

A SIMPLE APPROACH TO GREAT CAPTIONS

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LESSON OVERVIEW

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, the student:

1. Will be able to identify the components of a good caption.
2. Will understand the importance of captions.
3. Will be able to write captions that fully identify the people in photos and are accurate, complete and informative.

Resources provided

1. [Video: A Simple Approach to Great Captions:](#)
 - a. Introduces students to the value of captions and how to write them effectively.
 - b. Demonstrates how four components are key to producing storytelling captions.
 - c. Outlines how answering the 5W1H aid in writing informative captions.
 - d. Offers additional writing tips.
2. Classroom Starters
 - a. Intended to be distributed to students at the beginning of the class. Its goal is to help the students begin to focus on the lesson before starting the video. This video is also paired with a quiz.
3. Caption Writing Exercise: Tell me more
 - a. Students can practice with this follow-up assignment.
 - b. Students are to write captions for two photos using the information provided.
 - c. Discussion of student examples will provide opportunities to reinforce the lesson.
4. Caption Writing Exercise: 5W1H
 - a. Students can practice with this follow-up assignment.
 - b. Students will write three captions for the photo using the information provided and each emphasizing a different W or H.
 - c. Discussion of the student examples and the selections of which captions are the most effective will provide opportunities to reinforce the lesson.
5. Handout: It's as Easy as ABCD
6. Handout: Writing Captions with Flair
7. Handout: Caption Checklist

Additional resources

“Captions provide the total yearbook picture”

<https://www.walsworthyearbooks.com/captions-provide-the-total-yearbook-picture/>

“Captions extend visuals”

<https://www.walsworthyearbooks.com/captions-extend-visuals/>



BELL RINGER EXERCISE: WHAT DOES IT TELL YOU?

INSTRUCTIONS

In today's class, we will learn to write captions. A caption is a brief description of a photo. Take a look at this photo. In no less than one sentence, tell what you know solely by looking at it.



Photo by Alex Wagstaff

CAPTION WRITING EXERCISE: 5WS/1H

INSTRUCTIONS

With virtually every photo, there are at least six basic facts that can be answered early in a caption. Using the photo and information provided below, write three captions, each emphasizing a different Who, What, When, Where, Why or How. Decide which of your captions you believe to be most effective and explain why.

Information

- *Thoroughly Modern Millie* production.
- Production presented by Drama Club.
- Cast selected from open tryouts.
- 72 students were part of the cast and crew.
- Max Rushmore was the director. He is a sophomore. The youngest director for a school production.
- Leads: Millie Dillmount played by Jennifer Dyller (junior); Miss Dorothy Brown played by Caitlyn James (senior); Jimmy Smith played by Ryan Miraz (senior); Trevor Graydon played by Billie Henderson (senior).
- Location: Paul W. Laird Auditorium, Prairie Village Academy, Des Moines, Iowa.
- Three-day show, Nov. 14, 15, 16. All three shows were sold out.
- The play is set early in the flapper era in 1922.
- In this photo, Mr. Gradon (right) has just dictated a letter to Millie (center) as a part of determining whether she is qualified to work as a part of the secretarial pool for Sincere Trust. He begins slowly but increases the speed of his dictation throughout the song. Despite the speed of the dictation, Millie is able to keep up and is hired. This is the final pose in the song "Speed Test."
- "I was so surprised that I got the role of Millie. I was sure that a senior would get the lead." — Jennifer Dyller
- "My friends used to tease me about being in musicals but now they think it's pretty cool. They know how much I enjoy performing." — Billie Henderson



Photo by Haley Dougherty



Caption 1

Caption 2

Caption 3



CAPTION WRITING EXERCISE: TELL ME MORE

INSTRUCTIONS

Below you will see two photos as well as information and quotes. Determine what information needs to be included and then write the best possible caption for each photo.

Photo 1

Information

- Junior Emily Daly and junior Daniella Lyons (Daniella is in the front).
- Performing during the halftime show of the game against Benson High School on Oct. 12.
- The band is called the Marching Lion Pride.
- Their music for this season's show features songs from the movie *Jekyll and Hyde*.
- The football team lost the game, 21-10.
- The band won first place in the Mid-America Marching Festival the next day.
- The color guard moms designed and sewed these flags for the group.
- "I just love this show. It is the most difficult show we have performed since I joined the band two years ago and we do it so well." — Daniella Lyons
- "We put in a lot of hours of practice to perfect these routines and then four games later the season ends and you are done." — Emily Daly
- "You'd be surprised how heavy these flags are. It's almost as good of a workout as lifting weights." — senior Francine Dowell

