

Captioning Corner: Broadcast Lingo for Captioners

By Deanna Baker

What does it mean when a show is preempted? Does it air at another time or not at all? Do I caption what airs in its place?

If, as a captioner, you are scheduled to caption a 5 p.m. news broadcast and it has been preempted by another program - for example, replaced by another program, such as a sporting event or other special -- that 5 p.m. news broadcast has been cancelled. Unless other arrangements have been made with you as captioner or with the captioning company you're working for, you do not caption that "new" program. Arrangements should be in place that you are still compensated for a preempted show. But if you don't know what is done in this situation, you might want to check that out with the company you work for.

What do top of the hour and bottom of the hour mean?

This TV lingo is for the time on the clock. The "top" of the hour is on the hour, meaning 6, 11, 2. The "bottom" of the hour is 30 minutes after the hour.

What is studio audio?

When captioners cannot see the program they're captioning by using an audio line and receiving one of two types of audio, either program audio or studio audio. The program audio would be just as if the captioner were listening to the television over headsets, hearing the broadcast and commercials. The studio audio would be what is being heard in the studio, not only the program but also the director's comments, the "chat" of anchors during commercials, and so on, which can be very confusing for the captioner. The preferable audio for the broadcast captioner is always the program audio!

What's a VO or voiceover?

If a captioner has the luxury of receiving scripts from a newsroom computer source, which is usually generated by a TelePrompTer and which the news anchors are reading, a common thing to see in that script is "VO," or "voiceover." A voiceover occurs when the consumers watching the broadcast are not actually seeing the news reporter talking but a certain scene and the voice of the reporter off screen.

What's a squeeze back?

Tammie Shedd, RPR, of Visual Audio Captioning, provided this answer. She explained that a squeeze back is when a station shrinks a picture to add additional information to the screen. An example might be that if a bad weather alert must be sent during a soap opera, the station might shrink the soap opera picture and add information about the weather in a separate box or around the soap opera picture. One station Shedd works with actually squeezes their news picture when it has a special weather report to add to the regular news.

This shrinking can affect the display of captions, she continued, and stations need to make the technical adjustments to be sure the squeeze back doesn't disable the captions.

Any crawl placed at the same spot as the captions will be covered by the captions, regardless of whether there is a squeeze back or not. This is more an issue of knowing there is a crawl and placing captions somewhere to avoid covering the crawl or graphic.

What does "in the can" mean?

This phrase means the show is done, finished, put to bed, all over, concluded. Another version of the same term can mean that the show is completely scripted, such as in post production.

What is a bug as it relates to television broadcasts?

Most commonly, a bug is the little square that shows sports scores and is usually positioned in a corner. As captioners, we have to make sure our captions are positioned so the bug isn't covered up.

If you're interested in learning more television lingo, visit www.skillset.org/facilities/article_3483_1.asp or www.itvdictionary.com/a.html.

About the Author

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