

# Sample Textual Descriptions for Illustrative Materials

This guide will help you get started writing textual descriptions for various types of illustrative materials in your manuscript. Textual descriptions are necessary because, in the electronic version of your book, some technologies will process only text content, some reading systems will be unable to reproduce images, and some readers will be unable to see them. Description increases the usefulness of publications by making visual resources accessible to more people.

Good textual description is consistent, concise, and dependent on context. It should communicate information (contained in the illustration) that is essential within the context. In all cases some description is better than no description. Good description will reflect the same intention the visual resource serves within the main body. Additionally, when describing, more important information will be ordered first, with supporting information following.

Description is composed of four elements. Body and caption are visible to all readers. Alt text and long description can be accessed only by using assistive technology and machine readers.

- **Alt text:** shorter description (often 140 characters or fewer) of a specific visual resource; accessed via assistive technology. Required for every image that is meaningful and not merely decorative.
- **Body:** main text of the publication; provides context for visual resource.
- **Caption:** shorter text associated with a specific visual resource, or a group of visual resources presented together. Available via all reading technology.
- **Long description:** longer text associated with a specific visual resource; accessed via assistive technology. May contain structural elements or subsections (e.g. a table, paragraphs).

The examples below demonstrate the different approaches required when describing specific types of illustrative materials for users and devices that cannot access the materials. This is a living document and will expand as we continue to work with authors to produce excellent examples of textual description. For more examples that are common in social science publications, see the [DIAGRAM Center's Image Description Guidelines](#).



## **Table of Contents**

[General Guidelines](#)

[Abstract Art](#)

[Diagrams](#)

[Graphs](#)

[Maps](#)

[Page Images](#)

[Paintings](#)

[Photographs](#)

[Portraits](#)

[Posters](#)

[Stills](#)

[Tables](#)

[Appendix: Additional types of illustrative materials](#)

# General Guidelines<sup>1</sup>

## Consider context

Textual description is a portion of the publication and should be consistent with that publication. Textual description need not repeat information that is contained elsewhere (surrounding text, caption) except when repetition constitutes the best textual description. Textual description may refer to terms, names, and knowledge previously established within the text.

## Consider purpose

Textual description should prioritize information that is relevant to the illustrative material's purpose within the text. The textual description should advance or enhance the argument in the same way that the illustrative material does.

## General to specific

In almost every case it is best to begin longer descriptions with overview statements that allow the reader to grasp the whole of the illustrative material, before moving on to specifics. The convention also allows the reader to decide whether they wish to continue for further information.

---

<sup>1</sup> For additional general guidelines that informed our own, see the [Style and Language section, DIAGRAM Guidelines](#).

# Samples

## Abstract Art

From Siebers, Tobin. *Disability aesthetics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010. Plate 7.



PLATE 7. Judith Scott, untitled, no date,  
Creative Growth Center

### *Surrounding Text*

A remarkably gifted fiber artist emerged in the late 1980s in California named Judith Scott. Her work is breathtaking in its originality and possesses disturbing power as sculptural form (color pl. 5). The sculptures invite comparisons with major artists of the twentieth century and allude to a striking variety of mundane and historical forms, from maps to the works of Alberto Giacometti, from Etruscan art and classical sculpture in its fragmentary state, to children's toys (color pl. 6). [...]

Although materials were made available to her, Scott behaved as if she were pilfering them, and each one of her sculptures takes the form of a cocoon at the center of which is secreted some acquired object (color pl. 7). The first hidden objects were sticks and cardboard spools used to store yarn and thread. Then she began to wrap other objects, an electric fan, for instance. [...]

Scott's method always combines binding, knotting, sewing, and weaving different fiber materials around a solid core whose visibility is entirely occluded by the finished work of art. She builds the works patiently and carefully, as if in a process of concealment and discovery that destroys one object and gives birth to another mysterious thing (fig. 11). A number of aesthetic principles are clearly at work in her method, even though she never articulated them. She strives to ensure the solidity and stability of each piece, and individual parts are bound tightly to a central core. Since she had no view to exhibit her work, no audience in mind, her sculptures do not distinguish between front and back. Consequently, her work projects a sense of independence and autonomy almost unparalleled in the sculptural medium (color pl. 8). Despite the variety of their shape, construction, and parts, then, Scott's sculptures consolidate all of their elements to give the impression of a single, unique body.

