

captions

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Looking at a picture without a caption is like watching television with the sound turned off.



UP IN FLAMES ► Chemical changes and physical changes such as the one Trey Grubb watches in chemistry class were an ordinary part of the new science curriculum. "Sometimes the flames went up about three feet causing the heat to somewhat 'sing' the ceiling," said freshman Mike Payne.

Photo by Cameron Livingston.

My yearbook editor brought me a great reaction photograph to use on a division page. I remembered the moment in the photo and didn't want to include it in the book even though it was up close and in focus.

The photo showed a girl who was the last to be named to our homecoming court. Whoopee. Her name was the last called at the end of the pep rally, and she tumbled down the bleachers squealing in front of the entire student body. Finally she made it to the gym floor where she collapsed into the arms of her best friend. I had never seen a more ridiculous display in my entire life; furthermore, I thought this child seriously needed to get a life if being on homecoming court made her this happy.

My editor countered that this was a great photo. I argued that we shouldn't encourage this type of reaction by rewarding it with a dominant photograph on the division page. It was up to her, but I would never use it. Period.

As a rule, we included a quote in each caption in the yearbook. So the editor, Glenda, interviewed the girl, Christa, thinking a quote better than "I can't believe they called my name," would persuade me to bestow my blessing upon her using the photo.

A GREAT STORY

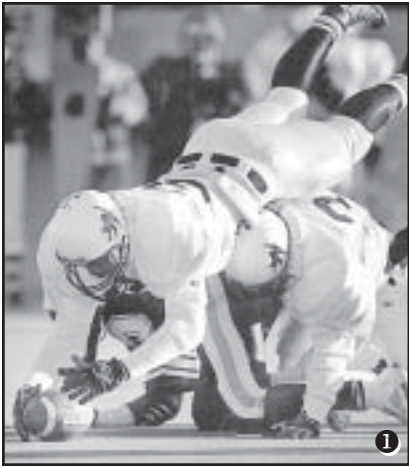
Glenda interviewed Christa at length and found a wonderful story, a story no one would have known without an in-depth caption.

Christa's last name began with a "W," and by some goof from the office, the names were called out alphabetically though few had realized it. Fourteen other girls made the court; only one spot remained. The world was growing dim for Christa as each slot passed by.

Neither popularity, a chance for queendom, nor a new suit, none of these things, had been the motivation for Krista's excitement. Krista had five older sisters who had attended the same school, and all five had been members of the homecoming court. Krista, the youngest, didn't want to be the only one in her family not to make the court.

She couldn't recall exactly what had happened that afternoon, she just remembered the rush of relief she felt when she heard her name.

A great story would have been lost had an obstinate adviser had her way. It became the dominant photo on the spread. Glenda was right.



SAMPLE CAPTIONS

1 REACH OUT AND GRAB

Grabbing for the ball, quarterback Scott Joseph jumps over teammate Pat Patterson while the Mexia quarterback tries to recover the ball. Mexia won the state championship game by one point. "We were just too tired," senior Mike O'Mera said. Photo by John Moore.

2 MORE WATER

Volunteer firefighters Palmer Buck and Carol Czichos apply more water to a small fire in the high school parking lot which two students said they started by throwing matches into a pile of leaves. "We were just horsing around after school," said freshman Kevin Johnson said. No charges were filed, but three students were assigned to in-school suspension for three days. Photo by John Layton.

3 MARKING TIME

While waiting for her turn to perform in the state marching contest, Adana Milliken watches the Georgetown HS band perform. Georgetown ended up winning the state competition. "We did our best. We marched better than we've ever marched before. We played better than we've ever played before. They just out-performed us," Milliken said. Photo by Joey Lin.

4 HEAD OVER HEALS

Trying to avoid kicking another player, Richie Dozier jumps and continues to dribble the ball during a play-off game against Leander which ended up winning 52-28. "It was just a tough game. They were real good," Richie said. Photo by George Bridges.

The following caption ran:

SISTER ACT

After being the last girl named to the homecoming court, Christa Washington ran down the bleachers in the gym Oct. 13 and collapsed screaming in Robin Elliot's arms. All five of Christa's older sisters had been on the court their senior years. "I felt so much pressure to be on the court, and I didn't want to be the baby sister who didn't make it," Christa said. Photo by Evan Kolvoord.

