



Subtitling Style Guide

Chinese, Cantonese (ZH-CAN)

 EN ZH
CAN

Date: 20th April 2025

Please ensure that you always consult the latest Style Guide, by visiting the certification website on <https://avtpro.oona.net>

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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 18 characters per line (cpl).

T2.2 Maximum of 2 lines.

T3. Text Formatting

T3.1 Font type: SimHei.

T3.2 Font size: point 35

T3.3 Font colour: white

T4. Background

T4.1 Use a subtitle background to enhance the visibility of subtitles where appropriate.

T5. Positioning

T5.1 Always position either top or bottom center. Never have subtitles in any other position.

T5.2 Subtitles should be moved to the top of the screen if there is text in the lower third of the screen (e.g., credits) or other important information contained in the images.

T5.3 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.

T5.4 In cases where the entire screen is covered with text, choose the option that causes the least disruption to the viewer.

T6. Maximum display rate

T6.1 9.0 characters per second (cps).

T6.2 The absolute maximum you are allowed to go is 12.0 cps, but only in a limited number of cases (see T6.3).

T6.3 If need be, up to a maximum of 10% of the subtitles in any given file can be over the reading-speed limit, that is, between 9.1 and 12.0, but remember that no display rate should be 12.1 cps or above.

T7. Minimum subtitle duration

T7.1 The minimum duration of a subtitle on screen is 1 second.

T7.2 In exceptional cases only, e.g., for only one word, the minimum duration can be 20 frames.

T8. Maximum subtitle duration

T8.1 The maximum duration of a subtitle on screen is 7 seconds.

T8.2 In exceptional cases only, e.g., for song lyrics, the maximum duration can be exceeded up to 8 seconds.

T9. Minimum gap between subtitles

T9.1 Leave a minimum gap of 2 frames between subtitles.

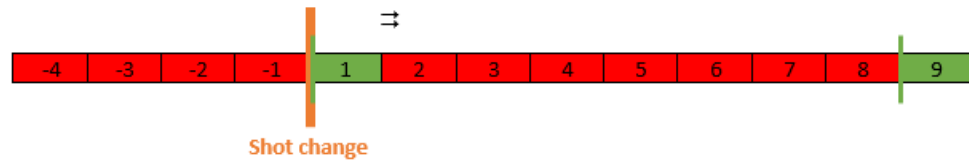
T10. Timing (see T12 Chaining subtitles)

T10.1 Subtitles should be timed to audio (within 3 frames).

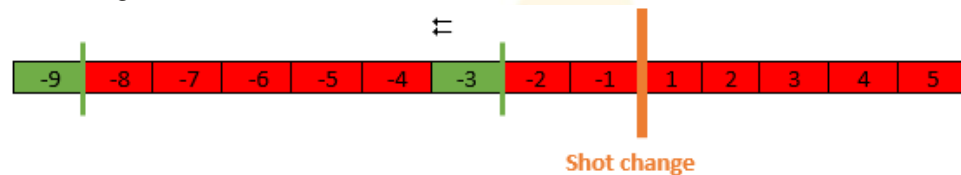
T10.2 If extra time is needed for the reading speed, the out-time can be extended by a maximum of 12 frames after the end of audio, (if it doesn't cause the event to cross a shot change and look awkward).

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.
- L1.2 Line breaks, within and across subtitles, should be syntactically segmented, keeping linguistic units together.
- L1.3 If possible, the bottom line should be longer than the top line, provided you do not violate L1.2.
- 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.

L2. Proper Names

- L2.1 Do not translate proper names (e.g., John, Mary) unless requested, otherwise transliterate.
- L2.2 Only translate nicknames if they have a specific meaning or are well-known and have official Chinese equivalents:

Donal Duck = 唐老鴨

- L2.3 Use local language translations for historical/mythical characters:

Santa Claus = 聖誕老人

- L2.4 Translate brand names to a generic term if the brand is unknown in Chinese and is relevant to context:

Q-tips = 棉花棒

- L2.5 If an official Chinese name does not exist for an actual organization or brand, such as YouTube, Instagram or Xbox, leave it in its source language.
- L2.6 Special terms, whose Chinese translation is not used in Hong Kong, should remain in English:

Disney+, Marvel Studios, Marvel

- L2.7 If the character is introduced in a forced narrative, always use the following format regardless of onscreen format:

Jimmy Fallon – Host
(主持 吉米法倫)

- L2.8 Do not use a Chinese mid-line period separator (·)

L3. Dual speakers

- L3.1 Use a hyphen without a space to indicate two speakers in one subtitle, with a maximum of one speaker per line:

-明白?
-好, 收到

- L3.2 Always use the shorter hyphen (-), as opposed to the en- and em-dashes (*— and *—).

