

MIPA

JOURNALISM DAY

Thursday Oct. 18, 2007 – Session 1 – Room 104

Caption Writing 101 (N, Y) Room 104

Jeff Salisbury, adviser, Wayland Union HS

Captions are one of the most widely read elements of any publication, but sometimes they get written at the last minute, and they suck. So learn how to write them with real voice and style.

"No matter the fleeting trends in Education, I prefer to think of my content area as being teen-agers who deserve the right to interact with a generally-decent, mostly-stable, reliable classroom teacher on a daily basis. Anything academic or administrative that gets in the way of working with parents to help students become better people in June than they were in September, I happily shortcut or bypass altogether."

- Jeffrey L. "Jeff" Salisbury, BA, Journalism Education, MSU 1980

Certified Journalism Educator, Journalism Education Association

The Paw Print Press, newspaper adviser, 1987-present

Cat Tales, yearbook adviser, 1990-present

MasterS, literary, arts & entertainment magazine adviser, 2002-present

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Caption Writing 101

By Jeff Salisbury, publications adviser
Wayland Union HS

1. Captions should generally range from three to four sentences.
2. Answer the 5W's and 1H questions in every caption.
3. Tell the reader something that they CAN'T see in the photo.

For example, in a sports action photo, you might conclude the caption by telling the reader the outcome of the event they CAN see. In this way it can "wrap-up" the activity or event, providing further, previously unused information.

- *Did she make the basket?*
- *How many points did she score?*
- *Was she the leading scorer for the game? For the season?*

- *Did that shot win the game? Tie the score? Break a tie?*
- *What was the final score? Who won?*

4. Interview those involved in the photo as well as others associated with the event or activity.

5. Consider using a direct or indirect quote as part of the caption to add length and further details. This gives the feeling for the reader that they were there too.

6. Make effective use of "lead-ins." These two, three, or four word phrases (set in ALL CAPS and sometimes bold type) can draw the reader¹'s attention to the caption and connect it with the accompanying story or page.

Sample Caption Format:

(The order of sentences may vary slightly with each caption.)

FIRST: Write a 3-4 word "lead-in" to attract the attention of and to draw the reader into the caption.

Sentence #1: Tell the reader what's happening the moment the photo was taken. Use present tense so the reader knows what's going on when he or she looks at the photo.

Sentence #2: Provide some background information that the reader cannot get by merely looking at the photo. Use past tense to give the outcome or reaction to the initial experience captured in the photo.

Sentence #3: Use a direct or indirect quote to provide more background details and a "you are there" feeling for the reader.

Sentence #4: Without repeating any previous information, wrap-up the caption by providing some previously unused piece of information about the event or activity.

Sample Yearbook Caption:



STAYING ON TOP. Senior wrestler Tom Jenkins fights to stay on top and in control, later pinning his Cedar Springs Red Hawk opponent, in a Wildcat home victory, Tuesday Feb. 12. "Cedar is always a tough match for us," said Tom. "We had to work awfully hard in practice to come out on top." Jenkins, the team captain, went on to a 24-4 record. He was also a state qualifier at 152 pounds and finished the season as the team MVP. (Media credit by Dannette Richards)

Note: In a newspaper caption, you might also tell the reader in the final sentence how the win/loss improved/or lowered his/her individual record or the team record.



