bbc.co.uk

Online Subtitling Editorial Guidelines V1.1

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INTRODUCTION

The following guidelines outline BBC Subtitling's requirements for bbc.co.uk. This document is intended for use in subtitle production for BBC Commissioned AV content only

Good subtitling is a complex balancing act - you have to survey the range of subtitling guidelines on offer, and then match them to the style of the content. It will never be possible to apply all of the guidelines all of the time, because in many situations they will be mutually exclusive.
It is particularly important to understand that different types of content, different items within an AV clip, and even different sections within an item, will require different subtitling approaches.

The Content Producer's task is to judge which practices need to be given precedence over others. It would be tempting to try to present a hierarchy of guidelines, ranking the guidelines in order of importance. Unfortunately, subtitling is not a science - the hierarchy shifts from clip to clip. Sometimes it will be necessary to pay greater attention to speaker identification and language register (for instance, in a multi-character drama); at other times, there might be heavier emphasis on access to visuals (for instance, in a sports report in a news clip).
In order for the BBC to deliver a consistent user experience across all digital platforms, these guidelines are closely based on the broadcast subtitle guidelines published by the BBC for linear broadcast subtitling in 1998 and industry best practice. Additional sources of information used in the compilation of this document include;
ITC and BBC co-funded research into the use of subtitles, conducted by the Centre for Deaf Studies at Bristol University, research on children's subtitles,
Dial 888; Subtitling for Deaf Children, conducted by Dr Susan Gregory and research on news subtitles,
Good News for Deaf People, conducted by IFF Research Ltd

EDITING

1. Since people generally speak much faster than the text of their speech can be read, it is almost always necessary to edit the speech. The subtitler must always edit according to the amount of time available. Follow the timing conventions (see **Timing**, p7).

2. Where it's necessary to edit, edit everything evenly - do not take the easy way out by simply removing an entire sentence. Sometimes this will be appropriate, but normally you should aim to edit out a bit of every sentence.

3. If there is plenty of time for verbatim (or near-verbatim) speech, do not edit unnecessarily. Your aim should be to give the viewer as much access to the soundtrack as you possibly can within the constraints of time, space, shot changes, and on-screen visuals, etc. You should never deprive the viewer of words/sounds when there is time to include them and where there is no conflict with the visual information.

4. However, if you have a very "busy" scene, full of action and disconnected conversations, it might be confusing if you subtitle fragments of speech here and there, rather than allowing the viewer to watch what is going on.

5. It is not necessary to simplify or translate for deaf or hard-of-hearing viewers. This is not only condescending, it is also frustrating for lipreaders.

6. If the speaker is in shot, try to retain the start and end of his/her speech, as these are most obvious to lipreaders who will feel cheated if these words are removed.

7. Don't automatically edit out words like "but", "so" or "too". They may be short but they are often essential for expressing meaning.

8. Although it is often tempting to edit by removing conversational phrases like "you know", "well", "actually", and so on, remember that such phrases can often add flavour to your text.

9. Avoid editing out names when they are used to address people. They are often easy targets, but can be essential for following the plot.

10 Your editing should be faithful to the speaker's style of speech, taking into account register, nationality, era, etc. This will affect your choice of vocabulary. For instance:

    register: mother vs mum; deceased vs dead; intercourse vs sex;
    nationality*:* mom vs mum; trousers vs pants;
    era: wireless vs radio; hackney cab vs taxi.

11. Similarly, make sure if you edit by using contractions that they are appropriate to the context and register. In a formal context, where a speaker would not use contractions, *you* should not use them either. Regional styles must also be considered: e.g. it will not

always be appropriate to edit "I've got a cat" to "I've a cat"; and "I used to go there" cannot necessarily be edited to "I'd go there."

12. Having edited one subtitle, bear your edit in mind when creating the next subtitle. The edit can affect the content as well as the structure of anything that follows.

13. Avoid editing by changing the form of a verb. This sometimes works, but more often than not the change of tense produces a nonsense sentence and also, if you do edit the tense, you have to make it consistent throughout the rest of the text.

14. A common subtitling error is to edit a piece of speech before finding out exactly how much time is available; then, if it emerges that there is more time than anticipated, the subtitler forgets to go back and reinstate some of the edited-out text.

15. Sometimes speakers can be clearly lipread - particularly in close-ups. Do not edit out words that can be clearly lipread. This makes the viewer feel cheated. If editing is unavoidable, then try to edit by using words that have similar lip-movements. Also, keep as close as possible to the original word order.

16. Do not edit out strong language unless it is absolutely impossible to edit elsewhere in the sentence - deaf or hard-of-hearing viewers find this extremely irritating and condescending. Of course, if the BBC has decided to edit any strong language,, then your subtitles must reflect this in the following ways:

(a) If the offending word is bleeped, put the word **BLEEP** in the appropriate place in the subtitle - in caps, in a contrasting colour (white, cyan, yellow or green only), and without an exclamation mark. If only the middle section of a word is bleeped, show this:

e.g. **f-BLEEP-ing**. (In this instance, however, you will be unable to use a contrasting colour for the bleep, as that would add extra spaces within the word.)

(b)   If the word is dubbed with a euphemistic replacement - e.g. *frigging* - put this in.
If the word is non-standard but spellable - e.g. *frerlking* - put this in, too.

(c)   If the word is dubbed with an unrecognisable sequence of noises, leave them out.

(d)   If the sound is dipped for a portion of the word, put up the sounds that you can hear and three dots for the dipped bit: e.g. "**Keep your f...ing nose out of it!**" (Never use more than three dots.)

(e)   If the word is mouthed, use a label:
e.g. *So (MOUTHS) f...ing what?*

When the content has been edited for strong language you should allow time for the following disclaimer to appear at the end of the AV clip.

The BBC has removed strong language
   from this film's soundtrack. The

subtitles match this edited version.

