

# CHANNEL 4 SUBTITLING GUIDELINES

## for *foreign-language* programmes



You must subtitle foreign language commissioned programmes prior to delivery to Channel 4. Please observe the following guidelines in accordance with our house style.

## FONTS

### **DRAMA, ANIMATIONS AND ARTS PROGRAMMES**

**Standard Definition films:** Gill Sans font, size 28 for linear or size 32 anamorphic, with a dropshadow outline.

**High Definition:** Helvetica Medium Condensed NOB Latin 46A, with a dropshadow outline.

Text should be limited to a **maximum of 38 characters per line**; if wide letters such as M and W occur frequently, then limit this to 34 for that line to stay within the text safe area.

### **FACTUAL PROGRAMMES AND PROGRAMMES FOR THE DEAF**

**Standard Definition:** Arial Narrow font, size 30 linear or 34 anamorphic, with a ghost box enclosing each line of text separately; no outline.

**High Definition:** Arial Narrow Latin 45A 1080, with the ghost box and no outline.

Text should be limited to a maximum **42 characters** per line.

## GUIDELINES

- All subtitles must stay within **text safe 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 and for the American market e.g. "Mom" is fine in the US but should be translated as "Mum" in the UK. American English needs to conform to British spoken English
- 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, each line is preceded by a dash, and the lines are **justified left and then centred**, as below:
  - Where have they gone?
  - To the country

**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. Dots can be used where speech trails off or a sentence remains unfinished, but 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
- Keep the use of exclamation marks to a minimum; too many devalue their own impact.
- 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, 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.

For Further information, or to be put in contact with a Channel4 approved subtitler, please contact:  
 programmemanagement@channel4.co.uk