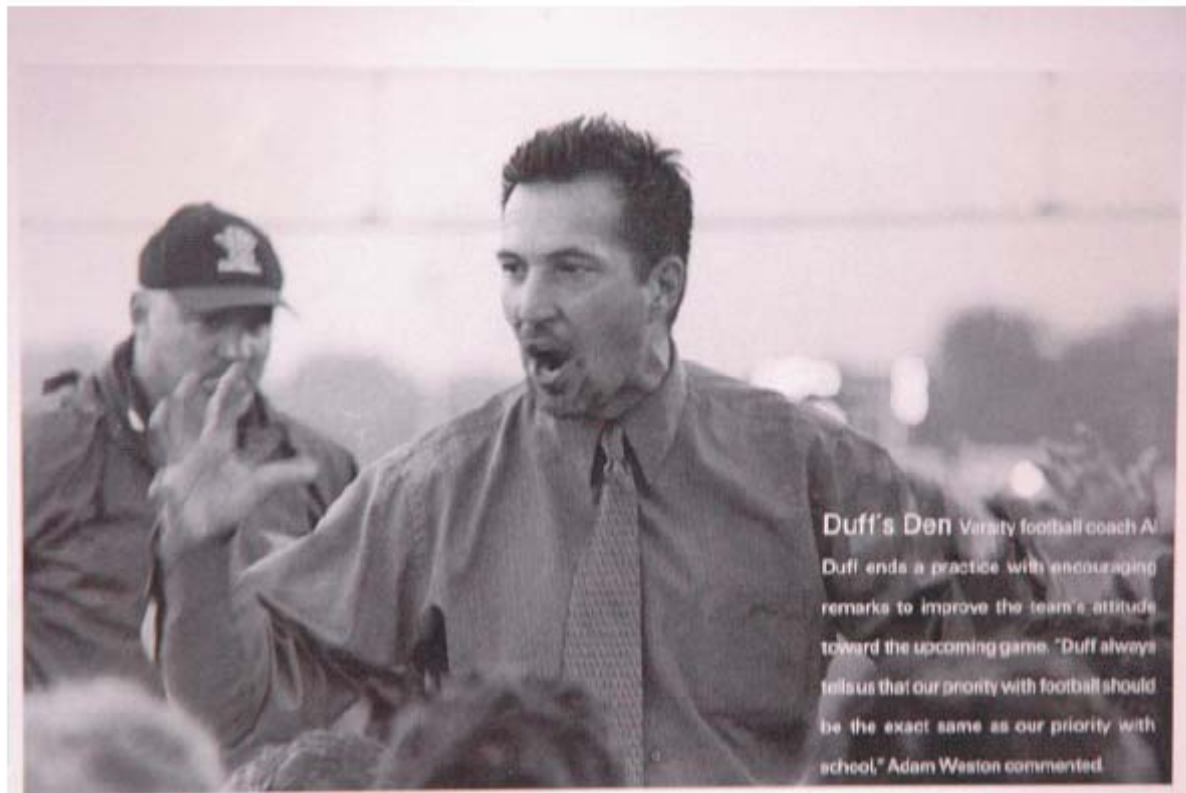
Who is this? Who are these people?

What is happening in this photo right now?

Where and when is it happening?

How did this person feel about this event?

What are 2-3 facts the reader cannot see?



