



**MAKING
ACCESSIBLE
BOOKS**

ACCESSIBLE
Audiobook
Resource Guide

Following research and guides published by [The National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#), [BookNet Canada](#), [eBOUND Canada](#), and [CNIB/Beyond Print](#), and others, this guide is a broad overview that briefly outlines current and developing practices in accessible audiobook publishing. It explores making audiobook content accessible and provides a Quality Assurance Checklist for accessibility. A glossary of terms related to accessible audiobooks is included, as is a list of further resources.

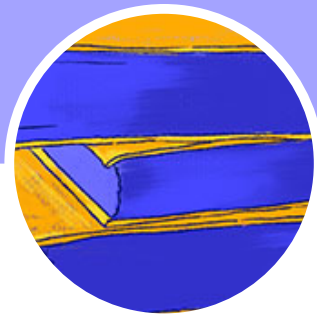
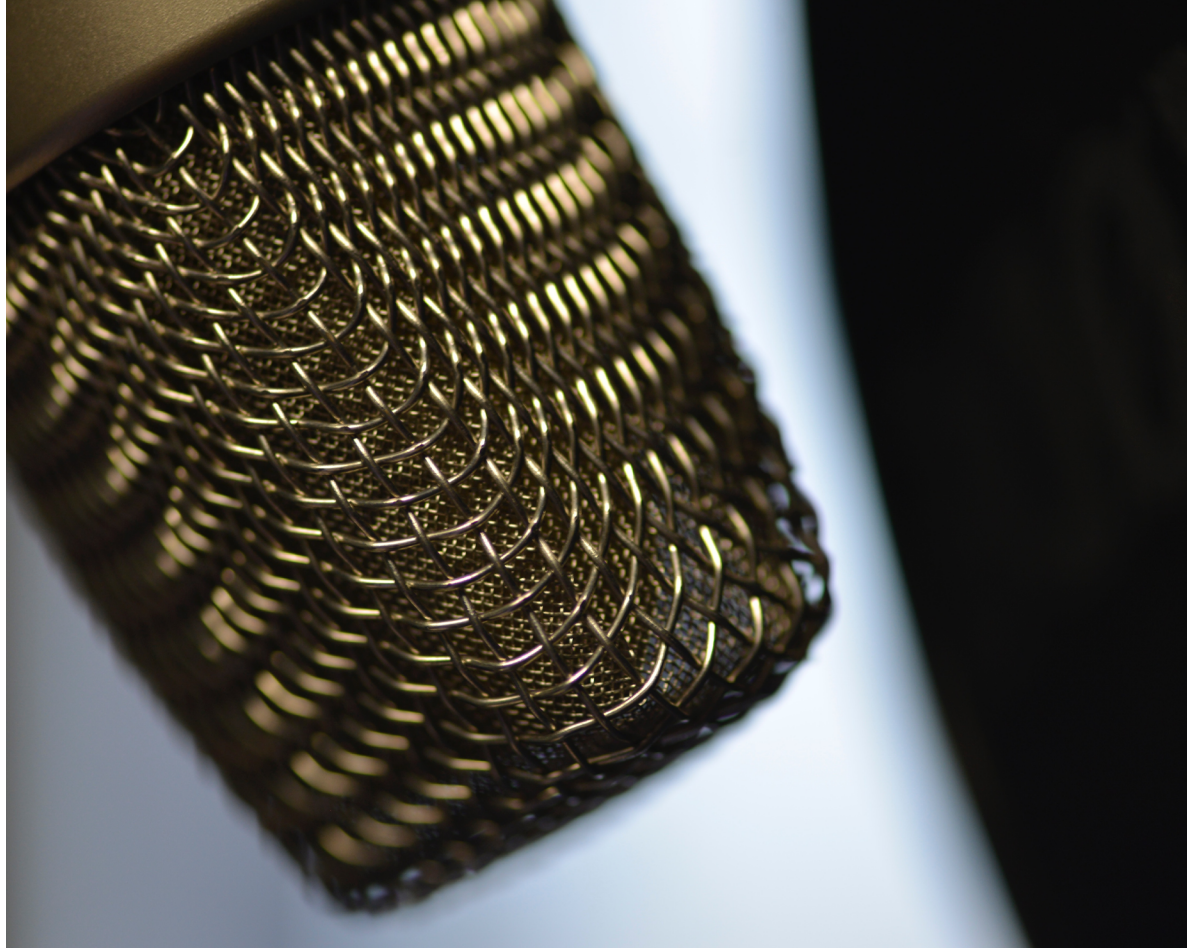


