Closed Captioning
Style Guide

Rules of Captioning

The following rules of captioning have been designated by the Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the National Association for the Deaf. The elements of a good caption include the following:

Accurate

Errorless captions are the goal for each production.

Consistent

Uniformity in style and presentation of all captioning features is crucial for viewer understanding.

Clear

A complete textual representation of the audio, including speaker identification and non-speech information, provides clarity.

Readable

Captions are displayed with enough time to be read completely, are in synchronization with the audio, and are not obscured by (nor do they obscure) the visual content.

Equal

Equal access requires that the meaning and intention of the material is completely preserved.

Text

The following guidelines are in place for text:

- Use mixed case text, except in the case of screaming or shouting which should be in ALL CAPS.
- Use a white font color on a black background. Note: YouTube captioning is used by OTS Training and the style is already embedded into the program and cannot be altered.
- When a sentence is broken into two or more lines, break the sentence at a logical point where speech would normally pause.
- A period usually indicates the end of a caption, and the next sentence starts with a new caption.
- Do not break a modifier from the word it modifies.
- Do not break a prepositional phrase.
- Do not break a person's name or title.
- Do not break a line after a conjunction.
- Always create new sentences on a new line.

Punctuation and Grammar

The following guidelines are in place for Punctuation and Grammar:

- Always use an Oxford comma when captioning a list.
- If there is a hesitation, stutter or pause, caption the hesitation.
- If there is a significant pause, use ellipsis.
- Use quotation marks for onscreen readings.
- Use quotation marks and italics for off-screen readings or voice overs.

Sound Effects and Music

The following guidelines are in place for Sound Effects and Music:

- When a sound effect is used, enclose the description of the sound effect in square brackets: [applause].
- Off screen sound effects should be enclosed in square brackets and be italicized
- Use punctuation to indicate speed and/or pace of sound: [dog barking] woof...woof...woof
- A description of music should be described in square brackets [lyrical flute solo].
- Non-essential music should be captioned by placing a music icon on the screen.

Speaker Identification

The following guidelines are in place for Speaker Identification:

- A speaker's name should be on its own line in parenthesis (Rodney)
- When a speaker cannot be identified by name, use non-gendered labels and pronouns (Speaker), (Interviewer), (Interviewee), (Narrator), (Voiceover)
- In the event that more than one speaker could be described using the same speaker label, use descriptive words to differentiate rather than numbering (Seated Person), (Standing Person), (Speaker at Podium), (Speaker at Table), (Candidate on Right), (Candidate on Left)

Special Considerations

The following special considerations are in place:

- Indicate the speaker's emotion if not on screen: [angrily].
- When a person whispers, indicate as such: [whispering].
- When people are seen talking but there is no audio, indicate as such: [no audio].
- If someone is speaking in a different language, indicate the language: [speaking French].
- Type numbers as numerical figures (1000 instead of one-thousand).
- When something is spoken phonetically, caption it the way it is commonly written.