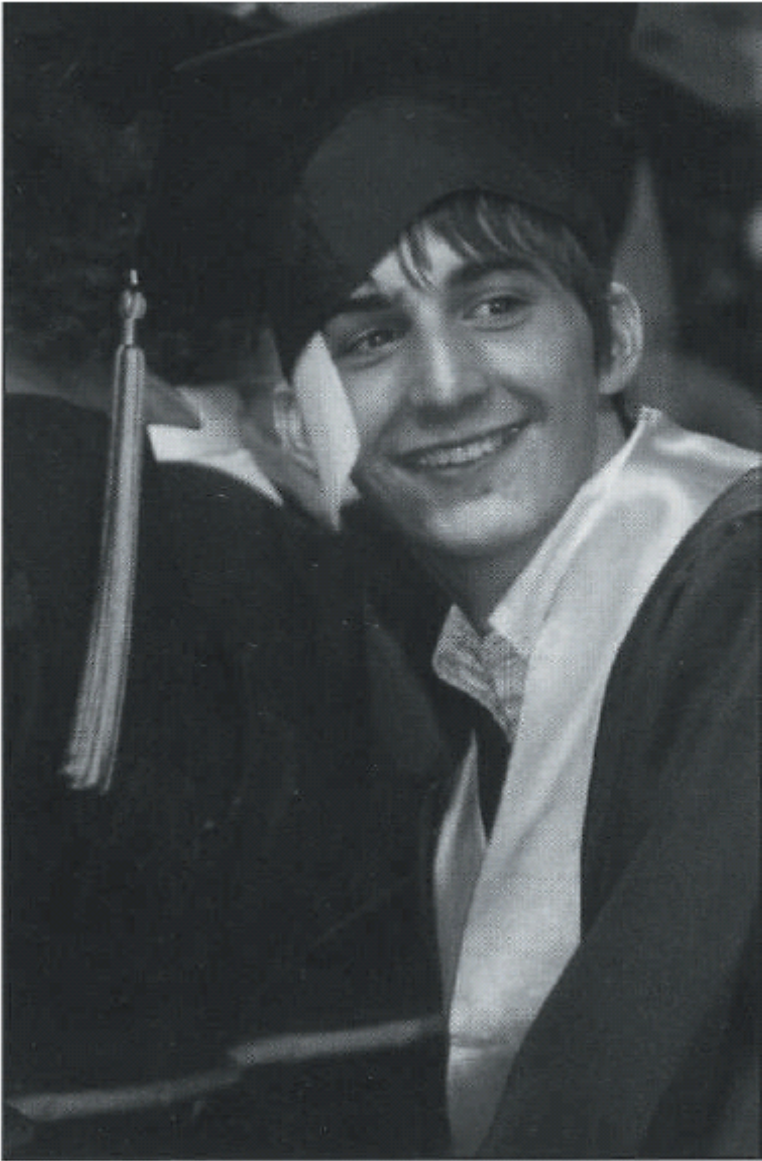
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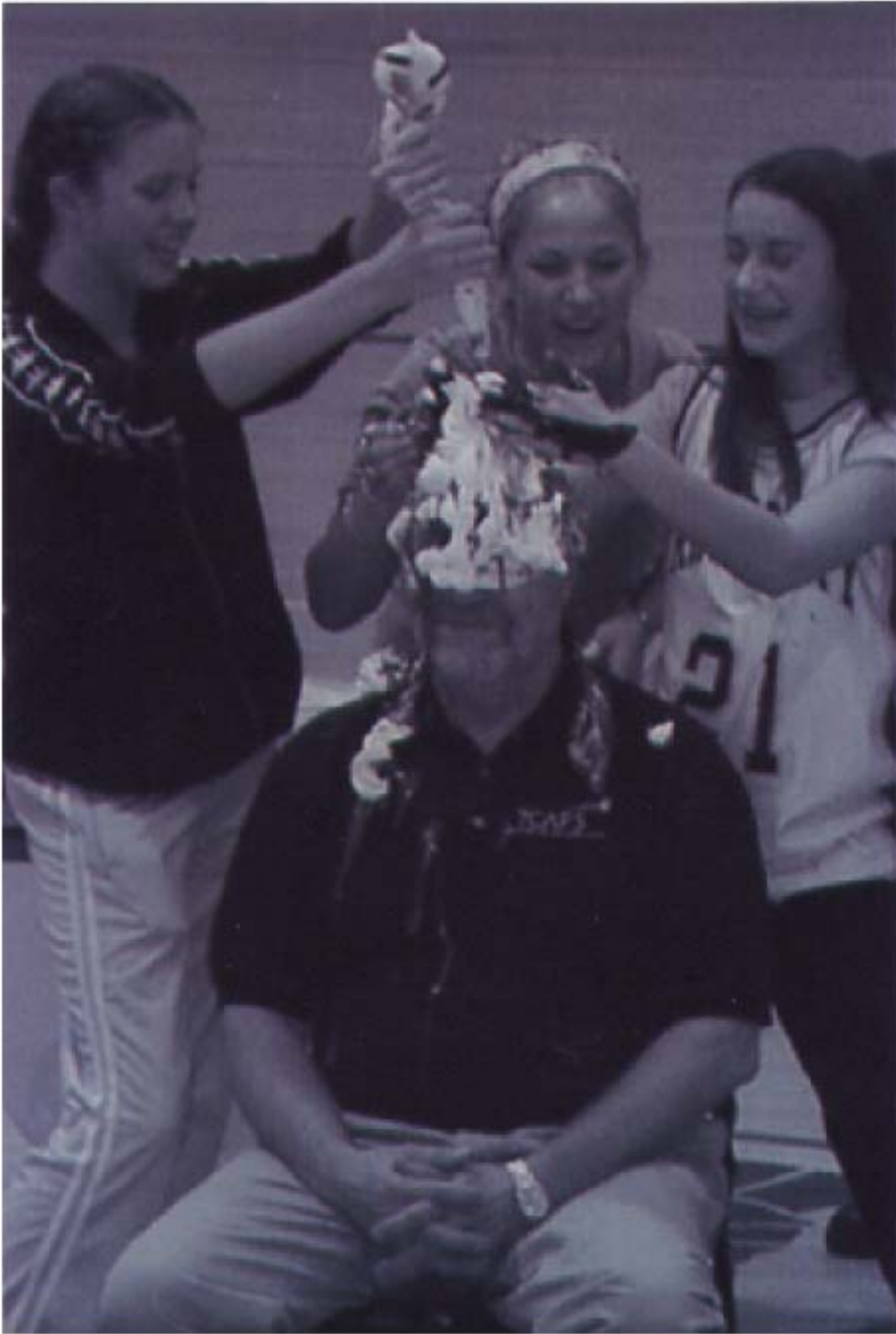
Who is this? Who are these people?

