CAPTIONING TECHNIQUES FOR THE
CAPTIONED FILMS/VIDEOS CAPTIONING WORKSHOP: PART I

Mike Waugh, Workshop Director
Johnson County Community College
Olathe, Kansas
1988

Part I of a captioning manual prepared for teachers at summer workshops sponsored by the Captioned Films/Videos Program. This section includes general guidelines and an explanation of captioning levels.

Contributors:

Carolyn Breeden; Kansas School for the Deaf; Olathe, Kansas
Garry Loysen; Rochester School for the Deaf; Rochester, New York
Donna Farman; Phoenix Day School for the Deaf; Phoenix, Arizona
Joyce Kantor; Fairfax High School; Los Angeles, California
Mary Bauer; St. Paul School District; St. Paul, Minnesota
Mary Modica; Modern Talking Picture Services; Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Mike Waugh; Johnson County Community College; Overland Park, Kansas

---

Special Thanks To:

Ruth Verlinde, NTID, Rochester, New York
Peter Schragle, NTID, Rochester, New York

Portions of this manual were drawn from *How to Write and Caption for Deaf People* (T.J. Publisher, Inc., 1986) written by Ruth Verlinde and Peter Schragle.

EVERY WORD COUNTS: CAPTIONING AN EDUCATIONAL FILM

The process which culminates in a captioned film being viewed by hearing-impaired students involves several different activities and requires some 18 to 24 months. The actual caption writing activity takes place during the annual captioning workshop. This workshop is conducted every summer in a different region of the country and is hosted by institutions involved in the different region of the country and is hosted by institutions involved in the education of the hearing impaired. State schools for the deaf, day school programs for the deaf, and colleges and universities which provide services and training for professionals in deaf education have served as host sites. The 1988 Captioning Workshop is being hosted by the Texas School for the Deaf from July 11th through August 5th. Marvin Sallop is the executive director of the Texas School and Sheila Penick is the site coordinator for the workshop.

The captioning workshop is part of the Captioned Films/Videos Project which is sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education, Office of Special Education. The current contractor for the Captioned Films/Videos Project is Modern Talking Picture Service (MTPS), St. Petersburg, Florida.

Films eventually captioned at the captioning workshop have passed a rigorous screening process. To qualify for evaluation and possible selection, films must first meet predetermined curricular needs. Once past this first hurdle, films are viewed and evaluated by educators of the deaf at various evaluation sites throughout the country. The films recommended for selection by the field evaluation teams are reviewed at the national validation workshop. The validation group includes experienced caption and lesson guide writers and consists of teachers, administrators, media specialists, and other professionals in the field of deaf education. Both selection and validation teams evaluate such aspects as a film's basic educational value, content accuracy and suitability, potential viewer interest, potential use, and captionability.

Once films have been selected and validated, decisions regarding the total number of titles (films) and the number of prints (copies) of each title to be purchased are made. Following contractual agreements with each film's distributor, the film finally begins the actual captioning process. The initial step in this process is the development of a spotting list.

A spotting list is a film's sound track in written form. The exact locations within a film where narration, dialogue or sound effects start and end and a verbatim translation of the audio are noted on the spotting list. Additionally, the duration of each audio segment is recorded. Thus, a spotting list contains start, end and duration measurements and a verbatim account for every audio segment within a film. The spotting lists and films are delivered to the captioning workshop where the second step of the captioning process occurs.

Activities at the captioning workshop include writing the caption scripts, proofing the scripts for both language and math, the data entry, printing, and copying of the scripts, and mailing copies of the finished scripts to the Illinois School for the Deaf, site of the lesson guide workshop and to the contractor. The captioning workshop is a labor intensive workshop which requires more than 30 people, working 2 ½ to 4 weeks each, to produce caption scripts for more than 100 educational films.

Caption writers are the largest group within a captioning workshop. A core of writers with 1-7 years of experience comprises more than one-half the caption writing team and represents regions from around the country. New writers are selected from those professionals within the host institution's region who have submitted applications. The subject areas and grade levels of the films to be captioned affect the

selection of writers for the captioning workshop. Other workshop personnel recruited annually include language proofers, computer operators, interpreters, the site coordinator, and the assistant site coordinator.