Caption



Photo 2

Information

- Junior Lovell Jones (in the center)
- From left to right, Junior Devon Willey, Junior Jeremiah Jones, Junior Aaron Messick
- Jones broke his leg on the first day of football practice and must be on crutches for the remainder of the season
- These juniors led chants for all home and away football games
- Lovell Jones is chanting to the school during the varsity football game
- The game is held at the new home stadium
- This was the first home game of the season
- "When I was out there chanting, I just kinda forgot my leg was hurting. I guess I was just all in the moment, cheering my friends on." - Lovell Jones

Caption

CAPTION CHECKLIST

CAPTION CHECKLIST

- Attention getter is two to five words and is strong and interesting.
- Attention getter makes the caption/photo connection clearly.
- Uses strong, visual, specific nouns.
- Uses colorful, lively action verbs.
- First sentence is written in the present tense.
- First sentence appropriately identifies who is in the photo and describes what is happening without stating the obvious.
- Complementary information is written in past tense and takes the reader beyond the moment of the photo.
- Includes as many of the who, what, when, where, why and how as possible.
- Uses active voice, not passive.
- Quotes are interesting and not just facts.
- All names and grade levels are spelled correctly.
- All people are identified appropriately.
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation are correct.



IT'S AS EASY AS ABCD

Captions that provide detailed information give the readers the full story not only for the now, but also for the years to come.



ATTENTION GETTER

A mini-headline that makes a direct link from the caption to the photo.

BASIC INFORMATION

The first sentence that tells who and what is happening in the photo. It uses present tense.

COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

A past tense sentence that adds information that is not readily obvious in the photo. Usually contains information that indicates the outcome or consequence of the action in the photo.

DIRECT QUOTE

A quote from someone in the photo discussing an aspect of the event captured in the picture. Quotes capture the thoughts of those who were part of the event. Sometimes the quote swaps positions with the complementary information.

Dissect it. Feeling the sheep's brain, Emily Ballard (12) enjoys a hands on activity in her zoology class. During this dissection, students learned about individual parts of the brain and their functions. Ballard said, "It was fun because we could feel the odd texture of the sheep's brain and really get a closer look." Photo by Jadyn Wells.

Photo by Jadyn Wells

WRITING CAPTIONS WITH FLAIR

The old saying goes, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” However, without a caption, readers may get a thousand different messages from a picture, and all of those messages could be wrong.

Strong captions add much-needed depth and clarity. While writing quality captions for every photo is challenging, it is not impossible. The rules for caption writing are simple and easy to remember.

Do

- Make the caption a natural extension of the photo without stating the obvious.
- Make the first three to five words grab attention and link photo and rest of caption.
- Write the lead-in to state the obvious in an unobvious way.
- Include 5 Ws and H.
- Use a variety of adjectives and adverbs.
- Consider the action before and during the photos, and reaction to the event.
- Use strong, visual, specific nouns.
- Use colorful, lively, vital action verbs.
- Write in present tense, active voice (unless changing tenses to make logical).
- Keep them factual.
- Use a variety of sentence patterns.
- Identify all people in pictures (up to six, and then just the main participants).
- Use complete sentences.
- Use first and last names.
- Interview teachers, sponsors, officers, coaches and other sources for information.
- Make captions at least three sentences long. The first sentence is written in present tense and describes the activity occurring in the photograph. The second and third sentences are written in past tense and provide background information relating to the photo.
- Incorporate adequate detail.
- Give credit to the photographer.

Don't

- Don't begin with name leads or overuse the same lead pattern.
- Don't begin with label leads.
- Don't state the obvious — well written captions provide information that the reader would not otherwise know without reading the caption.
- Avoid excessive use of verbals (-ing words).
- Don't use “during” as lead.
- Don't use “pictured above,” “shown above,” “seems to,” “attempts to.”
- Avoid use of to be verbs (is, as, was, were).
- Don't pad the caption.
- Don't use “gag” or joke captions.
- Don't comment, question or talk to the picture.
- Don't editorialize.

Special caption considerations in sports

- Identify both the school's players and opponents by jersey number and name.
- Stating position of player adds depth to the description of the action.
- Consider those players who lead up to the action shot.
- Tell result of the play or outcome of the game.

Special caption considerations for posed group shots

- Begin with name of group.
- Identify from left to right, but don't write that as part of the caption.
- Give clear row designation of Front row, Row 2, Row 3, Back row.
- Row designations should be set in different typeface or in parenthesis.