*Caption*

Plate 7. Judith Scott, untitled, no date, Creative Growth Center

*Alt Text*

Photograph of untitled fiber sculpture by Judith Scott.

*Description*

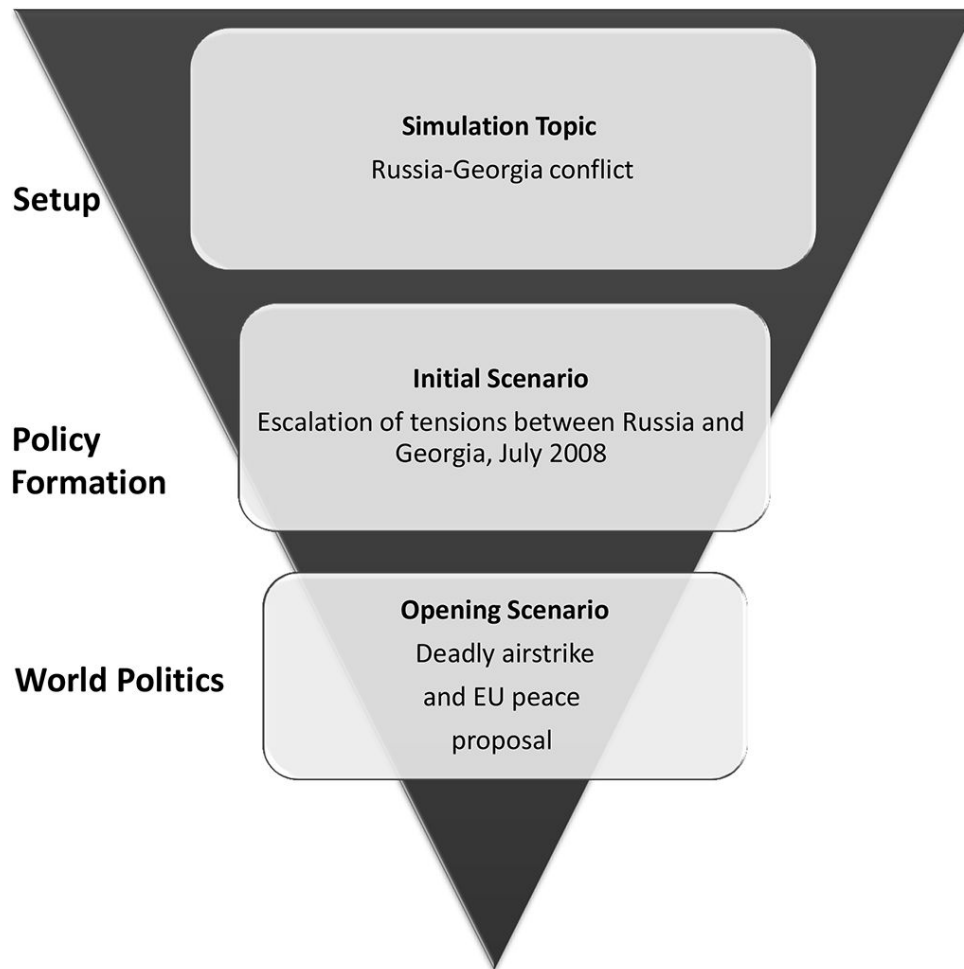
[None]

[Note: image is sufficiently described in the surrounding text. In certain contexts, the author may wish to provide further description to distinguish among the several images of work by the same artist.]



## Diagrams

From Ben-Yehuda, Hemda, Luba Levin-Banchik, and Chanan Naveh. *World politics simulations in a global information age*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. 71:



### *Surrounding Text*

Figure 5.1 illustrates the evolution of a narrative told in the simulation story, from its most general topic introduced during the setup preparations, through the more focused initial scenario that is revealed before policy formation begins, to the acute change contained in the opening scenario that triggers the activities of world politics. As you plan your simulation, you are like a professional storyteller who knows the full story but discloses the details gradually and saves some new information for each publication. Such incremental information disclosure, with its dramatic impact in the transformation from pre-crisis to crisis or from limited change to drastic challenge, sets a gradual learning process in motion, motivates your students to deal with more focused and operational aspects of the subject matter, and leaves ample room for practice and



critical thinking on the simulation events and the teams' activities.

