

◀ See a Voice ▶

ASSISTED PERFORMANCES
CUSTOMER CARE GUIDE

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ASSISTED PERFORMANCES CUSTOMER CARE GUIDE CONTENTS

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WHAT ARE ASSISTED PERFORMANCES?

This venue is committed to providing assisted performances to audiences with sensory impairment by means of AUDIO DESCRIPTION for the visually impaired, and CAPTIONING for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

STAFF AWARENESS

The most important element in providing assisted performances is the attitude of staff towards all customers regardless of their disability.

Always ask someone if they need assistance whatever their disability; everyone is different so may require different assistance or none at all.

Awareness of different kinds of disability will help you to give better customer service to all members of your audience.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Audio description in theatre is a live verbal commentary providing information on the visual elements of a production as it unfolds. From sets, props and costumes, to actors' facial expressions and movements across the stage, the description is delivered during the quieter moments in a performance. It gives only essential information that a VI person might miss. The description is received through an infra red system via a headset.

Pre show notes:

A CD is sent out to customers in advance of the performance containing detailed information about the venue's access, and information about the performance such as set, costumes, props and characters. These notes are also broadcast live fifteen minutes before the performance, accommodating any changes that may have taken place during the course of the run eg. cast changes.

Accessible formats:

Your venue may have on offer large print and Braille cast lists. They will also produce season brochures in an audio format.

Touch tours:

Your venue may precede an audio described performance with a touch tour. This would usually take place about an hour before the performance and last approximately half an hour. Touch tours give customers a chance to get up on stage and experience the set, props and costumes and sometimes to meet the cast.

CAPTIONING

Captioning is similar to television subtitling and gives deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people access to live performances. Captioning converts the spoken word into text, which is displayed on a caption unit, or units, situated on or next to the stage.

The actors' words appear on the unit(s) at the same time as they are spoken or sung. Also included in the captioning is the speaker's name, music, sound effects and any offstage noises. The captioner delivers the script live to the unit(s) during the performance.

Captioned performances have been found to also benefit foreign visitors and students who are studying the play or learning to speak English.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AWARENESS

A visual impairment is generally defined as an eyesight impairment that cannot be corrected by wearing glasses, contact lenses or by surgery.

There are nearly two million blind and partially sighted people in the UK. Only 4% of VI people see nothing at all. Only 3% of VI people can read Braille.

Helping a VI customer:

- When you approach a blind or partially sighted customer remember they probably won't be aware of your approach.
- Say hello and who you are, and ask if they need help. At this point you could touch them lightly on the arm to indicate you are addressing them.
- Offer your arm for the VI customer to grip just above the elbow.
- When the journey is over make sure the VI customer knows where they are, the direction they are facing and where to go next.
- When you leave, say that you are going.

DEAF, DEAFENED AND HARD OF HEARING AWARENESS

There are 9 million deaf, deafened or hard of hearing people in Britain; that is 1 in 7 of us. Of these only 50-70,000 are British Sign Language users.

Almost all deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people rely on lip reading to some extent. Some combine signs from BSL with English in order to communicate. A large majority of deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people would benefit from captioning.

Communicating with deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers:

- Don't assume that all deaf people you meet use sign language or have no hearing at all.
- Face the customer, 3-6 feet away and make sure your face is well lit.
- Make sure the customer is looking at you before you start.
- Do not shout as this will distort your lip patterns and make it difficult to lip read.
- Phrases are easier to read than unconnected single words; speak as simply and clearly as possible.
- Repeat words as necessary, but remember that sometimes it is better to change a word as some are harder to lip read.
- Write things down if you need to clarify anything.
- Give the customer time to absorb what you have said.
- Keep your head still, your hands away from your face and stop speaking if you turn away.
- Do not eat whilst you are speaking.
- Use gestures to help you communicate more clearly.
- **Do not give up!**

What if I do not understand the customer?

