



# Subtitling Style Guide

## Spanish, Latin American (ES-LA)



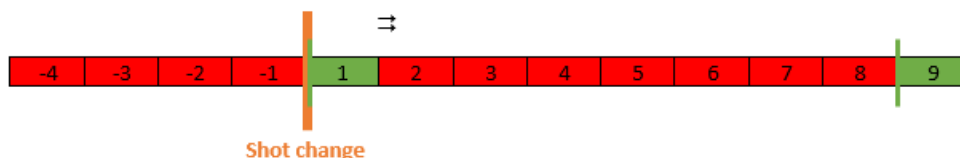
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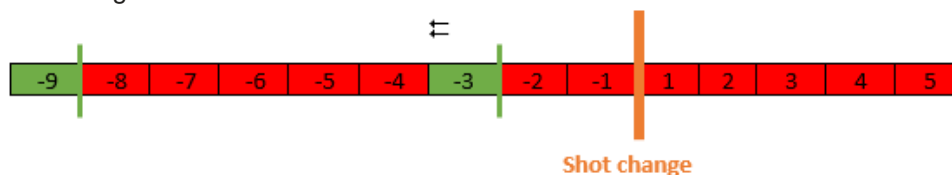
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## Technical dimension

- T1. Video framerate**
  - T1.1 All videos run at 25 frames per second (fps).
- T2. Line limitations**
  - T2.1 42 characters per line (cpl).
  - T2.2 Maximum of 2 lines.
- T3. Text formatting**
  - T3.1 Font type: Arial.
  - T3.2 Font size: point 30.
  - T3.3 Font colour: white.
- T4. Background**
  - T4.1 Do not use background for only a few subtitles. If a few subtitles need a box (background), then add the box to all the subtitles in the video.
- T5. Positioning**
  - T5.1 Horizontal: center-aligned.
  - T5.2 Vertical: bottom of the screen.
  - T5.3 Subtitles should be moved to the top of the screen to avoid overlap with onscreen text or other important information contained in the images. Do not position subtitles in the middle of the screen or either left or right.
  - T5.4 In long opening credit sequences, avoid switching back and forth between bottom-and top-positioned subtitles and stick to the same position throughout the sequence as much as possible. In these cases, it is recommended to keep all subtitles aligned at the top.
- T6. Maximum display rate**
  - T6.1 18.0 characters per second (cps). Please be very mindful of this limit and never exceed it.
- T7. Minimum subtitle duration**
  - T7.1 The minimum duration of a subtitle on screen is 1 second.
- T8. Maximum subtitle duration**
  - T8.1 The maximum duration of a subtitle on screen is 6 seconds.
  - T8.2 In exceptional cases only, e.g., for song lyrics, the maximum duration can be exceeded to a total of up to 7 seconds.
- T9. Minimum gap between subtitles**
  - T9.1 Leave a minimum gap of 2 frames between subtitles.
- T10. Timing (see T12 Chaining subtitles)**
  - T10.1 Subtitles should be timed to audio (within 3 frames).
  - T10.2 If extra time is needed for reading speed, the out-time can be extended by a maximum of 12 frames after the end of audio.
- T11. Spotting around shot changes**
  - T11.1 Where dialogue starts on the shot change, or within 8 frames past the shot change, set the in-time to coincide with the shot change:



T11.2 If the out-time is within 8 frames before the shot change, extend the out-time so that the subtitle leaves the screen two frames before the actual shot change:



## T12. Chaining subtitles

T12.1 In the case of consecutive subtitles, any gaps of 3 to 11 frames inclusive must be closed to 2 frames (chained subtitles). That is, the gap can be either 2 or a minimum of 12 frames.

# Linguistic dimension

## L1. Line treatment

- L1.1 Text should normally be kept to one line unless it exceeds the character limitation, in which case the subtitle should be broken in no more than two lines.
- L1.2 Line breaks, within and across subtitles, should be syntactically segmented, keeping linguistic units together.
- L1.3 In some cases, to enhance readability, it may be justified to use two lines even if the text is shorter than 42 characters. For instance, to break up syntactical units when a subtitle consists of two or more phrases, to highlight rhyming patterns (e.g., poetry and songs) or to follow the line break of an onscreen message:

*Sin haberlo deseado,  
la canción he rimado.*

- L1.4 Avoid having long sentences run over more than 3 or 4 subtitles. If possible, try to merge subtitles together, or break the sentence into several, shorter units.
- L1.5 Avoid leaving one word in one line and the rest of the dialogue in the next line:

Cálmate  
o no vamos a conseguir nada.

