



# Consumer Guide

## Closed Captioning on Television

Closed captioning displays the audio portion of a television program as text on the TV screen, providing a critical link to news, entertainment and information for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Congress requires video programming distributors (VPDs) - cable operators, broadcasters, satellite distributors and other multi-channel video programming distributors - to close caption their TV programs.

### FCC closed captioning rules

FCC rules for TV closed captioning ensure that viewers who are deaf and hard of hearing have full access to programming, address captioning quality and provide guidance to video programming distributors and programmers. The rules apply to all television programming with captions, requiring that captions be:

- **Accurate:** Captions must match the spoken words in the dialogue and convey background noises and other sounds to the fullest extent possible.
- **Synchronous:** Captions must coincide with their corresponding spoken words and sounds to the greatest extent possible and must be displayed on the screen at a speed that can be read by viewers.
- **Complete:** Captions must run from the beginning to the end of the program to the fullest extent possible.
- **Properly placed:** Captions should not block other important visual content on the screen, overlap one another or run off the edge of the video screen.

The rules distinguish between pre-recorded, live, and near-live programming and explain how the standards apply to each type of programming, recognizing the greater hurdles involved with captioning live and near-live programming.

(The FCC does not regulate captioning of home videos, DVDs or video games.)

### Exempt programming

Currently there are two categories of exemptions from the closed captioning rules, self-implementing and economically burdensome:

- Self-implementing exemptions include public service announcements shorter than 10 minutes and not paid for with federal dollars, programming shown from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m., and programming primarily textual. There is also an exemption for locally produced non-news programming with no repeat value. To see a complete list of self-implementing exemptions, visit the FCC's website at: [www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/exemptions-closed-captioning-rules](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/exemptions-closed-captioning-rules).
- The FCC has established procedures for petitioning for an exemption from the closed captioning rules when compliance would be economically burdensome. To find out about the economically burdensome exemption, visit the FCC's website at: [www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/economically-burdensome-exemption-closed-captioning-requirements](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/economically-burdensome-exemption-closed-captioning-requirements).

### What to do if you experience closed captioning problems

You may contact your VPD to report the problem at the time that the problem occurs to see if you can get the problem fixed. You can find your VPD's contact information on your bill, or, if you have broadcast only TV, the contact information for the TV station should be in the phone directory. This information is in the FCC's VPD Registry located at [esupport.fcc.gov/vpd-search/search.action](http://esupport.fcc.gov/vpd-search/search.action). VPDs must provide the FCC with contact information for the receipt and handling of immediate closed captioning concerns by consumers, and contact



information for written closed captioning complaints. For more information, check the FCC's closed captioning website at [www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/closed-captioning-video-programming-television](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/closed-captioning-video-programming-television).

For captioning problems during non-emergency programming, you may file a written complaint with either the FCC or your VPD. If you file your complaint with the FCC, the FCC will forward the complaint to your VPD. FCC rules require that your written complaint must be filed within 60 days of the captioning problem. After receiving a complaint, either directly from you or from the FCC, the VPD has 30 days to respond to the complaint. If you filed your complaint with your VPD and they do not respond within 30 days, or if a dispute remains, you can send your complaint to the FCC.

## Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

## What to Include in Your Complaint

Your complaint should include the following information:

- The television channel number, call sign and network
- The name of the subscription service, if you pay to receive television
- The location of the TV station or subscription service
- The date and time when you experienced the captioning problem
- The name of the program or show with the captioning problem
- A detailed description of the captioning problem, including specifics about the frequency and type of problem (e.g., garbling, captions cut off at certain times or on certain days, captions missing only with HD programming)
- Any additional information that may assist in processing your complaint

## Accessible formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to [fcc504@fcc.gov](mailto:fcc504@fcc.gov).

###

*This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.*

Last Reviewed 1/20/15