- Let the customer know.
- Ask them to repeat or rephrase.
- Use finger spelling (check that the customer knows the manual alphabet first).
- Ask them to write down or indicate what they want.
- Do not pretend you have understood when you haven't.

ASSISTANCE DOGS

Be clear about your theatre's policy on assistance dogs at the time of booking and on the day of the performance.

Assistance dogs improve access for people in public places which might not otherwise be accessible to them, such as supermarkets, restaurants, theatres and public transport.

Assistance dogs covered by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) are generally provided by one of the following organisations:

- Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People.
- Canine Partners.
- Support Dogs for Disabled People.
- Dogs for the Disabled.

If you use the term "guide dog", you may be excluding other assistance dogs, so use the universal term "assistance dogs".

Assistance Dog Etiquette

| DON'T | DO |
|--|--|
| Touch, talk, feed or otherwise distract the dog while he is wearing his harness. | Allow the dog to concentrate and perform for the safety of his handler. |
| Treat the dog as a pet. | Give him the respect of a working dog. |
| Give the dog commands. | Allow the handler to give commands and ask if the handler needs your assistance. |
| Feed the dog. | Respect the owner's need to give the dog a balanced diet and maintain good habits. |
| | Have water bowls available for dogs. |

BOOKING TICKETS: AUDIO DESCRIBED PERFORMANCES

Box Office staff need to know what an audio described performance is, who will benefit, and when these performances are scheduled.

Customers who want to book seats for a production on the same day as the assisted performance should be advised of this when they call the Box Office, as they may prefer to book for a different day.

Customers using the audio description should be given appropriate seating in areas of the auditorium which have a clear reception for the headsets. These bookings should be coded on the box office system for easy identification.

Booking procedure for VI customers:

- If a touch tour is scheduled advise the customer and record if they want to attend. Tell them where within the venue they should assemble for the touch tour and at what time they will need to arrive. Touch tours normally happen an hour to an hour and a half before the show.
- Ask the VI customer if they would like to use a headset to hear the audio describer. This information to be recorded and made available to front of house staff in advance of the performance.
- Ask the customer if they are bringing an assistance dog and whether they would like the dog to be taken care of by ushers, or if they would prefer to take the dog in to the auditorium. Again ensure front of house staff know of this in advance of the performance.
- Advise the customer if there will be bright lights, or loud noises during the performance.
- If available, ask the audience member if they would like a pre-show CD sent to them in advance of the performance. This should also contain directions to the venue and notes on access. Record the details and pass these to the nominated member of staff to arrange for dispatch.
- Tell the customer where at the theatre the headsets and accessible cast lists/programmes will be available from. Alternatively post the accessible materials in advance to allow the customer time to read them.
- Advise the customer what time the pre-show notes start, normally 15-20 minutes before the performance, what time the show starts, and if known when the interval will be and how long it will last and what time the show will end.

BOOKING TICKETS: CAPTIONED PERFORMANCES

Box Office staff need to know what a captioned performance is, who will benefit, and when these performances are scheduled.

Customers who want to book seats for a production on the same day as the assisted performance should be advised of this when they call the Box Office, as they may prefer to book for a different day.

Customers using the captions should be given appropriate seating in areas of the auditorium set aside for this purpose, which have a clear view of the caption unit(s) and good reception for those who have requested to use the Sennheiser infra red hearing system. These bookings should be coded on the box office system for easy identification.

The seats for a captioned performance and a sign language interpreted (BSL) performance are not in the same area in the auditorium. Seats for a sign interpreted performance are closer to the stage so that deaf customers can see the interpreter clearly.

Captioned seats are further away from the stage, usually mid-stalls or at the front of the dress circle, to allow for minimal head movement between captions and stage. Unlike surtitles for foreign opera, which are above the stage and are for hearing people, the caption unit(s) should be positioned so that deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers can enjoy the production in comfort.

