

# THE CBC CAPTIONING STYLE GUIDE

GENERAL GUIDELINES  
FOR OFF LINE  
ROLL UP  
AND  
POP-ON  
CAPTIONS

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The following are guidelines that pertain exclusively to off line roll up closed captioning, as distinct from other styles of off line closed captioning. They are intended to supplement those guidelines set forth in *The CBC Captioning Style Guide: General Guidelines for Off line Pop On Captions*, which should be taken as the authoritative reference in the event of any omission from the present document.

### **General Guidelines**

**Editing Caption Text** – Ideally, a normal caption line should end at a period or a comma, and new captions should be created at the conclusion of a proper sentence. However, discretion needs to be exercised, especially in cases where reading time may be unduly compromised by adhering strictly to these rules.

Under no circumstances should dialogue from two separate speakers be contained within the same caption (unless they are speaking simultaneously – see *Speaker identification*).

**Timing** – As with pop on captions, every effort should be made to produce captions in sync with the audio, and to adhere as much as possible to scene and shot changes. With roll up captioning, however, there is significantly more flexibility in terms of timing, because in a three-line format each caption line will remain onscreen for the duration of the following two.

The following are suggested parameters for caption duration, in seconds and frames, using the conventional three-line format:

<b>Standard duration</b>		<b>Minimum duration</b>
1:10	for single words or very short sentences	1:00
2:00	for one full line of text	1:20

It is generally advisable to stick to a three-line format. However, where two-line roll up format is used, and especially where captions are being repositioned vertically, a minimum 10-20 frames should be added to the above times for each caption. This is due to the fact that each caption will clear one line earlier than would captions in three-line format.

Captions that would otherwise 'hang' for an inordinate amount of time should be cleared from the screen at an appropriate point. This might include dialogue that comes directly before a lengthy music note, and vice-versa, or where an attempt is made to clearly delineate a scene change. This is not only aesthetically preferable, but also prevents any possible confusion on the viewer's part regarding the timing of the caption.

Captions that are to be cleared from the screen for any reason should be given an additional duration of 20-30 frames, as the viewer will not have the benefit of the additional reading time that would otherwise be allotted when captions roll up in normal fashion.

### **Positioning and Appearance**

Roll up captions commonly appear aligned and justified left at the bottom of the screen (line 15). Again, three-line roll up captions are most commonly used, but two-line captions are acceptable. Because of the nature of the movement of caption lines in this style, each roll up caption can be no more than one line in size. Roll up captions that are more than one line will not appear properly onscreen.

### **Onscreen text**

Ideally, the vertical position (line 1 or line 15) of roll up captions should remain consistent throughout a caption file. Therefore, if it is deemed necessary that captions be displayed at the top of the screen (line 1), to accommodate important onscreen graphical information appearing at the bottom of the screen, they should remain there for the duration of the programme.

It may be acceptable, however, to adjust the vertical position of captions by only a few lines. For example, captions that cover graphical information appearing at the bottom of the screen may be moved from line 15 to line 13, but must roll up in a two-line format (that is, beginning on line 13, and rolling up on line 12). Captioners are reminded to make sure that captions do not obscure any other important visuals, such as speakers' mouths. Further, remember that lines 5 to 11 are to remain caption free, as some closed captioning decoders may not properly display captions on these lines.

Where appropriate, an alternative to altering the vertical position of captions is to include onscreen information within the captioned text itself. Though unwieldy in many situations, this may be preferable where a "super" identifies the speaker. In this case, and where provided, include the speaker's name, title, or any other information about the speaker that is offered onscreen, using one of the following formats:

Example - >> Tom Ford, Designer:...  
>> Tom Ford (Designer):...  
>> Tom Ford, *Designer*:...

Other possible strategies might include a "captioner's note" that would contain other types of graphical information. In order to distinguish this additional information, it should be placed within parentheses, and in mixed typeface.

Example - (Location note: Calgary, AB)  
(URL note: [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca))

**Speaker identification** - All speakers are indicated by the use of two chevrons followed by a space. Names and other pertinent information appear in a mixed case typeface followed by a colon. Titles or positions, when referring to a speaker, should be treated as proper nouns (see example above).

Example - >> Wayne Rostad: HELLO, AND WELCOME  
TO *ON THE ROAD AGAIN*.

