

Captioning Vendor Best Practices

Captioners and captioning vendors are dedicated to providing high-quality captions for those who rely on them. All captioning vendors are delivering a service, and this makes it imperative for closed captioning providers to produce accurate, timely, and complete captions without interruption. There are common practices among captioning vendors that have proven to facilitate the achievement of those goals. However, not all captions are created equal, and conflicting or vague definitions of “quality” can cloud the issue of what constitutes the best. Although methods may vary, committed focus on the following is paramount.

Real-time (live) captioning vendors should:

- Create metrics to assess accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of real-time captions.
- Establish minimum acceptable standards based upon those metrics while striving to regularly exceed those minimum standards.
- Perform frequent and regular evaluations and sample audits to ensure those standards are maintained.
- Consider “accuracy” of captions to be a measurement of the percentage of correct words out of total words captioned, calculated by subtracting number of errors from total number of words captioned, dividing that number by total number of words captioned and converting that number to a percentage. For example, 7,000 total words captioned minus 70 errors equals 6,930 correct words captioned, divided by 7,000 total words captioned equals .99, or 99% accuracy.
- Consider at a minimum mistranslated words, incorrect words, misspelled words, incorrect punctuation that impedes comprehension, and misinformation as errors.
- Consider “timeliness” of captions to be a measurement of lag between the spoken word supplied by the program origination point and when captions are received at the same program origination point.
- Consider “completeness” of captions to be a measurement of how many of the spoken words in a broadcast were captioned. Completeness of captions is to maintain the following principles:
 - Captions are written in a near-as-verbatim style as possible, minimizing paraphrasing.
 - The intended message of the spoken dialogue is conveyed in the associated captions in a clear and comprehensive manner.
 - Captions are placed on screen to avoid obscuring on-screen information and graphics (e.g. sports coverage).
 - Musical lyrics should accompany artist performances.

- Ensure proper screening, training, supervision, and evaluation of captioners by experienced and qualified real-time captioning experts.
- Ensure there is an infrastructure that provides technical and other support to clients and captioners at all times.
- Ensure that captioners are qualified for the type and difficulty level of the programs to which they are assigned.
- Utilize a system that verifies captioners are prepared and in position prior to a scheduled assignment.
- Ensure that technical systems are functional and allow for fastest possible delivery of caption data and that failover systems are in place to prevent service interruptions.
- Regularly review discrepancy reports in order to correct issues and avoid future issues.
- Respond in a timely manner to concerns raised by clients or viewers.
- Alert clients immediately if a technical issue needs to be addressed on their end.
- Inform clients of appropriate use of real-time captioning (e.g., live and near-live programming, not pre-recorded material) and what is necessary to produce quality captions, including technical requirements and the need for preparatory materials.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders in the closed-captioning process, including broadcasters, producers, equipment manufacturers, regulators, and viewers, and keep abreast of issues and developments in those sectors.
- Ensure all contracted captioners adhere to real-time captioner best practices.

Real-time captioners should always strive to caption with the greatest possible accuracy while simultaneously captioning as much content possible. Factors beyond the captioner's control -- such as the quality of the audio source, the individual speakers, amount of preparatory information provided, and the density and nature of the dialog -- influence the level of quality that can be achieved in any given captioning session. Consequently, it is important to note that producing high-quality closed captioning requires cooperation, communication, and commitment between the captioning vendor and the client.

Real-time captioners should:

- Caption as timely, accurately, factually, and completely as possible.
- Ensure they are equipped with a failover plan to minimize caption interruption due to captioner or equipment malfunction.

- Be equipped with reliable, high-speed Internet.
- Be equipped with a multiple telephone lines.
- Prepare as thoroughly as possible for each broadcast.
- File thorough discrepancy reports in a timely manner.
- Make an effort to ensure live captions do not carry over into the following broadcast or commercial, impeding the subsequent captioning.
- Engage the command that allows captions to pass at commercials and conclusion of broadcasts.
- Monitor captions to allow for immediate correction of errors and prevention of similar errors appearing or repeating in captions.
- Perform frequent and regular self-evaluations.
- Keep captioning equipment in good working order and update software and equipment as needed.
- Possess good troubleshooting skills.
- Keep abreast of current events and topics that they caption.

Offline (pre-recorded) captioning vendors should:

- Ensure offline captions are verbatim.
- Ensure offline captions are error-free.
- Ensure offline captions are punctuated correctly and in a manner that facilitates comprehension.
- Ensure offline captions are synchronized with the audio of the broadcast.
- Ensure offline captions are displayed with enough time to be read completely and that they do not obscure the visual content.
- Ensure offline captioning is a complete textual representation of the audio, including speaker identification and non-speech information.
- Create or designate a manual of style to be applied in an effort to achieve uniformity in presentation.
- Employ frequent and regular evaluations to ensure standards are maintained.

- Inform clients of appropriate uses of real-time and offline captioning and strive to provide offline services for pre-recorded programming.
 - Encourage use of offline captioning for live and near-live programming that originally aired on broadcast television and re-feeds at a later time.
 - Encourage use of offline captioning for all original and library pre-recorded programming completed well in advance of broadcast.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders in the closed-captioning process, including broadcasters, producers, equipment manufacturers, regulators, and viewers, and keep abreast of issues and developments in those sectors.

This document is a collaboration between captioning vendors CaptionMax, National Captioning Institute, VITAC, and WGBH and includes concepts put forth by the National Court Reporters Association's "Captioning Matters: Best Practices Project" document (http://www.ncra.org/Files/AnnualConvention/2013Convention/Sat_1400_BestPractices_Finkel.pdf) and the Described and Captioned Media Program's Captioning Key guidelines (<http://captioningkey.org>).