



Curriculum Guide

USING CAPTIONING AS A TEACHING  
TOOL FOR  
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS

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## INTRODUCTION

Captioning is a valuable language acquisition tool for English as a Second language students. Using captioned television can make learning English enjoyable for students, since students can learn "passively" and "forget" that they are learning a new language: Learning becomes entertainment. In a recent study undertaken at Sheridan College in Mississauga, Ontario, it was proven that captioned television enhances an English as a Second Language curriculum, and can be credited with accelerating the rate of language acquisition in ESL students.

Captioning was introduced in Canada in 1980 to provide access to television for the deaf and hard of hearing. At that time, captioning's full potential as an educational tool was not yet recognized. We are only beginning to tap into its potential.

Captioning is a learning tool for those learning language. It accelerates the acquisition of communication and literacy skills. It stimulates word recognition and increases vocabulary, by providing video, audio and textual information to the student. Captioned television provides the meaningful context required for acquiring a new language, in the safety and comfort of the home or classroom. It is an unthreatening, non-judgemental teacher.

## WHAT IS CAPTIONING?

Closed captioning is an electronic process which converts the audio portion of a television program into written words - like foreign language subtitles. The captioning explains the dialogue as well as important sounds. Captioning is said to be open when it can be seen on a normal television screen and closed when it cannot normally be seen on the screen of a television receiver, but can be made to appear with the use of special, dedicated circuitry either inside the television set or through an external decoder.

Captions usually appear at the bottom of the television screen as white capital letters inside a black box. Captions are easily visible regardless of the images on the screen. The size of captioning varies depending on the size of the television screen on which they are viewed. On a 19-inch screen, the letters are approximately half an inch high.

## CAPTIONING AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Recent studies have shown that captioning is an effective tool to teach English as a Second Language. A recent study, The ESL Project, proved the effectiveness of using captioned television to prepare English as a Second language learners for the Canadian labour market.

Two teachers of ESL at Sheridan College participated in the study. Working with a Project Coordinator, they developed a methodology for the study and an enhanced curriculum for their Labour Market Language Training (LMLT) classes to incorporate the use of video material and specific television programming. The control class viewed the material with no captioning, while the study class viewed the same material with captioning. Specially designed tests were used to indicate progress in both classes. The process was then repeated for a second session of LMLT classes.

Teachers recognized faster language skills development in the students in the study classes. In all areas tested: vocabulary; grammar; memo writing; dictation; reading comprehension; and communication functions, the study group surpassed the control group. At the completion of the study, a comparison of pre-session test scores with post-session test scores showed that the overall improvement achieved by the study group was almost **double** the improvement made by the control group.

## TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT

To view captioned video or captioned television in the classroom, you will need the following:

- OR/            A television and a closed captioning decoder box
- A television with built-in captioning decoder circuitry
- AND/           A VCR for viewing captioned videos
- (NOTE:     Some VCR's have built-in captioning decoder circuitry.)
- AND/           A captioned video or television program

### A.    Connection Guide for Exterior Closed Caption Decoder Box

1.    Plug TV electrical cord into DECODER socket.
2.    Plug DECODER AND VCR into wall socket.
3.    Connect TV coaxial cable to DECODER connection marked OUTPUT to TV (far left on back of decoder.)
4.    Connect DECODER coaxial cable from connection marked INPUT FROM ANTENNA (right on back of decoder to VCR connector marked OUTPUT TO TV (top left on back of VCR).
5.    Turn the power on in all three units
6.    Set TV, DECODER, and VCR to channel 3 (both on front and back of VCR and DECODER.
7.    Make certain all cable connections are secure.
8.    Adjust caption quality on back of decoder if necessary. (See background and character adjust buttons.)

## SOURCES OF CAPTIONING EQUIPMENT

### A. Closed captioning decoders

Many cable companies offer closed captioning decoders to their deaf and hard of hearing subscribers for a refundable deposit of about \$25.00. Some cable companies will rent out decoders for a fee of approximately \$10.00 per month. Contact your local cable company to see if they have a decoder loan or rental program.

For information on where to purchase a decoder in Canada, you can write or call: Canada Caption Inc.