Speakers not appearing onscreen must always be identified, initially by their whole name, and then, when they reappear, by either their first or last name. Alternating speakers' dialogue must always contain two chevrons. Where it is clearly discernible that a conversation or interview is taking place between two identified speakers, subsequent and alternating lines of dialogue need only be preceded by two chevrons.

Example - >> Reporter: WHEN DID THE ACCIDENT OCCUR?  
>> Woman: IT WAS AROUND THE LUNCH HOUR.  
>> WERE THERE ANY OTHER WITNESSES?  
>> THERE WAS ONE OTHER MAN...

Multiple speakers' dialogue is indicated by the use of three chevrons followed by a space. If it is not clear that everyone is speaking at the same time, indicate speakers as a group.

Examples - >>> All: WE ARE HERE TO STAY!  
>>> Both: HOW ARE YOU?

### **Text**

**Italics** - The use of italics to identify narrators or announcers is not common, as it is in pop on captioning, due to the method of speaker identification particular to roll up captioning (see above). All other conventional usage of italics, however, still applies (e.g., in reference to companies, for emphasis, etc.).

Example - >> Announcer: THIS *CBC PROGRAMME*  
WAS BROUGHT TO YOU  
BY *GMC SIERRA*.

### **Descriptive Captions**

Descriptive captions may be handled similarly to pop on style. Sound effects, for example, are indicated by the use of square brackets. Use a mixed case typeface, but do not capitalize the first letter unless for proper nouns.

Non-verbal utterances or noises made by a person are indicated in the same manner as a sound effect. No chevrons are used on the same caption line, and if it is not clear to whom the sound effect pertains, include the speaker's name with the descriptive text.

Example - >> Steven: MICHAEL... WHAT'S WRONG?  
[Michael cries softly]

### **Music and song lyrics**

Music styles are indicated in the same manner as sound effects.

Examples - ♪ [theme music]

♪ [marching band plays]

♪ [bagpipes played poorly]

Song lyrics are not italicised. Song lyrics begin with a single music note placed at the beginning (but not the end) of the caption, followed by a space. Do not use chevrons to indicate the singer(s). Upon completion of a song, use two music notes, without a space between them, in the caption subsequent to the last lyric.

Example - ♪ HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR HAROLD  
♪ HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU  
♪♪

Punctuation is kept to a minimum within song lyrics, with the possible exceptions of relevant commas and question marks. Do not use periods within song lyrics.

For lengthy instrumental segments, use a double music note, spaced and flush left, per caption line (i.e., ♪ ♪). Each double music note should remain onscreen until either a new caption is required, or the music ends. Make sure also that the preceding caption is cleared before any music notes are displayed, and conversely, that music notes are cleared before more text is displayed.

## **Use of Guidelines Pop On Captioning**

The *CBC Captioning Style Guide* is meant to ensure a consistent output regardless of circumstance.

### **General Guidelines**

Captioning a show verbatim is the ideal, but people generally speak faster than a comfortable reading rate allows, therefore it is often difficult to offer a show that is truly verbatim. Space and time limitations invariably lead to the reduction of text, therefore very strong language skills are necessary to ensure readability and consistency of text.

### **Editing Caption Text**

- be sure to edit dialogue only when absolutely necessary for a sufficient reading rate. Try to stay as close as possible to the original wording in order to uphold the meaning of the dialogue.

### **Cutting text –**

YOU KNOW, I FELT PRETTY LOUSY,  
SO, LIKE, I WENT TO BED.

change to:

I FELT LOUSY,  
SO I WENT TO BED.

### **Changing text -**

YOU ARE GOING  
TO PAY FOR THIS!

change to:

YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS!

### **Timing**

- ideally, captions should appear in sync with the audio. If a person is speaking very quickly, make use of what is called "lead" and "lag" time to ensure that the captions appear for an acceptable length of time. This is the time before and after a person is speaking within the scene. If there is no lead or lag time available, it may be necessary to edit the text to ensure a comfortable reading rate.

It is also important to edit the "in" and "out" time of captions to the exact frame of a scene change unless the dialogue continues over a scene change.