Whenever possible, writers caption films which match their subject area and/or grade level expertise. The critical concern when actually writing captions is the film's classification. A film is either a SYNCAP or NON-SYNCAP film. SYNCAP is an acronym for SYNchronous CAPtions. In a SYNCAP film, a film's original audio track is replaced with an audio track which is exactly the same, in both content and timing, as the writer's captions. In a NON-SYNCAP film, the original audio track is retained and the captions are written, as closely as possible, to match the existing audio. Those films which have on-screen dialogue or narration (the speaker(s) appear in the film) or are narrated by well-known personalities become NON-SYNCAP films. Films which have nearly the entire audio track narrated off-screen become SYNCAP films. Another classification, PARTIAL SYNCAP, has both SYNCAP and NON-SYNCAP segments in the same film.

Before beginning to write the actual captions, the writer must view the film. During this initial viewing, the writer verifies the content of the spotting list, notes the major concepts and special vocabulary which must be retained in the captions, determines those segments which may require speaker identification, and looks for any visuals on the film which might require caption placement other than the normal lower one-fourth of the screen. The two components which most affect the way in which captions are written are the grade level of the primary audience and the film's classification of either SYNCAP or NON-SYNCAP.

Educational films are captioned at a 120 words per minute (WPM) reading rate. These rates are not absolutes and are altered by several factors. A high school science film, "Principles of Lubrication," requires that the captions contain more specific vocabulary and adhere more strictly to the sequence of presentation than does a primary science film such as "Farms in Summer." The lower the grade level of the intended audience, the greater the writer's ability to keep the reading rate below 120 WPM.

A NON-SYNCAP film often has a faster reading rate than does a SYNCAP film. Those factors which cause a faster reading rate include,

1. the presence of directly quoted material, such as famous speeches or passages from literature, which requires verbatim captioning;
2. the rapid-fire pace of dialogue which forces the reading rate of the captions to be nearly that of the spoken word; and
3. the need for speaker identification in dialogue films which adds one or two words to a caption length without contributing to the caption's content.

After the initial viewing, the writer works with the film in segments. In a SYNCAP film those segments are most often film scenes. A scene is a film segment in which the camera angle (the "eyes" of the viewing audience) does not change. For example, in a driver's education film, a camera angle from the driver's position showing the street ahead as a car travels down the street would be one scene. The scene changes when another visual appears such as a close-up view of a child playing in a nearby yard. The audio for the street scene might explain that safe drivers must be prepared for unexpected circumstances. The audio for the child's scene would then emphasize that the child might unexpectedly run into the street.

Scenes vary in both length and in the amount of audio information presented within them. The spotting list provides the length (duration) of the entire scene and duration of each audio portion within the scene. In a SYNCAP film, a writer has the liberty to "resequence" the audio segments within a scene because the visual remains the same (the scene does not change) and a new audio track will match the captions exactly. As captions are written, these general rules prevail,

1. each caption may not exceed 2 lines of 36 characters per line;
2. all captions should be complete sentences; and
3. the number of words which can be used in a caption is determined by the amount of time the caption will remain on screen and the corresponding word allowance based on the 120 WPM caption scale.

***** CAPTION SCALE *****

WORDS ALLOWED	TOTAL FRAMES
1	18
2	30
3	42
4	54
5	66
6	78
7	90
8	102
9	114
10	126
11	138
12	150

EXAMPLE A: NON-SYNCAP film: if a scene contains one audio segment which is 126 frames in length, the caption may contain 10 words or less.

EXAMPLE B: SYNCAP film: if a scene is 402 frames long and has more than one audio segment, the scene may contain any number of captions providing the total length of the captions does not exceed the scene length. The scene might contain three captions, one of which contains 8 words (102 frames) with the other two containing 12 words (150 frames) each.

CAPTION #1	8 words =	102 frames
CAPTION #2	+ 12 words =	150 frames
CAPTION #3	+ 12 words =	150 frames
3 CAPTIONS =	32 words =	402 frames

Thus, the captioning writing process requires that a writer determine how many frames are available for a particular audio segment then write captions of appropriate word length while maintaining the content of the film's original audio.

While working through a film, a writer must also recognize those segments of a film which require repositioning captions from their normal location in the lower one-fourth of the film frame to the upper one-fourth or, less frequently, to the middle one-fourth of the film frame. This repositioning is necessary when the film contains visual information in the lower portion of the frame which would be covered by normal caption placement. This visual information might be names and titles of on-screen speakers, arrows or other kinds of graphic symbols, or a portion of the film's visual which demonstrates a critical procedure or technique such as the safe way to grip a chain saw.

The writer is also responsible for researching various facts within a film to verify their accuracy. Statistics must be current. Geographical names and technical vocabulary must be spelled correctly. Research requests occasionally require that local experts on foreign countries, medical libraries at hospitals, larger libraries at nearby universities, and other sources be contacted to supply needed information.