(White on a Black background)

This explains the position to lipreaders.

Give the disclaimer a generous timing where possible (i.e. 8 seconds for the 3 lines it runs to).

If you need to write "clip" instead of "film", "programme" or "show" in the disclaimer.

TIMING

1. Subtitles must be on screen for long enough to be read by a deaf or hard-of-hearing viewer who will also be trying to take in other visual information at the same time (the action/facial expressions/graphics, etc).

2. In both live and pre-recorded subtitling, timings are intended to be flexible. The standard timings shown in the Appendix are intended to provide general guidelines, but should not be taken too literally. When assessing the amount of time that a subtitle needs to remain on the screen, it is important for the subtitler to think about much more than the number of characters on the screen; this would be an unacceptably crude approach.

3. It is crucial that subtitles are displayed for a sufficient length of time for viewers to read them. The subtitle presentation rate for pre-recorded programmes should not normally exceed 140 words per minute. In exceptional circumstances, for example in the case of add-ons, the higher rate of 180 words per minute is permitted.

Less than preferred time

Do not dip below the standard timings unless there is no other way of getting round a problem. Circumstances which could mean giving less reading time are:

Shot changes

Give less time if giving the standard timing would involve clipping a shot, or crossing into an unrelated, "empty" [containing no speech] shot. However, always consider the alternative of merging with another subtitle.

Lipreading

Avoid editing out words if they can be lipread, but, again, only in very specific circumstances: i.e. when a word or phrase can be read very clearly even by non-lipreaders, and if it would look ridiculous to take out or change the word.

Catchwords

Avoid editing out catchwords if a phrase would become unrecognisable if edited.

Retaining humour

Give less time if a joke would be destroyed by adhering to the standard timing, but only if there is no other way around the problem, such as merging or crossing a shot.

Critical information in a news item or factual AV content

The main aim when subtitling news is to convey the "what, when, who, how, why". If an item is already particularly concise, it may be impossible to edit it into subtitles at standard timings without losing a crucial element of the original.

Very technical items

These may be similarly hard to edit. For instance, a detailed explanation of an economic or scientific story may prove almost impossible to edit without depriving the viewer of vital information. In these situations a subtitler should be prepared to vary standard timings to convey the full meaning of the original.

Extra time

Try to allow extra reading time for your subtitles in the following circumstances:

Unfamiliar words

Try to give more generous timings whenever you consider that viewers might find a word or phrase extremely hard to read without more time.

Several speakers

Aim to give more time when there are several speakers in one subtitle.

Labels

Allow an extra second for labels where possible, but only if appropriate.

Flashing subtitles

Allow more time as these are harder to read.

Visuals and graphics

When there is a lot happening in the picture, e.g. a football match or a map, allow viewers enough time both to read the subtitle and to take in the visuals. ([See Presentation p20](#))

Placed subtitles

If, for example, two speakers are placed in the same subtitle, and the person on the right speaks first, the eye has more work to do, so try to allow more time.

Long figures

Give viewers more time to read long figures (e.g. 12,353).

Shot changes

Aim for the upper end of the timing range if your subtitle crosses one shot or more, as you will need longer to read it.

Slow speech

Slower timings should be used to keep in sync with slow speech.

- It is also very important to keep your timings consistent. For instance, if you have given 3:12 for one subtitle, you must not then give 4:12 to subsequent subtitles of similar length - unless there is a very good reason: e.g. slow speaker/on-screen action.

• **If** there is a pause between two pieces of speech, you may leave a gap between the subtitles - but this must be a minimum of one second, preferably a second and a half. Anything shorter than this produces a very jerky effect. Try not squeeze gaps in if the time can be used for text.

Standard Timings

1. A short and familiar word or phrase - 1.12 to 2 seconds.
    e.g.:   **Hello***.*
    or: **Excuse me.**

2. Up to half a line - 2 to 2.12 seconds.
    e.g.:   **Where do you live?**
    or: **See you tomorrow.**

3. One line - 2.12 to 3 seconds.
    e.g.:   **How long will it take us to go home?**
    or: **He's got a real headache.**

4. One line and a little bit - 3.12 seconds.
    e.g.:   **How long will it take Johanna to go home?**

5. Up to one and a half lines - 4 to 4.12 seconds.
    e.g.:   **It is important to tell her about the decision we made.**

6. Two lines - 5 to 6 seconds.
    e.g.:   **I think it would be a very good idea to keep dangerous dogs on a leash.**

7. Two lines and a little bit - 6.12 seconds.
    e.g.:   **How long will it take the whole cast to come home by taxi to Duals, North Dyfed?**

8. Two and a half lines - 7 seconds.
    e.g.:   **The best thing about going abroad is that you don't have to put up with the British weather***.*

9. Three lines - 7.12 to 8 seconds.
    e.g.:   **What will the City do about the Tory Government's humiliating defeat in the House of Commons last night?**

SUBTITLE BREAKS

1. Subtitles should start and end at logical points in a sentence. Aim to divide up the text into whole sentences. If this is not possible, aim at least to end every subtitle at a logical mid-sentence point: e.g. at the end of a phrase or clause.

2. If a subtitle consists of part of a sentence, try to put the next sentence in a new subtitle, rather than tagging it on to the part-sentence.