Booking procedure for deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers:

- Ask the customer whether they need a headset to enhance sound quality. This information should be recorded and made available to front of house staff in advance of the captioned performance as well as non-captioned performances. Tell the customer where they need to collect the headsets.
- If there are any loud noises in the production, make sure you tell the customer in case they want to adjust their hearing aids before the show.
- Ask the customer if they are bringing an assistance dog and whether they would like the ushers to look after it or would prefer to take it into the auditorium. This will, of course, depend on your venue's policy on assistance dogs. Again ensure that front of house staff know about this in advance.
- If available, ask customers if they would like to receive a synopsis of the play and/or directions to the theatre.
- Advise customers to arrive in good time so that they can check their seats and ensure they can see the caption unit(s) clearly.

- Let customers know what time the show starts, and if known when the interval will be, how long it will last and what time the show will end.
- Promote the next captioned performance so that deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers can book their tickets.

How to make booking tickets for captioned performances easier:

Details of all of the booking methods the venue offers for accessible performances should be included in your theatre brochure, on publicity materials, and on your website. There are a number of ways to improve booking facilities for deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers at your theatre.

Booking by phone without Type talk:

- Some deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people can use the phone in the usual way, perhaps via an amplifier on their handset.

Booking by phone with Type talk:

- Type talk is a telephone relay service which enables deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people who have a textphone (minicom) to communicate with hearing people via an operator who relays calls between the two parties.
- To use this service to contact your theatre, a deaf textphone user dials **18001** followed by your full telephone number. Once the call is answered by someone in your box office, a type talk operator will join the line to relay the call. Once connected, the textphone user types a message from their keyboard and the operator reads it word for word to your box office staff. The staff member then speaks their reply and the type talk operator types exactly what is said so that the deaf customer can read the conversation on their textphone display panel.
- In some cases, the deaf customer may speak their reply and the type talk operator will type your response.
- If a hearing person wishes to call a textphone user via type talk the sequence above happens in reverse. They should dial **18002** followed by the full telephone number of the customer they are trying to contact. Once the call is answered by the textphone user, an operator will join the line to relay the call.
- Box office staff should be familiar with the service and know how to use it.

Booking by textphone:

- If you have a textphone (minicom) always provide a textphone number so that deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers who have a textphone can contact you directly.
- Make sure that the Box Office textphone is switched on, in good working order, and that Box Office staff have been trained how to use it.

Booking by fax:

- Many deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers find sending a fax a convenient way of communicating.
- There may be a specific booking form so that you get all the information you need about each customer's requirements.

Booking online:

- If hearing customers can book tickets for your performances online, you should make sure that deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers can too, with any appropriate discount and in the seating area held back for caption users.
- An interactive seating plan is a useful tool to allow deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers to choose where they would like to sit.

Booking by email:

- It's always helpful to provide an email address for the Box Office, or whoever is responsible for booking tickets for accessible performances.

Booking by SMS:

- Short Messaging Service (SMS) is increasingly used by deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers so you could have a dedicated mobile phone in the Box Office for this purpose.

FRONT OF HOUSE: AUDIO DESCRIBED PERFORMANCES

Headsets for the infra red system:

Make sure that headsets are clean, that the batteries are fully charged and have been tested before the performance.

FRONT OF HOUSE

- If there is a touch tour, agree with the audio describer(s) and stage manager, the schedule for this.
- Designate at least one usher to meet customers on arrival, or have someone at the door to direct customers to where headsets need to be collected.
- Introduce yourself and check how the customer wishes to be guided to their seat or the stage, if a touch tour is on offer.
- Ensure that a designated usher checks to see all customers headsets are working during the pre-show notes. Advise customers having problems with headsets to attract the usher's attention to swap the headset if necessary.
- Ushers need to be aware of how many assistance dogs are expected and who will look after the ones staying outside the auditorium. Have bowls of water available for the dogs.
- Ask customers if they require refreshments during the interval and offer to help get these for them, as often it is extremely busy and difficult for VI customers to negotiate a crowded environment.
- If you are serving a customer during the interval, ensure you state where you are placing their food and drink, and that it is within easy reach.
- After the performance ensure that ushers are available to guide customers out of the venue or, if there is time permitting, help customers to wave down a taxi.

