Rules For Caption Writing

Every photo needs a caption. Looking at a picture without a caption is like watching TV with the sound turned off. The caption's purpose is to explain the action and characters in the photo. Since captions are often the most frequently read copy in any publication, staffers should strive to cover all the facts and write concise, interesting caption copy.

By Robert J. Courtemanche, CJE  rcourtemanche@galenaparkisd.com  Galena Park HS, Texas
Permission for use granted for any classroom teacher in a public or not-for profit / non-profit school system.
Identify everyone by first and last names.

Use this rule for candid photos featuring five people or less and for posed team or group photos.
Identify everyone by first and last names.

Example: While running through the halls, junior Jose Ayala waves an NHS banner during Spirit Week.
Avoid the obvious, but provide details.

Give information not explained in the photo by covering the five Ws and H (who, what, where, when, why and how).
Avoid the obvious, but provide details.

Good Example: While working on their second six weeks benchmark test, Ms. Diana Goodby’s Algebra II class sits quietly while their peers bubble answers and work problems.
Present tense/past tense.

Describe the action-taking place in the present tense. Write follow-up information in the past tense.
Good Example: Rushing down the hall, junior Stacie Meadows just makes it to her second period World History class. The new class schedule caused many students to be late for class.
Do not use gag captions.

Always write correct information that is actually about the photo. Never include personal opinions or gag copy. Gag captions can be considered defamatory or libelous and can lead to serious legal or school violations.
Do not use gag captions.

Bad: Sitting with her friend that she is “just talking to,” is Fishman Veronica Mars.
Do not begin a caption with a name

Start a caption with the what, why, how or even when instead of who.
Do not begin a caption with a name

Good: During the passing period, sophomore Ginny Gonzalez finds the books she needs for English class in her locker.
Do not use terms such as (pictured left) or (shown above).

Your captions should be placed close enough to the photos they pertain to without needing copy for identification.