So, try to avoid subtitles like this:

(a)   **Wouldn't it be fascinating**

(b)   *if it WAS Elizabeth Fitton?* **Liz, you
wanted a rational explanation.**

The following sequence would be preferable:

(a)   **Wouldn't it be fascinating**

(b)   *if it WAS Elizabeth Fitton?*

(c)   **Liz, you wanted
a rational explanation.**

3. It may be possible to break a long sentence into two or more separate sentences and to display them as consecutive subtitles e.g. 'We have standing orders, and we have procedures which have been handed down to us over the centuries.' becomes:

(a)   **We have standing orders
and procedures.**

(b)   **They have been handed down to us
over the centuries.**

This is especially appropriate for 'compound' sentences, i.e. sentences consisting of more than one main clause, joined by coordinating conjunctions 'and', 'but', 'or';

This procedure is also possible with some 'complex' sentences, i.e. sentences consisting of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses joined by subordinating conjunctions such as 'since', 'when', 'because', etc or by relative pronouns such as 'who', 'that': 'All we wanted was a quiet chat just you and me together, but you seemed to have other ideas.' becomes:

(a)   **All we wanted was a quiet chat
        just you and me together.**

(b)   **But you seemed to have
        other ideas.**

It is sometimes also possible to break single main clauses effectively into more than one subtitle; e.g. 'I saw a tall, thin, bearded man with the stolen shopping basket disappearing into the crowd.' becomes:

(a)   **I saw a tall, thin, bearded man
        with the stolen shopping basket.**

(b)   **He disappeared into the crowd**

If such sentence breaking procedures are inappropriate, it might be necessary to allow a single long sentence to extend over more than one subtitle. In this case, sentences should be segmented at natural linguistic breaks such that each subtitle forms an integrated linguistic unit. Thus, segmentation at clause boundaries is to be preferred. For example:

(a)   **When I jumped on the bus...**

(b)   **…I saw the man who had taken
        the basket from the old lady.**

Segmentation at major phrase boundaries can also be accepted as follows:

(a)   **On two minor occasions
        immediately following the war...**

(b)   **...small numbers of people
        were seen crossing the border.**

KEEPING IN SYNC

1. Research in eye movement has shown that hearing impaired viewers make use of visual cues from the faces of television speakers. Therefore subtitle appearance should coincide with speech onset. Subtitle disappearance should coincide roughly with the end of the corresponding speech segment, since subtitles remaining too long on the screen are likely to be re-read by the viewer. The same rules of synchronisation should apply with off-camera speakers and even with off-screen narrators, since viewers with a certain amount of residual hearing make use of auditory cues to direct their attention to the subtitle area.

2. The subtitles should match the pace of speaking as closely as possible. Ideally, when the speaker is in shot, your subtitles should not anticipate speech by more than 1.5 seconds or hang up on the screen for more than 1.5 seconds after speech has stopped. However, if the speaker is very easy to lipread, slipping out of sync even by a second may spoil any dramatic effect and make the subtitles harder to follow. The subtitle should not be on the screen after the speaker has disappeared.

3. Sometimes, in order to meet other requirements (e.g. matching shots), you will find it difficult to avoid slipping slightly out of sync. However, subtitles should never be more than 1.5 seconds out of sync.

4. It is permissible to slip out of sync when you have a sequence of subtitles for a single speaker, providing the subtitles are back in sync by the end of the sequence. When two or more people are speaking, it is particularly important to keep in sync. Subtitles for new speakers must, as far as possible, come up as the new speaker starts to speak - not before, not after.

5. If a speaker speaks very slowly, then the subtitles will have to be slow, too - even if this means breaking the timing conventions. A subtitle (or an explanatory label) should always be on the screen if someone's lips are moving. If a speaker speaks very fast, you have to edit as much as is necessary in order to meet the timing requirements. (See **Timing** on p7)

6. If the speech belongs to an out-of-shot speaker or is voice-over commentary, then it's not so essential for the subtitles to keep in sync.

7. Do not bring in any dramatic subtitles too early. For example, if there is a loud bang at the end of, say, a two-second shot, do not anticipate it by starting the label at the beginning of the shot. Wait until the bang actually happens, even if this means a fast timing.

8. Do not simultaneously caption different speakers if they are not speaking at the same time.

LINE-BREAKS

1. To ensure both legibility and readability, the maximum for subtitle text should be roughly 32 or 34 characters per line.

2. Lines should be broken at logical points. The ideal line-break will be at a piece of punctuation like a full stop, comma or dash. If the break has to be elsewhere in the sentence, avoid splitting the following parts of speech:

article and noun (e.g. the + table; a + book)
preposition and following phrase (e.g. on + the table; in + a way; about + his life)
conjunction and following phrase/clause (e.g. and + those books; but + I went there)
pronoun and verb (e.g. he + is; they + will come; it + comes)
parts of a complex verb (e.g. have + eaten; will + have + been + doing)

3. Good line-breaks are extremely important because they make the process of reading and understanding far easier. However, it is not always possible to produce good line-breaks as well as well-edited text and good timing. Where these constraints are mutually exclusive, then well edited text and timing are more important than line-breaks.

4.   If the text will fit on one line, do not rearrange it on to two lines. One line takes less time to read than two short lines and it causes less disruption to the picture. Similarly, do not rearrange two lines of text on to three lines, unless there is a very bad line-break between lines 1 and 2.

MATCHING SHOTS

1. BBC subtitles match shots as closely as possible. It is likely to be less tiring for the viewer if shot changes and subtitle changes occur at the same time. Many subtitles therefore start on the first frame of the shot and end on the last frame. If a subtitle ends before a shot change or starts after a shot change, there should be a gap of at least 1 second, preferably 1.5 seconds, between the subtitle and the shot change.

2. Avoid creating subtitles that straddle a shot change (i.e. a subtitle that starts in the middle of shot one and ends in the middle of shot two). To do this, you may need to split a sentence at an appropriate point (see **Subtitle Breaks** p10), or delay the start of a new sentence to coincide with the shot change.

3. If one shot is too fast for a subtitle, then you can merge the speech for two shots - providing your subtitle then ends at the second shot change.

4. Bear in mind, however, that it will not always be appropriate to merge the speech from two shots: e.g. if it means that you are thereby "giving the game away" in some way. For example, if someone sneezes on a very short shot, it is more effective to leave the "*Atchoo*!" on its own with a fast timing (or to merge it with what comes afterwards) than to anticipate it by merging with the previous subtitle.

