

# **SOUND IS NOT ENOUGH:**

The Art of Captioning for Universal Access

**(Book excerpt - first 10 pages)**

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Second Edition

Sound Is Not Enough: The Art of Captioning for Universal Access  
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# Introduction

*Tell me and I'll forget;  
show me and I may remember;  
involve me and I'll understand.*  
— Chinese Proverb

There are 48 million deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers in the United States and 466 million in the world.<sup>1</sup> They are ready to attend your event or use your product or service. If you have only been delivering your message orally, you haven't been able to reach them. They don't hear it or cannot access it for various reasons.

I am saying this as a professional accessibility consultant who also happens to be deaf. My professional expertise spans over twenty years in design, technology, and accessibility. I've lived in different countries, communicated in different languages, and worked and studied mostly in the hearing-only environments. I'm the only deaf member of my family. I have met many deaf and hard-of-hearing people from different walks of life who share the same frustrations with me regarding the lack of optimal communication access.

This book will show you how to reach that audience so they will use your products or services, whether paid or free. It's not hard nor expensive. It takes a commitment—to consistently share your aural message via speech-to-text translation (captioning and transcription).

## Aural Information with Text

Depending on where you live, you may have seen captions on TV in public places (such as gyms, bars, and airports), on many movie DVDs, in online videos, or on the electronic displays of public transport systems. Many people think of captioning as something that is used only in those situations, but with more awareness and more efforts to make captioning universal, it can be used to make any aural information accessible, anytime and anywhere.

You don't even have to be deaf to rely on text to get information. The world is noisy. People mumble, and audio quality is often poor. People listening to foreign speech find it easier to follow along with same-language captions, which can also help them improve their new

language skills. There are many ways we can apply captioning in various areas of our lives once it is more widely available.

The use of captions for TV, movies, and online content has increased in the past years in more countries, including the United States. It is a wonderful change. But imagine the positive impact if businesses, media owners, event organizers, educators, and employers were sensitive to the fact that 466 million deaf and hard-of-hearing people around the world could also be included by adding captioning to other media, such as podcasts, webcasts, plays, live events, classes, meetings, and any other situation in which information is conveyed orally. Businesses that make such changes will definitely have a competitive edge.

## **More than Captioning...**

Yet just captioning without care is also inadequate. Captioning is an art. It is not enough to just add words. Captions need to be of good quality, with speaker identifications, sound descriptions, and proper grammar and punctuation. They need to be verbatim, easy to read, synchronized with speech, well-formatted, and properly chunked—among many other things.

In addition, many people think that just using speech recognition software to generate captions is good enough. They do not realize that it cannot produce quality transcription on its own. It is of paramount importance to consider this issue in relation to recorded media and formal live events.

In this book, I aim to increase your awareness about high-quality, speech-to-text translation as a way to provide universal access, and to illustrate how using it in your business benefits many of us, regardless of our hearing abilities. I will give you a guide to all the issues and techniques needed to support deaf and hard-of-hearing users on websites, at events, and in public places. This support also benefits millions of others with good hearing who rely on text translation for various other reasons.

## **Appropriate Descriptions**

Keep in mind that not all people with hearing loss are the same in terms of hearing abilities and cultural affiliation. They can be:

- **hard-of-hearing** (as are the majority of people with hearing loss);
- **late-deafened** (they became deafened after acquiring language);
- **oral deaf** (they are born deaf or became deafened early in life and rely primarily on oral communications rather than sign language); or
- **culturally Deaf** (they are born deaf or became deafened early in life and rely primarily on sign language for communication).

There is no firm rule about how individuals with hearing loss are appropriately described. It would be best to ask them for their preferences.

As for describing a group of people with deafness and hearing loss, it would be best to call us “deaf and hard-of-hearing” people. It sounds more favorable to many of us than “hearing impaired,” a phrase that is discouraged by many local, national, and even international organizations of deaf and hard-of-hearing people.<sup>2</sup>

Those who call themselves “hearing impaired” are usually formerly hearing people new to hearing loss, not familiar with proper terminology, and not involved in disability advocacy. While some countries and international organizations (especially those focused on medical rather social models of disability) still use “hearing impairment,” it does not mean that it is an acceptable term.