## L2. Neutral Spanish

- L2.1 For Latin American subtitles, use Neutral Spanish. This is a variation of Spanish that does not use lexical and grammatical structures specific of a single country or region in Latin America. When creating subtitles in Neutral Spanish, please refer to official resources, such as CORPES by RAE or the *Diccionario de americanismos*, to verify that the terms you're using can be understood by most of the Latin American audience. When deciding what's

neutral and what's not, please consider the number of countries where such words and expressions can be understood, keeping in mind that Latin America as a whole is made up of 21 countries. Make sure your choices are as inclusive as possible so that the subtitles can be understood in most countries.

- L2.2 Examples to further understand what is expected:
- The usage of *voseo* is limited to very few countries in Latin America, namely Argentina and Uruguay, and should be avoided. Instead, use *tú* or *usted*, as needed.
  - As per the *Diccionario de americanismos*, the term *remera* [t-shirt] is mainly used in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Paraguay, and *playera* [t-shirt] is a regionalism found in Mexico and Nicaragua. For Neutral Spanish we should go for the term *camiseta*, which is used in most of the other Latin American countries.
  - For terms like *carro* or *coche* [car], which have the clear neutral term *automóvil*, please refrain from using a regional version, even though that version is understood in a wide range of countries.

### L3. Abbreviations

- L3.1 The use of abbreviations should be avoided, except in very specific cases, such as when abbreviating relevant titles like "doctora," but only in combination with a name:

Te presento a la Dra. Bueno.  
BUT:  
Es mi doctora de cabecera.

### L4. Symbols

- L4.1 Only use symbols such as km/h or % when they're frequently repeated throughout a show. Otherwise, spell them out.
- L4.2 Add a space between a number and a symbol. Check the updated version of the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* to see a list of all accepted Spanish symbols.

Nos quedan menos de 15 km para llegar.

- L4.3 The currency symbol comes before the number, without a space:

\$20 €99

- L4.4 Avoid using the \$ symbol to talk about Argentinian or Mexican Pesos, for instance. In those cases, always write down the name of the currency.
- L4.5 Symbols are invariable (20 h, not \*20 hs or \*20 H) and, unlike other types of abbreviations, do not need to be followed by a period (750 ml, not \*750 ml.).
- L4.6 Acronyms in Spanish should follow the latest RAE rules for capitalization, spacing, accents, and plurals: [www.rae.es/dpd/sigla](http://www.rae.es/dpd/sigla)

### L5. Dual speakers

- L5.1 Use a hyphen without a space to indicate two speakers in one subtitle, with a maximum of one speaker per line:

-¿Quieres que llame al médico?  
-Sí, enseguida.

- L5.2 Always use the shorter hyphen (-), as opposed to the en- and em-dashes (\*— and \*—).

### L6. Italics

- L6.1 Titles of albums, books, films, and audiovisual productions.

- L6.2 Foreign words unless they are part of regular usage or included in the *Diccionario de la lengua española*. Remember to always check the latest version as what you might know from the past could have been modified.
- L6.3 Dialogue that is heard through electronic media, such as a phone, television set or computer, or through any other devices that modify the original voice of a character, such as voice changer device.
- L6.4 Song lyrics and recited poems.
- L6.5 Voiceovers and off-screen narration, unless all the content consists of off-screen speech. Only use italics when the speaker is not in the scene(s), not merely off screen or off camera. Do not use italics if the speaker comes back on screen before the end of the dialogue in any given subtitle.
- L6.6 The voice of a visible character expressing unspoken thoughts, flashbacks, or inner monologue.
- L6.7 Do not use italics to indicate emphasis on specific words.

## L7. Numbers

- L7.1 From 0 to 10, numbers should be written out, unless there are space or time limitations, in which case figures can be used:

uno      cinco      nueve

- L7.2 From 11 and above, numbers should be written numerically, except *cien* and *mil*:

13      23      37

- L7.3 Do not combine numbers with letters (*\*11 mil*), except for millions and billions:

11 millones

- L7.4 Four-digit numbers should not use spaces or separators:

3500 dólares

- L7.5 Use a space as a thousand separator for five-digit numbers and above:

60 000      333 333

- L7.6 Use a period for decimals, as this is standard practice in Neutral Spanish:

7.5      23.81

- L7.7 Do not start a subtitle with a number. If necessary, flesh out the number:

Diecisiete casas son muchas casas.

