

## **From Kelley McGrath on captions vs subtitles:**

One important thing is to distinguish function from technology. There are three technological ways to get text on video:

### **1. Closed captions**

are encoded as part of a TV signal (in the U.S. this is line 21). In order to display them, a TV has to have a decoder. For many years, TVs have been required by law to include a decoder for closed captions. When we started getting DVDs, suddenly I was seeing a large number of DVDs that had the closed captioning symbol, but didn't seem to actually have captions. It turned out that stand-alone DVD players also need a decoder. Ours didn't have one so we had to get a new player. Our software DVD player also didn't have the ability to decode closed captions so we switched to different software. It is more common now for players and software to be able to decode closed captions, but, as the site that Teresa linked to points out, there are new problems with HDMI. The chief advantage of SDH is that they work regardless of what technology you use to play a DVD.

### **2. Subtitle or subpicture tracks (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DVD-Video#Subtitles>)**

can be encoded as part of DVD or Blu-ray video files. These are usually optional and can be turned on and off from the disc menu or remote.

### **3. Inextricable part of the image**

Open captions are printed on or bound up with the film itself and cannot be turned off. On videocassettes, you can distinguish between open and closed captions by using fast forward. Fast forwarding causes closed captions to disappear, but you can still see open captions. On DVD or Blu-ray, you occasionally get subtitle tracks that can't be turned off, although they may be using the subtitle tracks described above. Intertitles on silent films are another example of text that is part of the image itself.

There are three possible functions for text on video.

### **1. Captioning**

This is usually in the language of the film, but not necessarily. For example, non-English films are often captioned in English for the U.S. market. The key feature of captioning is that it includes not only the spoken dialogue, but any contextual information, such as sounds or indication of who is speaking, necessary for someone who cannot hear the soundtrack to follow the film. Technologies include closed captioning, SDH ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subtitle\\_\(captioning\)#SDH](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subtitle_(captioning)#SDH)) on subtitle tracks, captioning on internet videos and open captions. Any of these justify a "for the hearing impaired" heading.

### **2. Subtitles**

These include only the dialogue and not the additional contextual information that would be needed by someone who can't hear the soundtrack. They are often translations. Technologies include text printed on the film itself and optional subtitle tracks on videodiscs. As JT pointed out, sometimes there is no practical distinction between these two functions as there are no contextual cues needed. Some documentaries are an example of this. However, it is impossible to be sure without attentively watching the whole video so I don't apply "... for the hearing impaired" unless the publisher makes an explicit statement.

### **3. Intertitles (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertitle>)**

are the text that takes the place of spoken dialogue in silent films. Technically, I guess these would be accessible to the hearing impaired, although it's never occurred to me to add the heading. I suppose because they aren't made for that purpose.