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview.....	3
Audiobook Content	5
Accessible Audiobooks	
Quality Assurance Checklist.....	14
Glossary.....	17
Resources.....	18



Overview



A closeup of a microphone.
Image source: Anne Zbitnew

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) describes an audiobook as “a collection of audio resources grouped together by a reading order, metadata, and resources, all contained in a manifest.”

An audiobook is a version of a book that is read aloud by one or more narrators. Audiobooks may or may not include sound effects and soundscapes to enhance the listening experience. The most common formats for audiobooks are digital files including MP3 (MPEG audio layer 3), WMA (Windows Media Audio), and AAC (Advanced Audio Coding).

Initially created as an accessible format for people who were blind or have low vision, audiobooks now enjoy widespread popularity as a supplement, or even substitute for, printed books and e-books.



Overview

Why should audiobooks be accessible?

An audiobook seems to be one of the more accessible forms of a book or text but creating an audiobook that is truly accessible requires planning, careful attention to detail, and the right technology. A poorly made audiobook can be a frustrating experience—for all users.

Wendy Reid, the Accessibility and Publishing Standards Lead at Rakuten Kobo Inc., writes in an [article](#) on inclusivepublishing.org: “It would shock many people to know that audiobooks are produced without any sort of unifying specification at all [...] This fragmentation means that end users, depending on the platform they use (and they are almost always siloed to one), can get many different experiences.”

What are the features of accessible audiobooks?

As Wendy Reid notes in her article, four primary requirements of an accessible audiobook are: Listenability, Portability, Navigability, and Accessibility (in Reid’s words, “a user should be able to listen to their content without input or interruption”, “a user should be able to download, stream, or offline their content”, “a user should be able to know when and where they are in their audiobook”, and “regardless of ability, all users should be able to enjoy the content.”). An accessible audiobook also has rich metadata that makes it more easily discoverable by potential users ([The History and Future of Audiobooks](#)).



Audiobook Content

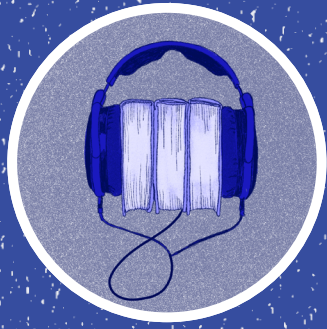


A person wearing black glasses, a black jacket, and red headphones looks down, resting their head on their left hand.

Image source: Dollar Gill/Unsplash

Accessibility in audiobooks is developing and evolving as technologies change and improve and collective knowledge grows. When creating audiobooks, there are more elements to consider than just narrating and recording the book. To be accessible, an audiobook must be easily discovered, opened, navigated, and listened to with the tracks in the correct order.

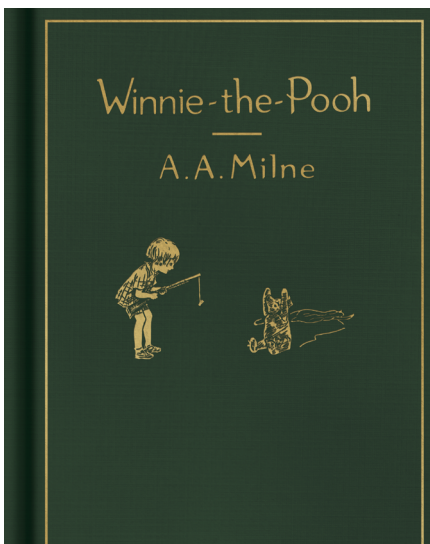
The National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) has designed a guide to help audiobook creators design and produce audiobooks and introduce many points to be considered throughout the process. The recommended practices are not fixed but the information in the guide is a starting place for publishers and will hopefully prompt discussions and help publishers develop their own guidelines (AccessiblePublishing.ca).