## L8. Time

- L8.1 Use a colon with times:

19:35      2:45

- L8.2 Use the 24-hour format to indicate the time rather than “a. m.” and “p. m.” as per the most recent RAE spelling rules.

- L8.3 In informal contexts, time can also be expressed in letters, unless there are space and/or time limitations:

Llevo aquí desde las siete.

## L9. Dates

- L9.1 Dates must be expressed with numerals, in the following Spanish standard format:

Nació el 23 de abril de 1977.

## L10. Currency and measurements

- L10.1 Do not convert currency unless required by the context.  
L10.2 Always convert measurements to the metric system, unless leaving the original units is required by the context/images, or there are instructions to keep the original units:

kilómetros (km)      grados Celsius (°C)      kilogramos (kg)

## L11. Hyphenation

- L11.1 Do not split words with a hyphen over two lines.

## L12. Quotation marks

- L12.1 English or straight double quotation marks without spaces should be used: " ", rather than \*« ».

- L12.2 Direct speech is introduced by a colon, followed by double quotation marks and capital case:

Le dijo: "Estoy harta de tanto frío".

- L12.3 Use double quotation marks without spaces for regular citations, making sure that the closing quotes end before the full stop:

Nos dijo: "Vengan mañana".

"Maribel no quiso romper el silencio".

- L12.4 If a quote carries over more than one subtitle, quotation marks should be used only at the start and at the end of a quote:

"El sol se levantaba en el horizonte,  
la lluvia seguía cayendo,  
y los pájaros seguían en sus nidos".

- L12.5 Book chapters, articles and song titles should be in double quotation marks:

Me encanta la canción "Al alba".

- L12.6 Use double quotation marks without spaces for agrammatical phrases, neologisms, made-up expressions, and speech impediments or disorderly speech, if relevant for the plot, and when someone is imitating another person or placing special emphasis on a particular word or phrase.

- L12.7 Use double quotation marks without spaces when a character reads out or quotes someone else.

- L12.8 Use double quotation marks without spaces when employing metalinguistic references:

El nombre "traduceplantillas"  
es muy común en el sector audiovisual.

- L12.9 When using quotation marks within other quotation marks, use single quotation marks ( ' ') within double quotation marks ( " "):

Dijo: "Tengo el corazón 'partío' por ti".

### L13. Continuity

- L13.1 Do not use ellipsis (three dots) or dashes when an ongoing sentence is split between two or more consecutive subtitles:

Subtitle 1:

Luego hay que aclarar la diferencia

Subtitle 2:

entre el "tú" singular  
y el "ustedes" colectivo.

- L12.2 Use ellipses between subtitles only to indicate a pause of two seconds or more.

### L14. Continuity (interruptions)

- L14.1 Check all correct uses of ellipses as per *Ortografía de la lengua española*, in addition to all uses described in this section.

- L14.2 Use an ellipsis to indicate abrupt interruptions:

Al final no supo si él había... Es inútil.

- L14.3 Use an ellipsis to indicate a pause in the delivery of the original, an intentional or accidental suspension of a part of the sentence, or an abrupt interruption:

No sé... tengo que pensarlo.

- L14.4 Use an ellipsis, without a space, to indicate that a subtitle is starting mid-sentence, e.g., when a character turns on the radio:

...y también por la tarde habrá lluvias.

- L14.5 Ellipses can be used when an utterance is interrupted by another character or by a forced narrative:

Example 1:

El subtitulado...

¡Cuidado, una bicicleta!

...es muy importante.

Example 2:

Te he dicho mil veces...

- ¡Cuidado, un coche!

- ...que no cruces sin mirar.

### L15. Profanity and taboo language

- L15.1 The original content's dialogue must never be censored in the translated version. Expletives should be rendered as faithfully as possible, without using dialects or words that would otherwise introduce a level of obscenity not implied in the original dialogue. Original register should be accurately reproduced in the target language.

