

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 may 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 pictures (up to seven, and then just the main participants).
- Use complete sentences.
- Use complete names.
- Interview teachers, sponsors, officers, coaches and other sources for information.
- Make captions at least two sentences long. The first sentence is written in present tense and describes the activity occurring in the photograph. The second sentence is written in past tense and provides background information relating to the photo.
- Incorporate adequate detail.

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 verb (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.