The following example from a simulation on the Russia-Georgia conflict demonstrates how the initial scenario fits in with the general simulation topic. During the preparations for the simulation, the educator introduced students to some basic information about the topic and actors of the approaching simulation. The students knew that they were going to play six teams in the protracted conflict between Russia and Georgia: Russia, the United States, Georgia, the European Union, Russian media, and American media. They studied the entire conflict, from its genesis to the most recent developments to gain a general overview of the topic of the simulation. Once students had become familiar with the big picture and its historical context, they were ready to handle more specific details, as illustrated in figure 5.2.

*Caption*

Fig. 5.1. Gradual disclosure of information

*Alt Text*

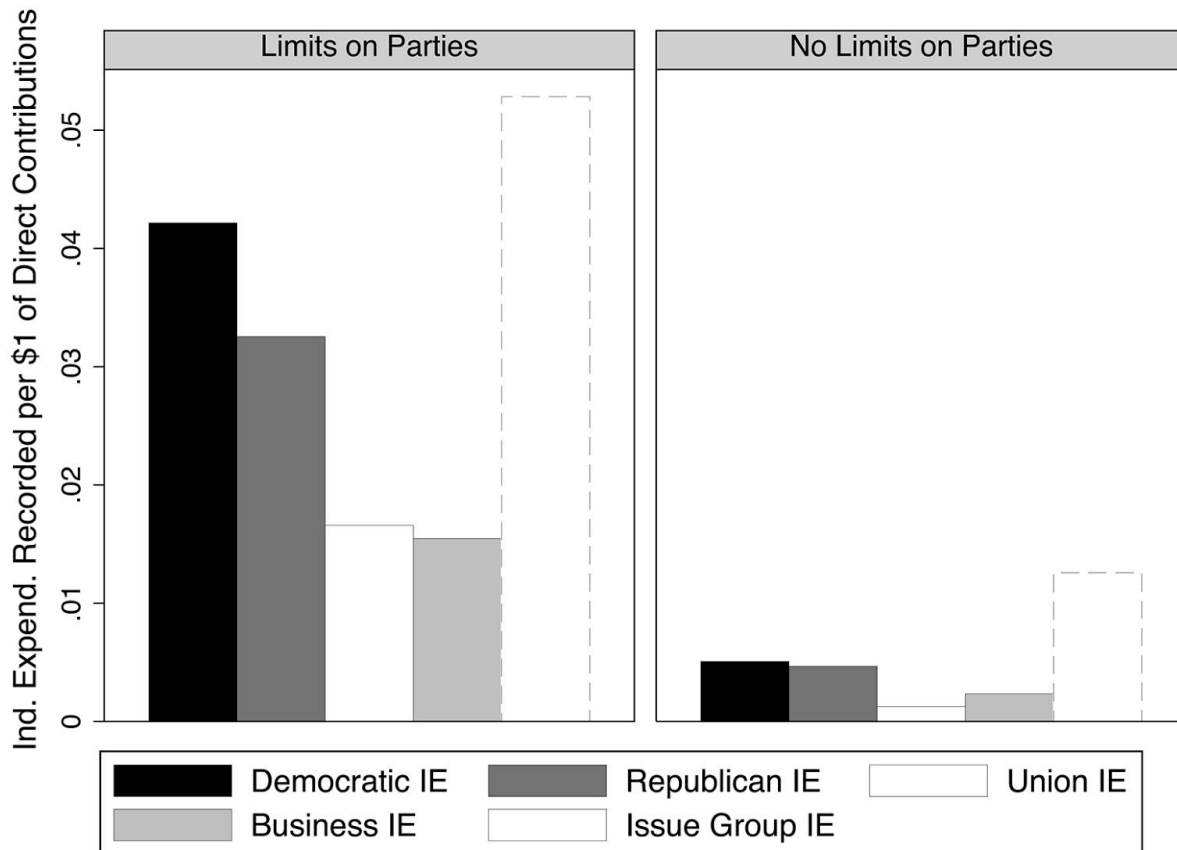
Three-part diagram indicating gradual disclosure of information in a policy simulation.