627 Lyon Lane, Suite 203

Oakville, Ontario, L6J 5Z7

Tel: (905) 338-1246

B. Closed captioning televisions

U.S. legislation, The Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990, requires closed caption decoding capability to be a built-in feature in all television set of 13 inches or more manufactured for sale in the U.S. after July 1, 1993.

In Canada, this means that television sets manufactured in the U.S. and sold in Canada should have this built-in closed captioning decoder circuitry. We advise that all television sets be tested prior to purchase but the following is a list of some popular television manufacturers that offer built-in closed captioning decoder circuitry to Canadian consumers:

HITACHI  
20" to 60"

JVC  
13" to 31"

MATSUSHITA  
93/94 - all

mitsubishi  
26" to 60"

SANYO/FISHER  
25" - 31"

SONY  
94 - 13" and up

THOMPSON CONSUMER ELECTRONICS (RCA, GE, ProScan)  
all sets over 13" manufactured after July 93

TOSHIBA  
20" to 55"

ZENITH  
all sets

\* This list should not be considered an endorsement of the aforementioned manufacturers or their products, but rather a list of sources only.

\*\* Many VCR's now have built-in decoders.



## CAPTIONED TELEVISION AND VIDEO SOURCES

A. Look for the "C.C." in your television guide.

Approximately 95% of all prime-time television is closed captioned. Check your local television listings to see what programs are captioned on your favourite stations, and encourage your students to watch them with the captions on!

B. Look for captioned videos at the video rental store.

Virtually all mainstream home videos are captioned for home video consumers. Ask for assistance to select a captioned version of the tape. It is a good idea to check to see if the video *really* is captioned while you are still in the video rental store. Occasionally, movie dubs or copies are made from an uncaptioned master tape, so it's best to double check BEFORE you leave the store to avoid getting an uncaptioned version.

PLEASE NOTE: Sometimes, you must write the owner of the material for permission to use their program in the classroom. For a copy of Canadian copyright laws, contact:

Copyright Board of Canada  
56 Sparks St., Ste. 800  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0C9

General Inquiries: (613) 952-8621  
FAX: (613) 952-8630

C. Canadian Sources of captioned video material

*In Eastern Canada:* Canada Caption Inc.  
627 Lyons Lane, Suite 203  
Oakville, Ontario L6J 5Z7  
(905)338-1246 Voice and TTY/TDD

Write or call for information or Catalogues on Captioned  
Instructional/Entertainment Videotapes of Films.

*In Western Canada:* Pacific Captioning Assistance Society  
1105 - 2016 Fullerton Ave.  
North Vancouver, B.C. V7P 3A6  
(604) 688-8583 Voice and TTY/TDD

Write or call for information or Catalogues on Captioned  
Instructional/Entertainment Videotapes of Films.

*Across Canada:* The National Film Board of Canada  
The NFB Closed Captioned Video Collection  
CC Videos, D-5  
P.O. Box 6100  
Station Centre-Ville  
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3H5  
1-800-267-7710 (Voice and TDD/TTY)

Since April 1990, all new NFB video releases have been closed  
captioned. Each year over 50 new titles are added to The Closed  
Captioned Video Collection. Ask your public librarian for more  
information.

*Other:* TVOntario  
2180 Yonge Street  
P.O. Box 200, Stn. "Q"  
Toronto, ON M4T 2T1  
1-800-463-6886 (TVO Customer Service Tel.)

Educational broadcasters will have captioned educational  
videos for students interested in learning through the television.  
Work through your librarian to get more information in your  
province or region.

D. Where to get a video captioned

For more information on where to get a video captioned, contact Canada Caption Inc., CCI.

Upon request, CCI will supply you with a list of approved captioning facilities (contact names, addresses, Voice/TTY and FAX numbers) in your area.

## USING CAPTIONING IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Make sure that you have access to the right equipment. See Section 4. for more information.
2. For information on where to get captioned material, see Section 6. Select programs that will be of high interest to your students.
3. Before showing a captioned video or tape in the classroom, make sure that everyone can see the captions from where they are sitting in the classroom.
4. Preface the lesson by defining captions for the students:  
*"Captions are a written translation of the spoken words and sound effects of a television program or video."*
5. Let students know that closed captioning will make learning English easier for them. Enthusiasm will run higher when students realize that learning the English language can be done while watching some of their favourite shows. Captioned television will improve their grasp of idiom and slang as well as conventional vocabulary and reading comprehension.