Audiobook Content

In 2021, CNIB/Beyond Print and eBOUND Canada published [*\(Experimentation Project for Accessible Audiobook Production: Best Practices in Publisher Workflow\)*](#) for publishers interested in creating 'born accessible' audiobooks. Recommendations from the guide include incorporation of basic features of accessible production into audiobook workflows, encouraging publishers to include as much supplementary material from the print original in their audiobooks, and employing image descriptions in audiobook editions of all print books that include content that is purely visual to convey this information to the listening reader.

Front Cover



The front cover file should include:

- The title
- The name of the author
- Any supplementary text, including blurbs and marketing logline
- A brief image description of the cover

A dark green book cover of Winnie-the-Pooh by A. A. Milne with a gold illustration of Christopher Robin holding a fishing pole and Winnie-the-Pooh sitting with their arms in the air.

Image Source: E.H. Shepard/Public Domain



Audiobook Content

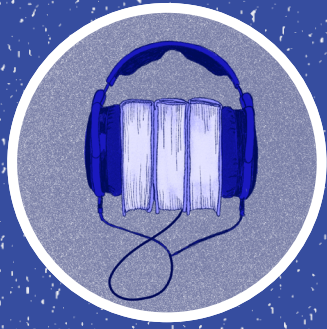
Introduction and Closing Recording Script

A scripted introduction and closing for the finished audiobook are the audio equivalent of a book cover. The audio introduction should communicate basic identifying information found on the printed book cover. It may include a land acknowledgement, thank those who assisted in the audiobook production, serve as a marketing or branding opportunity about the publishing house, and raise awareness of other books.

The introduction script should be short and convey straightforward information including the name of the publisher, the book title, author name, and the narrator's name. The closing script should repeat the same information and include acknowledgements to agencies and funders that provided grants or support, copyright information, and the location and date of the recording. Closing scripts may also include recommendations about other books by the author or books in the same series, contact information, and a thank you message to the reader for listening to the audiobook.

Primary Entry Page

A primary entry page is an HTML resource that helps to set the preferred reading order of an audiobook and makes information about the publication and any additional content discoverable. A primary entry page typically introduces an audiobook. According to W3C guidelines, it must include either a link to the manifest or have the manifest embedded. And it should also contain the table of contents, which should be the first element of the document.



Audiobook Content

Table of Contents

The table of contents is a list of links that reflects the structure of the audiobook and any additional content. In HTML, a table of contents is typically created using a nav element. The W3C stipulates that it must be identified by the role attribute “doc-toc.” It is not necessary to record the table of contents since the files should be ordered correctly on the primary entry page. The section headings should be recorded within the track file.

Section Headings

Section headings describe the structure of an audiobook by introducing the beginning of each part of the text. They should be read aloud by the narrator each time. Section headings should correspond to the table of contents. Each section should be saved as a separate file. The entire playlist should be saved in a folder with the name of the book.



Audiobook Content

Metadata

Detailed metadata can enhance the accessibility of an audiobook by providing information to readers about its content and features. Metadata embedded in the audiobook file itself also makes it more compatible and navigable across devices. If using MP3-style ID3 tags, translate the song-related label into its approximate book term to create tags.

Sample ID3 Tag



A black line illustration of Winnie-the-Pooh holding a jar of honey.