When writers have completed writing and proofing their captions, the caption scripts enter the proofing stages of the captioning workshop. The first proof of a caption script is the Film Proof. As the film is viewed, the script is compared to the spotting list and proofed for,

1. caption content to film content;
2. language, grammar, punctuation, spelling, subject/verb agreement, verb tense consistency, line division on 2 line captions; and
3. speaker identification and upper and center frame caption placement.

The writer's handwritten caption script is then entered into a microcomputer by the computer operators and printed. From this point on, all proofing is completed on the computer print out version of the caption script. After leaving the computer operators, the caption script is reviewed by a representative of the program contractor, a captioning workshop administrator, and the captioning workshop director.

The 1st and 2nd proofs are completed by the workshop proofing team which consists of teachers of the deaf with strong language backgrounds. Proofers are often English or language teachers. These proofs check grammar, spelling, and punctuation, caption flow, and appropriateness of the language used in the script. Additionally, these proofs check several technical factors which insure that the film will be properly captioned at the film lab. The caption script is then updated by the computer operators and printed again, final proofed by one of the proofers, copied, collated, and mailed.

At MTPS caption scripts enter another proofing cycle before copies of the caption script are delivered to the film distributors and to the film lab. The film lab physically places the captions on the film in accordance with the BEGIN and END footages of the caption script. As each film progresses through various stages of development, additional proofs and approvals are required. Upon final approval, the contracted number of copies of each film title are made and supplied to MTPS which is also the contractor for the distribution of Captioned Educational Films/Videos. Copies of the captioned films/videos are then distributed to the various Captioned Films/Videos depositories throughout the country. It is from these depositories that teachers order the captioned films which assist in the education of hearing impaired students.

TERMINOLOGY

Audio Begin	Frame at which sound segment begins on the film.
Audio End	Frame at which sound segment ends on the film.
Audio Production Notes	Notes in a caption script explaining to the technical lab how to handle the audio track of the adapted film.
Caption Scale	A ratio of frames of film and caption word length which determines the recommended caption FOOTAGE based upon a reading rate of 120 WPM (student).
Caption Folder	A manila folder which contains: 1. the spotting list 2. the caption script 3. the Caption Script Checklist 4. the typed script and copies 5. Special Information Sheet 6. Research Notes Form 7. additional materials that pertain to that specific title 8. library search notes 9. lesson guide The cover of the caption folder has a work-flow chart for that particular title.
Caption Script	The total of handwritten caption sheets developed by caption writers for EACH film.
Caption Script Checklist	8½ x 11 columned sheet for documenting the progression of a caption script through the workshop process. This form is left in the caption folder.
Caption Sheet	8½ x 11 columned sheet on which writers record their handwritten captions and film footages. 8½ x 11 columned sheets which are computerized reproduction of the proofed, 8 ½ x 11 handwritten caption sheets.
Captions	The adaptation of a film's sound track to print for hearing-impaired viewers.
Dialogue	That portion of a film's sound track in which two or more people (usually ON-SCREEN) are engaged in conversation.

Language Levels for Captions	Quick Reference of appropriate syntax to be used at three reading levels. There is also a supporting document which gives more information.
Library Request Form	Use to request research needed to document film information; be specific when identifying needed verification.
Log Sheet	A large chart kept in the workshop director's office. Workshop members sign off and record work times so that the work progression of each film can be tracked.
Narration	That portion of a film's sound track in which an OFFSCREEN voice describes (narrates) the film.
Non-Syncap	The film's original sound track is retained and the writer MUST develop captions which are as close to the sound track as possible.
Off-Screen	Used to describe the presence of a person speaking who is NOT seen in the film; most often used to describe narration.
On-Screen	The visual presence on the film of persons, graphics, titles or motion; most often used to describe persons engaged in conversation (dialogue).
Proofing Marks	Standardized proofreading marks which may be found in numerous typing or journalism texts. (See copy at end of this section.)
Research Notes Form	Documentation provided by the writer, film checker, proofers, etc. which includes corrections and sources.
Scene	A continuously developed unit of visual action in the film with no film edits.
Script Beginning and Ending Information	Instruction before and after the script which tell the laboratory technician such things as where to begin and end captions, film title, and film length.
Special Information Sheet	A document with each film which cumulates all information gathered regarding the film during pre-workshop activities.
Speaker Identification	Identifies the speaker in a captioned script when there is any question who is speaking, i.e., (Father) What are you doing here?

Spotting List   Typewritten, verbatim record of film's video scenes and sound track with corresponding frames as prepared by the spotting lab.