5. Where possible, avoid extending a subtitle into the next shot when the speaker has stopped speaking, particularly if this is a dramatic reaction shot.

6. Never carry a subtitle over into the next shot if this means crossing into another scene or if it is obvious that the speaker is no longer around (e.g. if they have left the room).

7. Well-grouped subtitles are important for ease of reading, so do not produce subtitles which are broken in odd places or which start in the middle of one sentence and end in the middle of another, just because this is the easiest way of fitting the shots. It is usually possible to produce well-grouped subtitles which also match the shots. If not, good grouping should take precedence.

IDENTIFYING SPEAKERS

1. Where necessary, use colours to distinguish speakers from each other. (See **Colours**, p18)

2. Where colours cannot be used you can distinguish between speakers in the following ways:

Placing

Put each piece of speech on a separate line or lines and place it underneath the relevant speaker. You may have to edit more to ensure that the lines are short enough to look placed.

Try to make sure that pieces of speech placed right and left are "joined at the hip" if possible, so that the eye does not have to leap from one side of the screen to the other.

e.g.   **What do you think?**
                            I'm not sure

or: **What's your name?**
                  Fred

NOT: **Who?**
                  The owner

Dashes

Put each piece of speech on a separate line and insert a white dash (not a hyphen) before each piece of speech, thereby clearly distinguishing different speakers' lines. The dashes should be aligned so that they are proud of the text.

e.g.:   **- What am I gonna do now?**
                    - Forgive and forget?

or: **- Found anything?**
                          - If this is the next new weapon,
                      we're in big trouble

The longest line should be centred on the screen, with the shorter line/lines left-aligned with it (not centred). If one of the lines is long, inevitably all the text will be towards the left of the screen, but generally the aim is to keep the lines in the centre of the screen.

Note that dashes only work as a clear indication of speakers when each speaker is in a separate consecutive shot.

3. If you need to distinguish between an in-vision speaker and a voice-over speaker, use single quotes for the voice-over, but only when there is likely to be confusion without them. (Single quotes are not normally necessary for a narrator, for example.) Confusion is most likely to arise when the in-vision speaker and the voice-over speaker are the same person.

Put a single quote-mark at the beginning of each new subtitle (or segment, in live), but do not close the single quotes at the end of each subtitle/segment - only close them when the person has finished speaking, as is the case with paragraphs in a book.

e.g.   **'I've lived in the Lake District since I was a boy.**

     'I never want to leave this area.
     I've been very happy here.

     'I love the fresh air and the beautiful scenery.'

If more than one speaker in the same subtitle is a voice-over, just put single quotes at the beginning and end of the subtitle.

e.g.   *'What do you think about it?* **I'm not sure.**'
     (blue text speaker)   (white text speaker)

(The single quotes will be in the same colour as the adjoining text.)

4.   When two white text speakers are having a telephone conversation, you will need to distinguish the speakers. Using single quotes placed around the speech of the out-of-vision speaker is the recommended approach. They should be used throughout the conversation, whenever one of the speakers is out of vision.

e.g.   **Hello. Victor Meldrew speaking.**
     'Hello, Mr Meldrew. I'm calling about your car.'

Single quotes are not necessary in telephone conversations if the out-of-vision speaker has a colour.

5.   Single quotes can be used in the same way to indicate when speech is emanating from a machine of some kind: e.g. a tannoy, radio, tape-recorder, answerphone message, television, etc, but often a label is sufficient.

6.   When an in-shot speaker and an out-of-shot speaker (same colour) need to be distinguished, use one of the following devices:

Arrows

If the out-of-shot speaker is on the left or right, type a left or right arrow (< or >) next to his or her speech and place the speech to the appropriate side. (Left arrows go immediately before the speech, followed by one space; right arrows immediately after the speech, preceded by one space. Make the arrow clearly visible by keeping it clear

of any other lines of text i.e. the text following the arrow and the text in any lines below it are aligned.)

e.g. *Do come in.*
Are you sure? >

When are you leaving?
< I was thinking of going
at around 8 o'clock in the evening.

When I find out where he is,
you'll be the first to know. >

NOT: *When I find out where he is, >*
you'll be the first to know.

The arrows are always typed in white regardless of the text colour of the speaker.

NB: If an off-screen speaker is neither to the right nor the left, but straight ahead, do not use an arrow.

Labels
If you are unable to use an arrow, use a label to identify the speaker: i.e. type the name of the speaker in white caps (regardless of the colour of the speaker's text), immediately before the relevant speech. If there is time, place the speech on the line below the label, so that the label is as separate as possible from the speech. If this is not possible, put the label on the same line as the speech, centred in the usual way.

e.g. **JAMES:**
What are you doing with that hammer?

or: **JAMES: What are you doing?**   (centred)

If you do not know the name of the speaker, indicate the gender or age of the speaker if this is necessary for the viewer's understanding:

e.g. **MAN: I was brought up in a close-knit family.**

7. When two or more people are speaking simultaneously, do the following, regardless of their colours:

Two people: **BOTH: Keep quiet!**   (all white text)

Three or more: **ALL: Hello!**   (all white text)

Or: **TOGETHER:** *Yes!* **No!**   (in different colours, with a white label)

COLOURS

1. Most subtitles are typed in white text on a black background to ensure optimum legibility. Text overlaid on an image should be contained within a black box.

2. A limited range of colours can be used to distinguish speakers from each other - yellow, cyan (light blue) and green.

Recommended Colours:
Speaker 1: White #FFFFFF
Speaker 2: Yellow #FFFF00
Speaker 3: Cyan #00FFFF
Speaker 4: Green #00FF00
Note: All of the above colours must appear on a black background to ensure maximum legibility.