Image source:
E.H. Shepard/Public
Domain

Author: A.A. Milne

Track: Chapter One

Title: In Which We Are Introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh and Some Bees, and the Stories Begin

Album Title: Winnie-the-Pooh

Track Number: 01

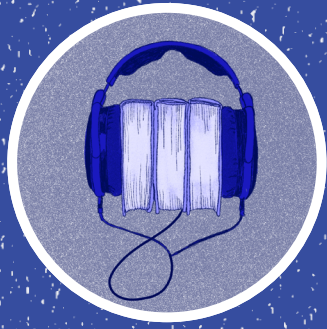
Year: 1926

Genre: Audiobook

Album Artist: Matthew Soanes

Producer: Matthew Soanes

From: [Librivox](#) - Winnie-the-Pooh



Audiobook Content

Narration

Narration is the process of translating a work of text into audio. Almost all sections of a book should be narrated, including the front cover, dedication, appendices, footnotes/endnotes, and bibliographies. Narratorial quality is key to the success of an audiobook. National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) identifies five core components to be considered for audiobook narration.

1. **Understanding of the text:** The narrator needs to comprehend the subject matter to translate it well to the reader.
2. **Consistent tone:** Ideally, the narrator will use a medium, conversational volume and tone that sounds “warm and crisp;” above all, their choice should be comfortable and sustainable for the duration of the recording.
3. **Objectivity:** The tone of the recording should not be impacted by the narrator’s personal views.
4. **Pronunciation:** Words should be said correctly and researched when necessary. Decisions about accents should be considered carefully and handled with sensitivity. Ensure that all names are pronounced correctly, as well as all words from a language other than that of the narrator(s).
5. **Pace:** The pace should be natural to both to the narrator(s) and the reader and considerate of the content.

Other important considerations include recording in a location without background noise and using quality recording equipment and techniques to avoid distortions and, when necessary, editing out distracting noise.



Audiobook Content

Soundscapes

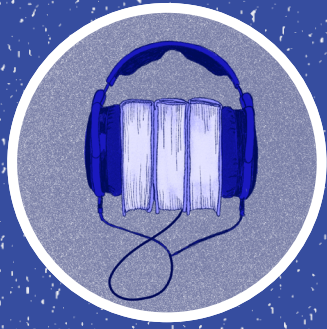
Soundscapes include music and sound effects that can enhance the listening experience for most readers. They can increase the accessibility of books by providing an aural expression of abstract or complex visuals. Keep the volume consistent and avoid sudden and drastic changes in volume.

File Format

File formats are standards by which information is digitally organized and encoded. MP3 is the most common audiobook file format, but others include AAC, FLAC (Free Lossless Audio Codec), and MP4, the accessible format DAISY (which also includes marked-up text for greater navigability), and corporation-specific formats like AAX (Audible), ALAC (Apple), and WMA (Microsoft). Some audiobooks continue to be available by CD, though digital audiobooks are now widely considered the standard format.

Footnotes/endnotes

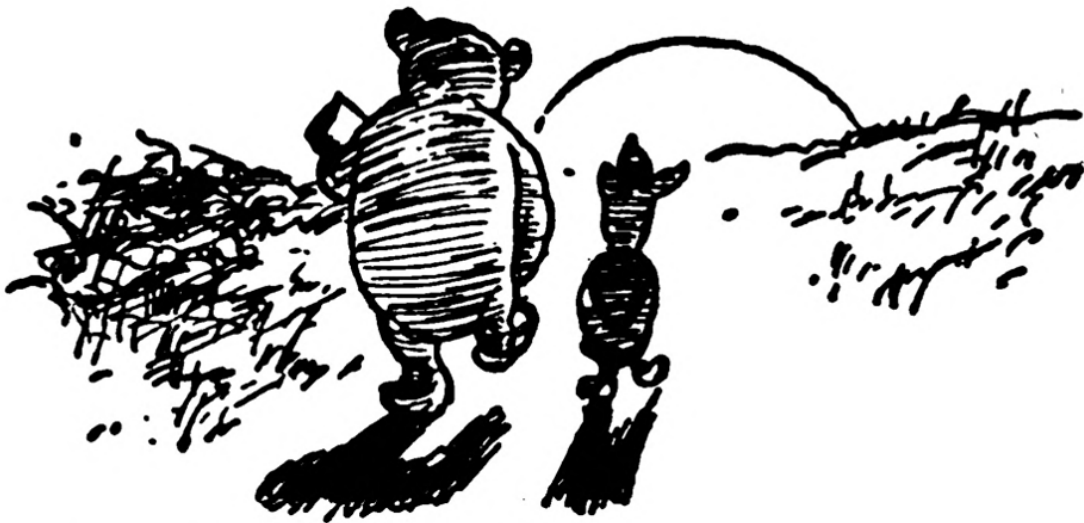
Decisions about the handling of notes should be made between the author and publisher. Additional information related to the text can be recorded inline (unskippable) or as a separate file (skippable, placed after the corresponding chapter or at the end of the book). Alternatively, notes could be included in a linked online PDF and directions to it could be included for listeners at the end of each chapter or as a disclaimer at beginning of the audiobook.