SYNCAP   The process which replaces a film's original sound track with a revised sound track which is EXACTLY the same as and synchronized with the captions written by caption writers.

Titles   The individual, typewritten, verbatim segments of a film's sound track for given frames within the film as presented in a spotting list.

Upper Frame   The placement of a caption in the upper ¼ of the film frame to accommodate conflicting or critical visuals which appear in the lower ¼ of the film frame where captions are normally placed.

Video BEGIN   Frame at which scene will first appear on the film.

Video END   Frame at which scene will be removed from the film.

CAPTIONING LEVELS

The following chart is intended to serve as a quick reference guide for the development of caption scripts. The chart is based upon information provided in Appendix B, "Language Control in Captioned Films," and should serve as general guidelines to augment the caption writer's educational experience and expertise.

A recommended Captioning Level and targeted grade level are noted on the Special Information Sheet (SIS) for each film.

	LEVEL A	**LEVEL B**	**LEVEL C**
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	Simple sentence patterns—follow subject-verb-object order.	Compound sentences—use <u>and</u>/<u>but</u> in simple clauses.	Compound sentences—use <u>or</u>. Complex sentences—use uncomplicated subjects, verbs, and objects.
VERB TENSES	Simple past, present, and future tenses (ran, runs, will run) Past and present progressives (was running, is running)		
VERB MODALS	Can, may, do, does, did, will, want to	Would, must, should, could, going to	Might, be able to, have to, used to, be able to
PERSONAL PRONOUNS PERSONAL PRONOUNS CONTINUED	I, me, you, *we, *us, *he, *she, *him, *her, *it. *Use only if referent is seen on the screen.	They, them	*it *May use when the referent is not specific.
POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS		Mine	Ours, yours, theirs, his, hers, its
INDEFINITE PRONOUNS		Everyone, everybody, everything, nobody, something	Somebody, someone
NEGATIVES AND CONTRACTIONS	Not, don't, can't	No, nothing, doesn't, didn't, isn't, wasn't, won't, wouldn't, I'm, it's, he's, they're, you'll, we'll	Never, not yet, no longer, couldn't, shouldn't, haven't
ADJECTIVES	Use one adjective per noun. Quantifiers: many, some	Can use two adjectives per noun. Quantifiers: all, another, each, every	
PREPOSITIONS	May use one prepositional phrase in the verb phrase. (Mike put the film <u>on the projector</u>.) At, down, for, in, near, on, off, out, over, to, under, with, up, into	May use two prepositional phrases in the verb phrase. (Carolyn walked <u>across</u> the room <u>with</u> the script.) Above, about, across, after, against, along, before, behind, below, beside, from, between, around, during, in front of, in back of, instead of, outside of, since, toward, through, until, without, inside, outside	May have prepositional phrase in the noun phrase. (Five <u>of the writers</u> left the room.) By, beyond, among, opposite, beneath, except.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The following language development guidelines reflect the levels of language Complexity commonly mattered by deaf children in the different grade level groupings. Caption writers can refer to the guidelines given here to SUPPLEMENT their own professional knowledge regarding the use of appropriate syntactical structures for the various Key Audience designations on the Special Information Sheet (SIS).

I. VOCABULARY
    The vocabulary presented in the spotting list (the film's audio) must be altered by the caption writer to fit the educational needs of hearing impaired students. In either a SYNCAP or NON-SYNCAP film, keep the original vocabulary only when it serves the needs of the targeted viewing audience noted on the Special Information Sheet. Eliminate or substitute more appropriate synonyms for vocabulary words not commonly found in basal readers appropriate for the targeted level. Remember that even in high school, many viewers do not read beyond a fourth grade basal reader.

    Retain any vocabulary important to the subject of the film which you would expect to be taught as new vocabulary prior to viewing the film. Vocabulary words used in lesson guide activities or suggested by the guide writer in the captioning notes is to be used in your captions. Please notify the WS director when such requests can not be accommodated or such guide activities can not be supported.

    Repeating key vocabulary within the captions can contribute to the learning of that vocabulary. Word captions in such a way that the context explains and re-explains the new vocabulary. If a vocabulary word is used only once, that may be an indication that the word is not essential to the film's content.

II. IDIOMS AND MULTIPLE MEANINGS
    Use idioms with caution. In general, idioms that are more literal than abstract are more easily understood. For example, "Come out here." is more easily understood than "Get out here." Remember that idioms are presented as a unit. If the viewers cannot understand the individual words within the idiom, they most certainly cannot understand the idiom.

