CHANNEL 4 Subtitling guidelines for foreign language content

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

If you wish your subtitles to be different from these guidelines, please seek editorial approval from your commissioning editor or Programme Management.

FONTS

FILM, 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.

TRANSLATION GUIDELINES

If an **existing English translation** is supplied, this should be taken as a guideline 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

Subtitles must remain faithful to character, intent and tone. Avoid rewriting dialogue into polished or improved English and normalising dialect, social register or emotional bluntness.

You must correct spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. Ensure consistency for names, places and institutions without altering character voice.

Do not subtitle any English Language, as this will be done by our access services team

When a word is **repeated several times**, avoid subtitling every instance—it tires the viewer and can look absurd. A rapid "No, no, no, no, no!" can simply be "No, no!", and a single "Maria" is enough for multiple repetitions. Obvious sounds like "Eh?" or "Mm-hm" generally don't need subtitling

Use **slang and colloquialisms** that match the film's style. For instance, while 'Mom' suits modern American settings, historical contexts like 16th-century France call for alternatives such as 'Mummy' or 'Mama'.

Translate expletives directly; don't soften or censor them. Dashes or asterisks only highlight the missing word. If a programme airs before the watershed, it's better to omit the expletive entirely.

Keep the use of exclamation marks to a minimum; too many devalue their own impact.

Do not include Emojis and emoticons (e.g. 🙄, ☹️, :), :() in subtitles.

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.

HOUSE STYLE GUIDELINES

Films start at the timecode 10:00:00:00 - It is vital that **2 ident titles** should appear before the film starts.

The first ident is 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.

The **second ident** 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.

All subtitles must stay within **text safe areas** and be **positioned in-picture** (not in the black).

Subtitles must be white only – if there is a need for another colour (e.g. different languages), please seek approval from Programme Management

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

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.

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 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

Version 1 June 2026