Audiobook Content

Image descriptions

If the image is connected to the narrative or to a point being made in the text, it must be described according to the guidelines of alt text. If it is a decorative image, then this description can be left out. In cases where image descriptions may seriously interfere with a listener's experience, a publisher may choose to create two versions of the audiobook: an "accessible" version and a "commercial" version (with both versions clearly identified as such).



A black and white line illustration of Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet walking down a path toward a sunset.
Image source: E.H. Shepard/Public Domain

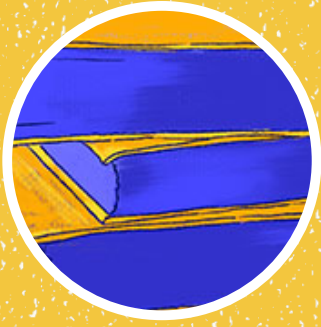


Audiobook Content

Image Description Requirements

Image descriptions are a key element of accessibility. If the audio version of a printed work does not also include image descriptions, the audiobook reader is experiencing an incomplete version of the book. Creating accessible audiobooks means that visual content is described in the audio version. Image description should meet the needs of the users from children's book illustrations to detailed, specialist information including complex maps, graphs, charts, or mathematical equations.

At Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), the technique that is most often used is to introduce images where they appear in the print edition. CNIB uses a 'producer's note' technique to make it clear where the printed text ends and the image description begins. Just before reading the image description script, the narrator says, "producer's note." After reading the image description, the narrator says, "end of producer's note" to signal a return to the text.



Accessible Audiobooks Quality Assurance Checklist

Narration

- ☐ Does the narrator speak in a warm tone and pronounce all words crisply and clearly?
- ☐ Does the narrator pronounce all names and terms correctly?
- ☐ Does the narrator speak at an appropriate pace for the text and audience?
- ☐ Does the narrator appear to understand the text? (For example: does not sound stern and formal in a section that is intended to be light and humorous).
- ☐ Does the narrator speak in a way that is objective? (For example: does not impose their personal opinions on text).
- ☐ Is the narration 100% accurate?
- ☐ Does the narrator speak the name of each section? (For example: "Chapter One," "Acknowledgements").
- ☐ Was the narration recorded in an environment that is quiet and controlled? (For example: no random sounds from outside or from other rooms).
- ☐ Is the volume level consistent throughout?
- ☐ Have all extraneous noises (hisses, buzzing, etc.) been edited out?



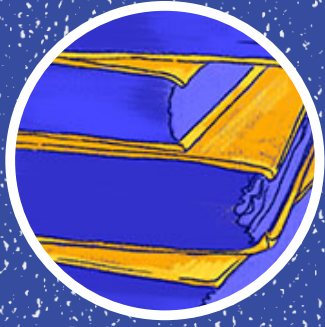
Accessible Audiobooks Quality Assurance Checklist

Files

- ☐ Is the audiobook file in a format that is playable across different systems and that allows for rich metadata?
- ☐ Is each section of the text a separate audio file?
- ☐ Does the metadata include all the necessary details?

Images

- ☐ Are only important images included?
- ☐ Are the images described?
- ☐ Do the image descriptions follow accessibility guidelines?
- ☐ Is the image purely aesthetic? If so, it does not have to be described.



Glossary

Accessible Content

Can be read by all users and incorporates accessible formatting standards into its design.

