

Behind the Art of Subtitling

Subtitling goes beyond mere transcription of spoken dialogue. Crafting effective subtitles involves the skill of conveying the video's message in an artistic manner. When working on subtitles, the goal is to convey the speaker's message, ensuring that each caption imparts meaning. Even if you can't hear the audio and rely solely on visuals, you should still grasp the full message.

Creating subtitle standards involves adhering to various guidelines. Here are some key considerations:

Duration for Reading Subtitles

Naturally, individuals read at different speeds, but here are general guidelines to keep in mind when creating subtitles:

For a single line of text, allow 4-4.5 seconds for reading (age range: 6-14).

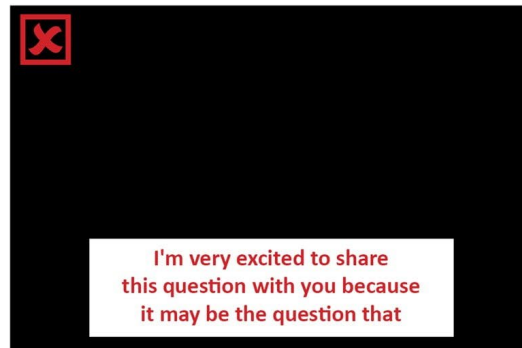
For a single line of text, allocate 3-3.5 seconds (age range: 14-65).

Two lines of text should be displayed for 8-9 seconds (age range: 6-14).

For two lines of text, aim for 6-7 seconds.

Number of Lines

Limit subtitles to a maximum of two lines to avoid cluttering the screen. Three-line subtitles can obscure too much of the visual content.



Character Limit per Line

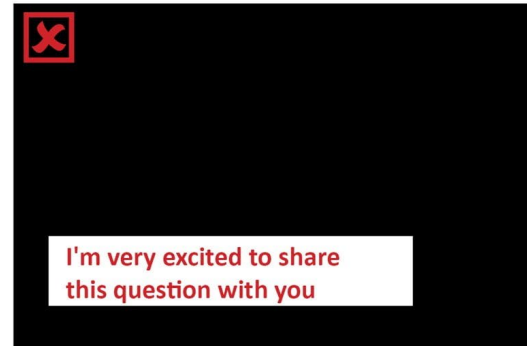
Each subtitle line should not exceed 42 characters, including spaces. Keep in mind that some languages, like German and Russian, require more space than English. For translated subtitles, stick to a limit of 35 characters, including spaces, to ensure proper fit and appearance.

Text Alignment

Center-align subtitle text on the screen and within the lines. This reduces the distance the reader's eye must travel to begin reading the subtitle. The only exception is dialogue text, which can be left-aligned on the screen and preceded by an "N-dash" before the speaker's line.

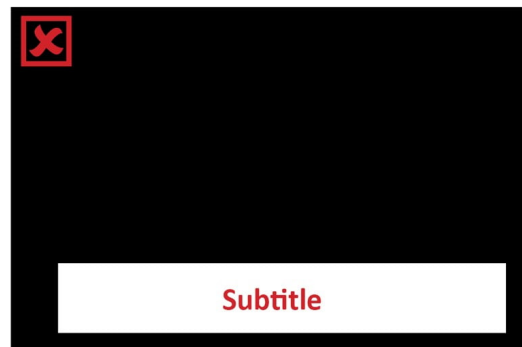
- How are you, Sam?

- Going well, John



Screen Placement

Position subtitles in the lower part of the screen, leaving sufficient space on both sides and at the bottom to respect screen safety margins.



Font Choices: Bold, Underline, and Italic

Avoid using bold and underline formatting in subtitles. Italics are acceptable only when indicating off-screen dialogue or noises, such as conversations happening out of view.

Font Color and Background

Best practice is to use white font on a gray background. However, background usage is infrequent, especially in movies. In such cases, add a text stroke to maintain visibility if the screen turns white.

Code of Good Subtitling Practice

When it comes to subtitling, the following practices should be followed:

- Subtitlers should have access to the production, dialogue lists, and glossaries of unusual words.
- Translation quality should consider idiomatic and cultural nuances.
- Simple sentence structures should be used.
- Subtitle text should be organized logically and grammatically.
- Maintain appropriate language register.
- Ensure grammatical correctness for literacy modeling.
- Translate and incorporate important written information from images.
- Subtitle "superfluous" information for hearing-impaired viewers.
- Subtitle songs when relevant.
- Sync subtitle timing with dialogue rhythm and film pacing.
- Limit subtitles to two lines.
- Correlate film dialogue with subtitle content.
- Acknowledge the subtitler in the film credits.
- Display the year of subtitle production and copyright information at the end of the film version.