



Original Content QA Lab: Subtitling Guidelines

ZH-HK

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Reading Speed

- 17 EN characters = around 9 Chinese characters per second for most programming/Adult.
- 13 EN characters = around 7 Chinese Characters per second for programming intended for children 6 and under.

Duration

- Minimum duration for subtitles is 20 frames.*
- Maximum duration for subtitles is 7 seconds.

*Reading speed should always be considered. Avoid reading-speed violations whenever possible.

Repetitions

- Do not translate words or phrases repeated more than once.
- If the repeated word or phrase is said twice **in a row**, time subtitle to the audio, but translate only once.

Intervals

- A minimum of 2-frame intervals should be used between continuous subtitles.

Character Limitations

- 41 EN characters = around 21 Chinese characters per line.

Timing + Duration

Text should be timed closely to the beginning and end of audio when possible. However, it's acceptable for subtitles to stay on-screen for up to a second after audio ends to meet reading-speed requirements.

Avoid subtitles that:

- Are not in sync with the audio
- Start well in advance of the corresponding audio (approximately 7 frames or more)
- Stay on-screen for too long (more than a second after dialogue ends or more than 7 seconds total)
- Flash on-screen too briefly to read

Line Treatment

Subtitles should occupy 2 lines maximum. If the subtitle exceeds one line, both lines should be of comparable length. Line breaks should ideally match a logical break in the dialogue, i.e. after a punctuation mark, or before a preposition or conjunction.

Positioning

- Standard positioning is center-justified, at the bottom of screen.

If subtitles obscure pertinent text that appears in the lower third of the screen, or if overlapping with lower-third text will cause subtitles to become illegible, then they should be moved to the top of the screen.

Titling Dialogue

Dialogue should be subtitled as faithfully as possible within the limits of reading speed. And plot-pertinent dialogue always takes precedence over background dialogue.

- When reading speed is exceeded, dialogue should be truncated without sacrificing or altering its intended meaning.
- Non-essential dialogue should generally be truncated first (verbal hedgers such as "Well," or "You know," for example).
- Conversely, subtitles should not add or rewrite dialogue for clarity.
- Do not title stand-alone utterances/exclamations such as oh, whoa, or wow. These can be titled when part of a larger sentence.

Dual Speakers

Use a hyphen to indicate two speakers in the same subtitle. No space should appear between hyphens and dialogue.

EXAMPLE:

Subtitle 1: -聽起來好像幫派
Subtitle 2: -死肥仔客串韋史密夫

Continuity

Do not use ellipses when an ongoing sentence is split between two or more continuous subtitles. Commas should be used as usual when appropriate.

CORRECT:

Subtitle 1: 你有没有曾經從密西西比河以西

Subtitle 2: 最高的建築物頂樓眺望過？

INCORRECT:

Subtitle 1: 你有没有曾經從密西西比河以西...

Subtitle 2: ...最高的建築物頂樓眺望過？

Use an ellipsis to indicate:

- Dialogue that trails off
- Dialogue that begins mid-sentence (To indicate mid-sentence pick-ups)
- A significant pause (one second or more)
- To indicate a pause or an abrupt interruption. In the case of a pause, if the sentence continues in the next subtitle, do not use an ellipsis at the beginning of the second subtitle.
- An interruption to the dialogue caused by on-screen text (see section "On-screen text").

EXAMPLE 1:

Subtitle 1: -但你說...

Subtitle 2: -我知道他說什麼

EXAMPLE 2:

Subtitle 1: -今天的天氣很...

Subtitle 2: -她很漂亮

On-screen Text

Provide subtitles for all plot-pertinent on-screen text. This includes narrative text (text that is part of principal photography) and burn-in text (text that has been added in post-production).

For on-screen text that includes details about the speaker, only subtitle their title (translate as appropriate). Do not subtitle speaker details that are redundant, such as the speaker name, the name of their company, or the name of their character.

- Forced narrative titles should only be included if plot pertinent.
- Forced narratives that are redundant (e.g., identical to onscreen text or covered in the dialogue) must be deleted.
- Never combine a forced narrative with dialogue in the same subtitle.
- When a forced narrative interrupts dialogue, use an ellipsis at the end of the sentence in the subtitle that precedes it and at the beginning of the sentence in the subtitle follows it.
- Use Chinese parentheses for on-screen text.

EXAMPLE:

Subtitle 1: -我最愛海灘，因為...

Subtitle 2: - (導演)

Subtitle 3: -...在海裏游泳最好了

Note: On-screen text and dialogue always have to be on separate subtitles (as shown above).

Character Names

- When confirming the names of songs, albums, cast & crew, movies/TV shows, or apps, please remain consistent with how they appear in Apple Music and iTunes.
- Nicknames should only be translated if they convey a specific meaning or if their localized name is generally used and well-known in HK. Do not use made-up nickname from social website.

Example:

CORRECT: "Elvis" for "貓王"

CORRECT: "超音鼠" for "SONIC"

INCORRECT: "Puffy Daddy" for "吹牛老爹"

INCORRECT: "Notorious B.I.G." for "聲名狼藉"

- Translate historical or popular characters if there is a localized name (e.g. "聖誕老人" for "Santa Claus").
- Apply localized spelling conventions for IP-protected names and terms (e.g. "米奇老鼠" for "Mickey Mouse").
- When introducing a cast member in a narrative, regardless of the on-screen presentation, always use the following format: James Cameron – Director = (導演 占士金馬倫)

Glossaries

- Keep a glossary of recurring terms and names to ensure consistency across episodes and seasons.
- Glossaries should also include templates for recurring opening- and end-credits sequences when necessary.