Accessible Publishing

Works designed to be accessible and compatible with assistive technologies.

Accessibility Metadata

Metadata that is used specifically to describe the accessibility of content.

Audiobook

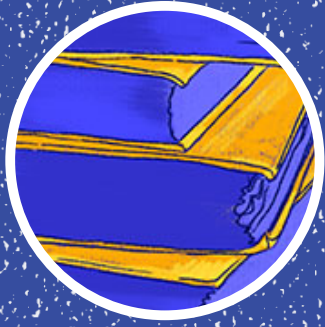
A voice recording of the text of a book.

Audio Mastering

The final step in polishing an audio production to ensure that it meets standards of quality.

Born Accessible

Content that is accessible upon publication and requires no further modification. The goal of most accessibility initiatives is to be able to create workflows that produce 'born accessible' e-books and digital products.



Glossary

Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY)

The DAISY Consortium represents libraries for people with print disabilities and has developed a specialist standard format for use in the creation of accessible versions for people with print disabilities.

Inclusive Publishing

Works that takes the needs of every reader into consideration.

Image Description

A detailed text explanation of an image

Metadata

The information embedded in the audio-file. Ideally this contains information like track name, track number, publisher, author, narrator, and copyright.

Narration

Text is spoken aloud by a narrator. NNELS describes the narrator as “a vessel to all of the print book’s information in audio form.”

Section Headings

The beginning of each section of a text, read aloud by the narrator. Section titles should correspond to the table of contents.

Soundscapes

Music and/or sound effects added to audiobook narration. Soundscapes can elaborate on the book’s action, can help to describe abstract images, and enhance the listening experience.

RESOURCES

Guides

Accessible Publishing / [NNELS Guide to Image Descriptions](#)

[Audiobook Recommendations for Publishers](#)
from Accessible Publishing/NNELS

[W3C Audiobooks Recommendations](#)

[The History and Future of Audiobooks \(2019\)](#)
by Wendy Reid from Inclusive Publishing;
DAISY Consortium.

[The National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#): A professional technical guide to engineering audiobook recordings and tips for the narrator.

Tips and Techniques for Audio Recording and Narration: A series of videos produced by the [National Network for Equitable Library Service \(NNELS\)](#).

Audiobook Production

[Record your own audiobook for Audible:](#)
An at-home solution for self-publishers.



RESOURCES

Audiobook Production

'Your throat hurts. Your brain hurts'. This article by Tim Dowling at The Guardian details the personal experiences of audiobook narrators.

Perkins School for the Blind details their process of recording audiobooks for the **Perkins Library**.

A **Village Voice** article about audiobook narrators.

The evolution of audiobooks from **Voices**, a voice actor marketplace based in London, Ontario.

Narrators Roadmap is an online resource for audiobook narrators that includes a casting directory of publishers and production companies, a knowledge base that includes a robust list of materials including downloadable training, podcasts, pronunciation guides, video courses, workshops, and a best practice guide to audiobook production workflow.

A **BookNet Canada** podcast episode about audiobooks and audio-first publishing ideas.



RESOURCES

Accessible Audiobooks

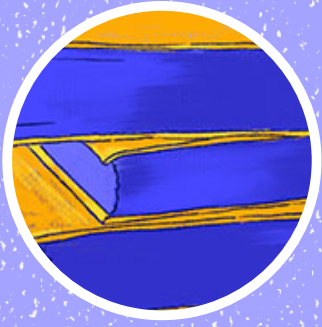
[W3C recommendations for accessible audiobooks](#) includes HTML code samples for a table of contents in an audiobook.

DAISY [Accessible Publishing Knowledge Base: Audio](#) is starting point for developers who seek to ensure their audiobooks are up to the latest standards in accessibility.

An article from [Book Riot](#) about how audiobooks make reading more accessible.

[What is DAISY format?](#) includes a tutorial on how to download a DAISY book and burn a CD.





