Ministry of Motion



GUIDE · ACCESSIBILITY

# Captions people can actually read

Why most captions fail, the simple rules that fix them, and how to caption every film without the cost.

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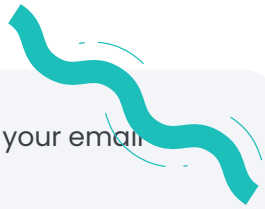

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# 01

# Foreword

Hi there,

A confession from the industry: for years, most films never had proper captions. Not because nobody cared, but because the sums didn't work.

**People couldn't read the captions, because the captions didn't exist.**

That's changed. Captions now take minutes and cost very little. But making them is only half the job: most captions on social are too small, too fast or hard to see. This guide is about the other half.




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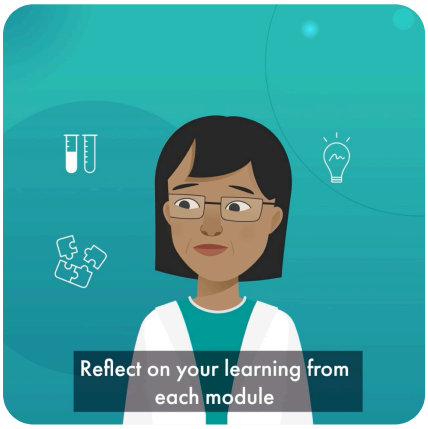
# 02

# The captions nobody could read

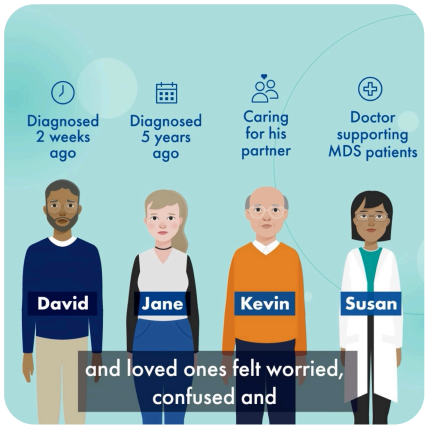
Why most films went without captions, and why that's no longer true.

Transcribing, timing, styling and checking captions by hand was worth it for a 30-second clip. For a training film, a webinar or a library of patient videos, it rarely was. **So a huge amount of video was made only for people listening with the sound on.**

Now a first draft arrives in seconds, already timed, and a person checks it. What took an hour takes minutes.




**Captioned cut-downs** from JOE for Colab Health




Big, bold and boxed




Readable with the sound off

People couldn't read the captions, because they didn't exist.

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# 03

# Who's reading

The people who rely on captions, and how many of them there are.

**18 million**

people in the UK are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus: one in three[1]

**3 in 10**

Britons typically watch with the subtitles on[2]

**53%**

of 18 to 24 year olds do[3]

### People with hearing loss

Many don't think of themselves as deaf; they just can't follow fast or noisy speech.

### People who prefer them

Plus everyone on a train, in an office, or next to someone sleeping.

### People reading in a second language

Captions help, especially with technical or medical terms.

### People who are tired or neurodivergent

Text alongside speech helps people concentrate and remember.

THE TAKEAWAY

**For healthcare, charities and public bodies, captions are often the main way the message arrives.**

SOURCES **1** RNID **2** YouGov, October 2026 **3** YouGov, October 2026

# 04

# The rules

What makes a caption readable, from the UK's broadcasting regulator.

Ofcom sets the standard for subtitles on TV and on-demand, and **its principles work just as well on a phone.**[1]




✕ **Hard to read: thin, tiny, under the buttons**




✓ **Readable: bold, boxed, in the safe zone**




**The safe zone, clear of the platform**

### Whole blocks

Each caption appears as one complete block, not word by word.

### A comfortable speed

No faster than 160 to 180 words a minute. Condense, don't transcribe.

### Two short lines

No more than two lines, about 37 characters each.

### Big enough

On vertical video, at least a twentieth of the frame height.

### Something behind it

A soft dark box or a strong outline, checked on the brightest shot.

### A clear font

Simple shapes, medium or semibold. Thin fonts disappear.

### The right place

Never over a face, and clear of the platform's buttons.

### Natural breaks

Break at logical points, so each caption is a complete thought.

### Time to read

At least a second on screen, and short ones longer.

SOURCES **1** Ofcom, Guidelines on Providing TV and On-Demand Access Services, April 2024, 3.6 to 3.17; Ofcom access services guidelines, 2012

# 05

# The mistakes we see most

Six common caption mistakes, and how to avoid them.

### A transcript, not a caption

Captions carry the meaning at a reading pace. **Cutting the ums is the job.**

### Tiny, thin, no background

Elegant in the edit, invisible on a bright shot or under the platform's buttons.

### Breaking mid-thought

"The" at the end of one line, the noun on the next.

### Wrong names and terms

The most common error, and the most serious in healthcare.

### Bouncing words on everything

Fine for a punchy clip. Never on a film that has to inform.

### Yellow on white

Still seen. Still unreadable.

# 06

# The legal bit, briefly

Who has to caption, in plain English. A summary, not legal advice.

### Public bodies

Pre-recorded video published since 23 September 2020 needs captions (WCAG 2.2 AA).[1]

### Every service provider

The Equality Act's duty to make reasonable adjustments. Captions are one of the most common and affordable.[2]

### Selling into the EU

The European Accessibility Act covers certain consumer services, including UK firms serving EU customers.[3]

THE TAKEAWAY

**Unsure what applies to you? Ask your accessibility or legal lead.**

SOURCES **1** Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/952, reg. 4); GOV.UK; W3C WCAG 2.2
**2** Equality Act 2010, s.20 **3** Directive (EU) 2019/882

# 07

# Captioning every film, affordably

Three ways to get readable captions on every film.

**1**

### Do it yourself

In our client area: pick a style, check the words, see the price, done in minutes. Guide price: around £4 a minute, plus VAT.

**2**

### Or let us do it

For films full of names, medical terms or languages, a person reads every line against the picture.

**3**

### Your house style, once

Set it in your Brand set-up, and every film comes out the same.




**End of Year** for Independent Age, captioned in Punjabi




in Polish




and in Urdu

HOW WE CAN HELP

## Caption your next film in minutes

See the price before anything runs, and pay as you go. The client area is invite only for now, so just ask.

Ask for an invite

# 08

## Your caption checklist

- [ ] Every film is captioned: burnt in for social, a subtitle file for your website and YouTube.
- [ ] No more than two lines, about 37 characters each.
- [ ] Comfortable reading speed: condense, don't transcribe.
- [ ] Big enough to read on a phone.
- [ ] A box or outline behind the text, checked on the brightest shot.
- [ ] Medium or semibold sans serif.
- [ ] Clear of the platform's safe zone.
- [ ] Lines break at natural pauses.
- [ ] Names, places and terms checked by a person.
- [ ] One house style, used everywhere.

# Get in touch

Want every film you make to be one people can read? Let's talk.

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Or ask for an invite to our client area, and caption your next film yourself.

**Ministry of Motion.** One story, many ways to tell it.