L4. Acronyms

- L4.1 English acronyms should be translated where time and character count permits:

Premier League = 英超 for 英格蘭足球超級聯賽

- L4.2 Commonly known English acronyms can be kept and should be written without periods (e.g., DJ, DNA, CD).

L5. Italics

- L5.1 Do not use Italics.

L6. Repetitions

- L6.1 Do not translate words or phrases repeated more than once:

Run, run, run!
快走

- L6.2 If the word or phrase is said twice in a row, time to audio but do not repeat the translation.

- L6.3 This rule may be disregarded if the context intentionally uses repetition for emphasis or comedic effect.

L7. Numbers

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

— = 三

L7.2 From 11 and above, numbers should be written numerically:

13 239 3768

L7.3 Use common writing characters for large numbers, not characters used in finance:

Correct	Incorrect
五千, 四十億 etc.	壹, 貳, 參, etc.

L7.4 When counting, Arabic numerals (0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9) are preferred for readability, and they should be in single-byte fonts.

L7.5 Chinese numerals (零 一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九) are used for Chinese set phrases.

L7.6 Use Western digits for apartment / street / phone / chapter / page / flight numbers, measurements, monetary amounts, addresses, dates and times.

L7.7 Use half width numbers (1, 2, 3) instead of full width numbers (1, 2, 3).

L7.8 Do not mix Western digits with Chinese number characters:

Correct	Incorrect
五千二百, 四億三千萬	五千 2 百, 四億 3 千萬

L7.9 Do not use Western digits for days of the week.

L7.10 Four-digit numbers should not use spaces or separators:

3500 歐元

L7.11 Sometimes, both Arabic and Chinese systems can be used in the same line, just like Roman numerals and Arabic numerals could be used together:

Season 1, Episode 16	第一季, 第 16 集
Chapter III, Section 1	第三章, 第 1 節

L8. Time

L8.1 Use a colon with times:

11:35 2:45

L8.2 For rounded times, use Chinese characters:

五點

L8.3 Use the 12-hour format to indicate the time and translate "am" and "pm" into Chinese, based on the time of the day:

凌晨五點 下午一點 晚上 8:25

L9. Dates

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

她 1997 年出生

L9.2 Always write years in full four-digit form.

L9.3 Do not abbreviate years.

L9.4 Decades and centuries should be written as follows:

1820 年代, 1970 年代, 17 世紀, 21 世紀

L10. Currency and measurements

- L10.1 Do not convert currency unless required by the context.
- L10.2 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:

Kilometers 公里 Celsius 度 Kilograms 克 Centimeters 厘米

- L10.3 For percentages, always write in Arabic numerals and use the percentage sign (e.g., 97%).

L11. Punctuation

- L11.1 Only use full width Chinese punctuation, except for the hyphens in dual speakers subtitles or the periods in abbreviations (e.g., M.B.A.).
- L11.2 Do not use commas, colons or periods at the end of a sentence.
- L11.3 Do not use semicolons.
- L11.4 「」 can be used to highlight euphemisms, sarcasm, nicknames, special and hidden meanings.
- L11.5 Use a full-width colon for quoted speech, an explanation or an example.
- L11.6 Enumeration commas can be used for lists:

“提子、牛油果、士多啤梨”

- L11.7 Use question marks for questions.
- L11.8 Only full-width exclamation/question marks are allowed at the end of a line.
- L11.9 Single-byte punctuation should be used for the following cases:
 - A) As dialogue dashes: - (same as English).
 - B) As part of a code, e.g., B-612
- L11.10 Do not use double exclamation/question marks (e.g., !!, ??, !?).

L12. Quotation marks

- L12.1 When quoting words of others, use full-width (:) and (「 」) without spaces:

愛迪生：「我從失敗走向成功」

- L12.2 , \ ; ? ! ... can be used inside 「 」
- L12.3 。 should be omitted.
- L12.4 Always have 「 and 」 in the same subtitle box. When a quote carries over several subtitles, use open and end quote for each line/quote:

Subtitle 1	林良曾說：「朋友能增長你的知識」
Subtitle 2	「擴充你的生活經驗」
Subtitle 3	「所以朋友真像是一本一本的好書」

- L12.5 Use single quotation marks (“ ”) for quotes within quotes. If the whole sentence is in quotes, the punctuation mark comes before the quotation mark:

他問我：「 ‘炒魷魚’ 是甚麼意思？ 」

- L12.6 If only a portion of a sentence is in quotes, the punctuation comes after the quotation mark:

「終極任務」指的是什麼？

- L12.7 Use 「」 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:

意思是「對當下想法的覺察」

L13. Continuity

- L13.1 When including ellipses in subtitles, use the single smart character (U+2026 / alt+1033) instead of three dots/periods.
- L13.2 Do not use ellipses or dashes when an ongoing sentence is split between subtitle events:

Subtitle 1	你有60秒時間
Subtitle 2	說服他們投資你的生意

- L13.3 Use an ellipsis to indicate abrupt interruptions:

Subtitle 1	我請了假...
Subtitle 2	幾時?

