

Creating Offline Captions

TS
Tip Sheet

Overview

Captioning, a textual representation of audio media, is an important accessibility tool for deaf people, as well as a benefit and learning tool for others. With so many avenues to obtain or create captioned media, ensuring that instructional materials are accessible is achievable.

How can I ensure that my media is captioned?

The most efficient strategy is to select media that is already captioned. Often, instructors wait until they learn that they have a deaf student or, more concerning, until they show the media for the first time to address the need for captioning. Though selecting already-captioned media is ideal, the reality is that the availability of captions varies greatly by media type. Expect the following concerning captioning:

- Commercial media, produced by large production companies, is often already captioned.
- Smaller or independent production companies may not have thought to include captions. However, they may add captions upon request.
- YouTube videos are most often not captioned, thus captions will need to be added. (YouTube's automatic captions are notoriously inaccurate and cannot be relied upon for access.)
- Instructor-produced media will most likely not have captions.

In the event that captioning is not readily available, there are three options:

- Create the captions in house.
- Outsource to a captioning vendor.
- Choose comparable media that is already captioned.

Most institutions use a combination of these methods, depending on the demand and the staff availability to fulfill requests. A well-prepared institution will have practical timelines for requesting captioning, whether the captioning is done in house or outsourced.

What are the elements of in-house captioning?

In-house captioning begins with the identification of the department or individual who will be responsible for the work. Whether in a college campus or workplace setting, in-house captioning is most often managed by the disability office or ADA compliance officer. Some disability offices have the capability to caption video. Other offices turn to their institution's media center.

When considering taking on the task of captioning in house, one must consider the labor involved in each step of the captioning process. Initially, in-house captioning may seem more cost effective, but institutions should evaluate whether current staff members can meet the demand or whether additional staff members are needed. A captioning "rule of thumb" is that 30 minutes of video equals 7 to 10 hours of work. Additionally, a training period for staff members to become proficient in the captioning process and technical support must be factored into the overall labor cost.



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How are captions created?

The basic process for creating captions includes the following:

- Creating a verbatim transcript of the dialogue that includes speaker identification, sound effects, and other important auditory information
- Dividing the transcript into grammatically correct lines of no more than 32 characters (including spaces) per line; each screen should have no more than two lines of text
- Using captioning software to add time codes, which synchronize the captions with the audio
- Importing the completed caption file into the video

The steps may seem simple but each requires attention to detail, technical expertise, and time.

The presence of words on the screen does not guarantee access. Poor-quality captions can cause more confusion and misunderstanding than no captions.

What should I consider for outsourced captioning and what are the criteria for high-quality captions?

According to the Described and Captioned Media Program Captioning Key, captions must be accurate, consistent, clear, readable, and equal.¹ The captioning market has a wide variety in cost and quality. Institutions can shop for high-quality captions within budget. Questions to ask include the following:

- What is the level of technical support available?
- What level of accuracy is guaranteed?
- What is the typical turnaround time?
- What is the price differential for rapid turnaround?

Captions should be no more than 32 characters per line and one or two lines of text per screen. Text should be divided at grammatically appropriate points, which increases readability. Captions should use a medium-weight, sans serif font. When possible, a translucent box should be behind the captions to increase contrast and readability. Captions should use both uppercase and lowercase letters. Captions using all capital letters are among the most difficult to read.² Using white text with a drop shadow makes the captions easier to read on most backgrounds.

Related Resources

- Why Captions Provide Equal Access: www.nationaldeafcenter.org/captionaccess
- Described and Captioned Media Program Captioning Key: www.captioningkey.org

Additional resources on this subject may be available at www.nationaldeafcenter.org/resources

References

¹Described and Captioned Media Program. (n.d.). *Quality captioning*. Retrieved from www.captioningkey.org/quality_captioning.html

²Tinker, M. A. (1963). *Legibility of print*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.



This document was developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, OSEP #HD326D160001. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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Additional resources can be found at www.nationaldeafcenter.org