

D O N N K I N G

Speak for your life!

WORKING WITH YOUTUBE CAPTIONS



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YouTube and Captions

Automatic captioning for your videos

A lot of faculty are using YouTube to share videos for class as well as for complying with ADA accessibility needs. YouTube's automatic captioning service is still in beta and improving, but generally does a decent job of creating captions for your videos. The results can be a bit odd at times, however, and I'm finding that faculty sometimes think they are stuck with whatever YouTube comes up with, like being stuck with the autocorrect version of cell phone text messages.

Actually, you can edit the captions. It's understandable to believe that you can't--even if you've found the tool on YouTube, when you click the button to edit the captions you (currently) get a read-only listing, with no direct way to edit.

You have the control--you just have to dance a bit first

YouTube's way of doing captions actually give you *two* really nice options. One involves waiting for YouTube to do its automatic captioning, downloading the resulting file, and editing it. The other involves taking your video script, if you wrote it word for word before recording, converting it to a plain text file, and then uploading it. In that case, YouTube will still process the file automatically, but will simply add the time codes needed to make it work as a caption file.

Option 1: Record and wait

If you do not have a script, or your recording with just an outline or notes, record your video and then go to bed and work on it again the next day. It can take minutes or hours, depending on the length of your video and the complexity of your audio track, but YouTube will do its best to turn what it hears into a transcript, complete with time codes.

Obviously, first go to YouTube and log in if you have not already done so.

Click on your username/icon in the upper right-hand corner and then choose "Video Manager."

Once you have done so, you'll see a listing of all your uploaded videos. The ones that already have active caption files will have the "CC" indicator. Click the edit button and choose the "Captions" tab, or use the drop-down button indicated and pick "Captions."

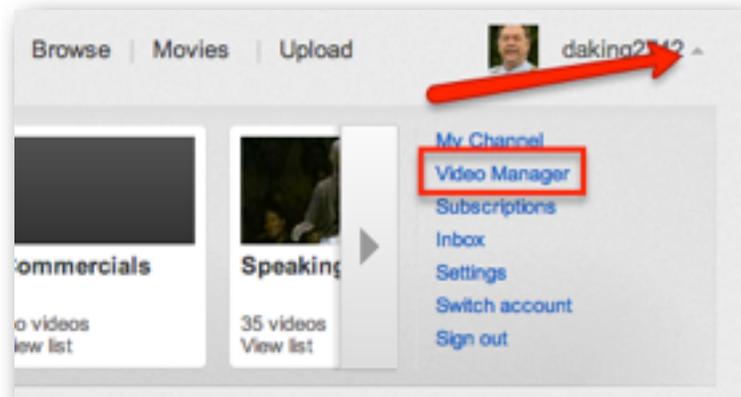


Figure 1: Get into your Video Manager

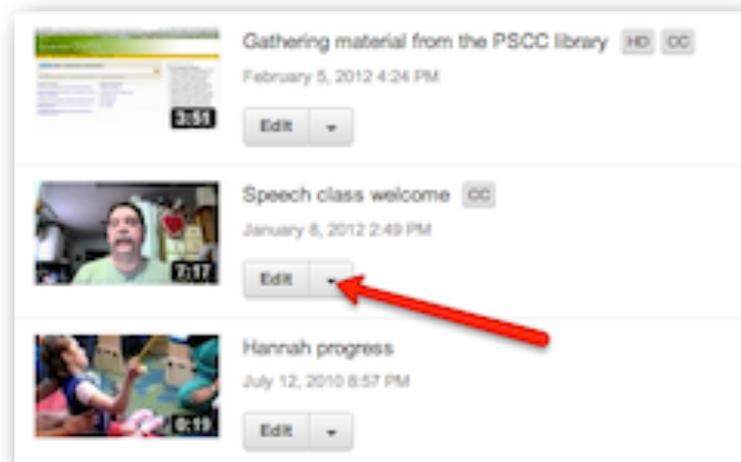


Figure 2: Edit

Can I edit yet?

Even though you've chosen "Edit captions," you're not yet where you can edit. On the left side of the screen, you'll see your video, and on the right under "Available Caption Tracks" you will see a single entry under the "Machine Transcriptions" subheading. Hover over any part of it except the green button, and you'll see an "Edit Track" balloon.

You don't have to click on the balloon. It's just tell you what will happen if you click where your mouse is. Click away.

Now it looks like I can edit!

But you can't really edit yet. This is a read-only listing that shows the time codes (in abbreviated form) on the left, and the transcription on the right. The only editing you could do here would be to give the track a name. The most important part of this view is the button in the lower right: "Download." Click that, and you will get your normal file download dialog. The default name is "caption.sbv." Save it to your hard drive (renaming it something unique in the process, but keep the .sbv extension), and note where you put it.

For real, that's something I can edit?