**General Caption Durations** - these durations are noted in seconds and frames.

#### **Standard duration**

1:20 for single words or very short sentences  
2:15 for one full line of text  
3:15 for two full lines of text  
4:15 for three full lines of text

#### **Minimum duration**

1:00  
2:00  
3:00  
4:00

When a caption contains numbers, uncommon names and/or unfamiliar words, extra time should be given when possible. The maximum duration for a caption is 15:20. The encoder is incapable of transmitting a caption that is 16 seconds or longer. This lengthy duration would apply to music notes only.

Wherever possible, try to present a block of captions that are similar in size and duration, and avoid having very long, large captions and small, short captions appear one after the other.

### **Captioning Children's Programmes**

- much longer durations are used for children's programmes. It is also important to present the text in short, concise one- or two-line captions. Use of three-line captions should be avoided completely.

### **General Caption Durations**

#### **Very Young Children**

2:20 - 3:00 single words or very short sentences  
3:20 - 4:00 one full line of text  
4:20 - 5:00 two full lines of text

#### **School Children**

2:00 - 2:15  
3:00 - 3:15  
4:00 - 4:15

### **Positioning and Appearance**

Captions generally appear centred at the bottom of the screen (line 15). If there are several speakers in a scene, position captions to identify who is speaking. You should re-position a caption in order to avoid covering up important visual information such as on screen text, graphics, a person's mouth, eyes, etc. Captions should always be one or two lines in length. Three line captions are acceptable when time or space is limited. Four line captions are unacceptable.

If text appears on screen which is also being spoken, do not generate a caption.

Example - [spoken] FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
CALL 1-800-222-3333.

[caption] FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL...  
[on screen] 1-800-222-3333

### **Multiple Captions**

- two or three captions may be displayed simultaneously when dialogue between speakers is very fast and insufficient time is available for each speaker to have their own caption. Make sure that spacing and placement clearly indicate who is speaking.

Example - WHO WANTS COFFEE?  
I DO. ME TOO.



**On Screen Information** - when it is necessary to move captions due to on screen information, make sure to give captions a bit more time to ensure that the viewer has a chance to both read the caption and the on screen text.

It is also important to have a consistent flow when moving captions from the bottom to the top of the screen. Try to move captions only at the start of a sentence or at a scene change. Allow the sentence or scene to end before restoring the captions to the bottom of the screen so that the viewer is able to follow.

**Speaker Identification** - it is important to identify who is speaking when it is not obvious to the caption viewer.

Example - NARRATOR: THIS IS THE HOME  
OF THE POLAR BEAR.

DR. LAM: LOOK, A CUB.

**Spacing** - there should never be more than one space used in a caption. It is not necessary to use double spaces after punctuation.

### **Text**

All text shall be presented in uppercase, except for descriptive text, when noting web site and e-mail addresses, when the spelling of a name requires lower case, or to note the plural of an acronym or number.

Example - [applause]

CHECK OUT [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca)  
OR WRITE US AT [show@cbc.ca](mailto:show@cbc.ca)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,  
HERE HE IS, MR. McDONALD!

BACK IN THE '60s,  
WE'D STAY AT ALL THE Y.M.C.A.s

**Italics** - use italics to identify an off camera speaker, such as an announcer or a voice on a telephone. Also use for emphasis, product names, TV and radio call letters, album and movie titles, books, plays, newspapers, magazines, and for foreign words or phrases.

Example - I WAS GOING TO HAVE *KRAFT DINNER*  
AND WATCH *BRAVEHEART*.

OH WELL,  
*C'EST LA VIE*.

**Abbreviations** - unless an abbreviated word is spoken, words should always be spelled out in full.

Example - [verbatim] ANY INFO YOU CAN GIVE ME  
WOULD BE GREAT.

[incorrect] ANY INFORMATION YOU CAN  
GIVE ME WOULD BE GREAT.

[incorrect] I WAS TRAVELLING  
AT A SPEED OVER 140 KPH.

[correct] I WAS TRAVELLING AT A SPEED  
OVER 140 KILOMETRES PER HOUR.

**Quotation marks** - use quotes around titles of newspaper and magazine articles, poems, song titles, a television show's episode title, or to point out a deliberate pun or play on words.

When dealing with a quote whose length spans two or more captions, place quotation marks at the beginning of each caption, except for the caption containing the end of the quote. It should only contain a closing quotation mark.

Always place periods and commas inside quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation marks are also placed inside a closing quotation mark unless they specifically apply to the sentence as a whole.

