# Accessible Accessibility:
## 7 Reasons to Caption (and why it's easy!)

VITAC™
ACCESSIBILITY FOR LIFE

# Preface

## Our world has become increasingly interconnected,

with technology making it easier to broadcast live content and share video in an instant. Ensuring that our stories, school lessons, work meetings, press briefings, news items, and videos are inclusive and accessible to everyone is crucial. Adding captions is one meaningful way to certify that a video's message is received. Read on to learn how captioning helps to keep us connected, learning, and growing in our rapidly changing 21st-century environment.

## Contents

# 1. Captions Benefit Everyone

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, closed captions are an essential means of connecting to a world that many in the hearing community take for granted. And the number of viewers dependent upon closed captions may be more significant than you think. One in five Americans has hearing loss, including 2.3 million veterans who report hearing loss as their number one service-related injury.

Though captions are a vital accessibility component for people who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHOH), many outside of the DHOH community also have found value in captions.

Among them are:

- Children learning to read who use captions as a learning tool
- Individuals learning English as a second language
- Our rapidly growing population of Americans over the age of 65 with hearing loss
- Muted audio viewers in public situations

**Did you know?**

- **10.6 million ELL (English Language Learners) students use captions** to help improve their English skills
- **150 million video views are recorded on Facebook every month**, with 85% of those videos watched without sound
- **57 million Americans belong to gyms,** and many watch captions while exercising

# 2. Not All Captions are the Same

**Captions can be offered in various ways for varying types of content, depending on program and creator needs. Below are brief explanations of just a few of the different types of captions that captioners can create.**

## Realtime (Live) Captioning

Trained, professional realtime captioners caption live shows by listening to a program in "realtime" and "write" or "respeak" what they hear, sometimes at speeds of up to 300 words per minute. The captions are then transmitted and displayed live on screens in seconds.

Typically created by steno writers or voice captioners, realtime captions can be found on live programming, such as the local and national news, live television shows, award shows, and regional, national, and global sporting events like the Olympics and the Super Bowl.

To ensure accuracy, captioners will do research in advance of each and every assignment, making sure they have the correct spelling of any names, places, terms, or topics that might appear, and check multiple sources, including news reports, social media pages, and any materials related to the assignment, to gain as much information as possible before beginning to caption.

# Offline (Prerecorded) Captioning

Offline or prerecorded captioning is the post-production process of adding captions to a program or video after the time of recording. Professionals expertly sync text (and add such things as line breaks and other descriptive elements) to the prerecorded video.

Offline captions can be seen on traditional cable and network prerecorded shows, as well as on streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu, HBO Max, and Amazon Prime, to name a few. Sometimes, the captions are called subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH). SDH refers to subtitles that meet the additional needs of viewers who do not hear the full soundtrack of a program, and include indicators of every audible element, such as sound effects (gunshots, computer beeps, and dogs barking) and music lyrics or descriptors.

The best offline captions involve continuous quality control, and are reviewed for typos, spelling errors, and stylistic issues. Ensuring a character's name or nickname is spelled correctly means ensuring that a deaf or hard-of-hearing viewer can experience the same program as a hearing individual, which is the ultimate goal in creating accessible content.

# 3. Technology Can Create Captions
## (But Results May Vary)

Some content creators choose to rely on freelance work and automatic speech recognition (ASR) systems.

The appeal of ASR is that the software provides instant, realtime captions and, perhaps most importantly, an inexpensive or free solution, as in the case of YouTube. It's a relatively simple procedure that checks most of the right boxes, except for the most important one – providing accurate, reliable, error-free onscreen information.

Though speech automation certainly has a role in creating captions, the programs have proven to need a human hand guiding and assisting them. Strides are being made in developing ASR, but the problem in quality lies with "unassisted" automatic captions, where a human is not involved.

### Did you know?

- **Even the most advanced speech recognition programs lack human intelligence and are essentially a guess** by machines at the spoken word. Without having a human eye or ear monitoring for items such as accuracy and completeness, ASR can fail to meet expectations.
- **ASR systems routinely fail to present names and technical terms properly.** Instead, they often stumble on accented or mumbled speech or background noises, and can have difficulty in determining the differences between what a speaker "said" and what they actually "meant." As a result, there's a noticeable disparity when comparing captions created by humans to those created exclusively by even the most innovative machines.
- **The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC) determined that auto captioning has several shortcomings and pitfalls** in their analysis of research on ASR's impact on deaf students.
- The NDC noted that "to the untrained eye, ASR may seem 'good enough' when testing its application in a quiet office with a single speaker." But when things such as accented speakers, rapid-fire dialogue, group discussions, and audio distortion are introduced, **ASR operating on its own has yet to prove comparable to a trained human captioning professional.**

