

Caption Criteria

Below are the detailed criteria for captions:

You should never write a caption without having the image in front of you—DO NOT WRITE FROM MEMORY! Captions are usually just two sentences long, but they should be as long as needed to answer the basic journalistic questions.

1. Your caption should identify who is in the picture and why they are significant. All names must be spelled correctly with the correct name on the correct person. (Identify people from left to right.) Use “cq” after names that are not common spellings. (see example below.) List ages for any children in the image.
2. What is in the picture? Write so that you’re completing a story, not just describing literally what’s in the picture.
3. When? The DATE, including the day of the week, date and year must appear in the body of all captions. (Example: Monday, Jan. 8, 2018)
4. Where? Be specific. Follow AP style for geographic locations. Use city and state. The correct style for the city and state is Dearborn, Michigan. See AP style handbook for geographic locations.
5. Why? Explain the circumstances and why it is relevant or adds to the story package.
6. Is it specific?
7. Is it easy to read?
8. Is it grammatically correct and written in AP style?

Here’s an example of a well-written caption:

Jonathan Smyth (cq), right, carries his daughter Samantha, 3, as they wait in line to purchase the new X-Box game Friday, Nov. 28, 2006. They were two of about 75 people who lined up early at the Sears store in the Merle Hay Mall in Des Moines, Iowa, waiting for the new game to go on sale at midnight.

Captions are generally made of two parts, each composed of one or more sentences. The first part, almost always written in present tense, describes the action seen in the photo. The second part gives context to the image. This part is usually written in past tense and describes why the action, situation or content of the picture is important or interesting.

–Courtesy University of Missouri School of Journalism.