## **Running a W-ICAD session: notes for facilitators**

Alison F. Eardley1, Lindsay Bywood1, Hannah Thompson2, Vanessa E. Jones3 and Deborah Husbands1  
  
1School of Social Sciences, University of Westminster, London, UK  
2Department of Languages, Literature and Cultures, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK  
3 National Portrait Gallery, Washington DC, USA

This document will give you the basic information you need to run a W-ICAD session. These are approximately 2 hours long. Depending on the objects that you are using, you may be able to describe one object in that time, or you may be able to describe multiple objects.

This document contains instructions for the facilitator, with a suggested timetable. The instructions are given in a bulleted form in the first part of this document. In the second part of this document, the instructions are written out as a full script. In the final section, there are suggested timetables. For guidance on writing up the audio description produced from these conversations, please see the W-ICAD website: <https://wicad.westminster.ac.uk/>

Please note: the timings are approximate for if you are doing one item/room. If you are doing multiple items, then you will repeat Q&S, context and follow-up questions for each item (see the end of the document).

### Part 1: Instructions for co-creators (bullet version)

(15 minutes before start) – arrival and coffee

#### **00:00 START; introduction to the day; introduction of all the participants (15 mins)**

* Welcome to the W-ICAD workshop!
* Introductions and visual descriptions; brief visual description of the room
* Background to WICAD model
* Interested in your experience as a group, based on describing through conversation
* Why this is different to standard AD

Traditional AD is sighted people describing for blind people  
BUT AD is good for sighted people AND blind people   
(vision is not as effective as we assume)  
Problem with the idea of vision being ‘objective’

* No ‘right’ way to experience anything
* We all bring our opinions, our memories, our perspectives, our imaginations.
* That is what we are interested in!

**So, your unique experience as a group is what is important, because you will bring your own perspectives and ideas, and life experience**

* What we will ask you (co-creators) to do:
* Have a conversation and describe the object/artwork/space
* Three sessions: Questions and Suggestions; Context, Some additional questions
* We will record the conversation (so we can create AD from it)

#### **00:15 Instructions before you (co-creators) start Questions and Suggestions session (5 mins)**

* Key points:
  + Describing based on your own personal experiences
  + Will start with X person (person who is partially blind), describe your first impressions
  + Then either X person can ask questions, or the group can ask X person questions
  + You can then each describe your first impressions, and then think about what you notice next or what questions come out of what is being discussed
* Things to keep in mind:
  + Describe colour beyond simple colour terms (compare it to something in a different sense e.g. twilight blue; fiery red colour; terracotta orange)
  + As well as description, share your thoughts, feelings, any memories that come to mind, suggestions about what things might mean
  + Try to describe size in relation to an object or thing in the real world
  + Try to use all of your senses when you are describing, think about what you are describing in relation to smell, touch, sound, taste, movement, or other physical sensations
* Remember:
  + There is no right or wrong way to experience (and therefore to describe)
  + It is okay to have different opinions
  + Your personal experiences, memories, ideas, suggestions can enrich the experience for others

#### **00:20 Questions and Suggestions (50 mins)**

**IMPORTANT NOTES FOR FACILITATORS for Q&S**

* + - There are some example prompts in the script [here](#_00:15_–_Introduction).
    - You CAN repeat questions to try to dig for more description.
    - You SHOULD try to make sure they are describing, and not just ‘naming’.
    - IF something is easily recognisable through vision, make sure that it is named early for blind and partially blind members (who may not recognise it).
    - If nobody in the group recognises it, try to encourage them to explore through description (do not tell them before the context section).
    - If your two blind participants do not have perceptual access to what is being described (e.g. no or limited usable vision) then start drawing in the narrative a little earlier, so they can respond to that, in addition to the description.
    - Do NOT ask people who have no usable vision to visually describe something. Instead, if they are not already asking questions of the group, prompt them by asking if there is any information they would like to know about the item, or if they have any questions
    - If it is possible to handle the primary item that is being described, then start with the totally blind participant.
    - If you have additional interpretation elements like touch, sound, smell in relation to what is being described, you can (should) ask participants to experience those AND describe them.