**For simplicity sake, I will use the word “deaf people” most times throughout this book to describe people with all degrees of hearing loss.**

## **Who is this Book For?**

This book is intended primarily for business executives, media producers, event organizers, educators, and employers. It will help hearing people see the world through my eyes as an experienced deaf consultant and will help readers better understand how to improve communication and information access via high-quality captioning and transcription. The book includes a mixture of personal and professional experiences, summaries of case studies, and general examples of speech-to-text best practices.

While most of the information in this book is related to communication and information access in the United States, many deaf people experience similar issues in other countries. Therefore, much of the information here is also applicable globally.

Accessibility information is always changing, and many things have changed since the first edition of this book was published in 2014. This updated edition has been revised to reflect those changes. For example, you will find a new chapter on accessibility issues during the COVID pandemic.

**The Glossary provides definitions of some abbreviations and words. The first time a word in the glossary is mentioned in the book, it will be underlined, to let you know you can look it up. To get the most out of this book, I recommend that you read the book from start to end since many sections are interrelated.**

While there are many different communication modes (sign language, cued speech, lipreading, listening via amplification, and so forth) used by people with hearing disabilities, this book primarily focuses on speech-to-text translation because it benefits more people than just those who are deaf. This in no way diminishes the importance of other communication modes, which are equally as essential for certain people in certain situations.

**This book cannot offer a one-size-fits-all solution for all situations. Therefore, I also provide customized solutions for communication access to businesses like yours.** In addition, I offer a quality check and proper formatting of captions and transcripts for media and events to ensure that they improve user experience. You can learn more about news and solutions from my articles, presentations, and/or consulting sessions, which can be found in the About the Author section at the end of the book.

## **Why Read This Book?**

The goal of this book is to help your business learn why it is important to make your aural content look professional and easy to access via text. While there are more people interested in improving access for deaf people, many don't know how to do it in a way that truly is of benefit to the audience in mind. I hope that this book will help more people with good hearing better understand why even small things matter to those with little or no hearing.



For example, people with good hearing can easily overhear other people's conversations, gain access to education, and participate in meetings and social events, while deaf people either do not receive this spontaneous information or must work very hard to get it.

Full and equal communication access is a basic human right for everyone, not a privilege, especially for deaf people. Reverend Jesse L. Jackson said, "The problem is not that the [deaf] students cannot hear. The problem is that the hearing do not listen." Sadly, hearing loss carries a social stigma. Deaf people are disabled by society's attitudinal barriers as much as by physical ones. These barriers can be easily removed so that deaf people would feel fully included, if society provides them with alternative ways to communicate and exchange information. Even people with good hearing find themselves in situations that make it hard for them to hear or understand audio or each other. So alternative methods of communication can help them, too.

## **The Future is Bright**

I look forward to a time when more of us can enjoy full access to communication and information exchange. I hope for a future where high-quality captions and transcripts are so widely used along with audio that future generations will find it hard to believe that generations before them could live without universal access. The key to the future starts with you.

**Let's think outside the EARS!**

# Chapter 1

## Deafness and Hearing Loss

*Blindness cuts you from things.*

*Deafness cuts you from people.*

*—Helen Keller*

Before understanding the various communication needs and abilities of people with hearing issues, it would be helpful to understand the nature of deafness and hearing loss. It is not simply the inability to hear well or at all, but more an inability to communicate with hearing people via audio only. This is what makes many deaf people—even those with mild hearing loss—feel left out if we are not intentionally included. Communication access is very important to us.

### Causes of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss and deafness can happen anytime and to anyone, and it is definitely not limited to senior citizens. Actually, the leading cause of hearing loss is not age but the constant exposure to loud noises and listening to portable music devices. These factors have increased the number of deaf people in the past few years, especially among the youth.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, the following<sup>1</sup> are the causes of hearing loss:

**(End of the excerpt. Order the full copy on <https://audio-accessibility.com/book/>)**