However, unnecessary use of cyan and green should be avoided, as viewers with poor eyesight find these colours difficult to read. Green should be the least frequently used colour. Once a speaker has a colour, s/he should keep that colour.

3. Use white text on a coloured background, or coloured text on a coloured background for utterances by "non-human creatures" like dinosaurs, robots, mutant turtles, etc, or relevant "alert" noises such as buzzers in game shows. These combinations must be easy to read.

White background

Avoid using any bright colour on a white back as often the low colour contrast can render them unreadable.

Red and Green Combinations

Almost 10% of men are red/green colour blind; another group are the blue/yellow colour blind. Despite the fact that red-green contrasts are very distinct for about 95% of humanity, there are about 5% of people for whom this is completely non-functional.
Avoid using either Red text on a Green background or Green text on a Red background.

Vibrating Colour Combinations

In addition to the issues of colour blindness and contrast mentioned above, placing areas of brightly coloured hues together can be hard for users with colour vision to read. Bright colours cause an afterimage effect. With only one bright colour, the after image is usually not bothersome, but with two bright colours together, the afterimages interfere with one another, causing a "visual vibration." This can be reduced by placing a neutral colour between the two areas of bright colours or by making one of the colours a pastel or dark shade.

Vibrating Colour Combinations

red/green	red on green	green on red
blue/orange	blue on orange	orange on blue
green/magenta	green on magenta	magenta on green
yellow/cyan	yellow on cyan	cyan on yellow
blue/magenta	magenta on blue	blue on magenta
orange/yellow	yellow on orange	orange on yellow
blue/green	green on blue	blue on green

Source: Pennsylvania State University

4. Avoid using the same colour for more than one speaker - it can cause a lot of confusion for the viewer. (The exception to this would be content with a lot of shifting main characters like *EastEnders*, where it is permissible to have two characters per colour, providing they do not appear together.) If the amount of placing needed would mean editing very heavily, you can use green as a "floater": that is, it can be used for more than one minor character, again providing they never appear together.

5. White can be used for any number of speakers. If two or more white speakers appear in the same scene, you have to use one of a number of devices to indicate who says what - see **Presentation** (p20) and **Identifying Speakers** (p15).

PRESENTATION

1. BBC online subtitles should be centred below the display and above the controls of the Embedded Media Player.

2. If the media player is embedded in the page the layout should change to accommodate the subtitle display.

3. If the subtitles cannot be positioned below the display, they should be overlaid on the image but with a black background to ensure legibility (see Colours, p18)

4. A one-line subtitle normally sits on line 1 (the bottom line); a two-liner sits on lines 1 and 2; a three-liner sits on lines 1, 2 and 3.

5. As a general rule, each subtitle should consist of no more than three lines.

6. Where the speech for two or more speakers of different colours is combined in one subtitle, their speech runs on: i.e. you don't start a new line for each new speaker.

7. However, if two or more WHITE text speakers are interacting, you have to start a new line for each new speaker. Each piece of speech may then be placed underneath the relevant speaker rather than being centred. (See **Identifying Speakers,** p15)

8. Subtitles that are overlaid on the image must not obscure any onscreen graphics that give context to what is being spoken or by whom.

9. If the onscreen graphics are not easily legible because of the streamed image size or quality, the subtitles must include any text contained within those graphics which provide contextual information. This must include the speaker's identity, what they do and any organisations they represent. Other displayed information affected by legibility problems that must be included in the subtitle includes; phone numbers, email addresses, postal addresses, website URLs, or other contact information.

10. If the information contained within the graphics is off-topic from what is being spoken, then the information should not be replicated in the subtitle.

Text

11. Characters should be displayed in double height and mixed (upper and lower) case.

12. Words within a subtitle should be separated by a single space.

13. Preferred fonts are Verdana, Helvetica, Tiresias or FS Me.

INTONATION AND EMOTION

1. To indicate a sarcastic statement, use an exclamation mark in brackets (without a space in between):

e.g.   **Charming(!)**

2. To indicate a sarcastic question, use a question mark in brackets:

e.g.   **You're not going to work today, are you(?)**

3. Use caps to indicate when a word is stressed. Do not overuse this device - text sprinkled with caps can be very hard to read. However, do not underestimate how useful the occasional indication of stress can be for conveying meaning:

e.g.   **It's the BOOK I want, not the paper.**

       I know that, but WHEN will you be finished?

If the word "I" is stressed, make it a different colour from the surrounding text.

4. Use caps also to indicate when words are shouted or screamed:

e.g.   **HELP ME!**

However, avoid large chunks of text in caps. They are hard to read because the words have no shape.

5. To indicate whispered speech, a label is most effective. However, when time is short, place brackets around the whispered speech:

e.g.   **WHISPERS:**
        Don't let him near you.

or: **(Don't let him near you.)**

If the whispered speech continues over more than one subtitle, brackets can start to look very messy, so a label in the first subtitle is preferable.

Brackets can also be used to indicate an aside, which may or may not be whispered.

6. Indicate questions asked in an incredulous tone by means of a question mark followed by an exclamation mark (no space):

e.g.   **You mean you're going to marry him?!**

ACCENTS

1. Subtitlers should not indicate accent as a matter of course, but only where it is relevant for the viewer's understanding. This is rarely the case in serious/straight news reports, but may well be relevant in lighter factual items. For example, you would only indicate the nationality of a foreign scientist being interviewed on **Horizon** or the **Nine O'Clock News** if it were relevant to the subject matter and the viewer could not pick the information up from any other source, e.g. from their actual words or any accompanying graphics. However, in a drama or comedy where a character's accent is crucial to the plot or enjoyment, the subtitles must establish the accent when we first see the character and continue to reflect it from then on.

