



Audio Description and Captioning Guide:

The following information covers how to make your videos and live performance accessible to all audiences. This includes audio description for blind and low vision audiences as well as captioning for Deaf and Hard of Hearing audiences. The guide contains both tips and resources.

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Audio Description:

Audio description is the practice of making video content accessible to blind and low/vision audiences. This is done by adding an extra audio track where a voice narrates important visual aspects of a video. Examples include, setting up the scene, introducing characters and describing important actions/events. Think of it as the audiobook version of your video.

Note: Audio Description can only be added during times of no dialogue.

Audio description can also be used in news videos, documentaries, live performances and presentations. The same concepts apply with a few differences.

When describing a video, performance or presentation, you don't need to explain every single visual element. Instead focus on the important moments and be succinct.

Describing Films and TV shows:

When describing a film, TV show or web series, include the following:

- At the beginning of every scene describe the setting and time.
 - These can be brief, i.e. *"on a city street, in an office, during the daytime."*
- Read all text that appears on screen.
 - Opening and closing credits
 - Text during scene transitions i.e. chapter titles, dates, "Three years later"
 - Subtitle for foreign languages being spoken
- Introduce characters as they enter a scene and announce when they leave.
 - A dark haired woman enters through the doorway.
 - Jack exits the room.

- Describe actions and movements of characters that are important to the plot.
 - Example, if a video is about dance, describe the dancing.
- Describe events that are important to the plot.
 - Example, if a video is about natural disasters, describe the disasters.

Describing News and Documentaries:

For news, informational videos and documentaries, you should describe the following:

- Introduce any characters that are not introduced by the hosts
- Read any text that appears on screen
- When cutting to a scene or some b-roll footage, describe anything that the hosts do not mention
- Describe in their entirety any statistics, graphs, or infographics that appear on screen if they are relevant to the story
 - If all of the information is too much, identify significant information such as highest point, lowest point, upwards trend or downwards trend

Describing Live Performances and Presentations:

- Describe the stage:
 - The stage has a large screen in the middle and a podium on the left.
 - For theater or dance performances, describe the backdrop
 - For musical performances, describe the arrangement of instruments
- Introduce people as they come on stage
 - Walei enters the stage. He is wearing a blue button-down shirt with black pants. He holds a black cane which he swings from right to left as he approaches the podium.
 - For theatre performances, describe what the character looks like and their costume
- Describe actions or gestures:
 - Walei raises two fingers in the shape of a peace sign.
- For Presentations
 - Describe slides
 - Read slide title
 - Describe images in the slides
 - Read bullet points

Examples of Audio Description:

[MOPD Becky Curran – NYC at Work Video Profile](#)

[DOT Cycle Eyes](#)

[NYCEM Ready New York - A Well Planned Escape](#)

Audio Description Resources:

[Audio Description in a few minutes – Rooted in Rights](#)

[Audio Description Project: A resource for content creators, viewers and audio description professionals.](#)

[Audio Description Training and Education Resources](#)

Captions

Captions are the written form of every sound within a video or live performance for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Audiences.



Captions include not only dialogue but sound effects and music as well. There are two different kinds of captions, **open captions** and **closed captions**.

Open Captions

Open captions are captions that are embedded directly onto a video that play automatically. They cannot be turned on or off, they are always on. Open captions are typically created during the video editing process.

When manually writing open captions:

- Make sure that the caption text is easily viewable against the background of the video. We recommend white font with a thick black stroke or on a black background strip.
- Whenever possible, only caption one sentence at a time. If the sentence is too long, break it up with a double dash (“--”) and complete it in a new caption.
- When characters are speaking offscreen, include their name before the dialogue. For example, *[Narrator]: Once upon a time...*
- Sound effects should be in parentheses. For example, *(Car Alarm)*
- Music should be surrounded by music notes. For example, *♪ Happy Birthday ♪*

Closed Captions

Closed Captions are captions that can be turned on or turned off (open or closed). Closed captions are common amongst streaming sites, DVD and Blu-Ray.

Many web platforms such as Youtube, Facebook and Twitter support the use of closed captioning. In order to create a set of closed captions you'll need to write out an .SRT File. An SRT File is a plain text word document that has all of your captions written out with the appropriate time code for each.

Writing an .SRT File

You can manually write out your .srt file in a word editor like Notepad for Windows or Textedit for Mac. Once you have all of the information within your file save it with a .srt file extension to be uploaded alongside your video.

[How to create an SRT File – 3Play Media](#)

Another option is to create captions within your video editor. This may be easier to write out and sync up to the timing of your video. Once you have added captions within your video you can export it to have a pre-timed srt file that you can upload alongside your video.

[Captioning in Adobe Premiere Pro](#)

[Using Captions in Final Cut Pro X and Compressor](#)

Adding Closed Captions to your Online Video

Now that you have your SRT file you can upload the file alongside your completed video. Depending on the online player that you are using there are different ways to upload your file.

[Adding Captions to Facebook Video](#)

[Adding Captions to Twitter](#)

[Adding Captions to Youtube](#)

Automated Captions

Some video platforms like Youtube have the option of automating captions for you. **This is not reliable captioning all by itself.** While the accuracy of the captions have improved over the years the timing, accuracy of names and overall placement are not good enough for captions.

You should only use automated captioning if it's a part of your process, not the whole thing. After you've had a set of automated captions generated, go through them manually to ensure accuracy and timing.

[Automatic Captioning on Youtube](#)

Captions for Live Performances

Live performances, speeches and other presentations can have captioning as well.

Captioning for Unscripted Performances

For unscripted performances, individuals can coordinate with Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) providers. These are individuals who listen and type everything that is being said live. This can either be projected onto a large screen for the audience to view, streamed into handheld tablets for individuals that require captioning or inserted into a live video as closed captioning.

[List of CART Providers in NYC](#)

Captioning for Scripted Performances

For live performances that will be sticking to a script like a play, captioning can be automated for not only individuals with hearing loss but for individuals who speak other languages as well.

There are many organizations that specialize in setting up this process online.