FRONT OF HOUSE: CAPTIONED PERFORMANCES

FRONT OF HOUSE

- Please display posters at every captioned show so that everyone knows the production is being captioned for customers who are deaf, deafened and hard of hearing.
- Inform deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers if there are any loud noises in the production in case they want to adjust their hearing aids before the show.
- Make sure the signage around the theatre and at the box office is clear so that people know what facilities you have in place. This will save customers having to ask ushers or staff.
- Clearly state how long the interval will be either at the box office, perhaps by using a false clock, or ask the captioner to put it on the caption unit(s). This is because customers may not be able to hear the bell alerting the audience to go back into the auditorium. You can also dim/flash the lights to let everyone know it's time to go in, without drawing attention to the deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers.
- If there are any announcements to be made, please inform the captioner so that they can put it on the caption unit(s).
- Make it clear that if a deaf customer is not happy with their seat and can't see the caption unit(s) clearly, they should inform one of the ushers before the show starts, or at the interval, to see if it is possible to change seats. This is why there is a message on the caption unit(s) before the show so that deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers can check if they can see the unit(s) properly.
- Let the audience know that you value their opinions, and encourage them to complete a feedback form and return it to a member of the front of house staff.

BAR

- Encourage deaf, deafened and hard of hearing customers to pre-order their drinks to save time at the interval, or have pen and paper ready at the bar so that customers can write down what they wish to order.
- If possible, try to make sure that the price display at the till is visible so customers can see how much the drinks cost.
- Some bars can be quite dark and noisy. Make sure you stand where there is good light. Always look at the customer when serving; don't look away or turn your back to them when speaking.
- Use hand signals or gestures to point to the till or to indicate the total price they need to pay.

USEFUL INFORMATION

INFRA RED HEARING SYSTEM - INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

This type of headset is designed to be used by VI customers who wish to listen to audio description and also by deafened or hard of hearing customers without a hearing aid. If a deaf customer has a hearing aid, they will need to take it out before using this system.

If your venue has an induction loop in the auditorium, this should be advertised in publicity materials and in the front of house. Deaf customers should be alerted to put their hearing aid switch to the "T" position.

Make sure that the headsets are clean and the batteries fully charged before each performance.

The headset is switched on by turning the thumb wheel volume control, on the left of the base of the headset, clockwise. A small hole in front of the wheel shows the volume level: 0 = off / 6 = maximum.

There is a small switch on the right of the base of the headset. It has 3 positions:

1. Marked I - for a customer with hearing difficulties, the switch should be set to the centre position.
2. Marked II - for a customer to listen to audio description, the switch should be set to the right hand position.
3. If the headset is for a customer with hearing difficulties who also wants to listen to the audio description, set the switch to the left-hand position, marked with what looks like an 8 lying on its side.

After setting the switch to the correct position, check the headset by turning it on, and listening to the earphones. If you are doing this outside the auditorium, you will hear a hissing sound, which proves the battery is charged and the headset is working. If you hear nothing, put the headset to one side so that it can be reported as faulty. Be aware that the audio described notes start approximately fifteen minutes before the show.

The headset is worn around the neck like a necklace, with the "Sennheiser" logo facing the stage. This side receives the sound signals, so it must not be obscured by clothing or other obstacles.

Once in use the customer should now be able to hear in the earphones the audio description or the audience, depending on what they are using the headset for. If they can't they should ask an usher to check the headset as it may be incorrectly set, or faulty.

To conserve battery power, ask customers to turn the headset off in the interval, and back on for Act II.

After the show headsets should be returned to the ushers, who should check that they are turned off.

BRITISH
FINGERSPELLING
ALPHABET
RIGHT-HANDED VERSION



BRITISH
FINGERSPELLING
ALPHABET
LEFT-HANDED VERSION