2. When it is necessary to indicate accent, bear in mind that, although the subtitler's aim should always be to reproduce the soundtrack as faithfully as possible, a phonetic representation of a speaker's foreign or regional accent or dialect is likely to slow up the reading process and may ridicule the speaker. Aim to give the viewer a *flavour* of the accent or dialect by spelling a few words phonetically and by including any unusual vocabulary or sentence construction that can be easily read. For a Cockney speaker, for instance, it would be appropriate to include quite a few "caffs", "missus" and "ain'ts", but not to replace every single dropped "h" and "g" with an apostrophe.

3. You should not correct any incorrect grammar that forms an essential part of dialect, e.g. the Cockney "you was". A foreign speaker may make grammatical mistakes that do not render the sense incomprehensible but make the subtitle difficult to read in the given time. In this case, you should either give the subtitle more time or change the text as necessary:

e.g.   **I and my wife is being marrying four years since and are having four childs, yes**

This could be changed to:

I and my wife have been married four years and have four childs, yes

4. The speech text alone may not always be enough to establish the origin of an overseas/regional speaker. In that case, and if it is necessary for the viewer's understanding of the context of the content, use a label to make the accent clear:

e.g.   **AMERICAN ACCENT:**
                              All the evidence points to a plot.

DIFFICULT SPEECH

1. Unscripted speakers often ramble on, in sloppily constructed sentences or sentences that never end. Remember that what might make sense when it is heard might make little or no sense when it is read. So, if you think the viewer will have difficulty following the text, you should make it read clearly. This does not mean that you should always sub-edit incoherent speech into beautiful prose. You should aim to tamper with the original as little as possible - just give it the odd tweak to make it intelligible. (Also see **ACCENTS**, p22)

2. However, this is more applicable to factual content, e.g. News and documentaries. Do not tidy up incoherent speech in drama when the incoherence is the desired effect.

3. If a piece of speech is impossible to make out, you will have to put up a label saying why:

e.g.   **DRUNKEN SPEECH**

or: **SLURRED SPEECH**

Avoid subjective labels such as "**UNINTELLIGIBLE**" or "**INCOMPREHENSIBLE**" or "**HE BABBLES INCOHERENTLY**".

INAUDIBLE SPEECH AND SILENCE

Inaudible Speech

Speech can be inaudible for different reasons. The subtitler should put up a label explaining the cause.

e.g. **APPLAUSE DROWNS SPEECH**

TRAIN DROWNS HIS WORDS

MUSIC DROWNS SPEECH

HE MOUTHS

Silence

Long speechless pauses in can sometimes lead the viewer to wonder whether the subtitles have failed. It can help in such cases to insert explanatory text such as:

NTRODUCTORY MUSIC

or

LONG PAUSE

or

ROMANTIC MUSIC

HESITATION AND INTERRUPTION

1. If a speaker hesitates, do not edit out the "**ums**" and "**ers**" if they are important for characterisation or plot. However, if the hesitation is merely incidental and the "**ums**" actually slow up the reading process, then edit them out. (This is most likely to be the case in factual content, and too many "**ums**" can make the speaker appear ridiculous.)

2. When the hesitation or interruption is to be shown within a single subtitle, follow these rules:

(a) To indicate a pause within a sentence, insert three dots at the point of pausing, then continue the sentence immediately after the dots (i.e. without leaving a space).

e.g. **Everything that matters...is a mystery**

(b) If the speaker simply trails off without completing a sentence, put three dots at the end of his/her speech. If s/he then starts a new sentence, no continuation dots are necessary.

e.g. **Hello, Mr... Oh, sorry! I've forgotten your name**

(c) If the unfinished sentence is a question or exclamation, put three dots (not two) before the question mark or exclamation mark.

e.g. **What do you think you're...?!**

(d) If a speaker is interrupted by another speaker or event, put three dots at the end of the incomplete speech.

(e) You may need to show a pause between two sentences within one subtitle - for example, where a phone call is taking place and we can only witness one side of it, there may not be time to split the sentences into separate subtitles to show that someone we can't see or hear is responding. In this case, you should put two dots immediately before the second sentence.

e.g. **How are you? …Oh, I'm glad to hear that.**

3. When the hesitation occurs in the middle of a sentence that is split across two subtitles, do the following:

(a) Where there is no time-lapse between the two subtitles, put three dots at the end of the first subtitle but no dots in the second one.

e.g. **I think...**
 I would like to leave now.

(b) Where there *is* a time-lapse between the two subtitles, put three dots at the end of the first subtitle *and* two dots at the beginning of the second, so that it is clear that it is a continuation.

e.g. **I'd like...**

      ...a piece of chocolate cake

NB *Remember that dots are only used to indicate a pause or an unfinished sentence. You do not need to use dots every time you split a sentence across two or more subtitles.*

4.   If a speaker speaks very slowly or falteringly, break your subtitles more often to avoid having slow subtitles on the screen. However, do not break a sentence up so much that it becomes difficult to follow.

5.   If a speaker stammers, give some indication (but not too much) by using hyphens between repeated sounds. This is more likely to be needed in drama than factual content. Letters to show a stammer should follow the case of the first letter of the word.

e.g. **I'm g-g-going home**

      or

      W-W-What are you doing?   (NOT: *W-w-what are you doing?*)

CUMULATIVES

1. A cumulative subtitle consists of two or three parts - usually complete sentences. Each part will appear on screen at a different time, in sync with its speaker, but all parts will have an identical out-cue.

2. Cumulatives should only be used when there is a good reason to delay part of the subtitle (e.g. dramatic impact/song rhythm) and no other way of doing it - i.e. there is insufficient time available to split the subtitle completely.

This is most likely to happen in an interchange between speakers, where the first speaker talks much faster than the second. Delaying the speech of the second person by using a cumulative means that the first subtitle will still be on screen long enough to be read, while at the same time the speech is kept in sync.