# 4. It's the Law

**The federal communications commission (FCC) has outlined its own comprehensive rules for TV closed captioning to ensure that viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing have full access to programming.**



The rules apply to all television programming with captions and explicitly sets forth quality standards for closed captions, including the requirement that captions be:

- **Accurate:** Captions must match the spoken words in the dialogue and convey background noises and other sounds to the fullest extent possible.
- **Synchronous:** Captions must coincide with their corresponding spoken words and sounds to the greatest extent possible and must be displayed on the screen at a speed that viewers can read.
- **Complete:** Captions must run from the beginning to the end of the program to the fullest extent possible.
- **Properly placed:** Captions should not block other important visual content on the screen (such as text crawls on news shows), overlap one another, or run off the edge of the screen.

The FCC also requires that programming captioned on TV must be captioned when distributed online. In addition, the Commission specifically states that the online captions must be of the same or greater quality as the captions that aired on TV.

And though FCC laws apply to traditional television broadcasts, many streaming content producers and platforms like Netflix, Hulu, HBO Max, and others have taken it upon themselves to caption their shows or require that shows appearing on the platform are captioned.

# 5. Captions Are Not Just for TV

As the popularity of captions continues to grow, businesses, schools, content creators, and event and conference centers are finding other ways that captions can help improve sales, learning outcomes, viewership, and event attendance.

Adding captions to conference calls and video conferences, remote classroom lessons and business meetings, presentations, training sessions, group discussions, and webcasts helps ensure full participation and inclusion by all of those in attendance.



## Did you know?

- **Captions can help businesses and content creators with Search Engine Optimization (SEO) rankings.** Search engines can only find the information they're able to pull from, that is, predominantly written information. If video content doesn't have a transcription attached, the content becomes almost entirely dependent upon the video's name and any other tidbits included on the page. Suddenly, if it has captions, the video's words become data that search engines can pull from, making it more likely to show up in searches.
- **Search engines serve millions of users per day looking for answers to questions or solutions to problems.** Captioning external content expands reach, boosts rankings, and ensures everyone, everywhere, sees your message.
- **Captioning can help create transcripts for classes, lectures, workshops, or webinars.** In addition, transcripts can be used as study aids for students or as a means of catching up on missed lectures or meetings.
- **Transcripts can help create handouts for students or attendees** and can help ensure your message is communicated, remembered, and referenced in the future.

# 6. Captioning Doesn't Have to Be Complicated

All the different options, requirements, and processes might lead you to believe that getting your content captioned is complicated. Though many behind-the-scenes components make up good captioning, the process doesn't have to be stressful for content creators, event organizers, and others seeking greater accessibility and inclusion.

A simple way to ensure that you're hitting accessibility marks (and the largest audience) is to work with a professional accessibility provider. Working with an experienced captioning provider can save time, simplify workflows, eliminate stresses, and, in many instances, reduce costs. Experienced providers understand the industry (and the shifting deadlines and quick turnarounds that accompany it) and often have answers to questions you may not even know to ask. In addition, they work with you as a partner, and can walk you through all of the processes and requirements.

# 7. It's Easy To Get Started with VITAC!

**Ready to include captions and embrace all the benefits of greater accessibility? Since 1986, VITAC has been the leader in captioning and accessibility services, featuring the most professional, highly skilled employees, 24/7 support, and a secure, technically sophisticated infrastructure.**

**As the largest and most trusted captioning provider in the industry,** many of the most recognized companies and institutions trust us to get the job done right every day. We work closely with our customers and take time to learn their needs and find the solution that fits them. We provide peace of mind and work to eliminate any worries over captioning concerns, regulatory problems, scheduling issues, or engineering hang-ups. VITAC's processes are seamless and secure for all customers. Our employees have helped develop the standards for captioning and subtitling and many of the systems used to create, encode, and decode captions. We use this deep experience to ensure that clients receive the highest levels of technical assistance and customer service, along with the best, most efficiently produced, and stylistically consistent captions and subtitles that anyone can create.

## When you choose VITAC's services…

…you can be sure that you will receive the highest quality product with unmatched customer service. Let us show you why we're the "no worries" captioning company.

**CONTACT US TODAY TO GET STARTED!**