CSCCE

DEI Tip Sheet: Captioning, subtitles, and transcription for online meetings and events

Introduction

Providing the text of online meetings and events can support diverse participation in multiple ways - from supporting those who may be hard of hearing, or not fluent in the language being used, to enabling busy participants juggling other responsibilities to stay engaged with the meeting. In this tip sheet, we offer some solutions for creating captions, subtitles, and transcripts to improve accessibility of your online settings and events. We also offer some points for further consideration as you decide upon a solution that works for you.

This tip sheet is not intended to be an exhaustive list of tools, but rather a framework for navigating your choices between some of the common tools in use at the moment. Note that the majority of the automated tools below have been developed to work with the English language. Specialist services may be required to provide captioning and subtitles for presentations in languages other than English.

Key definitions

It's really easy to get confused, and different services that may sound the same are actually subtly different.

- **Captions:** Appear on screen in real-time and include non-speech sounds - not just spoken audio. **Closed captioning** means text can be turned on/off by the listener.
- **Subtitles**: Appear on screen in real-time in order to translate a verbal presentation in one language into a written presentation in another language, and do not communicate non-speech sounds.
- **Transcripts:** A text-based version of material originally produced in video or audio. Can be recorded live or after the fact. Transcripts that have time stamps can be used to generate captions or subtitles, and some common file names are .srt, .vtt., and .ttml.

Some considerations before you start

- **Accessibility by default** - while some members of your community may be happy to contact you and tell you what they need, others may not feel comfortable doing so. Offering text rendering of spoken presentations or discussions before they are asked for is one way of meeting people where they are, and making your events more accessible.
- **Resources** - providing captions, subtitles, or transcripts will require you to expend more resources on your meetings or events. For free or low-cost options, you may need to invest more

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staff time (e.g., cleaning up inaccurate AI-created transcripts after the meeting), whereas paid options might make more sense if you are strapped for time.

- **Privacy** - most AI-based services involve recording your meeting, and some will use the event to improve their transcription abilities. You may want to consider how this affects participants' perceptions of safety and their willingness to speak freely.

- **Accuracy** - compared to a few years ago, AI transcription has come a long way. However, this method is rarely 100% accurate, particularly when a presenter is using a lot of technical language or has a strong accent (many AI platforms are trained on American English speakers, and may even struggle with British English accents). It's a good idea to test out a platform in advance, and many services offer free trials. In addition, if you are planning to create a subtitled or closed-captioned version of your event for archival purposes, you will likely need to edit any transcription created using these AI-based platforms. Budget in the extra time (or the extra money to pay a member of your community) to do this.

So, what do you need?

