

To The New York Times Contributors,

We've had a steady stream of incomplete or missing captions. This has hurt our archives, caused confusion and in some bad cases created errors.

Our move to set a better course is to institute a New York Times caption style. It is very similar to the Associated Press caption style that many photographers use every day.

Captions should leave no question as to who is in the frame and the action taking place. They need to provide background and context letting users know why the situation is being photographed. Someone should be able to look at your photograph and caption in 10 years and know who the people are, where you were, what is happening in the photo and why. Treat the photograph and the caption as one unit. Use the caption to plug any holes that are missing in the visual information. The basic reporting of Who, What, When, Where, Why and How need to be answered in each caption. Batch captions are fine as long as they are accurate.

BE CAREFUL WITH FACTS AND NUMBERS. YOUR CAPTION SHOULD NOT INTRODUCE ERRORS.

TEMPLATE:

Location (City and State) – Date (Month, Day, Year): First sentence describes what is in the photo, who (identified left to right) and what is going on. Second sentence gives context and background (how did this occur, why is the subject reacting).

EXAMPLE 1:

WASHINGTON, DC - MARCH 14, 2013: Professor Simon Johnson of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management testified before the Congressional Joint Economic Committee in the Dirksen Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill. The bipartisan committee took testimony from a panel of economists at a hearing, titled 'Flirting With Disaster: Solving the Federal Debt Crisis,' CREDIT: Jane Doe for The New York Times

EXAMPLE 2:

BROOKLYN, NY – FEBRUARY 13, 2013: A financial planner, Paul Capalad (left) and his husband, Brian Kushner (right), in their new home on Hart Street in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Mr. Capalad was looking for a house in his budget and in a specific location, in the process he started blogging at werebuyingahouse.wordpress.com. The house he finally bought is much less than his budget, but needs extensive renovations. CREDIT: Jane Doe for The New York Times