*Text Description*

Figure 5.1 is an inverted triangle with three levels indicating the gradual disclosure of information. The top (broad) level is Setup: Simulation Topic is the Russia-Georgia conflict. The middle (medium) level is Policy Formation: Initial Scenario is the Escalation of tensions between Russia and Georgia, July 2008. The bottom (narrow) level is World Politics: Opening Scenario is the Deadly airstrike and EU peace proposal.

## Graphs

From J., La Raja Raymond, and Brian F. Schaffner. *Campaign finance and political polarization: when purists prevail*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015., 127:



### Surrounding Text

To demonstrate that constraints on party organizations lead to greater dominance of ideological interests through IE spending, we look closely at the groups that engaged in this strategy between 2006 and 2012, using the same data cited above, collected by the National Institute on Money in State Politics. Figure 5.2 includes IE spending by 5 groups in the 3 states without party limits (on the right side), and the same groups in the 17 states with party limits (on the left side). The groups we identify include: Democratic Party (black), Republican Party (dark gray), labor unions (white), business (light gray), and issue groups (with the broken line). First, note on the left side of the graph that both Democratic and Republican party organizations try to get around constraints by using IEs, and they do so fairly equally.<sup>21</sup> Democrats spent just over 4 cents per dollar of total political contributions made by all donors to state legislative races; Republicans spent roughly 3.5 cents per dollar of contributions.

Of greater significance is the amount of IE spending by issue groups. Between the years 2006 and 2012, issue/ideological groups spent more than 6 cents per dollar of total political contributions made by all donors. Further analysis reveals that 61 percent of these contributions benefited Democratic candidates, while 39 percent benefited Republicans. Overall, the amount spent by issue groups reflects 36 percent of IEs in these states. Some of the largest spenders among issue groups were the Greater Wisconsin Committee, the Michigan Coalition for Progress, the Civil Justice Association of California, the California Alliance, and Twenty First Century Colorado.

Labor unions are also very active in the states with limits on parties, and entirely on behalf of Democrats. They spent 2 cents per dollar of contributions in those states. Recall our analysis in chapter 3, which showed that labor unions tend to support the most liberal candidates in the Democratic Party, a strategy that aligns them closely with very liberal issue groups in the Democratic Party coalition. We also observe about the same amount of independent spending sponsored by business interests, which appeared to come mainly from the various state chapters of Chambers of Commerce, realtor groups, and trade or professional associations.

*Caption*

Figure 5.2 Independent Spending by Groups in States With and Without Party Limits (2006-2012). (Note: Based on data from NIMSP.)

*Alt text*

Bar Graph comparing Independent Spending by Groups in States With and Without Party Limits.

*Description*

Figure 5.2 is a bar graph showing independent expenditures (per \$1 of direct contributors) by group, in states with and without party spending limits from 2006-2012. Data is summarized in the following table; all values approximate.

	With Limits on Parties	No Limits on Parties
Democratic independent expenditures	.042	.005
Republican independent expenditures	.032	.004
Union independent expenditures	.017	.002
Business independent expenditures	.015	.003

Issue Group independent expenditures	.053	.013
--------------------------------------	------	------

## Maps

From Williamson, Callie. *The laws of the Roman people: public law in the expansion and decline of the Roman republic*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. 147:



Map 3. Roman and Latin Colonies, 338-100

*Surrounding Text*

(See map 3 for colonies referenced in this section.) Laying claim to the productive lands of Italy, the Romans embarked at once on a systematic process of confiscation and incorporation. ...

[Note: the following chapter of the text is entirely devoted to describing the political and geographic history depicted in the map.]

*Caption*

Map 3. Roman and Latin colonies, 338-100.

*Alt Text*

Map of Roman and Latin colonies, years 338 - 100, on the mainland of present-day Italy.