What is happening in this photo right now?

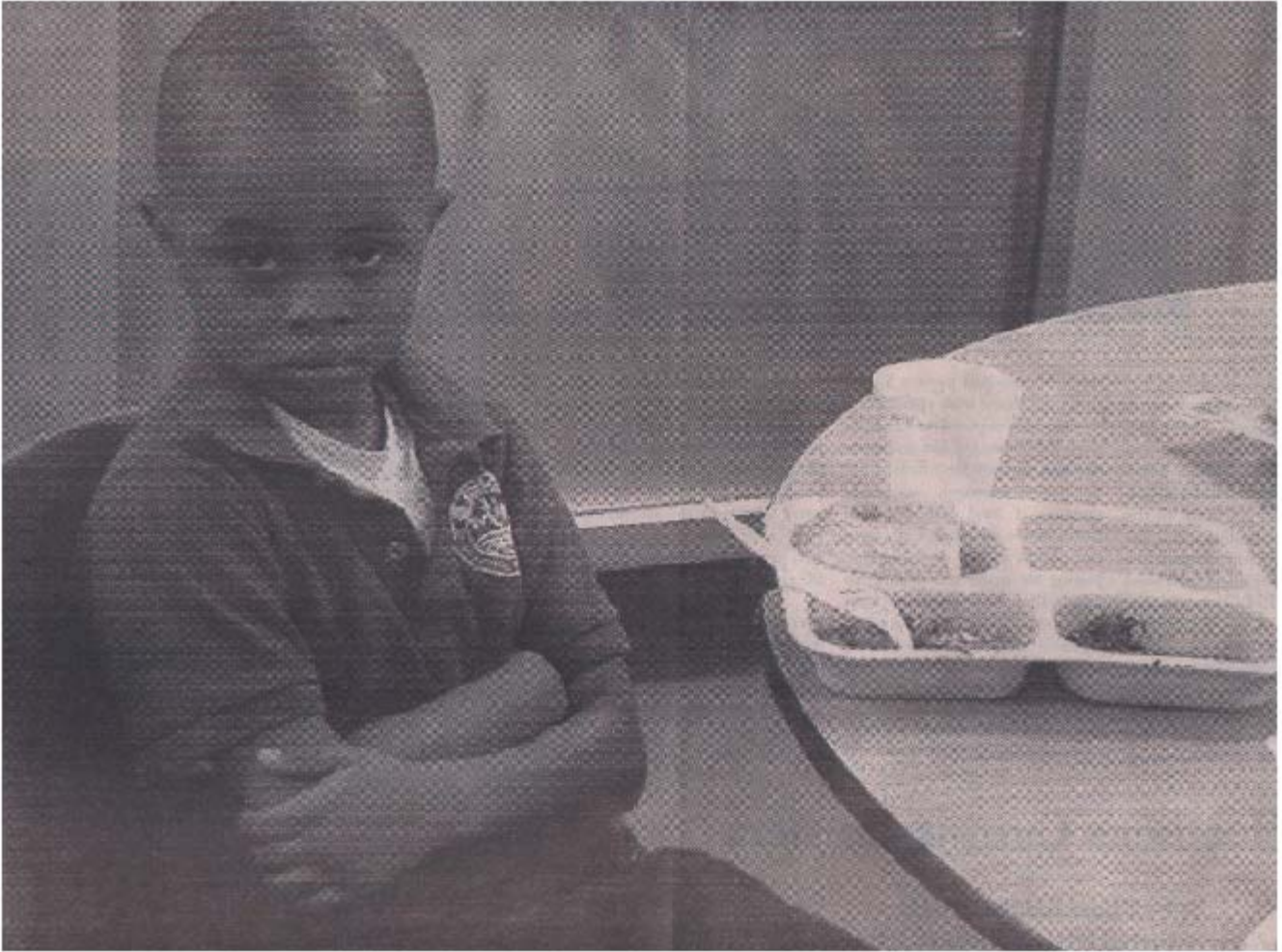
Where and when is it happening?

