Captioned Media Is Equitable Access

National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes • nationaldeafcenter.org

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IDEAs that Work

TA&D NETWORK

NDC National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes

Captions provide access for over 30 million deaf Americans. Quality is key! Only time-synced, verbatim captions provide equitable access to media content.

Institutional Responsibility

Institutions that provide informational or instructional video content must ensure that the content is accessible to deaf individuals participating in classes, events, or related services. The U.S. Department of Justice issued a memorandum on "effective communication," which lists closed captioning as a form of auxiliary aid to be provided by covered entities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require postsecondary institutions to ensure that people with disabilities have access to services and benefits, including all aspects of academic offerings and student life.

Institutions are responsible for adding captions to the following:

- Any required course materials containing media, including archived lecture videos, prerecorded lectures for online courses, and online media content used in the classroom
- Any media created by the institution, including instructional videos and promotional videos

Considerations for Policies and Procedures

Providing access is a shared responsibility involving collaboration between the disability services office, faculty, and college administration. In particular, campuswide captioning policies that the college administrators support and enforce help to clarify roles and responsibilities, thereby ensuring that media is accessible and reducing access barriers.

Component	Purpose
Accessibility Statements	Set academic policy regarding the use of accessible course materials, including digital materials or supplemental media components.
Protocol for Requests	Establish systems for receiving and processing requests in a timely and effective manner. Outline processes for requesting captioned media, including designated departments or individuals, timelines with anticipated completion dates, and approved vendors.
Purchasing and Procurement Practices	Set explicit guidelines and expectations for the institution and individual departments with regard to securing accessible copies of media, such as DVDs, that are already closed captioned.
Captioning Committee	Organize representatives across departments to address captioned media to help the institution to properly handle captioned media requests at all levels. The committee can draft policies, oversee compliance, inform staff about the procedures, and systematically address complaints regarding access.
Funding Directives	State who is responsible for funding captions and which account funds should be used.
Information and Training	Require instructors to create transcripts for recorded lectures, which can later be converted into on-screen captions.

Types of Captions

Captions are the textual representation of the audio content in media, conveying spoken dialogue, sound effects, and speaker identification. Only high-quality, time-synced captions provide equitable access to media materials. Poor-quality captions that are not time synced can cause confusion and lead to misunderstandings.

Closed Captions

White letters encased in a black box and hidden until turned on using a decoder. Widely recognized as traditional television captioning.

Subtitles

Usually white or yellow letters with a black rim or drop shadow. Widely recognized on foreign films or when speaker audio is unintelligible.

Subtitles for SDH

Similar to subtitles but include sound effects, speaker identification, and other essential audible features.

Making Captions Available

Strategies for approaching the captioning process vary. The different options have pros and cons, depending on the circumstances and capacity of the institution, including the necessary turnaround time, staff availability, and staff technical expertise. Institutions should consider whether they have the capacity to create captions on campus. In some cases, outsourcing may be the best option.

Use In-House Captioning

An institution utilizes staff time, captioning equipment, and software to add captions to media.

- Dedicated staff and office
- Software investment
- Training
- Volunteers

Outsource to Vendor

An institution contracts with an outside captioning agency to add captions to media.

- Level of support available?
- Level of accuracy guaranteed?
- Typical turnaround time?
- Price differential for expedited turnaround?

Use Existing Captions

An institution rents or purchases already-captioned media. Consider leveraging partnerships with the following.

- Publishers
- Libraries
- Streaming video providers
- Accessible material companies
- Other institutions