*Description*

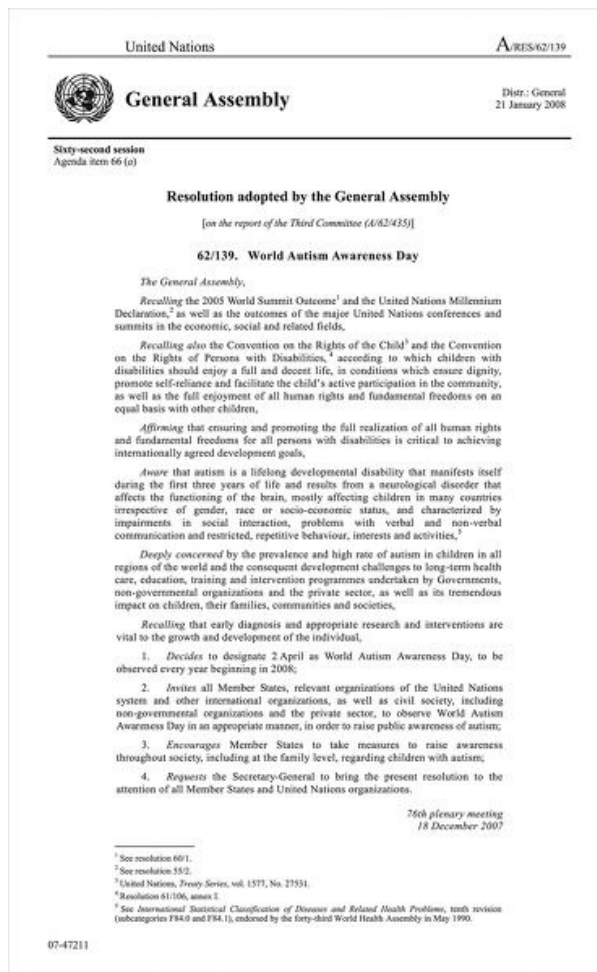
[None.]

[Note: map is sufficiently described in the text. The author may wish to provide orienting information.]

## Page Images

When a page scan is reproduced as illustrative material, textual description should reproduce all or as much of the page content as possible. If reproducing all page content seems unconstructive, consider whether all of the page content should be included as an image. If the main purpose of a page scan is to illustrate publishing context, this context may be summarized.

From McGuire, Anne. *War on autism: on the cultural logic of normative violence*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. 110:



### Surrounding Text

On December 17, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 63/139, which declared April 2 to be “World Autism Awareness Day” “in perpetuity” (Autism Speaks, 2011c, para. 1). As I will demonstrate, the resolution (fig. 5) makes it clear that raising public awareness about autism is tantamount to raising public awareness about it as a biomedical problem in need of biomedical solutions. The resolution also hints at how a neoliberal ideology—an ideology grounded in the logic of the market—underpins discourses of autism

advocacy and governs the formation of the subjects permitted to dwell within these discourses.

*Caption*

Fig. 5 United Nations Resolution 62/139 “World Autism Awareness Day” adopted at the UN General Assembly 76 Plenary Meeting, December 18, 2007.

*Alt Text*

United Nations Resolution 62/139 declaring “World Autism Awareness Day.

*Description*

United Nations A/Res/62/139

General Assembly

District: General

21 January 2008

Sixty-second session

Agenda item 66 (a)

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly

[on the report of the Third Committee (A/62/435)]

62/139. World Autism Awareness Day

The General Assembly,

Recalling the 2005 World Summit Outcome (footnote 1: See resolution 60/1.) and the United Nations Millennium Declaration (footnote 2: See resolution 55/2), as well as the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic social and related fields,

Recalling also the Convention of the Rights of the Child (footnote 3: United Nations, Treaty Series, Vol. 1577, No. 27531.) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (footnote 4: Resolution 61/106, annex I), according to which children with disabilities should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community, as well as the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children,

Affirming that ensuring and promoting the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities is critical to achieving internationally agreed development goals,

Aware that autism is a lifelong developmental disability that manifests itself during the first three years of life and results from a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain, mostly affecting children in many countries irrespective of gender, race or socioeconomic status, and characterized by impairments in social interaction, problems with verbal and nonverbal communication, and restricted, repetitive behavior, interests and activities (footnote 5: See International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, tenth revision [subcategories F84.0 and F84.1], endorsed by the Forty-Third World Health Assembly in May 1990.),

