Subtitle file formats and specification

These requirements apply only to new English language subtitle files originated from scratch. Reversioned or acquired material may be submitted as-is, in any mutually agreed format. (e.g. STL, SCC, XML/DFXP or similar.)

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS:

Subtitle files should be submitted as Closed Teletext level 1 Subtitles in the .STL (EBU 3264) file format. Files must always match the timecode and frame rate of the video material.

Maximum 35 characters per screen line, maximum 3 lines per subtitle. (2 lines preferred.)

Minimum 1-frame separation between subtitles (e.g. time OUT to next IN)

The following fields in the GSI header block should be set:
Original Programme Title – e.g. *Inside Halfords*
Original Episode Title – e.g. *SLI Batteries, Part 2*
Subtitle List Reference Code – should contain the item's Media ID (e.g. *C5/35525/0017L*)

Code Page Number 850 (Multilingual) should be used.

Where coloured text is used in subtitles, no more than TWO different colours may be used on any single screen line. Exceeding this will cause incorrect display on DTT. No more than three colour changes should occur on any single screen line – exceeding this will cause incorrect display on DSAT.

Subtitles may be positioned on any row from 1 to 22, although rows 4-13 should not be used due to IMM QC requirements. All text should be standard teletext double height.

CONTENT REQUIREMENTS:

Subtitles should be created in English SDH format, accurately representing all spoken dialogue and other sounds heard in the programme soundtrack, to a standard which would be reasonably accepted by UK audiences and the UK broadcast regulator OFCOM.

Subtitles should be positioned so as to avoid obscuring on-screen captions, faces, or any action occurring in the lower third of the screen (especially common in animation.)

Any music should be identified (e.g. "MUSIC: 'I Want You Back' – The Jackson 5") and lyrics subtitled. The # symbol should be used to indicate singing. (e.g. # La La La #)

STYLISTIC PREFERENCES:

Subtitles utilising coloured text should only use WHITE, YELLOW, CYAN and GREEN. PURPLE may be used in isolation as a highlight, but not routinely for character dialogue. BLUE and RED should not be used as a foreground text colour. Use of background colour is generally not recommended, for compatibility with online platforms.

Ideally colours should not be mixed on a screen line – try to render different speakers on different screen lines whenever possible. If changing colour mid-line is unavoidable, be sure to observe the limits outlined in the Technical Requirements. Avoid changing colour more than once on a line.

Subtitles will generally be default centre positioned at the bottom of the screen, but may use specific positioning if necessary or desirable.