

CHANNEL 4 SUBTITLING GUIDELINES for foreign-language programmes

If you subtitle your programme prior to delivery to Channel 4, please observe the following guidelines in accordance with our house style.

Films, animations and arts programmes use the **Gill Sans** font, size **28** linear or size **32** anamorphic, with a **dropshadow** outline; maximum 38 characters per line. **Factual** programmes and **Programmes for the Deaf** use the **Arial Narrow** font, size **30** linear or **34** anamorphic, with a **ghost box**; maximum 42 characters per line.

All subtitles should fall within the prescribed safety areas.

Subtitles should not appear on screen at the same time as **captions**, which should be cleared before subtitling starts.

If an existing English translation is supplied, this should be taken as a guideline only and not necessarily adhered to. This particularly applies when it is in the form of a subtitle list. Often, these lists have been created in the film's country of origin, by a non-native speaker, for the American market, and are not what we would wish to put on screen here.

Maximum **two** lines of text per subtitle. Where two lines are used, both should be of roughly equal length with the top line the longer.

Reading speed: allow 2 seconds per line of text (a very rough estimate). Text must be reduced as necessary to be readable in the time available. Time the subtitles to match the dialogue; do not leave a subtitle on screen after the speech has finished.

Text should be **centred**. However, where two speakers' dialogue is used in the same subtitle:

- Where have they gone?
- To the country

each line is preceded by a dash, and the lines are justified left, with the longest line centred, as per above. **No full stop** at the end of either line.

Wherever possible, subtitles should **not go over cuts** (this is standard subtitling practice) but should clear the cut by **2 frames on either side**.

Where dialogue is continuous and there are no cuts, there should be a gap of **4 frames** between subtitles. This can be reduced to 2 frames if the dialogue is very fast, but this makes for a rushed style which might not be in keeping with the film. If no gap is left between subtitles, i.e. a subtitle is timed to come in on the same frame as the previous subtitle goes out, the subtitling equipment might not pick up the change and errors will result.

No **full stops** or **commas** at the end of a subtitle. If the sentence is incomplete, end the subtitle with three dots... ..and begin the next subtitle with three dots.

Where a question mark or exclamation mark appears **within the text**, follow it with **two spaces** before resuming the text e.g.

Where have they gone? I thought they were staying
or: Good heavens! They've left their keys behind
This is not necessary where a ? or ! appears at the end of the text. And keep the use of exclamation marks to a minimum; too many devalue their own impact.

Dots can be used where speech trails off or a sentence remains unfinished, but again keep this use to a minimum.

Where the same word is repeated several times in a short space, don't subtitle all the repeats; it's wearying for the viewer and can look ludicrous. For example, a rapid "No, no, no, no, no!" could be subtitled as "No, no!", and one "Maria" might suffice for a string of repetitions of the name. And utterances such as "Eh?" and "Mm-hm" don't really need subtitling at all; leave the obvious unsubtitled.

Slang and colloquialisms should be appropriate to the style of the film. "Mom", acceptable in modern America, is hardly so in the context of 16th-century France where "Mummy" or "Mama" would be better.

Expletives should be translated as such; subtitlers should not bowdlerise. Rows of dashes or asterisks only draw attention to a) the "dirty" word and b) the fact that it's been censored. Better to leave it out altogether if the programme is likely to be transmitted before the watershed.

Italics should be used where a voice is heard on the telephone or from a radio, TV or public address system. In subtitling for the Deaf, they are used for dialogue off screen. Italics are also used for song lyrics.

If **text on screen** needs subtitling, it should be in the normal style, not italics or capitals.

It is vital that an **ident title** should appear at the head of the subtitle list. The text should consist of the programme's name (plus episode number if necessary), the name of the subtitler and the date of the job. This subtitle should be timecoded as coming in at 00:00:00:00 and going out at 00:00:00:08; this timecode gives the system a point at which to lock in. If it is not there, the first subtitle on the list will not appear, as the system will have had no previous timecode to recognise.

An ident title should appear on the **clock** before the start of each part of the programme. This should consist of the programme title, plus the line *Subtitled version* in italics below the title. This subtitle should come in at the frame the clock reaches 15 seconds, and come out 12 seconds later or when the clock goes out, whichever is earlier.

Main **credits** of a feature film should be subtitled: leading players, scriptwriter and director at least, plus the cameraman (director of photography) if credited. This is especially important if the text on screen is non-Roman e.g. Hindi or Chinese. But please do not add your own "subtitles by..." credit at the end; this may appear on films in the cinema but is not used in television, as the credit may be difficult to remove or change should the programme be re-subtitled for some reason.

We strongly recommend that you consult one of Channel 4's approved subtitlers, among whom are:

O&M Subtitles: Orna Kustow
Flat 12, Waverley Court
41 Steeles Road
London NW3 4SB Tel. 020-7722 6200 Fax 020-7722 6266
e-mail: OKustow@aol.com

Omnititles : Isabelle Geesen-Leigh
10 Wendover Road
Bromley
Kent BR2 9JX Tel/Fax 020-8460 4101
e-mail: Omnititles@ukgateway.net

Maite Lorés
15 Joscoyne House
Philpot Street
London E1 2JE Tel. 020-7791 3256 Mobile 07773 788 524
e-mail: loresmaite@yahoo.es

They can liaise with you at all stages of the subtitling process, and advise on translation, spotting, text reduction etc.

The following agencies have also done subtitling work for us:

IBF (International Broadcast Facilities)
12 Neal's Yard
Covent Garden
London WC2H 9DP Tel. 020-7497 1515 Fax 020-7379 8562

VSI (Voice & Script International)
Aradco House
132 Cleveland Street
London W1P 6AB Tel. 020-7692 7700 Fax 020-7692 7711

For further information please contact
Hazel Morgan, Subtitling, Programme Management
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