Deeply concerned by the prevalence and high rate of autism in children in all regions of the world and the consequent development challenges to long-term health care, education,



training, and intervention programs undertaken by governments, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector, as well as its tremendous impact on children, their families, communities, and societies,

Recalling that early diagnosis and appropriate research and interventions are vital to the growth and development of the individual,

- Decides to designate 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day, to be observed every year beginning in 2008;
- Invites all Member States, relevant organizations of the United Nations system, and other international organizations, as well as civil society, including nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, to observe World Autism Awareness Day in an appropriate manner, in order to raise public awareness of autism;
- Encourages Member States to take measure to raise awareness throughout society, including at the family level, regarding children with autism;
- Requests the Secretary-General to bring the present resolution to the attention of all Member States and United Nations organizations.

76th plenary meeting

18 December 2007

07-47211

## Paintings

From Biernoff, Suzannah. *Portraits of violence: war and the aesthetics of disfigurement*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. 63:



### *Surrounding Text*

*A Young Soldier Lies Dying* (ca. 1915) is a variation on the theme of the pietà (figure 16). In Dudley Tennant's version, on which this color halftone print is based, the young Madonna cradles the soldier's head in her lap as she gazes beatifically at his upturned face. The last rays of a setting sun blaze behind her in the shape of a cross.

### *Caption*

Fig. 16. Dudley Tennant, *A Young Soldier Lies Dying*, ca. 1915. Color halftone print, 32.7 × 45.3 cm. Wellcome Library, London.

### *Alt Text*

A Young Soldier Lies Dying

### *Description*

A man in military uniform lies on the ground with eyes closed, his head in the lap of a woman who gazes at his face and supports his head. The image of an illuminated cross shines behind her. Smoke rises in the otherwise empty background.

## Photographs

From Biernoff, Suzannah. *Portraits of violence: war and the aesthetics of disfigurement*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. 49:



### *Surrounding Text*

In November the same year Griffiths accompanied them to New York City for a charity walk. One photograph (figure 12) shows Martyn crossing a street adorned with American flags. We see him in profile at the edge of the photograph, the disfiguring effect of his injuries plainly visible. Behind and to his right, a woman casts a sideways glance at the camera, and by extension at us. Aligned with the image's vanishing point, her distrustful gaze interrupts our own.

### *Caption*

Fig. 12. Stuart Griffiths, British soldier (who was seriously injured in Afghanistan) on a charity walk, New York, 2008. (© Stuart Griffiths Photographs.)

### *Alt Text*

Martyn Compton

### *Description*

Crossing a Manhattan street on a hazy day, British war veteran Martyn Compton in stocking cap in foreground, behind him and to the right, a woman in raincoat gazes at camera. American flags hang in a row on the buildings across the street.

## Portraits

From Biernoff, Suzannah. *Portraits of violence: war and the aesthetics of disfigurement*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. 2:



### *Surrounding Text*

She returned for the wedding in October 2006, and took the photograph reproduced here (figure 1) in a commercial portrait studio on the way to the wedding ceremony at Metamora High

School. (...) Reviewing Marine Wedding for the New York Times, Holland Cotter describes Tyler Ziegel's expression, as he looks at his bride, as "hard to read: his dead-white face is all but featureless, with no nose and no chin, as blank as a pullover mask." Despite winning the World Press Photo Contest for portraiture, the photograph challenges the premise of the traditional portrait: that the face can be relied upon as an index of identity and emotion (figure 1).

*Caption*

Fig. 1. Nina Berman, Marine Wedding, 2006. (© Photo by Nina Berman / NOOR.)

*Alt Text*

Marine Wedding

*Description*

Tyler Ziegel and Renee Kline pose for wedding photo. Ty is in full military regalia with combat medals, his face with extensive scarring. Renee is in wedding dress with large bouquet of flowers. Ty looks down; Renee looks off to a point near camera.

