

the ABCDs of caption writing

Terms

- **Attention Getter** — A mini-headline to begin the caption
- **Basic information** — The first sentence of the caption that tells who and what is happening in the photo
- **Byline** — The name of the photographer who took the image, placed after the caption
- **Complementary information** — The additional sentences that add information to the caption
- **Direct Quote** — A quote from someone in the photo that adds emotion to the caption

Helpful Hints

A caption is a few words or sentences that describes who is in the photo and adds information about what is happening; it is also called a cutline. Every photo needs a caption, and every photo should have a great caption since captions are often the most-read pieces of copy on a spread. Use these tips to make your captions shine.

- Include the 5Ws and H; stick to the facts.
- Identify the people in the photo, or at least identify those in the center of visual interest.
- Use complete sentences in a variety of sentence patterns.
- Don't lead with a name.
- Don't repeat information; example: If "All smiles" is your lead in, don't say in the first sentence, "Mary Smith was all smiles when she was named homecoming queen."
- Don't write joke captions.

So how do you write a great caption? Just remember A, B, C, D.

A — Attention Getter

Run Fast serves as an attention-grabbing mini-headline. We can see the subject actually running in the photo.

B — Basic Information

Notice this first sentence includes who, what, when and where. Put as many of the 5Ws and the H as you can to tell what is happening in the photo without being obvious. Use present tense.

C — Complementary Information

The next sentence provides additional unknown information about what happened before or after the photo was taken to add context. This example explains a team good luck ritual — something we can't see in the image. Write in past tense.

D — Direct Quote

Include a unique quote from someone in the photo discussing an aspect of the event or photo. We learn how the students stormed the field after their win. Quotes should add emotion; they are not just facts.

Run Fast. With his eye on the opponent, JJ Wilson (10) runs the ball forward on Aug. 28 against Northridge. Prior to the game, the team started a new tradition: touching the hat of the newly dedicated Hat of Howard Sales Memorial, which seemed to bring them luck. Wilson said, "We were down at half time and we truly had to come together as a team to get the win in the second half. The student section stormed the field." Photo contributed by: Easterling Studios



Photo/caption courtesy of Oakwood High School/Easterling Studios