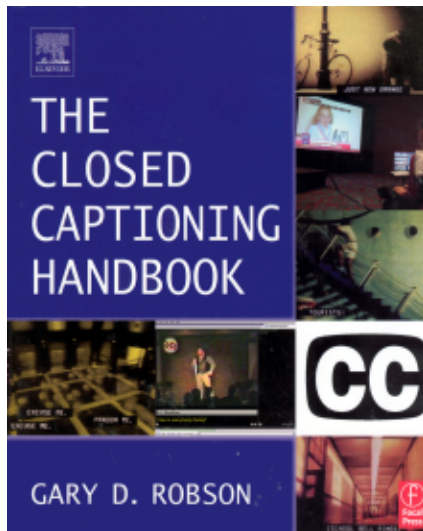


Book Review

The Closed Captioning Handbook

Reviewed By Ali Darwish



The Closed Captioning Handbook

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Several research papers and a handful of books have been published on media accessibility in the last three decades, but perhaps none since Robert G. Baker's groundbreaking publication *Handbook for Television Subtitlers* (1984) rises to *The Closed Captioning Handbook* in quality, variety, detail and above all recency. As the world moves towards open multimedia systems, increased global connectivity and real-time interactivity, new issues of accessibility arise which leave both seasoned specialists and beginners puzzled by the pace of technological advances and the complexity of human needs for accessible media. Old technologies are quickly being phased out and new readily available and easy to use software is enabling specialists and amateurs alike to provide captions and subtitles in both monolingual and bilingual environments.

Looking for answers, one should not go farther than the present publication. A handbook indeed—rather a treasure box that contains a wealth of information about various aspects of closed captioning.

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This impressive volume book, written by a leading expert in the field, consists of an introduction, 24 chapters and four appendices, with a foreword by Philip W. Bravin, former president of the American National Captioning Institute (NCI).

Chapter 1 Why Closed Captioning defines the terminology, captioning data channels, and symbols and logos used in Captioning. This chapter is important because it dispels some of the confusion about the definition of captioning-related terms.

Chapter 2 A Brief History of Captioning provides a useful timeline of major events in the history of captioning from 1947 to 2007 with projections into 2012. *Chapter 3 Captioning Styles and Conventions* discusses measuring quality, mixed-case versus all uppercase, verbatim versus edited captions, with for and against arguments, and conventions in caption presentation, taking into account factors such as reading speed, speaker identification, punctuation and spacing and other techniques and pitfalls.

Chapter 4 Captioning Law provides an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Television Decoder Circuitry Act, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Emergency Captioning, Rehabilitation Act of 1998, and Captioning complaints.

Chapter 5 Consumer Captioning Equipment discusses the equipment and technology used for captioning, showing how to connect the decoder equipment, with illustrations. It also discusses captions on consumer televisions, how captions are turned on and off, language support, text support, fonts, picture in picture (PIP), caption volume control, and caption relocation. This chapter also shows how to make caption work with VCRs and with DVD players, and describes the caption readers and caption decoders for computers.

Chapter 6 Troubleshooting shows how consumer troubleshooting is performed. It provides step by step instructions to fix missing captions and other captioning problems. It also briefly discusses broadcast troubleshooting.

Chapter 7 Line 21 Technical Details goes into the technical aspects of captioning, from the Line 21 waveform to the character set, text attributes, caption display area, decoder memories and caption styles, and other captioning functionality.

Chapter 8 Encoding Equipment and *Chapter 9 Decoding Equipment* discuss the hardware and software used in captioning. *Chapter 10 Online Captioning Overview* gives an overview of online captioning: working with scripts, scripts from newsroom computers, interspersing scripts with real-time, standard scripts, auto feed, stock captions, and online captioning software. This chapter also provides information on how to buy captioning software, what to look for when buying online captioning software.

Chapter 11 Realtime Stenocaptioning discusses a stenotype theory, finger spelling, writing numbers, punctuation and speaker identification, and other

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stenocaptioning techniques and aspects such as obscenities in captioning, translation dictionaries, and funny bloopers.

Chapter 12 Realtime Voice Writing discusses speech recognition. It defines terms such as speech recognition, voice recognition, speaker-dependent speech recognition and speaker-independent speech recognition, and voice writing. It presents a case for voice writing and compares voice writing to stenocaptioning. This chapter also explains the training process for new voice writers and training the speakers and other useful pointers. The chapter ends with a fascinating history of voice Writing.

Chapter 13 Offline and Nonlinear Captioning explains the differences between linear and nonlinear captioning, system configuration, file manipulation, and validation. *Chapter 14 Caption Placement Strategies* takes the reader through placement objectives, speaker identification, covering other screen information, dealing with air0-time and crawls, historical considerations and nonbroadcast options. *Chapter 15 Captioning Time* talks about timing objectives, time codes, assigning timecodes to captions, timing multiple caption streams, and asynchronous data.