The file you have saved is a useful starting point, and you can actually edit this file with any program that can handle saving in plain text format. Your installed programs aren't likely to recognize the .sbv extension, so you will likely have to right-click the file and choose "Open with" to choose the application you'll use. On the Mac, I just use TextEdit. On the PC, either Notepad or Wordpad will work fine. You can use Word, but that's like using a sledgehammer to kill a fly. You'll also want to check to make sure when you save the file later that it doesn't tack a .txt extension on the end.

Cool! So what do I do?

In general, do not mess with the time codes (with one exception I'll mention momentarily). Each code tells YouTube at exactly what point in the video timeline to show the text that follows it. The text will remain on the screen until YouTube encounters the next time code.

You'll still have your browser window open, and as the video plays, it will highlight to spot in the original caption file that would be displayed in the video. Listen, and read along. When you hit a spot that YouTube has munged, pause the video, switch to the app that has the .sbv file open, and make corrections. (Yes, it would be easier to edit right in the window on YouTube. Maybe when it comes out of Beta, that option will be available.)

Also, take advantage of the opportunity to put in punctuation, which YouTube does not attempt.

Donn King

Working with YouTube Captions

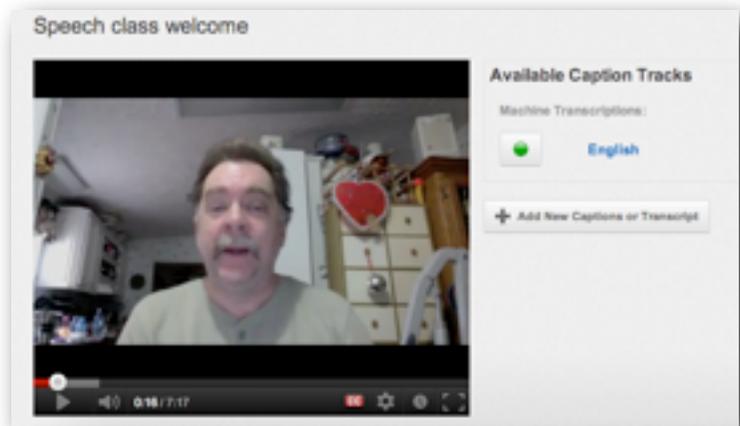


Figure 3: Getting to the actual file

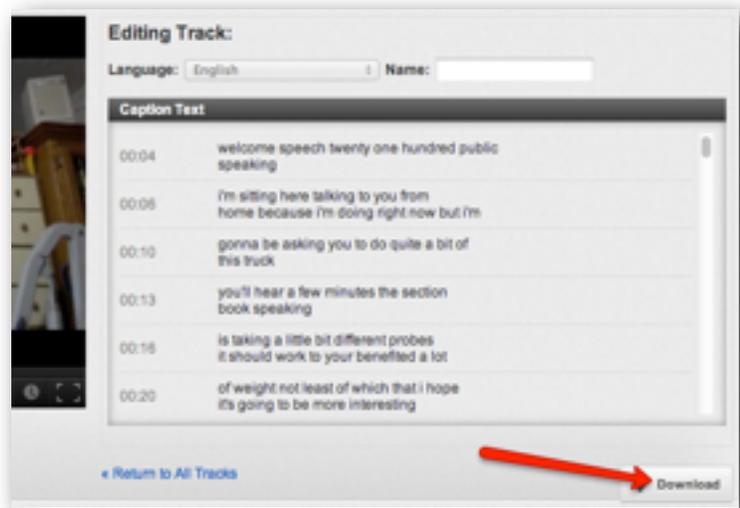


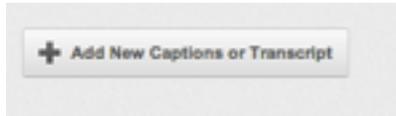
Figure 4: Not quite there yet

Did you say something about a time code exception?

Occasionally the YouTube machine transcript will isolate a single word or even syllable into its own little time sliver of time. This will look odd on the screen, and also won't be displayed long enough for anyone to be able to read it. In that case, as I'm editing I will simply remove that time code and bring the word up into the previous time block. This doesn't hurt anything as far as time flow is concerned. It simply displays that single word along with the previous block. The next block will start at the same time regardless.

Finishing up is easy, but push all the buttons

Once you have finished with the file and saved it, make sure it still ends with the .sbv extension. (Windows users who have never changed setting to display extensions will need to be particularly careful here.) If you up-



load a .sbv file with a .txt extension, YouTube may think it's a plain text file and try to include

the time codes as if they were caption text. You'll see why when we look at option 2.

Remember that as far as YouTube is concerned, you have created a new file, not changed the existing file. So click the "Add New Captions or Transcript" button in order to start the process of replacing the original Machine Transcript.

"Choose File" enables the normal routine for finding and uploading a file.