How did this person feel about this event?

What are 2-3 facts the reader cannot see?



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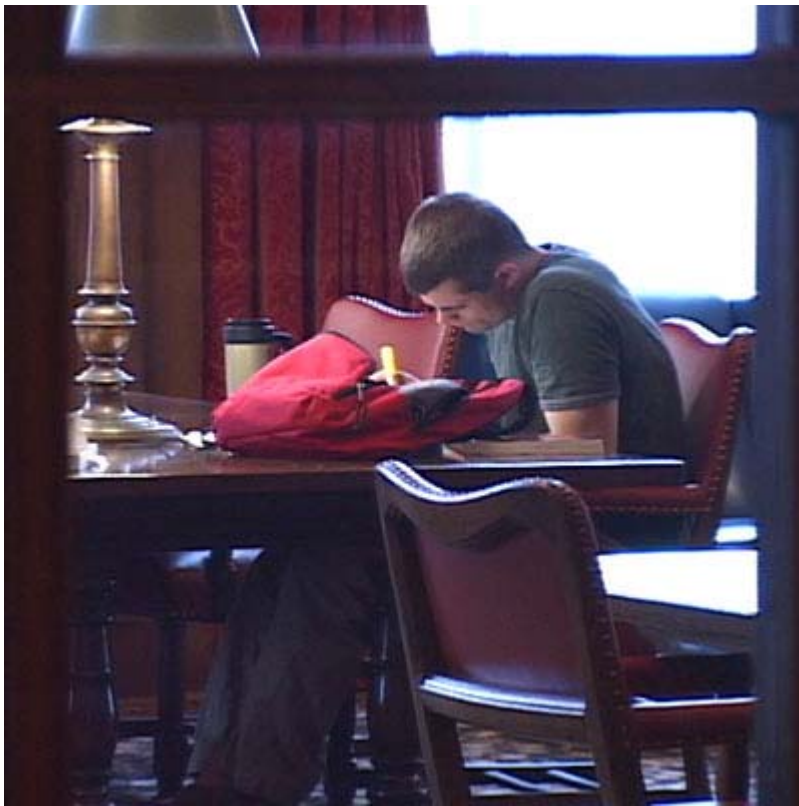
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Caption Writing 101

FCAs Checklist & Gradesheet

50 POINTS POSSIBLE

NAME _____ CLASS PERIOD _____

NAME _____ CLASS PERIOD _____

DEADLINE: _____ SCORE _____ GRADE _____

1. **LENGTH:** EACH of the five (5) captions contains four (4) sentences.

2. **CONTENT:**

- Caption opens with an effective ALL CAPS "lead-in" featuring appropriate transitions.
- Sentence #1 answers most of the 5W's and 1H and is written in **present tense**.
- Sentence #2 or #3 contains a **direct or indirect quote** from the subject of the photo or someone connected to the photo.
- Sentence #2 or #3 tells the readers two or more facts they **CAN'T** see in the photo.
- Caption contains a "media credit" at the end of the text.
- **PACKET** includes notes and rough drafts and shows evidence of editing.

3. **GRAMMAR:** Each of the five (5) captions follows appropriate conventions of News English **style, punctuation, grammar and spelling**.