- L13.4 Use an ellipsis to indicate a significant pause (2 seconds or more) or dialogue trailing off:

Subtitle 1	所以...
Subtitle 2	所以...你要執生

- L13.5 In the case of a pause (2 seconds or more), if the sentence continues in the next subtitle event, do not use an ellipsis at the beginning of the next event:

Subtitle 1	所以...
Subtitle 2	你要執生

- L13.6 Use ellipsis, without a space, to indicate that a subtitle is starting mid-sentence, e.g., when a character turns on the radio:

...吹和緩東至東北風

L14. Profanity and taboo language

- L14.1 Foul language is often toned down or replaced with softer, less offensive words in Cantonese subtitles, without using dialects or words that would otherwise introduce a level of obscenity not implied in the original dialogue.
- "Shit" might be translated as 弊, 慘了 or 糟糕, instead of using a direct vulgar equivalent.
 - "Fuck" could become 去你的 or 混蛋, rather than a literal vulgar term.
- L14.2 If the foul language does not significantly impact the meaning, it might be omitted entirely in the subtitles:

What the hell are you doing?
你到底搞乜鬼?

- L14.3 If a word has been censored in the audio use an ellipsis to indicate the censored word:

你他媽...!

L15. Titles

- L15.1 Titles of published works, existing movies and TV shows: if available, use official or well-known translations. If none are available, leave titles in the original language.
- L15.2 Title brackets 《 》 are used by default for titles of books, songs, magazines and movies.
- L15.3 Exception: 《 》 could be omitted if the main title contains the title of another show:

THE MAKING OF DEADPOOL	《死侍》製作特輯 (Adding extra 《 》 may cause confusion.)
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L16. Songs

- L16.1 Songs are only subtitled if they are relevant for the plot or part of the film (e.g., a character performs a song).
- L16.2 If coinciding with dialogue, whatever is more plot-pertinent should be subtitled.
- L16.3 Never combine a line of a song with dialogue in the same event.

L17. Text on screen

- L17.1 Text on screen should be translated when it is relevant and not redundant, and does not coincide with dialogue.
- L17.2 If there is simultaneous, plot-pertinent speech, and no time to accommodate both spoken and written text, subtitling the dialogue should be given priority.
- L17.3 Use Chinese parentheses for onscreen text:

SYDNEY, 1998	(悉尼, 1998 年)
WELCOME TO San Francisco	(歡迎光臨三藩市)
George Lucas Writer, Star Wars	(佐治盧卡斯) (《星球大戰》編劇)

Exceptions:

1. If the onscreen text is the English subtitles of a line spoken in a foreign language.
2. If it is a show title alone and 《 》 is used.

- L17.4 If the forced narrative is split between two or more subtitles, use parentheses at the beginning and end of each subtitle.
- L17.5 Ensure that forced narratives do not cover onscreen text. In the event, there is onscreen text at the top and bottom, place the forced narrative in the location easiest to read. If both locations are identically difficult, then place the event at the bottom.
- L17.6 Never combine a forced narrative with dialogue in the same event.
- L17.7 If a forced narrative interrupts dialogue, use an ellipsis without a space at the end of the preceding event and at the beginning of the following event:

Subtitle 1	我是安德魯卡蒙道
Subtitle 2 (FN):	...(安德魯: PAIR)
Subtitle 3:	...來自華盛頓特區

- L17.8 In the case of documentaries, only translate a speaker's title once, the first time the speaker appears in the documentary.
- L17.9 Do not subtitle disclaimers unless given explicit instructions to do so.
- L17.10 Emoji treatment

a) When emojis appear as onscreen text, translate the meaning of the emoji:

I ♥ HK

我愛香港

- b) For emojis contained within sentences, that could be difficult to transcribe into words, translate the sentence making sure the adaptation carries along the intention and meaning of the emoji:

So sad you didn't come yesterday 🙄💩

可惜你昨天沒來！

- c) If translating both the text and the meaning of the emoji would exceed the character limit, give priority to translating the on-screen text and do not translate the emoji.
- d) When there is only an emoji, or a series of emojis, and no visible text, do not add any subtitles if the meaning of the emojis is understood in your territory.

L18. Special instructions

- L18.1 Always translate as faithfully as possible. Do not use words that would introduce a level of obscenity not implied in the content.
- L18.2 Deliberate misspellings and mispronunciations should not be reproduced in the translation unless plot pertinent.
- L18.3 Specify if the person spoken to is female/male/animal/deity: 他、她、牠、祂、它。
- L18.4 Always use the gender-neutral second-person pronoun 你, unless instructions to the contrary are given.