

# Dr. Wells-Jensen Transcript

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lists, visual, description, accessibility, presentations, talk, good, person, checklist, fire, practice, disabled, inclusion, steadying, benefit, embarrassed, tweak, able bodied person, information, rabbit hole

## SPEAKERS

Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen

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**D** Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 00:00

Hi everybody, my name is Sherry wells Jensen, my pronouns are she/her/hers or ella if you speak Spanish, I am a blind white woman with mostly silver hair. And my voice is a little bit scratchy this this afternoon. And I'm sitting here in my favorite chair in my basement office where I spent many happy evenings. And having said that, I want to talk a little bit about these visual descriptions about these self descriptions that we sometimes do at the beginning of presentations. I don't want to take a deep dive on how to do these things. But I do want you to notice a couple things. Mine was pretty brief. It conveyed more than simply visual information. And I practiced it, I really did practice it, I practiced it. So it could turn into just a piece of the background. So it didn't have to be any big deal.

**D** Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 00:51

And I want to use these visual descriptions that we are now doing it the beginning of presentations as a way of talking about accessibility in general, because this is an accessibility tweak with no technical barriers to it. I mean, no one is going to say "Holy smokes, I don't know how to run the software, I don't know how to do alt text, I don't know how to do these things. I don't know what I don't know how!" You can't say that, all you have to do is talk.

**D** Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 01:16

So we're not we're not, we're not going to get tied up in knots about how to do a visual description. And the other reason I want to talk about it, as an example is because it's new, it's a new ish thing that we're doing. And so it's kind of right, on our minds lately. So I want to start by asking people who did presentations during this wonderful little

**D** Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 01:40

conference, or people who may have done presentations in the past at other conferences, if you did a visual description. I want you to take a moment to consider why or why not? And how you felt about it, how did it go? What was it like for you. So take a moment to just think about that. While I go down this

how did it go? what was it like for you. So take a moment to just think about that. While I go down this rabbit hole, I do have a rabbit hole I want to go down. And it's it's the rabbit hole about accessibility and checklists. I absolutely agree with the advice that we don't want to just employ a checklist for accessibility and call me call it done.

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Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 02:17

But also, I don't want you to get me wrong. I do like lists, I have lists for everything. I am the list, Meister, I have lists for my daily tasks, I have a really interesting variety of lists for packing, depending on where we're going, and who's going with me, I sort of know what to pack given, I have a list for that, right. And I actually even have a archived copies of old lists that I had when my kids were very little. And we had to put things like Teddy bear, you know, blankie on the packing list. So I have all those lists, I have lists for sound gear to throw into the back of the car when my band has a gig. And I have a very, very long lists of projects that I swear I'm going to do someday I really will get to them. But lists should be background elements, reminding you of things that you already want to do. And things that you already understand the reason for things you already know why you're doing it and that you want to do it. I don't have a list for the sake of having a list. I have it as a steadying assurance that I will do everything that I intended to do.

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Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 03:31

So a visual description might be on your list. And we're going to start with this question. If you did not do one. Why was that? So there's a variety of possible answers, right? Maybe because you've never heard of this thing before. What do you mean visual description? Like why did you do that thing? Would you started the recording? I don't know what you're even talking about. Okay, good reason. Maybe you didn't do a visual description because you forgot. Also reasonable. Maybe you didn't do one because you were embarrassed. And it is sort of an embarrassing and difficult thing to figure out what to say about yourself. And to work out what you're going to how you're going to do that. And I think that's one of the ways in which these visual descriptions get sort of long and boring and complicated. And take a while is that people haven't thought about what they're going to say. And they're embarrassed about doing it, which is also why we practice. Or maybe you believe that nobody really needed the visual description. Maybe there were no visually impaired blind people in your audience. You felt like I don't have to do this. Or maybe the person before you didn't do it. And so you're thinking, Oh, maybe maybe we're not doing that. Or maybe I don't want to make that person look bad. So I guess I guess I guess I'm not going to do it.

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Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 04:55

So those are some reasons why it might not have happened. So, why might it be on your list? Why would you do it? All these are good reasons, I think for why you might do a visual description, and they kind of come into two categories. So one category of reason for doing one of these visual descriptions is kind of for yourself, you want to practice your inclusion muscles, like you might work out at the gym, right? You might want to just, I just have to get good at this. And so I'm going to practice I'm going to do it becomes a habit, maybe it'll become part of my routine. Um, maybe you want to model accessibility for someone else in the room, a student or a colleague or someone like that. Maybe you want to make a good impression on someone. Maybe you're doing it to fit in, or maybe you're doing it to stand out. Maybe you're doing it to avoid conflict. Like they said, I had to do this thing. They said I had to make a visual description. So okay, okay, I'm doing it, I think I'm doing it. Um, maybe you want to do it to demonstrate to someone in particular, for the people in general that you are a good ally. Or maybe it's just a part of your routine now,

and you don't have to think about it anymore. That's why you do it. Or maybe you do it because you're just looking outstandingly amazingly audaciously cute today, and you just feel like, people should know that. So that's one category of reasons.

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Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 06:18

The other category of reasons for doing a visual description is maybe for the other people present. Maybe you're doing it to be kind, maybe you're doing it as an act of welcoming. Maybe you're doing it to deliberately level that playing field with the idea that if, if you have or if there is visual description, visual information, I mean available to some of the participants, it should be available to everybody. And so you want to just equalize that, make sure everybody has that information. But in the end, none of these accessibility initiatives and including visual description, in this category is about you. None of it's about you. And it's not about the other person, either. Not really. And that's actually a good thing. Because if you fail to do it, somehow, you don't have to get that sort of sick feeling in your stomach, like, Oh, my God, I was supposed to do this thing. And I didn't do it, and I did it badly. You know what? It's not about you. Right? It's also not about the other person in the room. Right? The other reason it's, it's good that it's not about you is that you don't get excessive praise for doing an ordinary thing that maybe you should be doing it anyway, right. Um, we do these things. Because they incrementally change the world. It's not about you. It's not about me, it's not about the disabled person who benefits from what you're doing and is in the room right now. It's not about that theoretical disabled person who might happen upon your presentation, set some point in the future and benefit from it, then, it's not about the able bodied person who will also benefit from this.

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Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen 08:18

From whatever accessibility tweak you give to your presentation. It's about taking deliberate action, to make the world different. It's about undermining the ubiquitous, ubiquitous systemic structures that keep people down. It's about making inclusion part of the background. Each act of inclusion is placing one more piece of kindling in the fire. And eventually, if we tend it, if we keep it strong, if we feed it, this is the fire that will comfort us, that will light our way that will keep us warm. And this is a fire that burned down every little thing that needs to be burnt down so the world can renew, remake itself and become a better place. And that really is our job. Take a checklist if you want to toss it on the fire, if that's handy, feed the fire. We feed the fire and we change the world. And that's why we do these things.