#### **01:10 Context session (15 mins) Information for facilitator**

* Create written notes about the item in advance. Make sure it includes any factual information you want to share, and a narrative around what is being described. This context/background information should be the types of things you would normally share with visitors to help them to engage with the item.
* Read out the information (or just talk, if you know it well enough).
* A curator can come in to do this session, if that works for you.

[Suggest a comfort break of 10 mins here]

**01:35 Follow-up questions (25 mins)**  
**Information for facilitator**

* This session enables you to make sure you have EVERYTHING you need to be able to create the description from the transcript. See [here](#_01:35_–_Follow-up) for some example questions. Remember you can ask the same question again, if they are struggling to answer it (which is common, description is hard). If they haven’t already, then ask them to:
  + Draw on other senses to describe (sound, smell, taste, movement etc.)
  + Compare size to physical objects
  + Talk about any emotional response
  + Think about how it is made/finished – does it tell you anything (e.g. functional, or very carefully finished etc/ brush strokes for art etc.)
  + What it might mean to them/make them think of
  + Any memories that come to mind
  + How they would structure the AD (where would they start, what might come next)
  + Make sure things you want described have been discussed
  + Make sure they have given detailed descriptions

#### **02.00 Wrap up and finish**

## Part 2: Example ‘script’ for facilitators with notes

(15 minutes before start) – arrival and coffee

#### **00:00 Start**

Okay, so let’s get on to the workshop. As you know, today is about exploring an artwork/object(s) as a small group, and about describing it to each other. We just want to make a few key points.

Firstly, we are really interested in how you are experiencing the object(s), through the information that is available to you. It doesn’t matter if you have little or no experience of museums or museum collections, or if you have come with a lot of experience or knowledge.

Audio descriptions/verbal descriptions have typically described visual information for people who are blind or partially blind, to provide access to museum collections that are displayed visually. However, today, we are using audio description to describe the experience, which can be thoughts, perceptual experiences, emotions, physical movement – anything that goes into how you as individuals, or together as a group, explore and experience the object(s)/artwork.

Museums recognise that each person will bring their own experiences and interpretations to artworks/objects/museum collections, and that there is never one way of experiencing. As such, there is never one ‘right’ way to experience anything. We all have different perceptions, memories, histories and personalities and that can mean that we can find new ways of experiencing and understanding from listening to each other.

The choices that people make when they describe an object, and the information they chose to include is always about opinion.

**ART:** This means that even the artist can’t say how a work of art ‘should’ be experienced, although they can provide a perspective on the ways in which it can be described or experience.

**OBJECT:** This means that even the museum professionals can’t say how an object ‘should’ be experienced, or know everything there is to know about that object. They can only provide their perspective on the ways in which it can be described or experienced.

**So, your unique experience as a group is what is important, because you will bring your own perspectives and ideas, and life experience.**

So, what we are going to do is to ask you to describe an artwork/object(s). We will ask you to start describing without any background information about what it is. This is because sometimes, knowing information about a thing can change the way in which we experience it or describe it. This can be helpful or unhelpful. Sometimes, it means we experience something differently because we use that background understanding to make assumptions about something. It can also become harder to describe because we assume that other people will understand something in the same way we do because they have the same information we have. So, for this process, we will ask you to explore and describe, and then we will give you some of the background information, and we will ask you when you think we should work that information into the final description. Whatever and however you decide to describe the item/object we give/show you, it will be a description by blind, partially blind and sighted people, FOR blind, partially blind, and sighted people.

We are going to get you to explore X artworks/objects/rooms today.

We will record the conversation, so we don’t have to try to remember. The recording will only be used to generate the description and be deleted afterwards. OR We are going to be taking detailed notes on the conversation, so that we can capture your words to be used in the final description.

ONE OBJECT/ARTWORK:

There will be three sessions. The first we call Questions and Suggestions (to acknowledge there are no right or wrong answers). You will explore the object/artwork together, discussing it in a relaxed and conversational way. We will give you some background information on the object/artwork. Then we will ask you a few more questions, just to make sure we have all of the information we need to put it together into a description.

MORE THAN ONE OBJECT/ARTWORK:

You are going to explore 2/3 objects today. For each object, there will be three mini sessions. The first is called Questions and Suggestions session (to acknowledge there are no right or wrong answers), you will explore the object/artwork together, discussing it in a relaxed and conversational way. We will give you some background information on the object/artwork. Then we will ask you a few more questions, just to make sure we have all of the information we need to put it together into a description. We will repeat that for each object/artwork.

