

Open Access Verbatim Captioning

Verbatim Captioning is the process of converting every spoken word of a show into formatted text and then displaying that text in the venue to make that event fully accessible to deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing audience members.

For “Open Access” the text is usually displayed on an LED caption unit situated on or next to the stage.

For best Access Theatre Captioning is operated live, with a trained captioner or operator triggering each line of text to be displayed as it is being spoken or sung.

The captioner pre-formats the script and imports it into the captioning software, working with a video recording of the show and, ideally, viewing a live performance to make sure the text displayed accurately matches what is being said, when it is being said and, importantly, how it is being said.

As well as dialogue, the captions also include the name of the character who is speaking or singing and descriptions of Music and other "atmospherics" such as Sound Effects should be included in captions if they are part of the story being told. It's up to you to decide what to include. Is the music part of the narrative? Is it portraying a mood that's important to describe?

Remember, your objective is to give deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing audience members the best theatre access we can by offering them a rich, full, and complete experience of the show.

Formatting Verbatim Captioning Files

What must Captions include?

All Character names.

For easy identification character names should be in capital letters followed by a colon.

ARTHUR: Mind my leg!
RONNIE: Sorry, Father.
ARTHUR: How are you, my boy?

PUMBAA: Yeah. It's our motto!
SIMBA: What's a motto?
TIMON: Nothin'!

All words spoken by characters (on and offstage) should be included.

VIOLET: *The Daily News!*
MISS BARNES: Mr Winslow?
So good of you to see me.

BRICK: What did you lock the door for?
MARGARET: To give us a little privacy
for a while.

Show HOW the words are being spoken to convey their meaning.

Use punctuation to convey, as much as possible, the way speech is delivered.

Did you know that?
BANZAI: Me? Nooo! Did you?
SHENZI: Nooo! Of course not!

ED: Huh huh huh huh. Yeah
ALL THREE: Chow down!
Ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-chow down

Use an ellipsis when there is a significant pause within a caption.

You deliberately disobeyed me!
SIMBA: Dad, I'm ...
I'm sorry.

Use a dash when there is a hesitation or if character searching for the right words.

What's happened here is, is, is -
is a very serious thing!
COPLEY: Okay - okay -

Use quotation marks where a character quotes from a poem, book, play, journal, letter, or simply someone else.

"A master of cloth", our Mum
used to say,
turned his hand to everything:

Use square brackets at the start of the line to describe a character's accent.

[SOUTHERN U.S. ACCENTS]
MARGARET: One of those no-neck monsters
hit me with a hot buttered biscuit

Use capital letters and italics to reflect how a character emphasises a line.

He would've been glad that you were . . .
GLAD that you were here.
We're going straight to the cemetery.

BENNY: *Thing is*, Gilbert, the thing is,
one of those photos was of my mum
with your dad and the other one

Use a single dash if a character interrupts or talks over another.

MUMS: - and controller in her hand.
- She tells me she's talking to friends -
- They all play together online or something.

Use numerals for Dates so lines do not become over-long.

**May 1970 but my birthday's in June
so it definitely wasn't me.
GIL: My birthday is May 25th, 1970.**

Unless the date is a lyric in a song in which case it should spelt out.

**BENNY: ♪ It was the third of September
That day I'll always remember
Yes I will**

Do not end one sentence and begin a new one on the same line.

**You go easy! You're hanging an innocent
man! I never even met the girl!
I've never even been to Norfolk!**

Punctuation should generally follow normal style and conventions.

**SHENZI: I'm chompin' at the bit, baby.
BANZAI: My stomach's on a growl, son.
BANZAI & SHENZI: Chow down!**

Grammar

Helpful things to look out for when formatting text.

Modifiers

Try not to detach a modifier from the word it modifies.

**I'm going to the Sarturn Cafe for a vegetarian
Burger**

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies—that is, gives information about—another word in the same sentence.

For example, in the following sentence, the word "burger" is modified by the word "vegetarian":

Example: I'm going to the Saturn Café for a **vegetarian** burger.

Example: The student **carefully** proofread her draft.

Example: She studied **in the library**.

Prepositional Phrases

Try not to break a prepositional phrase.

**I have lived in the Plymouth Hoe area since
2005.**

A preposition is a word or group of words used before a [noun](#), [pronoun](#), or noun phrase to show direction, time, place, location, spatial relationships, or to introduce an object. Some examples of prepositions are words like "in," "at," "on," "of," and "to."

