

# Accessible Times: The UATP Podcast episode 3

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You can find *Accessible Times: The UATP Podcast* on Spotify, Apple Podcast, Stitcher and BuzzSprout.

In this second episode dedicated to tactile learning, Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen of Bowling Green State University points out the advantages of tactile exploration, not just for the Blind but for everyone. She also discusses the cultural barriers that get between the Blind and their right to explore their world. Finally, she finishes up with a book recommendation--because apparently several writers have tried to create a "blind alien," but not all of them have done it well.

1:00 – Sheri reveals that one of her interests is understanding cognition, intelligence and language. She also wonders, if we met another species, what would their thinking and language be like?

2:00 – There is a level of public misunderstanding about what blind people do and do not know about the world. For example, they would understand that a cathedral is large and impressive, but a 3D model could help them distinguish one cathedral from another.

5:45 – Looking at objects does have disadvantages, compared to feeling them. For example, it doesn't work well in low light.

9:00 – Tactile exploration can help people understand more—not just for the Blind but for everyone. However, more and more learning is shifting to digital, which does not translate to tactile information well.

10:50 – [Geerat Vermeij at UC Davis](#) is a blind scientist who has expanded the world's understanding of mollusks through his own tactile exploration.

11:30 – Sighted children are shown how to explore visually from the beginning, but too often blind children are told, "Don't touch."

13:30 – 3D models can help communicate what a constellation is like, much more quickly than a description.

15:48 – Models can help you recall what an object is like, even if you have seen it before but haven't seen it in a while.

16:50 – Sheri takes on the story of the blind men and the elephant. It's a terrible story that shows the blind men were not allowed to fully explore an elephant. But in her experience, it is very exciting to explore a live elephant—so much so that it's hard to remember any data after the exploration is done. Models can help with that.

19:00 – Statues and kids' toys often misrepresent the object they depict.

19:45 – One of the challenges of making a 3D model is deciding what is prototypical.

21:39 – Should a 3D model communicate color differences on a penguin that is otherwise tactilely uniform?

23:30 – A cat's fur can vary a lot over its body. This can be tricky to represent in a model.

24:35 – Our cultural idea of touching something has limits; often the sighted person's hand directs a child's hands when they are touching an object.

26:00 – Does a blind child have the permission to touch an object with the same freedom that a sighted child is allowed to look at it?

28:00 – 3D models don't just allow a detailed exploration, they also allow privacy. They let the explorer look at something for as long as they'd like, without worrying that other people are waiting.

29:30 – The idea that touch is destructive is another barrier to learning.

30:00 – A 3D printed object will have its own texture, not necessarily the texture of the thing it represents.

31:12 – So far, model technology doesn't usually give us a 100 percent accurate picture of an item. But Sheri argues that it's not a question of whether we *can* produce the models, but whether we *will*.

32:00 – Sheri leaves us with a book recommendation for a well-written, "blind alien" book: *The Darkling Sea* by James Cambias.