Principles for Accessible Captions

These captioning guidelines combine resources from the [Described and Captioned Media Program](#) (DCMP), WCAG 2.1 recommendations and guidance from [3Play Media](#) to offer useful principles to follow when creating or editing captions:

1. **Captions are synchronized to match spoken content.**
2. **Captions are at least 99% accurate.** This means that there is a 1% chance of error. In a video segment with 1500 words, this means 15 or fewer errors in a total. The accuracy rate of most machine captions is around 80-95%.
3. **Captions are one or two lines.** Generally it is best to keep each line at 32 characters or less.
4. **New sentences start on a new line.** If sentences must be broken up, break them at a logical phrase.
5. **Captions are on screen for 3 to 6 seconds** - long enough for the reader to read them. They should not remain on screen when there is silence.
6. **Captions indicate when no audio is playing.** If an entire video clip has no sound, a note should indicate that "no sound is used in this video."
7. **Captions include non-speech sounds such as cheering, horns honking.** These sounds are conventionally provided in brackets, e.g., [horn honking].
8. **Captions must include all of the dialogue, verbatim or in essence.** Sometimes speech is simplified (for example, removing repeated words or phrases, ums, or confusing changes). When this is done to help the reader, it does not invalidate a caption's compliance to the standard.
9. **Captions are uniform in style and presentation,** do not use all capital letters, use a sans serif font and use serial commas.
10. **Color contrast on video captions is sufficient.**
11. **Captions do not obstruct important content in the video.** When possible place captions under the speaker.
12. **Label speakers and there is more than one person speaking in the video.** It is recommended to label people. Even if you do not know the names, general labels such as "professor" and "student" are acceptable.

Resources

- [WCAG information on Transcripts](#)
- [W3C more information on audio description](#)
- [3Play Media Ultimate Guide to Closed Captioning](#)