Remember, though, that just as in most course management software, once you have chosen the file, you still have to click the "Upload file" button to actually get the file into their system. For the process we just following, you also want to make sure the type chosen is "Caption file."

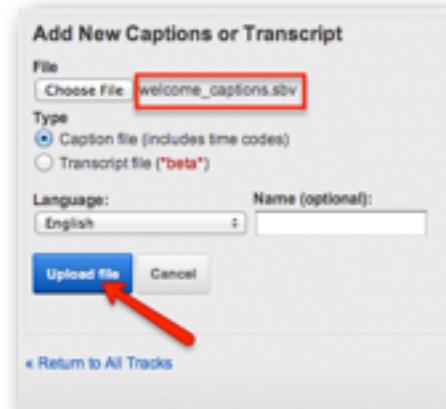


Figure 5: Uploading the new file

What if I made the video by closely following a script?

Glad you asked. That bring us to option 2.

Ah, the fabled option 2!

If you followed a script pretty much word for word, you can save yourself (and YouTube) a lot of work. YouTube can't take your Word doc and convert it, but you can save your Word doc (or Pages, or RTF, or whatever format you first used) as a plain text file. When you upload such a file, just change the type to "Transcript file." It's also explicitly listed as "beta" at this writing, and that's because YouTube still has to massage the upload before it can be used for captions. When you upload a plain text file, it will try to match what's in the file to what it "hears" in the video in order to encode the time markers.

YouTube, at the moment, can get a little confused if you have long stretches of such a video without language in the audio track. It will anticipate the next word in the supplied text file, and will match it to any sound that could conceivably be that word. You may, therefore, still need to go through a correction process very similar to option 1 above. You are a little more likely, in fact, to need to manually mess with the time marker codes. Just realize that if you change those codes (the patterns of which are fairly easy to figure out), it will be difficult to revert to the original ones.

In such a case, you can take out places where YouTube tried to tie random sounds to words, and you can manually adjust starting times for blocks (just look at the video as you listen and note the time marker).

It actually read like native English now!

By going through this process, you can ensure that “here’s an audit team when you look at screen rather than the camera it looks” properly gets processed into what you said: “there’s an oddity--when you look at the screen rather than the camera, it looks” (you see what I mean about punctuation?).

How do I make sure YouTube uses the right file?

You will seldom have more than two files loaded--the original machine transcription, and your edited version. You have the ability to upload more than one, though--I assume so that you can work on an updated version without having to first delete the original. YouTube seems to prefer your latest upload, and although it will let you delete an uploaded file, it will not give you that option for the original machine transcription.

However, you can be certain YouTube uses your preferred file by making sure that only one file has a green dot beside it. If you hover over a green dot, a dialogue balloon will say, “Disable Track.” Click, and the button will go gray. You can’t delete the machine transcription, but you can disable it.



Figure 6: There can be only one.

So the transcription is part of the video now, right?

Not so, Grasshopper. YouTube *uses* the .sbv file dynamically to produce Closed Captioning as the video plays. However, once an .sbv file has been produced, you can download both the video *and* the caption file, and several other video services are also able to use the files together in a similar fashion. In fact, YouTube can be an effective, free service for producing such files for other services that don’t have the same functionality.

Hmmmm. That gives me an idea

I’ll bet you’re thinking that you could make use of this to produce transcriptions of audio-only files. And if so, you’re right! It’s a little kludgy, since for the moment you have to go through the following process:

1. Combine the audio track into some kind of video file (for example, use iMovie to make a movie that consists of a still photograph backed by the audio track--think of the music “videos” you sometimes find on YouTube that are nothing more than the album cover with the song).
2. Upload it and wait for YouTube magic to work.
3. Download the resulting .sbv file.
4. Not only edit the file for corrections where YouTube didn’t “hear” correctly, but also strip out all the time marker code. (It’s not hard, just a little time-consuming.)
5. Pull the plain text into something like Word or Pages for formatting.

As kludgy as this is, it may still be less time and effort than listening with a pair of headphones and attempting to type a transcript. It just depends on your typing speed, patience level, and degree of arthritis.

Who is this guy, anyway?

Donn King is associate professor of speech and journalism at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, Tennessee, as well as a speaker, writer, and computer geek. He has spoken to audiences, churches, and radio audiences across the United States and written numerous newspaper, magazine, and blog articles as well as a textbook. Donn works with individuals and groups who want to forge top-notch communication skills to increase their influence.

Donn is passionate about approaching higher education as a special form of communication, and wants to help professors help their students. Contact him about coming to your campus and working face-to-face with your faculty to help achieve that common goal. If your budget doesn't allow for a face-to-face meeting, ask him about conducting a Webinar.

You can reach Donn at <http://donnellking.com/>, where you can also add your email address to get updated information about effective communication and speaking skills. You can also reach him at speakwrite@donnellking.com.