

Picture This!

Why describe newspaper or magazine pictures?

1. It enhances the experience for the listener. If they were seeing the materials for themselves, they would see pictures, graphs, cartoons and all.
2. It enhances your experience—it's a little more creative.
3. It can "save" you time if a picture caption tells you basically what the story says.
4. It can "buy" you time if your reading materials are thin of content.

How do I do it?

1. Describe the pictures like you read the articles. Be neutral, but have interest in your voice. Don't say things like, "That is the ugliest bridal gown in the world." When the publication puts in a photo that is obviously a "beauty shot" like sunsets, wildflowers, and clouds, you can say it is a pleasing, pretty photo—just be sure to say why.
2. Credit the photographer if they are mentioned, just like we credit the authors of articles.
3. Specify if it is a black and white or color photo. Most of our listeners have a reference point with those terms.
4. READ the caption and scan the article before you start talking and make sure you understand what you are seeing. If you don't have the correct context for a photo, you may say the wrong thing. EXAMPLE: A black leather-clad motorcycle gang driving down the main street of a small town. Are they law-breakers? Outlaws? Causing mayhem? Reading the caption would let you and the listener know they are collecting for Toys for Tots. Reading the caption before you talk keeps you from assigning the wrong sex to toddlers and teens. "There is a picture of a young girl with a long ponytail on a park swing set," you say, only to find out in the caption that "her" name is Arthur Smith.
5. Captions are generally repeated word for word in the body of the story. Rather than be redundant, choose where you will say that part, and say it only once. If you say that phrase as a caption, cross it out in the article. If you read it in the article, paraphrase the caption.
6. Choose what is important. When you have the inevitable picture of ribbon cuttings, Eagle Scout awards, Rotary Clubs donating money to a representative of a non-profit, and pictures of city council meetings, WHO they are is more interesting than what they wear or look like.
7. Sometimes the newspaper does the work for you. Don't try to describe a bridal gown yourself. Contained in the article is all the information about re-embroidered lace bodices and organza trains with rosettes than you will ever need to know.
8. Use imaginative, colorful, specific language. "Awesome" does not tell us anything. Use your adjectives. Look for color, texture, size, movement, and approximation to other items in the picture.
9. Plan what you are going to say. Write it down if you need to until you get the hang of it. For example, if there are a NUMBER of people in the picture, like athletes lined up on a stage, count them ahead of time.
10. If you don't know what something is, say you don't know. Then try to describe it as best you can generally, or choose another photo to describe.