Overview

Captioning, a textual representation of the audio, is an important accessibility tool for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, 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 definitely achievable.

What do I need to do to ensure my media is captioned?

The most efficient way to ensure your media is captioned is to select media that is already captioned. Often instructors will wait until they learn they have a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, or more concerning, wait 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. What to expect 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. (The automatic captions produced on YouTube videos are notoriously inaccurate and cannot be relied upon for access.)
- Instructor-produced media will most likely not have captions.

In the event 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 utilize 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 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 if current staff can meet the demand or if additional staff will be 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 to become proficient in the captioning process as well as the technical support must be factored into the overall labor cost.

How are captions created?

The basic process for creating captions includes:

- Creating a verbatim transcript of the dialogue which includes speaker identification, sound effects, and other important auditory information.

Offline Captioning: Creating Captioning

- Dividing the transcript into grammatically correct lines of no more than 32 characters (including spaces) per line. Each screen should have no more than 2 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. It is important to remember that the presence of words on the screen does not guarantee access. Poor quality captions can actually cause more confusion and misunderstandings than no captions.

What are some of the elements of outsourced captioning and what are the criteria for high quality captions?

According to the Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) Captioning Key, captions must be accurate, consistent, clear, readable, and equal.[1] In the captioning market, there is a wide variety in terms of cost and quality. Institutions will be able to shop around to find high quality captions that fit their budget. Questions to ask include:

- 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?

Whether in-house or outsourced, 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 will increase the readability. Captions should use a medium weight, sans serif font. When possible a translucent box behind the captions is preferred to increase contrast and readability. Captions should use both upper and lower case 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.

Correct   Incorrect

Captioning as means for providing access is discussed in detail in the Fast Fact titled *Offline Captioning: Why Captions Provide Equal Access*

Resources

The DCMP Captioning Key - http://www.captioningkey.org/
Access: Post-Production / Offline Captioning - https://dcmp.org/learn/468-access-post-productionoffline-captioning-module

References

[1] The DCMP Captioning Key – Quality Captioning. Retrieved from https://dcmp.org/learn/captioningkey/599

[2] Tinker, Miles A. (1963). *Legibility of Print*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press.

Published April 2016