References

Information in this guide is informed by material adapted from the following resources:

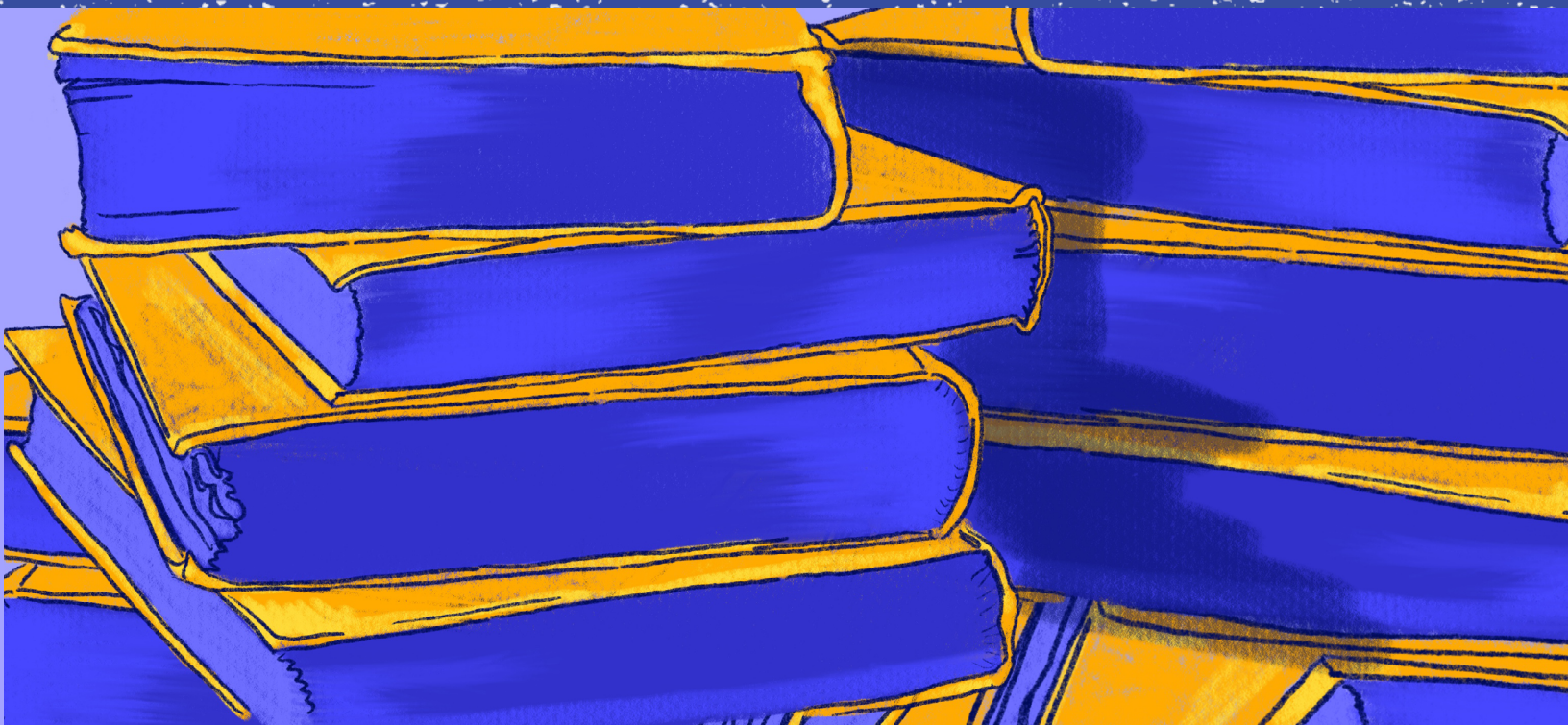
Accessible Publishing/NNELS Guide to Image Descriptions

Audiobook Recommendations for Publishers from Accessible Publishing/NNELS

eBound Canada and **CNIB Beyond Print** best practices guide for publishers interested in introducing accessible audiobook production into their workflow.

W3C Audiobooks Recommendations

Winnie-the-Pooh audiobook: **Librivox - Winnie-the-Pooh**



MAKING ACCESSIBLE BOOKS

www.makingaccessiblebooks.ca