

A+E Global Media

CLOSED CAPTIONING STYLE GUIDE

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Date	Revision
11/3/2023	Added Spoken On-Screen Text and Rejection Example
1/24/2024	Revised Spoken On-Screen Text and Acceptable Example
5/9/2024	S&P revision
6/18/2024	God & Capitalization
4/10/2025	Updated – A+E Global Media

The FCC has outlined best practices for captioning vendors in section 79.1(k). In keeping with FCC rules and regulations, A+E Global Media requires all caption vendors to adhere to the following best practices below.

It is the responsibility of all to comply with the March 15th, 2015 FCC mandate and do their part to adhere to best practices. Closed caption quality standards will be strictly enforced by A+E Global Media. All captions must be accurate, in-sync, complete and properly placed. Programs not in FCC mandate compliance are subject to failure.

All acquired content including programs that have previously aired on other networks or that have been produced pre-2015 will be treated as a new deliverable and should adhere to the specs below.

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FCC STANDARDS & REQUIREMENTS

Accuracy:

- Captioning must match the spoken words in the dialogue (including song lyrics) and fully convey background noises and other sounds possible in their original language, in the order spoken, without substituting words for proper names and places, and without paraphrasing.
- Music must be identified such as lyrics, music notes, “music playing.”
- Captions shall be 100% accurate with proper spelling, punctuation and capitalization, correct tense, and use of singular or plural forms, and accurate representation of numbers with appropriate symbols or words.
- If slang or grammatical errors are intentionally used in a program’s dialogue, they should be mirrored in the captions.
- Captioning shall provide nonverbal information that is not observable, such as the identity of speakers, the existence of music (whether or not there are also lyrics to be captioned), sound effects, and audience reaction.
- Captions shall be legible, with appropriate font, text size, and spacing between words for readability.
- If bump-in/transition music is present and less than 3 sec. no CC indication necessary.
- Background SFX that are necessary for the understanding and/or enjoyment of the media. If source of the sound is clearly visible in frame, no captions are required.
- Character ID vs. >>. The presence of a character ID or symbols are to be used to differentiate between who is speaking. (See [Speaker IDs](#))
- When language is dropped in the audio, asterisks are preferred. When a bleep in the audio is present, (bleep) or [bleep] is preferred (See [Profanity/S&P](#))

Synchronous:

- Captions must coincide with their corresponding spoken words and sounds to the greatest extent possible and must be displayed on the screen at a speed that can be read by viewers. Captions should be in sync with the dialogue.
- Captions will be timed to the same Frames Per Second (FPS) and Drop Frame or Non-Drop Frame (DF / NDF) as the final video file.
- Captions shall begin to appear at the time that the corresponding speech or sounds begin and end when the speech or sounds end.
- Captions shall not have overlapping cues.

Completeness:

- Captions must fully run from the beginning to the end of the program.

NETWORK-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

For every caption file delivery please include the Program ID in the filename. Program ID's can be obtained from the production company or A+E Program Acquisitions.

CC Offset:

- A+E requires that any caption events at the beginning of any texted segment be offset by 1.5s. This requires delaying any caption events that do appear in the first 1.5s, resulting in purposefully out of sync captions. This offset should affect as few caption events as possible, typically 1-3 events before caption sync is regained as quickly as possible. As result, no captions should appear in the first 1.5s.
- A+E CC Offset specs for each frame rate are as follow:
 - 29.97i - 45 frames
 - 23.98p - 36 frames
 - 25p - 38 frames
 - 50i - 38 frames
 - 59.94i - 45 frames
 - 59.94p - 90 frames

CC Event Entry:

- There should not be dual events present where CC events share the same timecode. This can result in one of the events being dropped during broadcast.



Proper Placement:

- Captions should be placed in the lower third unless frame is occupied by lower thirds/credits.



- Closed captioning should not cover lower thirds, graphics or credits regardless of its placement (see [Obstruction Rejection Example](#)). To safely clear lower thirds and credits so that they are easily readable, captions should always be raised to the upper third because of different viewing experiences.

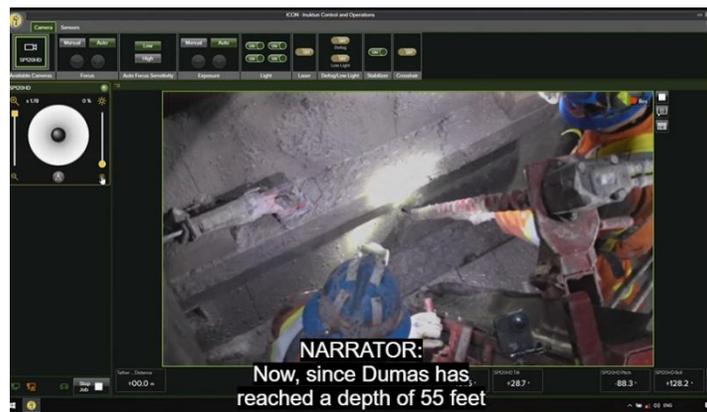


- If lower thirds, graphics or credits are placed out of the usual realm, closed captioning should also be placed to not cover this text. Where lower thirds and credits are placed in the middle of screen, bottom placement is preferred as to not cover faces as displayed below.