6. Always preview the tape or program to determine if it is appropriate for your needs before showing it to the students. Jot down questions to ask the students while you preview the material.
7. Initially, it may take greater concentration for students to focus on the action of the program at the same time as watching the captions appearing at the bottom of the screen. One suggestion is to engage the students' interest by playing the program with sound for the first few minutes of the program, and then turning the sound off! This technique requires that students read the captions to discover the resolution of the story.
8. Since watching captioned television requires greater concentration from students, it is best to view a program in short segments, 5 to 15 minutes at a time.

To follow are some ideas on ways to use captioning in any classroom. There are many more methods to try: explore your own techniques and ideas. Use what works best for you and your students.

LESSON IDEAS

A. WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW

Ask students to watch for the answers to the important questions:  
"WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW?"

Prepare an in-class exercise to take up after viewing the captioned segment. For example, ask the students to *write* the answers to questions specific to the content of the program viewed:

1. Who was late getting to the dance?
2. What happened on the way to the dance?
3. When did she find her invitation to the dance?
4. Where did she find the invitation?
5. How did she lose the invitation?

This will give you a good idea of how much the students have understood of the material shown to them. These five simple questions can be applied to virtually any program, on any subject.

As your students become more familiar with this exercise, their answers will improve. Collect each exercise, and note the improvement in the reading comprehension of your students as the term or semester progresses.

## B. FILL IN THE BLANKS

This method requires additional preparation time from the instructor, who must transcribe sentences from the program's captions before the lesson. Target certain vocabulary words for filling in the blanks. Make sure that you provide enough surrounding dialogue for the students to recognize the excerpt. Look at this example from a soap opera; the target word is *infatuation*:

AMANDA: Michael, leave him to me. I believe that I can get him to give you your job back. I can make him do anything I want due to his \_\_\_\_\_ with me. And don't worry about Jane. When God was giving out business sense, Jane was at the back of the line getting her nails done.

For more advanced classes, you can use this lesson as an opportunity to introduce the concept of context. Discuss how meaning can be inferred from context. For example, you can show the difference between the words principle and principal.

1. It is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the thing!!!
2. Go to the \_\_\_\_\_ Office, right now!!!



### C. TARGETING

Prepare students for the material by assigning them target words or phrases or sentence structure to watch for in the program. Review the material with the students afterwards. Repeat a segment for emphasis, if necessary.

**WORDS:** Ask students to write down all the words they see relating to the topic of the program. For example, if the show is about putting together a school newspaper, focus on learning the new words: Journalist/Reporter/Editor/Headline/Story/etc. . .

**PHRASES:** Ask the student to write down any strange or new expressions or phrases they read in the program, and take them up afterwards. This is a good way to teach idiom and slang for understanding colloquial English.

ie. I'm beat. - I'm exhausted.

It's raining cats and dogs. - It's raining heavily.

**STRUCTURE:** Have students watch a program for sentence structure. Explore the way a sentence can be arranged for different effect. For example, take the famous line:

1. Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.
2. My dear, I don't give a damn, frankly.
3. I don't give a damn, frankly, my dear.
4. Etc...

#### D. LISTING NEW VOCABULARY

Build list of new vocabulary based upon the dialogue of a captioned program. Ask students to write down words that are new to them and/or they do not understand. Select 10 or 20 of them at the end of a class and assign them to students to learn.

To check periodically on whether they are committing the assigned vocabulary to memory, try the following:

1. Ask your students to use the new words in sentences. Quiz the students both orally and on paper from time to time.
2. Use the words in dictation quizzes or short spelling tests.
3. Assign a writing exercise to students, asking them to use the new words in a creative writing exercise.

## E. READING ALOUD

After watching a segment, have students practise reading a very short part of the dialogue as if on TV, to work on students' pronunciation, and oral communication skills.

It is good for students to listen carefully to a variety of native English speakers pronouncing the language. Some actors have excellent diction, and can be helpful as examples in this area.

Through captioned television, you will be able to expose your students to different accents and pronunciation. This will help them learn to speak with and understand a Canadian accent.