## Posters

From Linett, Maren Tova. *Bodies of modernism: physical disability in transatlantic modernist literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. 168:



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, W602309\_1

### *Surrounding Text*

This rhetorical strategy of comparing disabled or otherwise “unfit” men to women to point out the ridiculous exclusion of women was a common refrain of suffrage posters. For example, one



poster, entitled “Votes for Women,” shows a lower-class man leaning against a wall with a pipe in his hand; he has a prominent nose and lower jaw, indicating his degenerate racial status. He is addressing a refined-looking woman with a diploma in her hand. The caption reads: “One of our voters—Wot do you wimmin want the vote for? You ain’t fit for it!” (“Votes for Women”). As in Woolf’s mockery of Browning’s praise for the lower-class, disabled Arthur, the poster’s power relies on the ironic contrast between the “unfit” man who does have the vote, and the more-than-“fit” woman who does not. Douglas Baynton describes this tactic: “A popular theme in both British and American suffrage posters was to depict a thoughtful-looking woman, perhaps wearing the gown of a college graduate, surrounded by slope-browed, wild-eyed, or ‘degenerate’ men identified implicitly or explicitly as ‘idiots’ or ‘lunatics.’ The caption might read, ‘Women and her Political Peers,’ or “It’s time I got out of this place. Where shall I find the key?” (25).

*Caption*

“Votes for Women.” Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

*Alt Text*

Votes for Women, poster.

*Description*

None.

Note: the image is sufficiently described in the surrounding text so that a more detailed description is not required.

## Stills

### Television

From Cheng, William, and Susan McClary. *Just vibrations. The purpose of sounding good*. Ann Arbor.: The University of Michigan Press, 2016. 77:



#### *Surrounding Text*

In a Charmed episode titled “Primrose Empath,” a demon secretly curses the good witch Prue, granting her the capability to sense everyone else’s feelings. The scenario begins comically, with Prue catching the laughing bug from a dentist patient who’s under the effects of nitrous oxide. Then she begins empathizing willy-nilly with her sisters’ and friends’ emotions of love, shame, and denial. But soon, Prue finds herself shouldering the weight of the world. Murmurs of others’ anguish thunder through her mind until she becomes, in her words, “one big raw nerve ending.” She retreats to her basement and curls up into a ball, tortured and afraid. “There are these people and they’re in my head, and they’re in my heart, and it just hurts,” she cries (figure 4.4).

#### *Caption*

Figure 4.4. Prue in Charmed (left) retreats from the world and (right) returns to fight the good fight. Closed captions in original.

#### *Alt Text*

Figure 4.4. Prue in Charmed

#### *Description*

The image on the left shows Prue in Charmed crying and huddled in a corner in her basement, with the closed captions, “I can’t. The pain, the noise.” The image on the right shows Prue,

re-emerged and ready to fight, fists raised in front of an expression of calm determination.

## Video Games

From Biernoff, Suzannah. *Portraits of violence: war and the aesthetics of disfigurement*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. 150.



### *Surrounding Text*

The original posting is simply a set of links: the first takes you to Project Façade, the second to Henry Lumley's photograph, the third to one of the concept drawings for BioShock (figure 54), and the last two to stills from the game itself (figure 55).

### *Caption*

Fig. 55. BioShock screenshot. Take 2 Games.

### *Alt Text*

Bioshock

### *Description*

Realistic animated scene of destruction with hand holding a cocked gun pointed in the direction of a man with a bandaged head and tattered clothes in an aggressive pose. In the background, a round illuminated sign that reads 'Happy New Year 1959.'

## **Tables**

Tables are different than charts and graphs because tables, like text, can be represented in a machine readable format. Therefore, tables should be formatted as valid, marked up data tables, not as image files containing a picture of a table. For more information, see the Author Guidelines, “What Should I Do about Tables?”

When images of tables are submitted, the textual description may be used to summarize the table data and findings, and to insert a valid data table (a reproduction of the table included in the image file) when the table is small and simple enough to allow doing so.

## **Appendix: Additional types of illustrative materials**

As this document grows and evolves, this appendix serves as a place to keep a running list of types of illustrative materials not yet included in the Sample Descriptions, but for which there is a recognized need.

For now, [we have compiled a list of all images](#) and their descriptions from U-M Press publications between 2019 and 2017.