3. Cumulatives are particularly useful in the following situations:
(a) For jokes - to keep punch lines separate
(b) In quizzes - to separate questions and answers
(c) In songs - e.g. for backing singers. They are particularly effective when one line starts before the previous one finishes
(d) To delay dramatic responses (However, if a response is not expected, a cumulative can give the game away)
(e) When an exclamation/sound effect label occurs just before a shot-change, and would otherwise need to be merged with the preceding subtitle
(f) To distinguish between two or more white speakers in the same shot

Timings
4. Avoid having any segment of the cumulative on screen for less than one second, unless it is a music clip

5. The total reading time should always be sufficient for the overall duration of the subtitle (except music clip)

6. Make sure that there is sufficient time to read the final part of a cumulative

7. You will often find that a cumulative has to go onto three lines, when the amount of text, if merged, would fit onto two. In this case, aim for a timing of at least 5:12 seconds

8. If you use cumulatives in children's content, observe children's timings

Shot-Changes
9. Be wary of timing the appearance of the second/third line of a cumulative to coincide with a shot-change, as this may cause the viewer to reread the first line

Visuals

10. Remember that using a cumulative will often mean that more of the picture is covered. Don't use cumulatives if they will cover mouths, or other important visuals

11. Stick to a maximum of three lines unless you are subtitling a fast quiz like University Challenge where it is preferable to show the whole question in one subtitle and where you will not be obscuring any interesting visuals

HUMOUR

In humorous sequences, it is important to retain as much of the humour as possible. This will affect the editing process as well as when to leave the screen clear.

1. Try wherever possible to keep punchlines separate from the preceding text.

2. Where possible, allow viewers to see actions and facial expressions which are part of the humour by leaving the screen clear or by editing. Try not to use reaction shots containing no speech in order to gain time.

3. Never edit characters' catchphrases.

4. Puns should be clearly indicated in your subtitle. Writing the relevant word in upper case is the most effective way to do this:

e.g. In a fish and chip shop one character says, *"***Your PLAICE or mine?***"*

CHILDREN'S SUBTITLING

Timing

1. There are two ranges of standard timings for children's content, generally based on the Cbeebies and CBBC brands. However, there may be occasions when the timing range for a particular age group is not appropriate for its content, so a producer/assistant producer should determine which timing range is appropriate for each item. The usual timings are:

(a) **Cbeebies:**
    4-5 seconds for 1 line,
    8-10 seconds for 2 lines.

(b) **CBBC:**
    3-3.5 seconds for 1 line,
    6-7 seconds for 2 lines.
.
2. There will be occasions when you will feel the need to go faster or slower than the standard timings - the same guidelines apply here as with adult timings (see **Timing, p7**). You should however avoid inconsistent timings e.g. a two-line subtitle of 6 seconds immediately followed by a two-line subtitle of 8 seconds, assuming equivalent scores for visual context and complexity of subject matter.

3. More time should be given when there are visuals that are important for following the plot, or when there is particularly difficult language.

Syntax and Vocabulary

4. Do not simplify sentences, unless the sentence construction is very difficult or sloppy.

5. Avoid splitting sentences across subtitles. Unless this is unavoidable, keep to complete clauses.

6. Vocabulary should not be simplified.

7. There should be no extra spaces inserted before punctuation.

MUSIC AND SONGS

Music

1. All music that is part of the action, or significant to the plot, must be indicated in some way. If it is part of the action, e.g. somebody playing an instrument/a record playing/music on a jukebox or radio, then write the label in upper case:

e.g.　　**SHE WHISTLES A JOLLY TUNE**

　　　　POP MUSIC ON RADIO

　　　　MILITARY BAND PLAYS SWEDISH NATIONAL ANTHEM

2. If the music is "incidental music" (i.e. not part of the action) and well known or identifiable in some way, the label begins "MUSIC:" followed by the name of the music (music titles should be fully researched). "MUSIC" is in caps (to indicate a label), but the words following it are in upper and lower case, as these labels are often fairly long and a large amount of text in upper case is hard to read.

e.g.　　**MUSIC: "The Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy"**
　　　　by Tchaikovsky

　　　　MUSIC: The Swedish National Anthem

　　　　MUSIC: "God Save The Queen"

　　　　MUSIC: A waltz by Victor Herbert

(The Swedish National Anthem does not have quotation marks around it as it is not the official title of the music.)

3. Sometimes a combination of these two styles will be appropriate:

e.g.　　**HE HUMS "God Save The Queen"**

　　　　SHE WHISTLES "The Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy"
　　　　by Tchaikovsky

4. If the music is "incidental music" but is an unknown piece, written purely to add atmosphere or dramatic effect, do not label it. However, if the music is not part of the action but is crucial for the viewer's understanding of the plot, a sound-effect label should be used:

e.g.　　**EERIE MUSIC**

Songs

5. Song lyrics are almost always subtitled - whether they are part of the action or not. Every song subtitle starts with a white hache mark (#) and the final song subtitle has a hache mark at the start and the end:

e.g.   **# These foolish things remind me of you #**

There are two exceptions:

(a) In cases where you consider the visual information on the screen to be more important than the song lyrics, leave the screen free of subtitles.

(b) Where snippets of a song are interspersed with any kind of speech, and it would be confusing to subtitle both the lyrics and the speech, it is better to put up a music label and to leave the lyrics unsubtitled.

6. Song lyrics should generally be verbatim, particularly in the case of well-known songs (such as *God Save The Queen*), which should never be edited. This means that the timing of song lyric subtitles will not always follow the conventional timings for speech subtitles, and the subtitles may sometimes be considerably faster.

If, however, you are subtitling an unknown song, specially written for the content and containing lyrics that are essential to the plot or humour of the piece, there are a number of options:

(**a**) edit the lyrics to give viewers more time to read them, or

(**b**) combine song-lines wherever possible, or

(**c**) do a mixture of both - edit and combine song-lines.

