

Caption Writing

FOR *Journalism*
TEACHERS ONLY

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A picture is worth 1000 words, but it still needs a caption.

Looking at a picture without a caption is like watching television with the sound turned off. The photograph should attract the attention of the reader and introduce the story, but only a good caption can continue that story and fill in the details which are not apparent in the picture.

The writer should research the photograph...what went on before and after the photograph was taken? Answer these questions: Who is in the picture? (Your readers want to know everyone and will forget the names they do know in a few years). What event or action is going on? When did it happen? Why were these people doing whatever they were doing?

How is a good caption written?

- **Be specific:** Supply concrete details. For sports captions, give scores and information about the particular action in the photo and its effect on the outcome.

Example: (bad) **HE'S OUT.** Chuck jumps and throws toward first.

Example: (good) **UP AND OVER.** Shortstop Chuck Davidson avoids Dan Gladden's rolling slide and makes the throw to first to complete the ninth inning double play which sealed Oakland's 3-2 win over Birkdale Twins in the subdistrict playoffs.

- **Tell something other than what is obvious in the picture:**

Example: (bad) **OUCH!** Oxford High bicyclist crashes.

Example: (good) **DOWN AND OUT.** Senior cycling team captain Bob Everitt takes it on the chin after cutting the final corner too close in a duel with Mosby High's Steve Sherrill at the season's first race. After a trip to the hospital and 10 stitches, Bob went on to win five races for the year and led the team to an overall second place finish in the region.

- **Continue the story begun by the picture.** Make the caption a mini-news story.

Example: (bad) **AMY ROSSFIELD** gets ready for practice.

Example: (good) **DAILY ROUTINE.** Junior Amy Rossfield prepares for her afternoon practice. "Since I won the state dance competition last year," she said, "I look forward to practice because I want to win again."

- **Fully identify everyone.** Do not use only first names or just first initials with last names.

- **Use lead-ins to grab the reader's attention.**

- **Put the first sentence in present tense, then switch to past tense for second and subsequent sentences.**