Example - inside quotation: SUSAN ASKED, "WHEN DOES THE NEXT BUS  
COME INTO THE STATION?"

outside quotation: DID YOU UNDERSTAND  
WHEN SUSAN SAID, "GET OFF THE BUS"?

When a speaker is quoting themselves, as in standard print media, single quotes are used. They are also used to enclose a quotation within a quotation.

**Numbers** - numbers under ten are spelled out. The number ten can either be spelled out or represented numerically depending on the situation.

Example - FROM ONE TO TEN.

I GOT 10 OUT OF 14!

Note - All numbers may be represented in numerals when text space or reading time is severely limited.

Uncommon fractions may be written numerically.

Example -                      1/4                      is acceptable  
   one quarter                      is preferred

   whereas      4 5/16                      is preferred

When documenting a sum of money, a dollar sign or the written word may be used, just be sure not to use both.

Example -                      [correct]      \$25.00, \$25, or 25 DOLLARS,  
   [incorrect]      \$25 DOLLARS

Note -                              use of ".00" is only truly necessary when other sums of money are present, and is not to be used for sums over \$100.

e.g.                              I PAID \$17.95,  
   BUT IT WAS ACTUALLY \$5.00!

When years and decades are included in text they should always be noted as follows:

   THE SIXTIES WERE GREAT.  
   or                      THE '60s WERE GREAT.

   IT HAPPENED IN 1976, THEN IN '79,  
   AND ALL THROUGH THE '80s.

When representing times, even if someone says "eight o'clock," it should always be written numerically.

Example -                              8:00 or 8:00 P.M.

Note -                              It is acceptable to write "noon" or "midnight" in conjunction with the number 12 if that is what's spoken.

Temperatures should be noted as they are spoken.

Example -                              IT'S MINUS 37 OUT THERE!  
   IT'S 28 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT.

## **Punctuation**

- it is sometimes necessary to break with the conventions of typical print media in order to ensure the greatest ease of readability.

Example - use a comma when there is a numerical representation of large numbers. Although \$1 000 is correct in print, \$1,000 is easier to read, especially when surrounded with capital letters.

Although NS is the accepted abbreviation for Nova Scotia, it is easier to read as N.S. when surrounded by capital letters.

Unless an acronym is pronounced as a word, like *UNICEF* or *SCUBA*, or is a highly recognized acronym like *CBC*, it is best to insert periods to avoid confusion.

A double dash is used to illustrate an abrupt interruption.

Example -                                 JOHN: YOU SEE, I SAID--  
  NO, THAT'S NOT RIGHT.

  JIM: SHUT UP, YOU STUPID--

  JOHN: WHO DO YOU THINK  
  YOU'RE TALKING TO?!

### **Double punctuation**

- as above, with a question mark and exclamation mark, may occur when a question is shouted or given excessive emphasis. The question mark would always appear first. You may use double or triple exclamation marks when ridiculous emphasis is needed. This normally occurs in children's programming.

### **Hyphenated words**

- all hyphenated words must remain on one line.

### **Ellipsis**

- this should be used if a person trails off leaving an unfinished sentence or if there is a long pause between sentences. An ellipsis may also be used to indicate that there is missing text or if there is text to follow on the screen.

Example -                                 I REMEMBER  
  WHEN I WAS A BOY...

  THINGS WERE SO DIFFERENT.

### **Spelling**

Unfortunately, there is no absolute standard for "Canadian English," so our standard tends to fall somewhere between our British and American compatriots. Here are some general guidelines for *CBC'S* use of "Canadian English."





## **Descriptive Captions**

Relevant descriptions of sounds and additional information can greatly enhance a captioned television show, but it is important not to congest a show with unnecessary descriptive captions. A caption viewer should not receive any more or less information than a hearing one.

Descriptive captions appear as lower case text set inside square brackets to inform the caption viewer of developments of which they would otherwise not be aware. They are to be placed at the centre of the screen unless they are specific to a certain character or need to be placed elsewhere for optimum clarity.

Example -                                [loud gunshot]  
   [applause]  
   [knock at door]

If a person on screen is moving their lips but not speaking, it is important to indicate this to the caption viewer .

Example -                                [indiscernible whispering]  
   [muttering]  
   [mouthing words]

It is also sometimes necessary to note silences.

Example -                                [crowd falls silent]  
   [absolute silence]

For children's programmes, it is acceptable to use descriptive captions in a more direct way.

