

Best Practices Guide for Real-Time Live Event Captioningⁱ Perspectives from Experienced Consumers

Captioning is a speech-to-text interpreting service that transcribes dialogue, lyrics and other auditory information (such as applause, music, and laughter) that is then displayed as text (captions) as an accommodation primarily to people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. It is in this regard that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) recognizes CART (Computer Assisted Realtime Translation; one form of real-time captioning) as an assistive technology that affords effective communication access. In addition, captions are as close to a universal method for making these sounds understandable for anyone who experiences difficulty understanding auditory communication. In addition to people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, captions benefit people for whom English is a second language as well as those without hearing loss when an event takes place in a noisy environment. Simply stated, captions allow everyone to read what they cannot hear and understand.

Real-time captioning can be provided in any number of settings ranging from courtrooms to classrooms to concert halls and can be displayed for an individual or for a group of people and on-site or remotely. When using remote captioning, the caption provider receives an audio feed from the event and supplies captions (streaming text) over the internet which is displayed at the event.

Caption Displays. Whether captions are provided remotely or on site, they will be most readily understood when they are displayed by taking the following into consideration:

1. Make the display visible to as much of the audience as possible.
2. Use a font for the display that is as distinct from the background as possible and of a size that is discernible to as much of the assembly as possible.
3. Before selecting or purchasing a method for displaying captions (reader board, projection screen, hand-held device, etc.) test the effectiveness of the different display methods under performance conditions by enlisting people with significant hearing loss (Deaf, Hard of Hearing) to determine which method is most effective and preferred. *While technically feasible, hand-held display devices are difficult to use, and are acceptable only if there are no other display options possible.*
4. Choose a display that is capable of showing at least two lines of captions.
5. The display should be of such a size and dimension that allows enough lines so that captions appear on-screen long enough to be easily read.

Host Organization's Role and Responsibilities. There are a number of things that can be done by the group that hosts the event, and contracts for the caption provider, to increase the likelihood that good quality captions will be generated.

1. Use an experienced caption provider. Poor quality captions reflect on the value of captions themselves, on the presenter, and on the host as well as the caption provider. Generally a caption provider with national CRR/CBC/CCPⁱⁱ certifications may provide better quality captions because those certifications include demonstrated skill levels and continuing education requirements.
2. As much in advance of the event as possible:
 - a. Request that material (e.g., power point presentations or handouts) that is prepared for the event, especially names or technical terms that need to be spelled correctly, be given to the caption provider as soon as possible.
 - b. Alert the speaker that they may need to:
 - i. Speak somewhat slowly, pause periodically, and enunciate.
 - ii. Ensure that when questions are asked or there is discussion among participants, only one person speaks at a time.

This document was developed by the Oregon Communications Access Project (OR-CAP) to provide guidance for providing captions so as to meet the needs of people who have a difficult time understanding speech.

- iii. Be sure that the caption provider is able to capture questions from the audience. This can be done either by glancing at the display screen or by repeating (paraphrasing) the question so that the caption provider and therefore the consumer will understand the question.
3. Monitor caption quality. The host organization representative on site should take responsibility to interrupt the speaker to request changes in speaking style (e.g., staying near the microphone and speaking less softly or more slowly) if there are indications of problems with the caption provider understanding the speaker, such as the caption provider repeatedly using "inaudible" in the captions.
4. If a sound system is used:
 - a. The system should be of high quality since the caption provider is dependent upon the clarity of the speaker's voice.
 - b. Whenever possible provide a direct feed to the caption provider who can be equipped with good quality headphones.
 - c. Include a high quality microphone.
5. When there is more than one speaker, such as in a panel discussion, request that speakers:
 - a. Speak one at a time.
 - b. Identify themselves by name each time they speak.
6. Transcripts can be made available, but must be discussed with the caption provider in advance of the event because normally the caption document is deleted immediately after the event unless prior arrangements have been made.

The Caption Provider's Role and Responsibilities. It is important that captions appear in a format that is easy-to-read and understand. Comprehension is aided by adhering to the following guidelines when possible.

1. In advance of the event, request from the host any material (e.g., power point presentations or handouts) that has been provided for the event in order to understand the basic contents of the presentation and to enter names or technical terms into the dictionary.
2. Captions should be verbatim or as close to verbatim as possible.
3. Punctuation should be used to clarify meaning.
4. Sound effects should be captioned when they aid understanding.
5. If the caption provider is having difficulty understanding the speaker and the host does not initiate change in the speaker's delivery, the caption provider is encouraged to ask the speakers to modify speech to facilitate captioning. When doing so, the caption provider is speaking for all those who are depending upon her or his work. For remote captioning, a volunteer at the meeting or presentation can provide that feedback to speaker.
6. If captions are available to a single individual, e.g., via a laptop display, the
 - a. Caption provider and consumer should discuss how or whether to interrupt the speaker to request change.
 - b. Confidentiality of the material should be maintained.
7. Position the caption display so that the consumer(s) can maintain "line of sight" with the caption display screen, any presentation material such as a Power Point display, and the speaker.
8. If no screen is being used for display of the speaker's aids, place the caption display screen directly behind and above the speaker if feasible.

ⁱ The terms "captioner" and "captioning" are often used as a generic term for anyone that is providing captions and is used in that meaning here. However technically the term applies to captioning video.

ⁱⁱ A Certified Realtime Reporter (CRR) has passed a skills test that involves a two-voice question-and-answer at 200 wpm and 96% accuracy. The Certified Broadcast Captioner (CBC) and Certified CART Provider (CCP) skills test is currently at 180 wpm at 96% accuracy.