Use this decision tree to find a tool (or tools) to meet your needs:
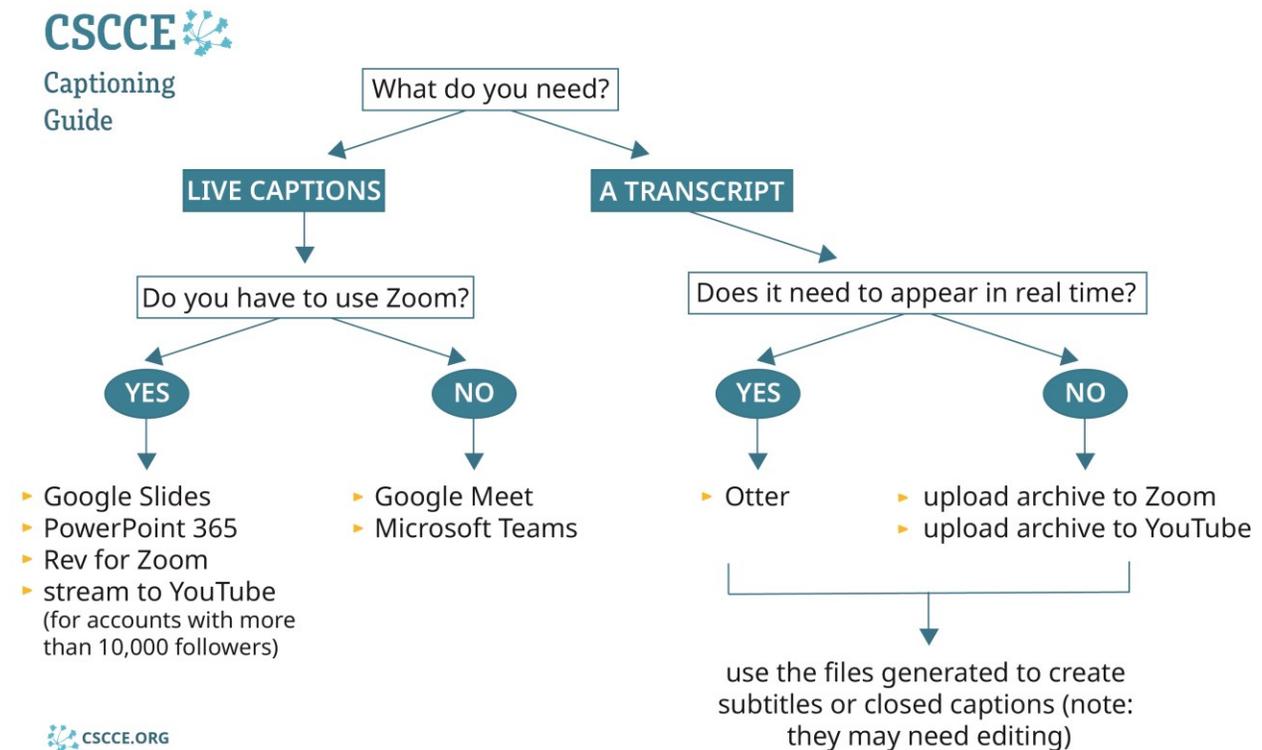
Quick start tips for each tool:

FOR LIVE CAPTIONS:

- Google Slides - screen share your slide deck in your virtual meeting, and once in presenter mode in Google Slides turn on captions in the bottom navigation bar. You can set text size and position. Note that if you want captioning to remain through the Q&A you have to continue screen sharing. Note only the slide presenter's voice will be captioned in a live Q&A.

- PowerPoint 365 - in the slideshow menu, choose "subtitle settings" to select your preferred language, microphone, and text position. Under "system caption preferences" you can change the color, size, transparency, and font style and background of the subtitles. You can change the background to improve contrast and make text easier to read. Screen share your slide deck to Zoom, and in presenter mode you can toggle the captions on and off. Note that if you want captioning to remain through the Q&A you have to continue screen sharing.

- Rev for Zoom - this paid service offers live closed-captioning for your Zoom-based meeting. Rev also generates a transcript of your meeting that you can use later if you plan to upload an archive of your video. Rev also offers additional services, including video captioning and foreign subtitles. See website for setup instructions.

- YouTube Streaming - stream your Zoom event to YouTube to have live closed-captioning automatically added. Currently only available for accounts with more than 10,000 subscribers.

- Google Meet - all users have the option to turn captioning on or off, so you as presenter or convener do not need to do anything. Uses the same AI available in Google Slides, and does not rely on presenter screen sharing to work.

- Microsoft Teams - similar to Google Meet, turn on live captions in your meeting settings before you start.

FOR TRANSCRIPTS:

Once generated, transcripts can be edited in a text editor as needed, archived as text files, and/or used to create subtitles or closed captions on archived videos.

- Otter.ai - the free version of this tool will create up to 40 minutes of time-stamped transcript in real time. You can pay to use it for longer events. You will need to set up your Zoom meeting so that it can stream to Otter as an additional platform. You can also share a link with all participants to be able to watch the transcript in real time as an alternative to the captioning options listed above.

- Zoom (or Rev for Zoom) - requires a paid account. Record your Zoom meeting to the cloud and then request a transcript, which will take on the order of 24h to be generated.

- YouTube - upload a recording of your call and then request a transcript, which takes about 24h to generate.

Acknowledgements

This tip sheet was created following a CSCCE community tools trial, a one-hour virtual meeting where members of our community of practice brainstormed use cases and solutions. Thank you to everyone who took part in the trial for your contributions. You can read more about our tools trials on the CSCCE blog, and you can request to join our community of scientific community engagement managers here.

Citing and reusing this guide

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