

Digital Subtitling Guidelines

- Stagetext advocates equal access for deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people through captions and subtitles. We never edit or alter the visual soundtrack from the spoken word.
- Subtitling is the means of creating a visual soundtrack; descriptions should be fact based and remain in the world of the play/video.
- The text should always be verbatim, styled as the person speaks, and where possible each caption syntactically self-contained.
- Once you've finished subtitling your video, watch the whole video on mute. Are you getting equal access?

Key	Definition	Example
1	References	Work with the copy of the text if possible, or dialogue list and glossary of atypical words and special references. Script, speaker and place names, specialist vocabulary, sound effects.
2	Subtitle line length	Average subtitle length is 42 characters. No more than 2 lines per subtitle. If possible the bottom line should be longer so as to not interfere with the image. When necessary to edit dialogue to fit on screen within a set time, text must be coherent.
		Remove unnecessary words such as: really, just, perhaps, that, quite, who, was, which
5	Translate the whole idea	Each subtitle should be syntactically self-contained. Keep pronouns and verbs together. It's actually quiet calm. Look at the clouds.
6		Names, off-screen interjections etc., should also be subtitled.
7	Minimum duration	Subtitles should be visible for at least 1 second.
8		Subtitles follow the rhythm of speech, matching the soundtrack. This helps people who lipread.
9	Maximum timing offset	Subtitles shouldn't start more than 0.5 seconds before or after the audio begins.
10	Maximum duration	Split subtitles lasting more than 7 seconds. Subtitles are more easily read if they stay within the shot.
11	Sounds	Describe meaningful sounds that are relevant to the plot/subject. Sound-effect labels should be as brief as possible and should have the following structure: subject + active, finite verb: FLOORBOARDS CREAK NOT: CREAKING OF FLOORBOARDS
12		Sound effects are notated in all CAPS inside square brackets, in the present tense, inside the world of the play / video. [DOOR BELL RINGS]
13		Onomatopoeia grrrrrrrrrrr
14		SFX description [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER]
15		SFX description & Onomatopoeia [BEE BUZZES] BZZZZZZZZZZZZ
16		Audience noise should be specified, with round brackets (AUDIENCE LAUGHTER)

17	Music	Describe relevant music which does not have lyrics, in Capital letters with a musical note(♫) or octothorpe (#).	[♫ BLUES HARMONICA ♫] OR [# BLUES HARMONICA]
18		Where the name and artist are known include both, title of the piece followed by author or performer.	[♫ FIFTH SYMPHONY - BEETHOVEN ♫]
19	Lyrics	Wrap relevant lyrics in musical notes. The musical notes (♫) identify when the singing starts and ends.	♫ Somewhere over the rainbow Way up high ♫
20	Speech	Emphasis, avoid capital letters, use italics.	- I will <i>not</i> leave!
21		Vocal effect description should be factual rather than interpretive. In all caps inside brackets.	[WHISPER] or [SHOUTS] (SLURRED): But I love you!
22	Sarcasm	Use a question mark in brackets.	You're not going to work today, are you (?) OR Charming(!)
23	Foreign Accent	Give a flavour of the accents, where possible rather than every word spelled phonetically.	- [FRENCH ACCENT] M'sieur, don't mock me
24	Off-Screen Voices	Off-screen voices, indicated by either a label or single quote or combination of the two.	- ATTENBROUGH: 'The pelican swoops'
25	Hesitation	Three dots (...) show a pause in speech / sound.	- The painting was ... beautiful!
26	Stuttering	Attempt to give the meter of speech, repeating letters where necessary.	I'm g-g-going home OR W-W-What are you doing?
27	Strong Language	Strong language should not be edited unless it is also bleeped out for hearing audience.	- What the F...(BLEEP) do you think you are doing.
28	Multiple speakers	Each speaker should have one line, and each lines should have a hyphen (-).	- Is there no remedy? -None, but such remedy as
29	Speaker identification	Identify off-screen and unclear speakers in parentheses.	WILLIAM: Wait for me!
30	Numbers	Numbers between one and nine should be written in words	- Five people waited outside.
		Information normally as figures such as telephone numbers, house numbers should be retained as figures.	+44 (0)20 7377 0540 OR 54 Commercial Street
		A time is written in standard form. The passing of time is written in words.	12:45 am. 3:00. Seven Minutes, twenty-three years, twelve days.
		Money can vary depending on space.	Fifty pence. £300. Twenty-three pounds. £18.36
34	Use meaningful speech	Exclude things like “um” “ah” and other disfluencies.	
35	Difficult speech	If a piece of speech is impossible to make out, label factually. Avoid subjective labels such as unintelligible, incomprehensible, or he babbles.	[DRUNKEN SPEECH] OR [SLURRED SPEECH]
36	Indicate inaudible parts	If the audio is inaudible, clarify in bracket.	[INAUDIBLE]
37	Foreign language	Verbatim, written phonetically.	- Thank you for having us, namaste.
Translation			
39	On-screen texts	Translate the texts on the video that are relevant to the plot/story.	
40	Foreign language	Identify relevant speech in foreign language.	- [RUSSIAN]: Thank you.