Example -                                [bang! bang!]  
   [squawk!]  
   [toot! toot!]

When it is important to know the way a word or phrase is said, a descriptive caption may be used.

Example -                                [dreamily]  
   I KNOW HE'LL BE BACK.

   [angrily]  
   WHERE ARE YOU?

**Foreign Accents**- when a person has an accent, use a descriptive caption to make note of it when possible. If it is a very thick accent, or they are having some difficulty speaking English, it is very important to note that in a descriptive

caption, for it may explain long pauses, incorrect tenses, etc. If a person speaks with an accent for comic or dramatic effect, it is also very important to make note of it.

Example - [very thick Russian accent]  
I GO FOR WALK NOW.

[over the top Italian accent]  
WE-A GO FOR PIZZA LATER, EH?

### **Indiscernible Speech**

- use a descriptive caption to note that what is being spoken is unclear due to it being muddled, faint or in a foreign language.

Example - [indiscernible conversation]  
[muddled, unclear speech]  
[speaking Chinese]

Note - never guess at a foreign language that is being spoken.  
If unsure, use [foreign language].

### **Line and Caption Breaks**

Line and caption breaks should be determined by the amount of text, sentence structure and punctuation.

When breaking a sentence into a two line caption, it is important not to break a modifier from the word it modifies.

Example - [incorrect] SANDRA MODELLED HER RED  
DRESS.

[correct] SANDRA MODELLED  
HER RED DRESS.

It is important not to break an auxiliary verb from the word it modifies.

Example - [incorrect] THERE'S NO WAY YOU COULD  
HAVE KNOWN.

[correct] THERE'S NO WAY  
YOU COULD HAVE KNOWN.

Do not break after a conjunction.

Example - [incorrect] THERE WAS THIS AND  
THERE WAS THAT.



[correct]

THERE WAS THIS  
AND THERE WAS THAT.

Do not break a person's name.

Example - [incorrect] HELLO, I'M MIRANDA  
WILSON.

[correct] HELLO,  
I'M MIRANDA WILSON.

### **Caption Size and Shape**

Most commonly, captions appear in a two-line pyramid or inverted pyramid shape.

Example - GEORGE WALKED  
ALL THE WAY TO THE STORE.

HE DOESN'T GET TO GO THERE  
ALL THAT OFTEN.

It is very important to make sure that captions of the exact same size and shape are repositioned slightly so that the viewer will note that a new caption has appeared.

Example - a) I SAID I DIDN'T DO IT!

I SAID I DIDN'T DO IT!

b) THERE WAS NOTHING  
TO SULK ABOUT,

THERE WAS SOMEONE  
TO TALK ABOUT.

### **Music and Song Lyrics**

Instrumental music is indicated by a caption containing two music notes separated by a space positioned at the bottom left of the screen.

Example - 

When possible, use a descriptive caption to indicate the style of music, song title and artist.

Example -  [bluesy jazz]

 ["Superman" by R.E.M.]

Lyrics must be written out for songs. In the event that they are unclear or in another language, use a descriptive caption to indicate that to the viewer.

Example -                    *♪ [singing in Italian]*

*♪ [very fast rap,  
words unclear]*

Musical notes are placed at the beginning and end of each caption followed and preceded by a space. The entire caption is italicized. The caption itself is to be placed at the bottom centre of the screen, should not include periods, and use of commas, question and exclamation marks are used only when it is necessary for clarity. Try to follow the phrasing of the lyric whenever possible.

Example -                    *♪ HEY JUDE ♪*

*♪ DON'T BE AFRAID ♪*

*♪ TAKE A SAD SONG  
AND MAKE IT BETTER ♪*

### **Tag Line**

Tag lines are used, typically, when the credits are rolling at the end of a show. This identification is necessary to let the viewer know who is responsible for the production of that show's captioning. Double dashes are used to indicate that the caption is not part of the show but something inserted by the caption editor. It should remain on the screen for a duration of anywhere from 2:20 to 3:15 (seconds and frames). Tagline placement is centred at the top of the screen. The time code placement is dependent on each programme.

Note: A tagline is presented in pop on style even when the file is mainly in roll-up style. Swift does accommodate mixed captioning styles.

Example -                    *-- CLOSED CAPTIONING PRODUCED  
BY CBC, TORONTO. --*