Example: The weather is cold **in** December (Time)

Example: I have lived in the Plymouth Hoe area **since** 2005 (Proportional Time)

Conjunctions

Try not to break a line after a conjunction.

I have only been a captioner for one day, so I have little experience actually outputting text.

Conjunctions are parts of speech that connect words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. There are three kinds of conjunctions: coordinating, paired, and subordinating.

Example: I have only been a trainee captioner for one day, **so** I have little experience actually outputting text. (Co-ordinating conjunction)

Example: **Both** the Captioner **and** the audience were satisfied with the d/Deaf access (Paired conjunction)

Auxiliary Verbs

Try not break an auxiliary verb from the word it modifies.

The documents for the loan proposal were being checked by the banking officials.

An auxiliary verb is a verb that is used as an auxiliary verb along with the main in a sentence to make it more meaningful. It is used to alter the tense mood or voice of the sentence.

Example: I **am** captioning

Example: The bill **has been** paid

Example: The documents for the loan proposal **were being checked** by the banking officials.

Music

Use a musical note at the beginning of your musical description and add adjectives to indicate the mood of the music.

♪ SOULFUL MELODY

Include the name of instrument, or instruments to enhance the description.

♪ LYRICAL FLUTE SOLO

♪ RHYTHMIC DRUMS RISE

Use left justification and square brackets when the music falls within a sequence of dialogue.

MACBETH: It is concluded.

[♪ CELLO RISES]

Banquo, thy soul's flight,

JOE: Yes, boss.

[♪ SLOW PIANO UNDERSCORES]

FAT SAM: Fizzy ...

Where possible and appropriate, music description should include the performer/composer and the title.

♪ "IMAGINE" BY JOHN LENNON PLAYS

If the lyrics of a song, or some of the lyrics, used as an atmospheric inform the narrative then they should be captioned.

♪ Imagine there's no Heaven
It's easy if you try ♪

To caption a song sung by an actor or actors, use a musical note at the beginning and the end of the words of the song.

GIRLS: ♪ Anybody who is anybody
Will soon walk through that door
At Fat Sam's Grand Slam Speakeasy ♪

Sound Effects

Sound effects are those sounds other than music, or dialogue and should be included in the captioning where they inform our understanding of the show.

For sound effects, always use CAPITAL LETTERS and include the source of the sound.



HYENAS CACKLE AND HOWL

Captioners also justify sound effects centre screen within square brackets.



[CHURCH BELL CHIMES]

Some Captioner's favour left justification and square brackets for sound effects.



[CHURCH BELL CHIMES]

Left justification is used for sound effects when they fall within a sequence of dialogue.

HENNESSY: Oh, you punctual bastards!
[CHURCH BELL CHIMES]
HARRY: It'll all go easier for ya,

Sound effects are sometimes be placed mid-line or within lines.

And every three days a woman is
[SCREAM] by a man.
- And every three days a man [SCREAM]

When describing a sound effect try to include a description of the source and its location.

It's a bit of a walk.
[CAR HORN OUTSIDE]
Ah, there's your son.

Use specific rather than vague, general terms to describe the sounds.

DISTANT HIGH PITCHED SCREECH
EARTH TREMBLING RUMBLE
GETTING CLOSER AND LOUDER

Comments

Comments are lines that are NOT output but are added between captions as an “aide memoire” to assist the captioner.

Use comments to insert a reminder that there is a pause in the action.

254		SCAR: I <i>was</i> first in line ...
		CO: PAUSE
256		until the little hairball was born.

105		Ngonyama Nengwebo Ngonyama
		CO: WAIT
107		ANTELOPE 1: Mai babo

Use comments to insert an instruction to Clear Screen (Hot Key C) after a specific line.

711		that'll be the first thing to go.
		CO: CLEAR
713		ZAZU: Not so long as I'm around.

Use comments to insert an instruction to Blank Screen (Hot Key B) after a specific line

787		SIMBA: ^ Oh I just can't wait to be king!
		CO: BLANK SCREEN
789		

Use comments to insert a reminder that the pace of the dialogue changes after this line.

		CO: WAIT NEXT LINES VERY SLOW
134		ANTELOPES: Thanana nanana
135		Thanana nanana

Use comments to insert a reminder that the next caption is a Sound Effect.

715		you're fired.
		CO: LISTEN FOR SQUAWK
717		[ZAZU SQUAWKS]

Exceptions to the Rules!

All these are general rules or conventions, and, for good captioning, you may find that you choose to ignore, change and adapt them.