

Best Practices

Captions are best when they are:

1. Errorless captions are the goal for each production.
2. Synchronized with the audio and displayed with enough time to be read completely.
3. Not obscured by, nor do they obscure, the visual content.
4. Under 30 characters per line.
5. No more than two lines on the screen at a time.

Tips for Captioning Dialogue:

1. Write exactly what the speakers are saying.
2. Use *italics* or write “**(off-screen)**”/ “**(VO)**” (for voice-over) when speakers cannot be seen.
3. Identify speakers by name, or role (i.e. Man 1), when it is not visually clear who is speaking. All speaker identification should be lowercase unless this identification is being used as a proper noun.
4. Identify hard to hear dialogue as “**[unintelligible]**” or “**[inaudible]**”.
5. Identify screaming/shouting by using all capital letters (i.e. “HELP!”)

Tips for Captioning Non-Dialogue Sounds:

1. Sound Effects should be shown in captions by brackets “**[]**” – NOT parentheses – to separate them from dialogue. Always name the object making the sound as what it is (i.e. “**[engine revving]**” or “**[clock ticking]**”). This creates meaning to those viewing content.
2. Establish that a sound stopped (i.e. “**[clapping stops]**”) or that there is a sudden silence (i.e. “**[silence]**”).
 - Always identify if a sound or music fades away slowly (i.e. “**[cheering slowly fades]**”).
3. If a speaker is moving their lips without dialogue, identify this with “**[mouths words]**” or “**[inaudible]**”
4. Distorted sounds should be identified by the type of distortion (i.e. “**[muffled]**” or “**[echoing]**”).
 - Also identify when the distortion ends.

Tips for Captioning Music:

1. Name the song/artist or the instrument and identify with music notes (i.e. “**♪ As It Seems by Lily Kershaw ♪**” or “**♪ saxophone ♪**”).
2. If the song, artist, and/or instrument is unknown, do your best to describe tone/mood of the music (i.e. “**♪ somber music ♪**” or “**♪ eerie music ♪**”).

Other Tips for Captioning:

1. Automatic captions will need manual edits to ensure accuracy.
2. Be Consistent. Uniformity in style and presentation of all captioning features is crucial for viewer understanding. Please be consistent in the spelling of words throughout the media.
 - This includes vocabulary that can be spelled either as one or two words or in hyphenated form.
3. Equal access requires that the meaning and intention of the material is completely preserved.
 - If it holds value for someone with access to the full audio, you need to caption it.
4. **Do not** emphasize a word using all capital letters except to indicate screaming or shouting.

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