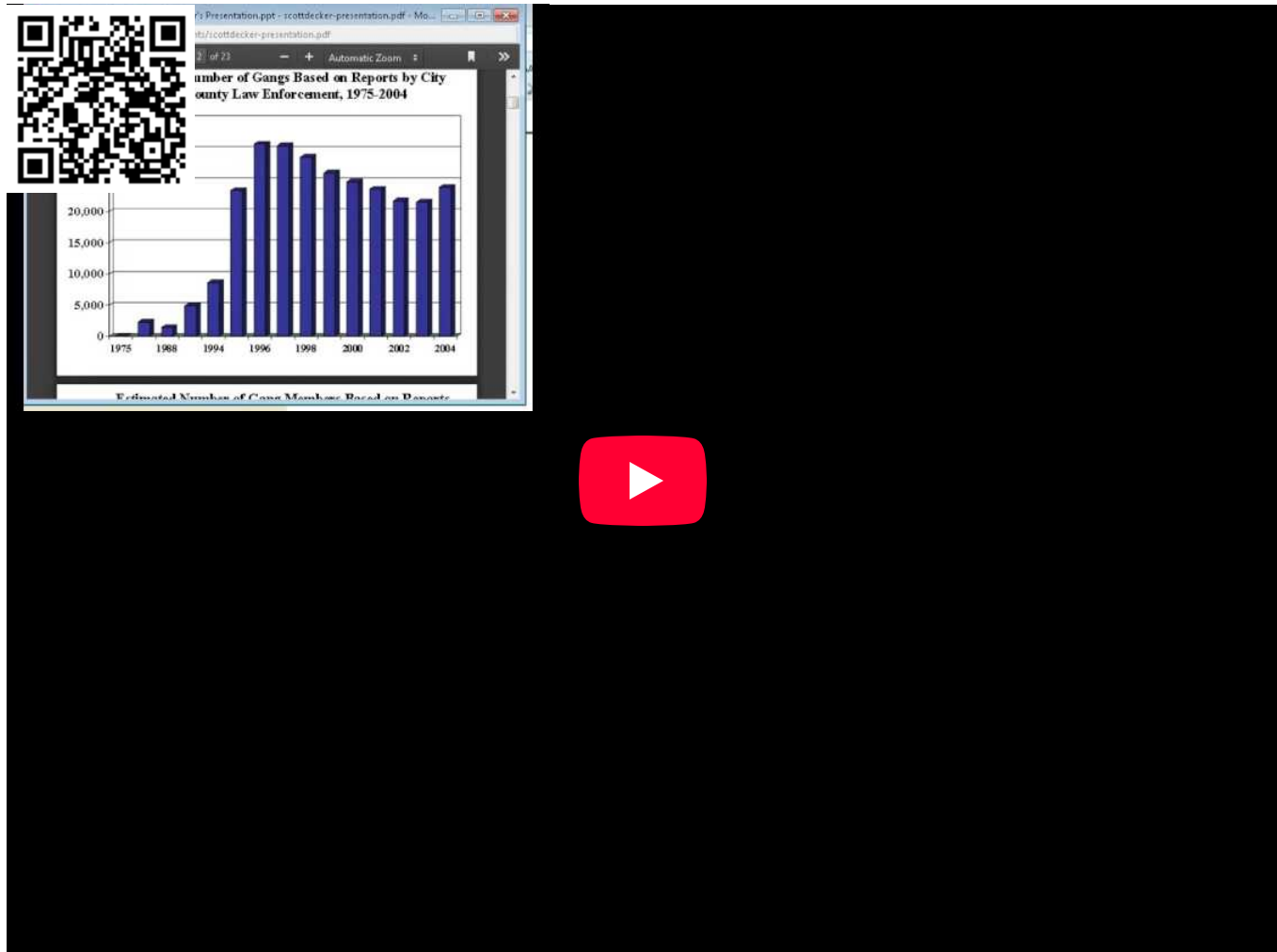
Captioning is the first and most obvious way a communicator can make sure a hearing impaired audience member understands a video. It can also benefit a non-native speaker, a viewer who has trouble understanding the dialect or accent of a speaker, or even just a viewer watching the video in a noisy environment.

There are vendors that provide video captioning services. The National Association of the Deaf [provides a comprehensive list](#) of vendors who will caption videos. However, a communicator with video editing software and a little bit of savvy can do it on their own. Some captioning standards to keep in mind:

- Captioning should not exceed three lines of text at a time
- Captioning should be synchronized with the spoken word—no faster or slower
- Captions should not cover up text or other important information on the video
- Captions should identify who is speaking when multiple speakers are present (as in an interview)
- Captions should use a sans-serif font such as Arial or Calibri
- Non-speech sounds should be indicated with brackets, like [applause]

Transcripts of videos can also provide hearing-impaired audience members with more accessible information from your video. One tool for creating a quick transcript of your video is to upload your video to YouTube and use its auto-generated subtitles. See the following video for a tutorial on how to use this free feature.

✓ Watch It



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