Example 1:

Original: Damn hospitals.

Suggestion: Malditos hospitales.

Avoid: Hospitales de mierda.



Example 2:  
 Original: Fucking cancer.  
 Suggestion: *Cáncer de mierda.*  
 Avoid: *Maldito cáncer.*

L15.2 Original intent and context should play a big part when conveying dialogue that can easily be mistranslated literally as an offensive/racial slur or expression that is not present in the original content or that can, on the other hand, produce watered down or censored renditions:

Example 1:  
 Original: Yo nigger! Sup?  
 Suggestion: *Ey, compa, ¿qué hay?*  
 Avoid: *¡Oye, negro! ¿Qué hay?*

Example 2:  
 Original: Wetbacks take our jobs.  
 Suggestion: *Los mojados nos quitan el trabajo.*  
 Avoid: *Los indocumentados nos quitan el trabajo.*

L15.3 When translating into Latin American Spanish, always remember that if you're using words or phrases that are specific to one Latin American country only, you're leaving out people from all the other countries. Even if you think that a term is widely known across countries, if it's a term only used by people in a given country, that term is not valid. Always check CORPES and other similar resources to see if the term is used by most Latin American speakers.

## L16. Titles

- L16.1 Titles of published works, existing movies, and TV shows: if available, use official or well-known translations that have been used in most of Latin America. If no title is available, leave it in the original language.
- L16.2 Capitalization of titles: only the first letter of the title should be capitalized:

*Se compró **El señor de los anillos.***

## L17. Songs

- L17.1 Songs are only subtitled if they are relevant to the plot or part of the film (e.g., a character performs a song).
- L17.2 Italicize lyrics.
- L17.3 If coinciding with dialogue, dialogue always takes precedence over song lyrics, unless in very rare cases where lyrics may be more relevant than the dialogue.
- L17.4 Follow regular Spanish punctuation and capitalization rules. Use commas, periods, exclamation and question marks as and when appropriate.
- L17.5 When translating songs, keep both rhymes and meaning.
- L17.6 If Anglicisms or foreign words are used in lyrics, inverted italics should be used to highlight them:

***Mi novia cantaba jazz  
 y yo tocaba en un grupo de rock.***

## L18. On-screen text

- L18.1 On-screen text should be translated when it is relevant and not redundant and does not coincide with dialogue. On-screen text becomes redundant when spelling is identical in both languages. However, the on-screen text must be translated if the Spanish text contains accents, punctuation or anything that sets it apart from the English one, as the text should always adhere to Spanish language rules.
- L18.2 On-screen text should be in ALL CAPS, except for written passages (e.g., excerpts from books, magazines or newspapers, handwritten notes, social

media messages and text messages), which must match the use of uppercase/lowercase as it appears on screen.

- L18.3 To improve readability, sentence case can be used for long passages of on-screen text (e.g., long written passages used as prologue or epilogue occupying five or more subtitles in total).

**L19. General recommendations**

- L19.1 It is a quite common mistake in subtitling, particularly for Latin American Spanish, to copy structures, phrases, idioms, and so on, from English into the target language. These will be considered as severe errors in the exam. Try to create a translation that sounds as natural as possible and make it as creative as needed. Consider the following examples:

Source	Literal translation	Natural translation
That's the type of businessman us bankers actually approve of.	Ese es el tipo de empresario que los banqueros respaldamos en verdad.	Esa es la clase de empresario que nos gusta a los banqueros.
Not too bad.	Nada mal.	Interesante.
We want to make sure that we destroy that doll.	Queremos asegurarnos de destruir esa muñeca.	La muñeca debe quedar destruida.
I wouldn't bet on that.	Yo no apostaría por eso.	No creo que suceda.
I think we should stop seeing each other.	Creo que deberíamos dejar de vernos.	Deberíamos separarnos.

- L19.2 Translate all the original utterances, no matter how clear they might sound to the Spanish speaking audience.
- L19.3 Avoid including the translation of filler phrases such as *you know, I think, like*, and so on.
- L19.4 Do not translate proper names unless specifically required by the plot or for some humorous effect. Only nicknames that carry meaning should be translated.
- L19.5 Do not duplicate or mix exclamation and question marks.
- L19.6 Do not create subtitles repeating two or more times a phrase or word uttered by a character unless those instances are separated by at least half a second.