Open source · runs locally

Accurate auto captions for Shorts, free and offline

Generate word-timed captions with Whisper and burn them into a vertical video with FFmpeg, styled for TikTok, Reels and Shorts. Works offline.

VideoToShorts · https://videotoshortsconverter.com/workflows/auto-captions-free-local · checked November 19, 2026

COST
Free

TIME
5 to 10 minutes per clip

LEVEL
Beginner to intermediate (command line)

HARDWARE
Any recent computer; a GPU speeds up transcription.

What you need

Whisper: Transcription and timed subtitles

FFmpeg: Burn styled captions into the video

Best for: Creators who already edit their clips, Privacy-sensitive footage, Non-English speakers (Whisper is multilingual).

Steps

1 Install

Install FFmpeg, then Whisper.

```
pip install -U openai-whisper
```

2 Transcribe with short caption lines

Word timestamps plus a short line width give the 1-line, few-words-at-a-time style used on short-form video. Use --language to skip language detection. Larger models (medium, large) are more accurate and slower.

```
whisper clip.mp4 --model small --language en --word_timestamps True --
max_line_width 24 --max_line_count 1 --output_format srt
```

3 Optional: highlight the spoken word

Whisper can underline each word as it is spoken in the subtitle file, a karaoke-style effect.

```
whisper clip.mp4 --model small --word_timestamps True --highlight_words True --
max_line_width 24 --output_format srt
```

4 Fix names and terms

Open clip.srt in any text editor and correct brand names, people and jargon. Speech models most often miss proper nouns.

5 Burn in with a short-form style

Bold, outlined text, bottom-center, lifted above the app buttons.

```
ffmpeg -i clip.mp4 -vf
"subtitles=clip.srt:force_style='FontName=Arial,FontSize=16,Bold=1,Outline=3,Shadow=0,Alignment=2,
-c:a copy captioned.mp4
```

Questions

Which Whisper model should I use?

Start with small. Use medium or large if names or accents come out wrong and you can wait longer.

Does this work for other languages?

Yes. Whisper is multilingual; set --language to the spoken language, or leave it out to auto-detect.

Sources

- Whisper README and CLI options
- FFmpeg subtitles filter

Commands checked against each tool's docs on November 19, 2026.