

Captioning:

The How and Why of Making Media Accessible for Users who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing



Captioning is a research-based component of [accessible instructional material \(AIM\)](#) shown in educational literature to improve literacy. It is an element of [universal design for learning \(UDL\)](#) that provides users with a text alternative to audio content embedded in various media types. Captions provide information relative to who is speaking, the dialogue taking place, and even the kind of sounds and music presented auditorily. Individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHH), as well as many others, including people in situations where sound may be turned down or off, can benefit from captioning.

Provision of captions is supported by both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Any organization or project which receives federal funding is tasked to provide captions, making content accessible for all. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has developed [captioning regulations](#).



The Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) has developed guidelines for educational captions. The guidelines can be found in their [Captioning Key](#). Even after you learn how to properly caption, you will need to reference the DCMP caption key to make sure you are using the correct standards of caption production.

The [DCMP Learning Center](#) is a resource for ensuring the regulatory guidelines are met. This site on media accessibility information, guidelines, and research is a suitable place to start your journey of providing accessible media to your users.

3 FREE Resources for Creating Postproduction Captioned Media

- 1.** **The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning at CAST (AEM Center)** has a [module](#) on locating captioned videos and creating your own.
- 2.** **The National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAAE)** has a [captioning page](#) which includes a video tutorial on how to appropriately caption YouTube videos. Their resource is also available as a one-page PDF file.
- 3.** **The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC)** has a web page dedicated to [creating offline captions](#) which includes a PDF instruction manual.

Auto-Generated Captions



The world of free and available automatic speech recognition (ASR) software, (the artificial intelligence (AI) behind auto-generated captions) is advancing quickly. Both Google (e.g., Meet, Slides) and Microsoft (e.g., Teams, PowerPoint, Translator) now have auto-generated caption options in several of their applications. It should be noted that **auto-generated** may not equate to **accessible**. Users must remember that captions created by AI often have errors in punctuation, spelling, and content, potentially creating a barrier to comprehension, impeding full access, and could even cause confusion for the reader. The built-in auto caption features in the applications are powerful additions in real-time professional development environments but cannot be edited for accuracy. YouTube also features auto-generated captions in playback. YouTube auto-generated captions can be edited post-production by the creator. Remember to choose your captioning choices and media with the audience and end product in mind.

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