All staff members can learn two very important lessons here. One is that research is very important for any writing, even if it's a three-sentence caption. The second is that every action/reaction photograph has a great story behind it. (For clarity, no logical conclusions can be drawn about advisers and editors, so don't even try.)

Captions are the most read copy in yearbooks and newspapers because we Americans are visual. We almost always look at the photos first. The caption is a natural extension of this curiosity. For this reason, great captions can hook readers and keep them interested long enough to read the related material.

THE PHOTOGRAPH

No one can write a good caption without an action/reaction photograph. Posed pictures with people looking directly into the camera do not make interesting reading. What can you say? "Joe Smith looks directly into the camera?" Action photos take us to a time when we saw the activity, when we did something like it or arouse our interest to find out more.

HOW TO WRITE A CAPTION

Great captions do not begin in a publication lab room. Go out and interview the people who are in the photographs. Find out every detail about what happened immediately before and immediately after the photo was taken. Get the correct spelling of every name.

The interviews achieve two purposes, information and interest. Whenever these people are interviewed, the reporter gets secondary information that is not obvious in the photograph, and the interviewee knows that he/she will be included in the yearbook or newspaper.

SPORTS CAPTIONS

In addition to all the other rules for caption writing, sports captions require even more research to recover the following information. Each sports caption should include the outcome of the play, names of the players for both teams with their uniform numbers in parentheses, and the outcome of the game. Stats about the player of team make great secondary information. For example

PITCHER PERFECT

With a 2-0 count, Jim Tannehill (11) throws a third strike to Matt Worthington of Sherman. Tannehill, who posted a win 7-2, ended the season undefeated and pitched a no-hitter against Flower Mound. "If I throw two strikes in a row, I always get a strike on the next pitch," Jim said. Photo by Justin Grimm.

A great caption always begins with a great photograph and thorough research, then ends with well-written, polished sentences in active voice and a informative and enlightening quote.

Caption Crunch

A good caption has four parts:
a headline; an identification sentence;
a secondary information sentence
and a quote.

h e a d l i n e

The headline should be a clever title that is verbally linked to the photograph. While still trying to avoid corny humor, a pun works well here.

i d e n t i f i c a t i o n

The identification sentence explains exactly what is going on in the photo, names all visible people and is written in present tense. Avoid beginning with a name and don't overuse gerund phrases.

s e c o n d a r y

The secondary information sentence adds information that is not obvious in the photo and is written in past tense. This is the information from the interview and gives the photo more meaning.

q u o t e

A quote at the end adds the feeling of being there. Use feelings and opinion in quotes. There's rarely a need to use quotes that simply transact facts.



CHEER UP ▶ After a 21-20 loss to Judson, varsity cheerleader Janet Beasley cries after Plano misses a last-minute attempt to score three points. "I really wanted them to win to make my senior year extra special," Janet said. Photo by Joey Lin.

Remember to write in active voice avoiding forms of "to be." Directional words such as above or below are not needed if the captions are placed next to the photos they describe. Caption length should be fairly consistent throughout a spread or story package. Narrow captions should be set aligned to the right or left.

a s s i g n m e n t

Write a caption for the following pictures.



WHO: Chris Wright • **WHAT:** Off road biking • **WHEN:** May 29 • **WHERE:** on ground soon to be new middle school • **QUOTE:** "This was one of our favorite places to go off-roading," said Wright. "Dozens of us would spend hours each weekend riding our bikes. Now we'll just have to find some place else." • **CREDIT:** Emma Juneke

WHO: Curt Arnette • **WHAT:** looks for a player to break Taylor's press • **WHEN:** last game of the season was against Taylor, Friday, Feb. 13 • **WHERE:** Alamo Dome • **QUOTE:** "We played hard," Curt said. "We hustled the ball up and down the court. We played probably harder than we've ever played before. And that's what it takes to be district champs. It was tough making it to regional playoffs and then getting beat. But at least Taylor High School went on to win. They were good. In some ways, I was relieved the season was over. I was tired of having to work out two hours a day." • **CREDIT:** Joey Lin





WHO: Student Council President Jill Cavness • **WHAT:** gives blood • **WHEN:** Tuesday, Oct. 13, 6:30 a.m. • **WHERE:** small gym • **QUOTE:** "Hit hurt a bit when the needle went in. And I didn't particularly like watching my blood flow through the tube, but it was for a good cause," Cavness said. The Student Council was attempting to collect 30 pints of blood in one day to help flood victims after the flash flooding that occurred in late September. • **CREDIT:** Justin Grimm
