

Captioning YouTube Videos

There are two types of captions for videos: *closed* captions and *open* captions. With open captions, the captions are part of the video itself, as if the words were burned into the film. They are always there. With closed captions, the words are kept in a separate file, synchronized with the video. Closed captions require more sophisticated playback software, but they give the viewer the option of displaying captions or hiding them.

Closed captions are better for YouTube videos, so that's what we'll focus on here.

Closed captioning videos for YouTube is the right thing to do.

- It makes our video content accessible to those who cannot hear the audio;
- it allows us to meet our legal obligations (section 508);
- it makes our videos much more easily found through YouTube searches;
- it gives us written content that can also be used in our web pages and elsewhere; and
- it helps non-English speakers understand the video content through YouTube's auto-translation feature.

A properly captioned YouTube video consists of two parts: the video itself, and a separate caption file. The caption file is simply a transcript of the words spoken and a description of other relevant sounds from the video, to which "time stamps" are inserted to indicate when each bit of audio occurs in the video.

Many tools and strategies can help you caption your YouTube videos more easily and quickly.

You can

1. start with a transcript and have YouTube automatically sync it with the video;
2. start with a transcript and then use desktop or online software to manually sync it with the video;
3. use desktop or online software to create a caption file from scratch;
4. pay a contractor to do as little or as much of the work as you need; or
5. ask YouTube to create everything automatically.

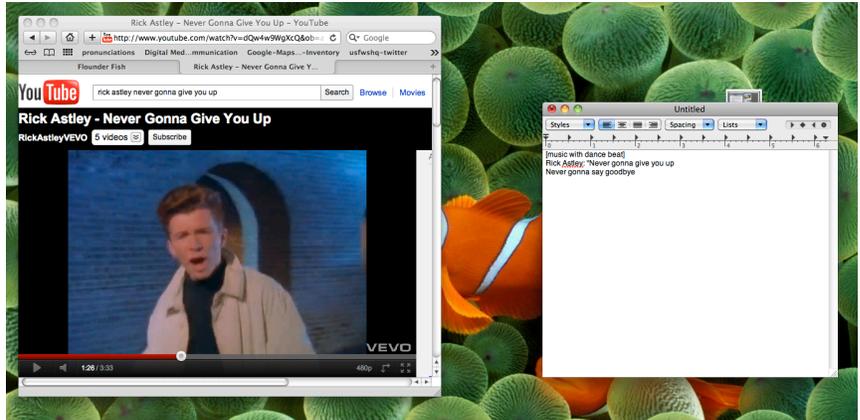
There are pros and cons to each. Options 1, 2, and 3 can be time-consuming. Option 4 involves the usual overhead associated with contracting and requires some lead time. Option 5 looks good, but relies on notoriously tricky speech-to-text technology. You could wind up spending as much time fixing the transcript as you would making one from scratch.

You'll most likely find the best balance of time, cost, and quality in Option 1. This gives you control where you need it (figuring out just what was said) and gives YouTube a job it handles pretty well (figuring out where it was said). So the first step is making a transcript...

Making a Transcript

A transcript is a written record of the sounds you want to describe in your video, plus any additional details that would help someone who can't hear the audio track in the video, such as identifying the speaker, indicating whether a sound is soft or loud, etc.

If your video is fully scripted, it's pretty easy to take the script and add whatever details you need to flesh it out as a transcript. If the video is not scripted, you make the transcript by listening to the video and writing down what people are saying. The lowest-cost approach for computer-based videos is to open two



With your video open in one window and a word processor in another, you can easily play the video and transcribe what you hear.

windows on your computer desktop, one in which you play the video, and one in which you use a word processor to write down what you hear.

Search the Web and you'll find programs that make the transcription process easier by giving you better control over the video playback. Inqscribe (at Inqscribe.com) is one we've used that works well, though at \$100 it is not the least expensive. Inqscribe can also be used to create captions, as we'll discuss later.

In the transcript, don't worry about long blocks of text, or how to place line breaks. That'll all work out in the captioning phase. Once you've finished the transcript, save it in the "plain text" (.txt) format and you're ready to use that transcript to caption your video.

Here are some other things you can do to help get the best results when you later convert your transcript to captions:

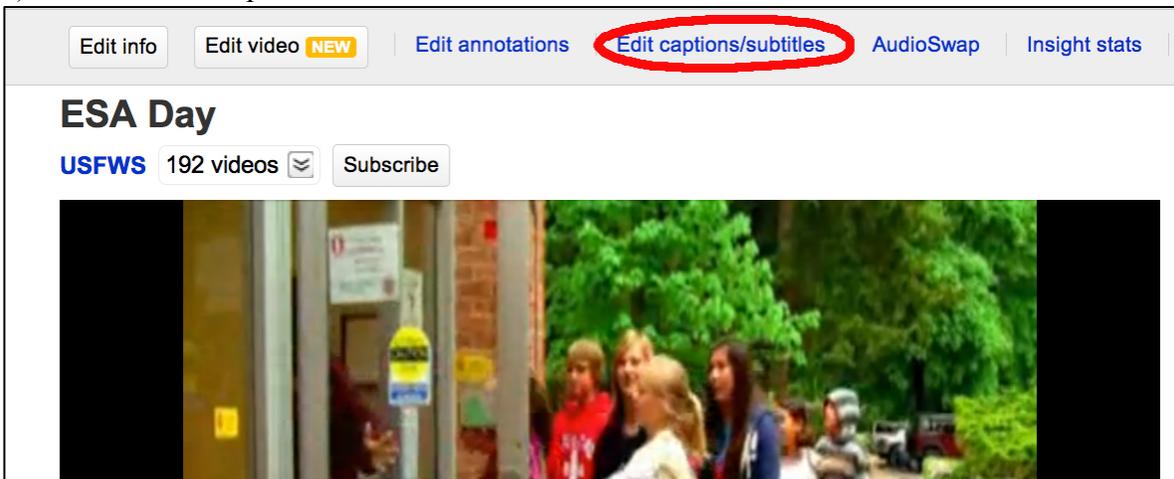
- Identify speakers when it's not clear who's speaking.
- Enclose descriptions of other *relevant* sounds in brackets, e.g., [birds chirping in background]. You don't have to describe every incidental sound, just those that matter.
- Identify long pauses (3 seconds or longer) or music in the transcript with a *double line break*. Captions are usually presented in two-line segments, so this will force a pause between the first and second lines, if necessary.
- Use *double line breaks* anytime you want to force a caption break.
- You can also add tags like >> at the beginning of a new line to identify speakers or change of speaker.

Captioning a video from a transcript

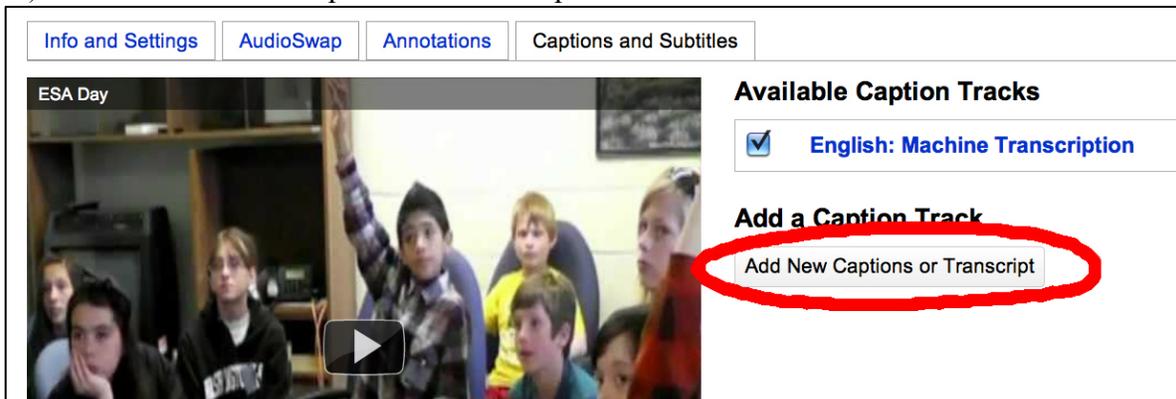
If you have a completed transcript, you have a few options for making the captions. You can use desktop captioning software, online captioning software, YouTube's automated captioning, or hire a contractor.

The easiest approach is to use YouTube's automated captioning feature to convert your transcript into a time-stamped caption file. Here's what you do.

- 1) Save the transcript file in a plain text (.txt) format. YouTube will accept Word files, but they can cause problems.
- 2) Upload the video to YouTube. Flag it as private for now.
- 3) After the video is uploaded, view it on the site by clicking the link at the top of the upload page.
- 4) Select "Edit Captions/Subtitles"



- 5) Select "Add New Captions or Transcript"



Captioning software may be of the desktop or online variety. We mentioned Inqscribe earlier as an example of desktop transcription and captioning software. There are others, for both Windows and Mac—just be sure they can save the finished caption file in the SubViewer (*.sub) or SubRip (*.srt) file formats, as these are the two formats that YouTube currently (late 2011) supports.

There's also online captioning software, at least one of which, CaptionTube (<http://www.captiontube.appspot.com/>), is nicely integrated with YouTube. CaptionTube works with videos you've already uploaded to YouTube. With CaptionTube, you play the video online and, by pausing and typing, add captions directly when they should appear in the video. The result is a fully-formed caption file ready for YouTube. There are plenty of tutorials online to teach you the ins and outs of CaptionTube. You can start here: <http://captiontube.appspot.com/help/>, then watch some video tutorials at <http://captiontube.appspot.com/myvideos/>.

Use a contractor to transcribe and/or encode your video with captions.

Finally, if you really don't have the time or energy to caption videos yourself, you can always pay someone to do it for you. There are numerous transcription and captioning services on the Web, and possibly some even in your local area. They will do as little or as much as you need, depending on how much money you have to spend.

One vendor that we've used in the Washington Office is Closed Caption Productions, based in Arizona. You can visit their website at <http://ccproductions.com>. Rates are about \$75 for a five-minute video. Other options are transcription services—many are available online—or even locally based stenographers. Turnaround time is usually within one to two weeks, and while you can generally upload a file to the transcription service website, you may want to save the audio as a standalone file to make the file size more manageable.