- Captioning shall be viewable and shall not block other important visual content on the screen, including, but not limited to, character faces, featured text (e.g., weather or other news updates, graphics and credits), and other information that is essential to understanding a program's content when the closed captioning is activated.
- When onscreen (OS) text is present in both upper and lower portions of the screen, or a full screen graphic is present, closed captions should be placed where it is least intrusive based on overall readability of both closed captioning and OS text. (See [Required Top Placement Rejection](#))





Profanity/S&P:

- Closed captions should match audio.
- If a bleep is present in the audio, captions should read “[bleep] or (bleep)”.
- If profanity is dropped in the audio, captions should read the first letter followed by asterisks representing the remaining characters in the spelling of that word (ex. F***, S***, etc.).
- When the n-word is present in audio and/or in CC in any form (ending with either "a" or "er"), captions should ALWAYS be reflected with the first letter preceded by all asterisks (ex. N*****). The n-word should NEVER be present/readable in a caption event.
- If someone’s mouth is blurred (ex. Dance Moms) - All dashes or asterisks should be present in the captions.
- For all globally offensive words – The first letter followed by asterisks is sufficient for closed captioning.
- Foreign language S&P – Please make best effort to correct.

NOC - Network Originals Credit/Branding Bug

- The production company will recommend the best time for the NOC to appear and ensure it does not interfere with closed captioning.
- If an instance occurs where both the NOC and a lower third appear, the NOC takes precedence and should never be covered by captioning. (See [Acceptable and Rejection examples](#))



Picture In Picture (PIP)

- Closed caption placement and PIP will be examined on a case-by-case basis.
- CC is to remain at the bottom of the screen (see below) so that captions do not cover PIP characters or the forehead/eyes of the main-screen character and all faces are visible.



- If lower thirds are present either inside the PIP or present on the main screen, captions should be raised to the top.

STANDARD TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

A+E requires that captioning on all programming including dramatic, reality and documentary be pop-on style. Pop-on can be timed and placed or center pop-on. Roll-up and paint-on captions are unacceptable (See [Rejection Example](#)).

- Mixed case characters are preferred for readability. However, capital letters are used for screaming or shouting.
- Font: Sans serif white characters is preferred. They must be proportionally spaced.

Maximum Characters Per Line: 32 characters or less, including spaces.

Number of Lines: 2 line maximum (See [Rejection example](#))

Please follow these basic principles when the text must be broken into 2 lines. The line should be broken:

- After punctuation marks
- Before conjunctions
- Before prepositions

The line break should not separate:

- A noun from an article
- A noun from an adjective
- A first name from a last name
- A verb from a subject pronoun
- A prepositional verb from its preposition
- A verb from an auxiliary, reflexive pronoun or negation

Duration:

- Captions should have a minimum duration of 40 frames (1 second and 10 frames). Captions should have a maximum duration of 6 seconds. (Background music notation is an exception).

Words per minute:

- All lower-level educational media should optimally be captioned at a presentation rate not to exceed 130 words per minute (wpm), middle-level not to exceed 140 wpm, and upper-level not to exceed 160 wpm. The original meaning, content, and essential vocabulary must be maintained. Achieving optimum rates is more difficult when complex new concepts and vocabulary are introduced in a media production.

Spoken On-Screen Text:

- When there is on-screen text *without* narration, closed captioning should not be simultaneously displayed. (See [Rejection Example](#))
- When on-screen text *is accompanied by* narration in the audio, closed captioning should reflect the action.
Example: [Narrator reads on-screen text] (See [Acceptable Example](#))

Dashes:

- Use a double dash for cut-offs only, not merely pauses.
Example: I see you met-- - Enough already!
- Use a single dash when indicating a stutter or stammer within dialogue.
Example: You can't-can't tell her that!

Effects IDs:

- Use brackets with lower case text for effects descriptors.
Example: [phone rings]

Ellipses:

- Use three dots for trail-offs or significant pauses (either duration-wise or emotionally significant), as well as opening ellipses for mid-sentence pickups (new events only, not to indicate continuations with uninterrupted pauses).

Example:

Event 1:

I wonder if... (pause)

Event 2:

something science will happen today.

OR

Event 1:

[Alan] I wonder if... (pause)

[Steve] If what?

Event 2:

[Alan] ...something science will happen today.

Foreign Dialogue:

- Only include foreign dialogue translations if the dialogue is meant to be understood by the general audience. If in question, please reach out to A&E Closed Captioning.
- Americanized language if in English (ex. Married at First Sight Australia).
- Use italics for any foreign words required for inclusion.

