Captioning Standards for Quality Checklist

Captions convey not what is being said, but what is being communicated.

Equal

Equal access requires that the meaning and intention of the material is completely preserved.

- ☐ Represent details that aid overall understanding of the intention of the film.
- ☐ Include tone of voice (humor, anger, sarcasm) in brackets above captions as needed.
- ☐ If there is no audio, include that in brackets: [silence], [no talking].
- ☐ Preserve profanity and inflammatory language.
- ☐ Speakers with an accent and or using provincial language (regional terms, etc) are noted within brackets prior to speech.
- ☐ When a word is spoken phonetically, caption it the way it is commonly written (e.g. "N-double-A-C-P" written as NAACP).

Accurate

Errorless captions are the goal for each production, including spelling, punctuation and grammar.

- ☐ Ensure no spelling errors and be consistent with spelling of words throughout the film.
- ☐ Use correct punctuation, including commas, periods, exclamation points, question marks, and quotation marks.
- ☐ When a speaker stutters, caption what is said.
- ☐ Use an ellipsis to indicate trailing off or a short pause within a speaker's language.
- ☐ Use italics to indicate the following: an off-screen voice-over reading, when a person is dreaming, thinking, or reminiscing, when there is background audio that is essential to the plot, the first time a new word is being defined, off-screen dialogue, narrator, sound effects, or music (this includes background music).

Consistent

Uniformity in style and presentation of all captioning features is crucial for viewer understanding.

- ☐ Write captions in standard text, using normal upper and lower-case capitalization conventions.
- ☐ If possible, use a sans serif font such as Arial or Helvetica medium, which is easily readable.
- ☐ If possible, choose a font size and color that are easily read and that provide excellent contrast with the background (white on a translucent gray background is ideal).

Complete

A complete textual representation of the audio, including speaker identification and non-speech information, provides clarity.

- ☐ When possible, identify the speaker by placing the caption under the speaker.
- ☐ When a speaker cannot be identified by placement and their name is known, the speaker's name should be in parentheses. Also, the speaker's name needs to be on a line of its own, separate from the captions.
- ☐ When a speaker cannot be identified by placement and their name is unknown, identify the speaker using the same information a hearing viewer has (e.g., "female #1," "male narrator").
- ☐ If there is only one narrator, identify as (male narrator) or (female narrator) at the beginning of the media, though it is not necessary to identify gender for each caption thereafter.
- ☐ When an actor is portraying another person or character, identify the actor as the person being portrayed.
- ☐ A description of sound effects, in brackets, should include the source of the sound, but eliminate the description if the source of the sound is visible onscreen.
- ☐ Caption background sound effects only when they are essential to the plot.
- ☐ Include onomatopoeia when possible, e.g. thud, splash, woof, pop, etc.
- ☐ When captioning music, use objective descriptions that indicate the mood. Avoid subjective words; e.g., "classical string music," not "beautiful music."
- ☐ If music contains lyrics, caption the lyrics verbatim. The lyrics should be introduced with the name of the vocalist/vocal group, the title (in brackets) if known/significant.
- ☐ Caption lyrics with music icons (♪) if possible. Use one music icon at the beginning and end of each caption within a song.

Readable

Captions are displayed with enough time to be read completely, are in synchronization with the audio, and are not obscured by (nor do they obscure) the visual content.

- ☐ Text should be centered on the screen and left-aligned, with line breaks following logical grammar syntax chunking, e.g. "Let's all go / to the park," not "Let's all go to the / park."
- ☐ Timing of captions should be synchronous to the audio in the film as closely as possible while allowing time for material to be read.
- ☐ If possible, move captions below the visual content so that both captions and film are fully viewable.

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Additional Resources

- Pepnet 2: Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- DCMP: Described and Captioned Media Program

Information adapted from Described and Captioned Media Program
http://www.captioningkey.org/