#### **00:15 – Introduction to Questions and Suggestions**

In this first session, which is called Questions and Suggestions, we would like [name of partially blind participant] to start describing your experience of the object/artwork. The best place to start is what first grabbed your attention. Describe your experience, and then either you can ask questions, or the group can ask you questions, or it can be a bit of both! At this point, other members of the group might want to add in suggestions, opinions, or their own descriptions about what they are experiencing.

**(NOTE to facilitator: IF the artwork/object is likely to be immediately recognisable for most people, you should mention what the object/artwork is (for artwork, title and painter) AFTER the group have described their first impressions. This can be done when there is a pause in the conversation.)**

After you have all explored your first experiences and thoughts or questions, you will then be able to repeat this question and suggestion process as you consider the artwork/object. Describe where your attention is drawn next. In your conversations, you can also think about whether you have any connection to it.

* It might be emotional
* It might remind you of something,
* or perhaps you might feel quite disconnected from it.

Remember, there is no one right way to explore the object/artwork, just follow the path that grabs your attention, and describe and discuss it, and don’t worry about trying to discuss all possible details. As a group, you might disagree, and that’s OK.

There are some things we would like you to think about as you describe:

* **What does it sound like/smell like/feel like?** If it is possible to get direct sensory experience beyond the visual.
* **How you might describe things by drawing on ideas from other senses.** So, for example, if you are describing a colour, try to include either an object (so, for example, terracotta orange instead of browny-orange), or perhaps something that you might be able to feel (like twilight blue; a soft peach-coloured skin). Or can you imagine dampness in sea mist, or could you imagine the smell of a forest, if there are many trees close together. Is there any movement in the scene that could be described (or is there a stillness)?
* **Can you describe size by comparing it to a physical object?** so saying something is like the palm of a hand, or saying something is as tall as two adults.
* **Do you experience any emotions with the object? Or do you perceive any emotions in it** (NOTE: more relevant for some things than others). If people disagree, that is totally fine; different ideas can be helpful for listeners.
* **Does the way it has been made communicate anything?**
* **Can you interpret any meaning from it?**
* **Can you imagine the person who made it?** (NOTE: Only relevant for some things)
* **IF IN GALLERY:** What space is it in? Does that add anything to what we might think about the object/artwork?
* **Do any personal memories come to mind**? As a response to what you are experiencing, or in response to things that the other group members have said, thought or felt about the object/artwork?

#### **01:05 – COMFORT BREAK (if needed)**

#### **01:15 - Context – discussion with the curator**

**(NOTE: EITHER discussion with curator OR read out a pre-prepared summary of information about the object/artwork; Doesn’t have to be really long, feel free to use information from your website/on the label/ in a standard audio guide)**

I am now going to give you a little bit of background or context about the object/artwork. We have this written down so don’t worry about remembering it all, just enjoy listening, and do feel free to ask questions at any point.

(Can ask if they have questions, or if what they think, or any thoughts that come to mind after hearing the background information)

#### **01:35 – Follow-up questions**

In this session, we are going to ask you for some further thoughts so that we have all the information we need to put together the audio description.

**NOTE TO FACILITATORS: GOALS for this session are to**

* Know how the co-creators would structure the description, what they would start with, what would come next; etc. (what is the narrative journey)
* Make sure that you have the personal ‘subjective’ memories/meanings/interpretations.
* Makes sure that you have multisensory descriptions (in particular in relation to colour); and some understanding of size.
* Find out when the co-creators would prefer the context to be introduced into the audio description.
* Make sure all of the bits you would like described have been described! (DON’T be afraid to ask the same question more than once, if they are struggling to describe something).

We are going to use all the notes that we made in the earlier session, but we also have some questions we would like you to think about. Some of these questions will ask you to think about various aspects in a little more detail. Some of the other questions we will have covered well in the first session, so we can go through those ones quickly, but we will ask them just in case any more ideas or thoughts come to mind.