Example: - What was that he said?
 - He said, "*No más.*"

Italics:

- All off-scene speech and sound.
- Electronic speech (TV, radio, phone, speaker, etc) when speaker is not physically present.
- Song lyrics.
- Album/book/film/magazine/newspaper/etc. titles found within dialogue.

Lyrics:

- Include all audible lyrics for closed captions.
- Use an opening and closing musical note and italicize each lyric.

Example: ♪ *Let me see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars* ♪

Quotes:

- Use opening quotes and closing quotes at the start and finish of the full applicable quote (regardless of how many sentences are within). Do not use opening quotes at the start of each line.
- Use quotes for song title references if found within dialogue.

Song IDs:

- Include song identifiers when applicable. Check end credits for song IDs where applicable and match accordingly.
- Use brackets with lower case text for descriptors.

Example: [upbeat melody plays]

[“Fly Me to the Moon” by Frank Sinatra playing]

Music IDs:

- Include music style identifiers for meaningful musical cues pertinent to shaping the story/enhancing audience fulfillment.
- Use brackets with lower case text for descriptors.

Example: [upbeat melody plays]

Speaker IDs:

- Wait until a speaker has been identified to the general audience before using name ID.
- Use brackets for speaker IDs.

Example: [Ethan]; [woman]; [man 1]

Utterances:

- Include for closed captions as time permits and truncate if reading speed or space is an issue.

Examples: “oh”, “uh”, “um”, “huh”, “ah-ha”, etc.

God and Capitalization:

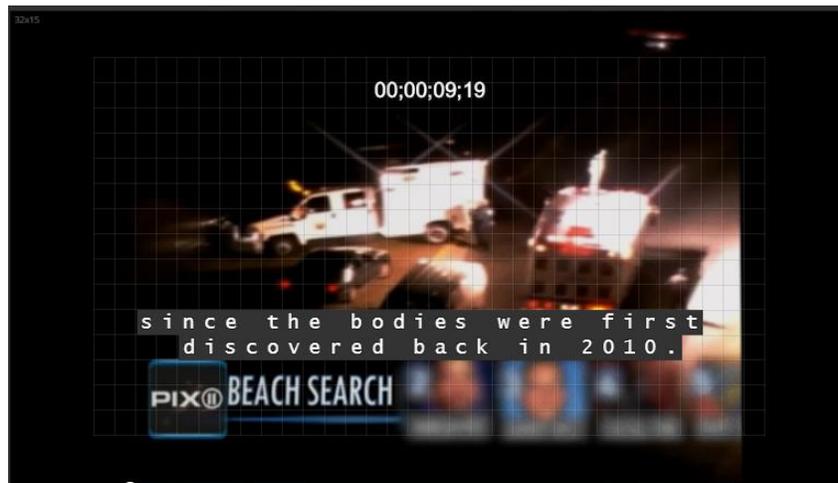
- When the term “god” is used as a proper noun and referred to as a supreme being, specific god or person, it should be capitalized in the captioning. When the word is used nonliterally (ex. oh my god), it does not need to be capitalized.

COMMON REJECTION/ACCEPTABLE EXAMPLES

REJECTION - Paint-on captions are not acceptable.



REJECTION – CC TOP placement is required when lower third text present.



REJECTION – CC obstruction. CC TOP placement is required when lower third text present.



REJECTION – CC TOP placement required when bug is present.



REJECTION – Exceeds 2-line CC limit.



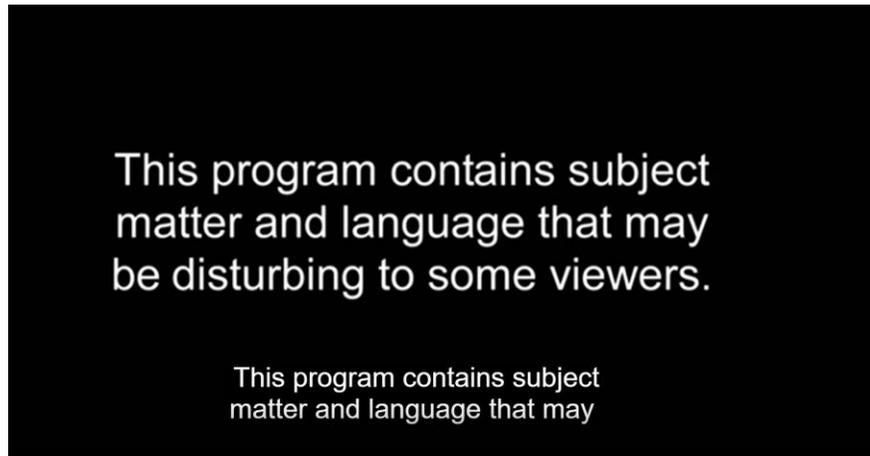
REJECTION - Network Originals Credit/Branding Bug obstruction.



ACCEPTABLE - When both NOC and lower third is present, covering the lower third is acceptable.



REJECTION – No cc should be present when on-screen text is present and/or present in the audio.



ACCEPTABLE – CC is acceptable to describe narration/sfx