Chapter 16 DTV Captioning discusses captioning for digital television; bandwidth, Digital Television Closed Caption windows, character formatting, the layering model and legacy captioning. *Chapter 17 Captioning and Subtitling on DVDs* discusses methods and techniques for DVD captioning and subtitling, and *Chapter 18 Other Line 21 Data* discusses Web Television and provides some technical information. It also provides a list of USTV ratings and visual identifiers.

Chapter 19 Captions in Internet Streaming and Computer Media provides an overview of captions on the Internet and reviews the standards used: SAMI (Synchronized Accessible Media Interchange) and SMIL (Synchronized Multimedia Integration Language). The author laments the fact that “no industry organization stepped forward with a standard for streaming synchronized captions”.

Chapter 20 Accessible Web Site Design opens with this observation: “When it comes to standards, we live in paradoxical times. Organizations like ISO, W3C, ANSI, CEA, SMPTE, and ATSC have standards for virtually anything you can imagine. Companies large and small rush to jump on the standards bandwagon—if for no other reason than to list the buzzwords in their advertising. [¶] At the same time, every Web designer knows how hard it is to come up with standards-compliant code that actually *works* [emphasis in original] in every available browser. [¶] On the Internet these days, accessibility and compatibility run hand-in-hand. The closer you run to the bleeding edge of technological advancement, the more likely you are to exclude the very people you are trying to reach with your message, whether it be through traditional media like television or the mighty morphing of the Net” (274). The chapter presents the fundamentals of accessibility with hints and tips: (1) adapt to the

user, (2) enhance your links, (3) include alt text for all images, (4) caption all video clips, (5) caption all audio files, and other useful tips. The chapter alerts the readers to considerations such as attractive layouts being incompatible with accessibility.

Chapter 21 Movie Theater Captioning discusses captioning for the theatre: open captions, rear window captioning, bounce-back systems, and personal captioning systems. *Chapter 22 Cart and Live Event Captioning* discusses a system called Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), which unlike captioning, which consists of words on a video picture, is just words on a screen. This is most useful in educational setting and onsite at live events as the author suggests. The chapter compares CART and sign language and clarifies that CART and sign language are interchangeable. The chapter distinguishes between prelingually and postlingually deaf people and between CART and note taking. It also explains live event captioning.

Chapter 23 Audio Description for the Blind provides guidelines for producing audio description, and explains the icons used for audio description. It touches on the legal mandates and provides details of key companies and organizations working in audio description in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Chapter 24 Language Issues in Line 21 discusses issues such as the character sets for various languages: Afrikaans, Danish, Finnish, French, Gaelic, German, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and non-Latin alphabets such as Arabic, Greek, and Japanese.

Appendix 1: Captioning Equipment Vendors gives a list of hardware and software vendors, and *Appendix 2: Captioning Service Providers* gives a list of captioning services providers in the United States and other countries including Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Spain, United Kingdom and Venezuela. *Appendix 3: Captioning Resources Online* provides details of online links to captioning information about products and services and broadcasting organizations, and disability rights and ADA organizations. *Appendix 4: Standards Documents* provides details of standards organizations. The *Glossary* provides a useful list of terms and their definitions.

One criticism of this impressive publication is its fluctuation between technical and non-technical topics within the same chapter and across chapters on the one hand and hierarchy of topics within each chapter, for example, discussing technology and techniques and presentation styles all in one chapter. The reader is soon attuned to this style of presentation that does not detract from the most valuable content of the handbook, which is not designed to be read from cover to cover but rather selectively. This is not an academic book purely about theory—it is a hands-on *All You Need To Know About Captioning* desktop reference book for readers to consult as the need arises.

On the whole, this is an excellent comprehensive handbook, written with magnificent clarity and precision. If you are not technically orientated, don't be

put off by the technical details. These are presented very clearly with illustrations and without the sophistication and usual ambiguities and gobbledygook of technical jargon. 🐦

Ali Darwish is a technical communication, translation and knowledge management consultant. Combining forty concomitant years of technical writing and translation, he is a distinguished translator of considerable knowledge and international exposure. Since 1974, he has held positions in information technology, education, and knowledge transfer in the United Kingdom, the Middle East, and Australia. He has taught translation and interpreting theory and practice, discourse studies, professional ethics, technical and professional writing, communication skills and other subjects at Australian universities for 12 years and has authored several books on translation and cross-cultural and technical communication, including *The Transfer Factor* (2003), *The Translator's Guide* (2001), *The Interpreter's Guide* (2003) and *Language, Translation and Identity* (2005), and more than 90 articles and research papers, and has maintained an internationally recognized translation studies website since 1998. He has also served as a NAATI translation and interpreting official examiner for twelve years (1990-2002). His new publication *The Book of wonders of Arabic Blunders in Journalism, Politics and Media* will be released in 2007.

Ali holds an MA in Translation from Salford University (1988), a Postgraduate Diploma in Translation (UK), a BA in English language and literature, and a bidirectional Advanced Translator Accreditation (NAATI, 1989). Ali is the founder and director of Translation Standards Institute and the founding editor of Translation Watch Quarterly, Australia's premier refereed international journal of translation studies.

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