**FOR FACILITATORS: Some example questions are**

* + We know what first grabbed [PB person’s name]’s attention but for the rest of you, was it the same thing, something different?
  + Where does your attention want to go next? What is the journey you would take through the object/artwork? Which bits would you describe in which order?
  + Did you have any thoughts about the object/artwork?   
    Things it reminds you of? Any thoughts on the background information that we shared? Any memories, or associations? Any of your own similar experiences?
  + What did you feel about the object/artwork?
    - Maybe there was something you particularly liked? Or anything you thought was beautiful? Or anything that you did not like or even hated? Or anything that you felt was problematic? Or any other emotions that you experienced in response to it?
  + In thinking about these descriptions you all gave, we would like to enrich them with imagery from many senses. Are there any aspects of the artwork/object you think could be described in relation to smells, sounds, textures or possibly even tastes?
  + When thinking about colours, we would like you to try to think about how you would describe the colours using non-colour terms, so for example, you might think about sunflower yellow, or terracotta orange. You might also want to think about things the colours remind you of in terms of memories, like the red after a bad sunburn. How would you describe the colours?
  + Thinking about the background information, are there any bits you would really like to hear interwoven with the description? Or would you prefer to hear all of it at the end? If there are bits you would like to hear worked in to the description (rather than waiting until the end), what would those be? Any thoughts of where?

#### **02:00 – End of session/wrap-up**

THANK YOU! So, how was that? How did you think it went? Did you enjoy it? (Remember to allow space for discussion here and also negative impressions and feedback).

**END**

## Part 3: Example ‘script’ for facilitators with notes

Approximate timings for different numbers of objects.

For full information regarding running the sessions, please see the associated document: *Running a W-ICAD session: notes for facilitators*

**ONE object**

9.45am – arrival and coffee

10am – start; introduction to the day; introduction of the participants

10.15am – introduction to Questions and Suggestions

10.20am – Questions and Suggestions session

11.10am – Context – discussion with the curator

11.25am – comfort break

11.35am – Follow-up questions

12.00 – End of session/wrap-up

**TWO Objects**

9.45am – arrival and coffee

10am – start; introduction to the day; introduction of all participants

10.15am – Introduction to Question and Suggestions

10.20am – Object 1 Q&S session

10.45am – Object 1 Context – discussion with the curator/ Follow-up questions

11.05am – comfort break

11.15am – Object 2 Q&S session

11.40am - Object 2 Context – discussion with the curator/ Follow-up questions

12.00pm – End of session/wrap-up

**THREE Objects**

9.45am – arrival and coffee

10am – start; introduction to the day; introduction of all participants

10.15am – Introduction to Question and Suggestions

10.20am – Object 1 Q&S session

10.40am – Object 1 Context – discussion with the curator/ Follow-up questions

10.55am – Object 2 Q&S session

11.10am – Q&S session comfort break

11.20am - Object 2 Context – discussion with the curator/ Follow-up questions

11.40am – Object 3

11.40am - Object 2 Context – discussion with the curator/ Follow-up questions

12.00pm – End of session/wrap-up

All sessions can be run by the facilitator, though different people can be brought in for the context sessions if appropriate.

If AD is to be generated after the session then it will be necessary either to have a scribe (with fast typing skills to try and capture as much verbatim as possible) or speech-to-text software, or a recording that can be transcribed afterwards.

### Sessions

Introduction to the day, introduction of all those participating

A general introduction. Institutional housekeeping. Everyone introduces themselves. Facilitator gives general introduction to the day, including timetable.

*Questions and Suggestions*

This is the main co-creation session. Starting with one participant - usually one who is partially blind - the attendees are asked to describe their experience of the artwork, starting with what first attracts their attention. The group is encouraged to ask one another questions and to discuss their individual impressions and experiences. The conversation should grow organically and usually the facilitator is only minimally involved, if at all. Tombstone information can be given after all the participants have done their initial description of what first attracts their attention and when there is a lull.

*Context session*

This is an opportunity to answer any questions about the artist and the work that have come up in the earlier session - when you should politely decline to answer and explain that the information will come later. It’s also the place to give the information that you might typically find in an audio or written guide.

*Follow-on questions*

This is an opportunity to ask more directed questions of the group to fill in any gaps from the morning. We have suggested a list of ten questions, but there is no need to ask them all if you already feel you have enough information from the earlier session.

*Wrap-up*

Get impressions of the day. Share any information about follow-up if necessary - will you be using the AD? Will the group get to hear it before it is made public? Get feedback and allow everyone to be heard. Say goodbye.