    Words with multiple meanings must also be used with caution. Be certain that the meaning of such a word when used in your captions is the appropriate meaning and that another use of the word with a different meaning does not appear in other captions. Think of the possible meanings of words like run, and fire. These words can be used as nouns, verbs, in idioms, etc.

III. SENTENCE PATTERNS
    The following represent a basic reference list for SENTENCE PATTERNS to be used in captions at the various grade levels:

    A. Primary Level
        1. Use ONLY simple sentences.
        2. Follow Subject-Verb-Object word order.
        3. AVOID compound sentences.
        4. Don't split captions. Simplify a split caption into two simple sentences. Compound subjects (John AND Mary ate dinner.) and compound objects (John ate meat AND potatoes.) are acceptable.

5. Do NOT use CONJOINED sentences (John ate potatoes BUT Mary ate meat.)

B. Intermediate Level: compound sentences, as well as, simple sentences are appropriate.

C. Jr. High and High School Level: complex sentences, conjoined verbs, and conjoined prepositions are acceptable, but still difficult.
    1. Complex sentences can often become two simple sentences.
    2. Conjoined verb–"The men are sawing and drilling the wood."
    3. Conjoined prepositions–"The cat ran into the house and under the bed."

IV. CONTRACTIONS AND NEGATIVES
Using contractions to save a word and meet the Captioning Scale allotment is another technique to be used with extreme caution. Some contractions are visually confusing or look much like another word, e.g., we'll and well. Remember that the captions appear on screen for only a short time and the viewer does not have the luxury of scrutinizing any particular word within a caption. Many times, two words written out are more quickly comprehended than is the equivalent contraction.

Do not use invented contractions, e.g., "mightnt've been," and nonwords such as, "gonna," and "usta." The use of nonwords is acceptable when reflecting dialectical speech patterns or when the use of such words is integral to the film's instructional objectives. In either case, prior approval of WS administration is required.

The following represent a basic reference list for the use of CONTRACTIONS and NEGATIVES at the various grade levels:

A. Primary Level: "can't, don't, doesn't, didn't, isn't, wasn't, and won't" are the contractions most appropriate.
B. Elementary Level: "wouldn't, I'm, he's, they're, you'll, and we'll" can be added to the Primary contractions.
C. High School Level: "won't, couldn't, shouldn't, haven't," and the negative "not yet" can be added to the Elementary contractions.
D. All Levels: Contracting pronouns with "would" or "have" are DIFFICULT. Ex: "I'd, he'd, I've, she's, they've."
E. All Levels: Avoid "neither" and "no longer."

V. VERB TENSES

A. Primary Level: use ONLY simple past, present and future tenses; e.g., Carolyn walks, Carolyn walked, Carolyn will walk.
B. AVOID passive voice, whenever possible. Be aware that the changing of passive voice to active voice can occasionally change the concept. In such situations, do not change passive voice to active voice. See Appendix A for clear and concise descriptions of active and passive voice.
C. The following represent a basic reference list for the use of VERB MODALS at the various grade levels:

1. Primary Level: "can, may, do, does, did, will, want to, try to."
2. Elementary/Intermediate Level: "would, might, must, going to, need to, should, could, be able to, used to" can be added to the Primary verb modals.
3. Most Difficult/Avoid whenever possible: "ought to, be about to, be unable to, had better, had best, have to, shall, supposed to, had better be."
4. Some modals substitute for each other readily. Use "must" or "should" for "have to." Use "will" for "going to."

VI. PRONOUNS

The key to all use of pronouns at ALL LEVELS is to be sure that the reader understands the REFERENT. If you are using pronouns in your captions, be sure to identify the REFERENT for your pronoun every two or three captions. EX: if you are using "she" to refer to Donna in three or four successive captions, Donna should be identified one or two times in those four captions. This is a critical consideration as the viewer does NOT have the opportunity to "look back" a few captions and determine who "she" is. (Of course, we ALL know who Donna really is.)

The following represent a basic reference list for the use of PRONOUNS at the various grade levels:

A. Primary Level: most PERSONAL pronouns are understood.
B. Elementary/Intermediate Level: INDEFINITE pronouns such as anybody, anyone, everyone, someone, nothing, something.
C. Most Difficult: POSSESSIVE pronouns except for "mine" which is appropriate at the Primary Level.
D. "There insertion" is a difficult construction. "There are . . ." sentences can be simplified by eliminating the "there" and moving the verb.

EXAMPLE:
There are 15 apples left. DIFFICULT
Fifteen apples are left. PREFERRED