NB: If you do have to edit, make sure that you leave any rhymes intact.

7. Song lyric subtitles should be kept closely in sync with the soundtrack. For instance, if it takes 15 seconds to sing one line of a hymn, your subtitle should be on the screen for 15 seconds.

8. Song subtitles should also reflect as closely as possible the rhythm and pace of a performance, particularly when this is the focus of the editorial proposition. This will mean that the subtitles could be much faster or slower than the conventional timings.

There will be times where the focus of the content will be on the lyrics of the song rather than on its rhythm - for example, a humorous song like *Ernie* by Benny Hill. In such cases, give the reader time to read the lyrics by combining song-lines wherever possible. If the song is unknown, you could also edit the lyrics, but famous songs like *Ernie* must not be edited.

9. Where shots are not timed to song-lines, you should either take the subtitle to the end of the shot (if it's only a few frames away) or end the subtitle before the end of the shot (if it's 12 frames or more away).

10. All song-lines should be centred on the screen.

11. It is generally simpler to keep punctuation in songs to a minimum, with punctuation only within lines (when it is grammatically necessary) and not at the end of lines (except for question marks). You should, though, avoid full stops in the middle of otherwise unpunctuated lines:

e.g.   **# Turn to wisdom. Turn to joy**
      There's no wisdom to destroy

This could be changed to:

      # Turn to wisdom, turn to joy
      There's no wisdom to destroy

In formal songs, however, e.g. opera and hymns, where it could be easier to determine the correct punctuation, it is more appropriate to punctuate throughout.

12. The last song subtitle should end with a full stop, unless the song continues in the background.

13. If the subtitles for a song don't start from its first line, show this by using two continuation dots at the beginning:

e.g.   **# ..Now I need a place to hide away**

      # Oh, I believe in yesterday. #

Similarly, if the song subtitles do not finish at the end of the song, put three dots at the end of the line to show that the song continues in the background or is interrupted:

e.g.   **# I hear words I never heard in the Bible... #**

SOUND-EFFECT LABELS

1. As well as dialogue, all editorially significant sound effects must be subtitled. This does not mean that every single creak and gurgle must be covered - only those which are crucial for the viewer's understanding of the events on screen, or which may be needed to convey flavour or atmosphere, or enable them to progress in gameplay, as well as those which are not obvious from the action. A dog barking in one scene could be entirely trivial; in another it could be a vital clue to the story-line. Similarly, if a man is clearly sobbing or laughing, or if an audience is clearly clapping, do not label.

2. Sound-effect labels are not stage directions. They describe sounds, not actions:

e.g. **GUNFIRE**
      (not: THEY SHOOT EACH OTHER)

3. A sound effect should be typed in white caps. It should sit on a separate line and be placed to the left of the screen - unless the sound source is obviously to the right, in which case place to the right.

4. Sound-effect labels should be as brief as possible and should have the following structure: subject + active, finite verb:

e.g. **FLOORBOARDS CREAK**
      (not: "CREAKING OF FLOORBOARDS" or "FLOORBOARDS CREAKING")

      JOHN SHOUTS ORDERS
      (not: "ORDERS ARE SHOUTED BY JOHN")

5.   Do not put up a sound-effect label for something that can be subtitled. For instance, if you can hear what John is saying, the second example in (4) would not be necessary.

6. If a speaker speaks in a foreign language and in-vision translation subtitles are given, use a label to indicate the language that is being spoken. This should be in white caps, ranged left above the in-vision subtitle, followed by a colon. Time the label to coincide with the timing of the first one or two in-vision subtitles. Bring it in and out with shot-changes if appropriate.

e.g. **IN JAPANESE:**
             I live in Tokyo.

If there are a lot of in-vision subtitles, all in the same language, you only need one label at the beginning - not every time the language is spoken. If the language spoken is difficult to identify, you can use a label saying "TRANSLATION:", but only if it is not important to know which language is being spoken. If it is important to know the language, and you think the hearing viewer would be able to detect a language change, then you must find an appropriate label.

7. The way in which subtitlers convey animal noises depends on the content style. In factual wildlife, for instance, lions would be labelled in the following way:

LIONS ROAR

However, in an animation or game, labels can look bland and wooden, and subtitlers should endeavour to convey animal noises phonetically. For instance, "**LIONS ROAR**" would become something like:

Rrrarrgghhh!

8. Where possible, allow slightly more reading time for a label than for a speech subtitle - an extra second is sufficient.

NUMBERS

Spelling Out

1. Unless otherwise specified below, spell out all numbers from one to ten, but use numerals for all numbers over 10.

2. Spell out any number that begins a sentence.

3. Spell out any non-emphatic numbers.

   (a) She gave me hundreds of reasons

4. Numerals over 4 digits must include appropriately placed commas.

5. If there are more than 1 number appears in a sentence or list, it may be more appropriate to display them as numerals instead of words.

   (a) On her 21st birthday party, 54 guests turned up

6. For sports, competitions, games or quizzes, always use numerals to display points, scores or timings.

Dates

7. For displaying the day of the month, use the appropriate numeral followed by lowercase "th", "st" or "nd".

Money

8. Use the numerals plus the £ sign for all monetary amounts except where the amount is less than £1.00
For amounts less than £1.00 the would "pence" should be used after the numeral

9. If the word "pound" is used in sentence without referring to a specific amount, then the word must be used, not the symbol.

Time

10. Indicate the time of the day using numerals in a manner which reflects the spoken language:

   (a) The time now is 4:30

   (b) The alarm went of at 4 o'clock

Measurement

11. Never use symbols or for units of measurement, however abbreviations can be used if the use of longer names of measurement.

12. If the unit of measurement is the subject, then you must not use abbreviations or symbols.