Who What Where When Why how who what Where when Why how who what Where when Why how

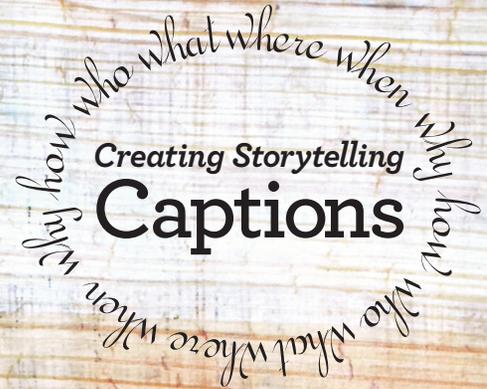*Creating Storytelling*

Captions

Contemporary yearbooks focus on storytelling—both visually and verbally. And while stories are important, captions are arguably the most important writing in the yearbook since these carefully crafted words work in conjunction with the photographs to communicate a complete story to the reader.

Captions do not serve the reader when they simply repeat what the reader can see in the photo. To be effective verbal elements, captions should add to what is obvious to the reader. Names are essential.

Of course, adding to what the reader can see in a photo means identifying the subjects, which is sometimes enough for scrapbook-style photos. It also means giving details about what's happening. It might also mean including information about what went on just before the instant captured in the photo or about what happened right after. It might mean including quotes if the thoughts or the words of the subjects are important and interesting.

Anyone who looks at a photo has at least one question that can't always be answered visually. When they look at a photo, readers want to know the five W's and H (who, what, when, where, why, how). The caption should be there to give them that information.

Creating Storytelling
Captions

who what where when why how who what where when why how

Storytelling requires mini-interviews.

reporting

Caption writing requires storytelling details.

Photographers should be encouraged, if not required, to get essential information such as names and to write down other observations that could be used in a caption. Or, reporters accompanying photographers could take the notes.

Caption writers should contact the people in the photo, and, through mini-interviews, get direct quotes and background information. Another source of material for captions is the interview and research notes compiled for other stories on the topic.

Direct quotes from individuals in the photo add depth.

When direct quotes are used in captions, these first-person accounts bring photos to life and add a human perspective. As in stories, direct quotes are preferred over indirect quotes. Not all captions require or call for the use of quotes.

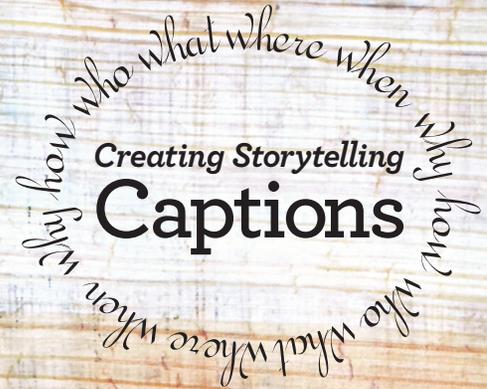### Joke captions should be avoided.

Captions making fun of people or situations in the photos are unacceptable by responsible journalistic standards.

Although intended to be funny, gag captions can offend readers, generate complaints from readers and even result in lawsuits.

Formats offer layers of information.

Creating Storytelling
Captions

who what where when why how who what where when why how

Whit Pruitt, Bryant High School, AR

formats

Caption formats range from identifications to mini-stories.

ID CAPTION: Identifies individuals and offers a brief explanation of the photo's content.

FLAG FOOTBALL. Senior Mark Bellman, four-year letterman.

SUMMARY CAPTION: Highlights the most important aspects of the five W's and H.

FLAG FOOTBALL. To the roar of the home fans, senior Mark Bellman leads the varsity players onto the field against rival University High School in the last game of the district season. For the first time in eight years, the team advanced to regional play-offs shutting out the Tigers, 21-0.

EXPANDED CAPTION: Answers the five W's and H and provides additional details, often direct quotes from individuals pictured.

FLAG FOOTBALL. To the roar of the home fans, senior Mark Bellman leads the varsity players onto the field against rival University High School in the last game of the district season. For the first time in eight years, the team advanced to regional play-offs shutting down the Tigers 21-0. "When I was injured in the third game of the season, I just knew my senior year would be the biggest bummer ever. However, when my teammates unanimously voted to let me lead them onto the field the rest of the games, I knew I was still part of the team and became its biggest fan and cheerleader from the sidelines," said Bellman, a four-year letterman.

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Components serve important functions.

Creating Storytelling
Captions

who what where when why how who what where when why how who what where when why how

components

A lead-in serves as a mini-headline for a caption.

With a few carefully crafted words and distinctive graphic treatment, the lead-in draws readers' attention to the caption and connects it with the photo. The lead-in might be boldface or a larger point size than the rest of the caption. It could start with a dropped initial letter, a dingbat or another graphic element.

The first sentence identifies individuals and explains what is happening.

The summary sentence, written in present tense, gives first and last names of individuals and answers questions readers might have about the most important of the five W's and H. It doesn't repeat what readers can see when they look at the photo.
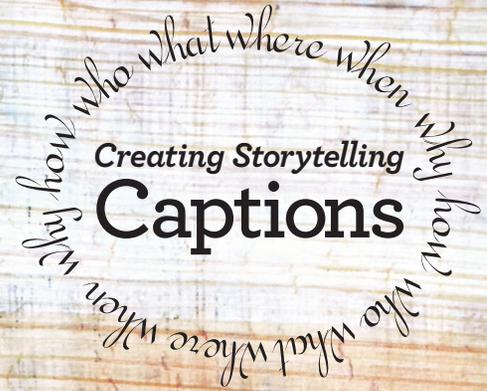
A second sentence adds information and insights.

In past tense, this descriptive sentence might feature the outcome or consequences of the action shown in the photo or add interesting information that relates to the photo. This additional information should enhance the story told by the photograph and caption, not seem to be random space-filling.

Writing a caption is like writing a poem; each word counts.

Visual nouns and strong action verbs do the job best. The first five to seven words should capture readers with attention-getting information. Captions should begin with impact words, not names. Common nouns, adjectives, adverbs and participles—all are ways to start captions. The number of captions on a spread calls for a variety of beginnings.

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Typographic details impact readability.

Creating Storytelling
Captions

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design

Captions employ a smaller point size than stories.

Captions are generally displayed in eight-point type. A sans serif font is often used for the caption text and provides contrast if a serif font is used for stories.

Columns promote consistency.

Using the column grid, establish a consistent width for the captions.

Emphasizing lead-ins increases readership.

Use typographic and graphic techniques to emphasize the lead-ins. Options include bold, dropped initial letters, dingbats, graphics and color (lines, tints, black bars with reverse text).

FLAG FOOTBALL. To the roar of the home fans, senior Mark Bellman leads the varsity players onto the field against rival University High School in the last game of the district season. For the first time in eight years, the team advanced to regional play-offs shutting down the Tigers 21-0. "When I was injured in the third game of the season, I just knew my senior year would be the biggest bummer ever. However, when my teammates unanimously voted to let me lead them onto the field the rest of the games, I knew I was still part of the team and became its biggest fan and cheerleader from the sidelines," said Bellman, a four-year letterman.

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