Quotes

- Use full-width quotation marks.
- Quotes: Double quotation marks (") without spaces.

Example:

Subtitle: 那句“我們開始療傷吧”

- Single quotation marks (') for quotes within quotes.

Example:

Subtitle: 他問：“老師，‘有條不紊’的‘紊’是甚麼意思？”

- Quotes should be used at the start and end of a sentence and not at the start of every subtitle.
- When a whole sentence is in quotes, the punctuation mark comes before the quotation mark.

Example:

Subtitle: 他問：“老師，‘有條不紊’的‘紊’是甚麼意思？”

Expletives

- Match the audio. Do not censor at will. If the expletive is audible, title the word.
- If the expletive is bleeped, muted, or censored in any way, title the first letter of the word and represent the rest of the word with asterisks.

EXAMPLE:

Subtitle: 這真是太他***聰明了。

Foreign Dialogue

Foreign dialogue should only be translated if it is plot-pertinent and meant to be understood by the viewer (i.e., if it was subtitled in the original version).

Non-essential foreign dialogue should not be titled if it stands alone. If non-essential foreign dialogue is part of a larger English sentence, then it can be titled.

Foreign words or phrases should be translated when possible (i.e. hello, goodbye, thank you, merci) or transliterated when no accurate translation exists.

EXAMPLE:

Subtitle: 我有一段時間要跟所有甜品說 arrivederci 了。

Italics

- Do not use italics.

Numerals

- Chinese numbers from 1 to 10 should be written out if space permits: 一 二 三
- Use half-width numbers (1, 2, 3) instead of full-width numbers (1 , 2 , 3).
- Do not use a comma to separate the thousandth digit where there are only four digits.
- Do not use financially used characters (壹, 貳, 參, etc) to represent rounded large numbers, use characters for common writing instead (e.g., 五千, 四十億).
- Use Arabic numerals for apartment numbers, street numbers, phone numbers, measurements, chapter numbers, monetary amounts, page numbers, addresses, time, flight numbers, dates.
- Convert to the metric system: kilometers (km), centimeters (cm), meters (m), kilograms (kg).
- Money: Do not convert currency to HKD (e.g., \$10 > 10元; £20 > 20英鎊; ¢25 > 2毫半).

Punctuation

Follow standard official rules.

- Curly double-byte quotation marks should be used for dialogue and written text that is quoted, recited from memory, or read.
- When punctuation marks are part of the quoted material, they should be placed inside the quotation marks.
- If quoted text continues over several subtitles, quotation marks should only be used at the very beginning and very end of the quote (not at the beginning of each subtitle within the quote).
- Use single quotes for a quote within a quote.
- Do not use commas or as. Use one single space instead.
- Enumeration commas can be used for lists (e.g. “A、B、C”).
- No period at the end of subtitle.

Example:

Subtitle: 樽主要是用紙造的(。)

- Separate two sentences using comma. If they are too long in one row, it is better to separate into two rows.

Example:

Subtitle 1: 這個應用程式很有貼心，而且很人性化

Subtitle 2: Johnny曾在那裏住過一段時間(，)
和我在同一間高中讀書(。)

- Only question marks or exclamation marks are allowed at the end of a line/subtitle.

Example:

Subtitle: 你真有趣！

Subtitle: 一起唱《The Wire》好嗎？

- Use a full-width colon to introduce quoted speech (e.g., 我問：“你有什麼問題？”).
- A colon may be used to introduce an explanation or an example (e.g., 日期：1976年8月27日)
- Use a full-width question mark or exclamation mark when necessary.
- Do not use:
 - A question mark with an exclamation mark (!?)
 - Double question marks (??)

- Double exclamation marks (!!)
- Please use guillemets (《》) for name of album, song, TV show and movie, newspapers, magazines, books.

Example:

Subtitle: 他們的單曲名稱是 《Come and Talk to Me》

- No spacing in between English and Chinese characters

Example:

Subtitle: Lightspeed是一間很出色的創投公司

Songs

Song lyrics should generally **not** be titled unless they are actuated on-screen and plot-pertinent. Plot-pertinent doesn't simply mean thematically relevant—it means that the lyrics convey information that is necessary for a viewer's understanding of the plot.

- No end punctuation should be used when titling lyrics, except for question marks or exclamation points when appropriate.
- Commas should be used as usual within lyrics, but not at the end of a line. Only question marks and exclamation marks should be used.
- Do not use italics or quotes for song lyrics.
- Use an ellipsis when a song continues in the background but is no longer subtitled to give precedence to dialogue.

CORRECT:

Subtitle:

你當我是浮誇吧 誇張只因我很怕

INCORRECT:

Subtitle:

你當我是浮誇吧！誇張只因我很怕。

Translation Credits

There should not be a subtitle for a translation/translator credit.

Common Issues in Traditional Chinese-HK subtitles

1. Do not use informal or oral expressions or words, e.g. “唔”, “咁”, “嚟”, “喇”, “呢度”, “個陣” & “嘅”, etc. Language should be consistent with that used by HK mainstream multimedia, e.g. TVB Pearl, ViuTV or RTHK. Please use the same tone as in the App Store and Apple Music.

EXAMPLE:

CORRECT: 這裏的人思想開明

INCORRECT: 呢度嘅人思想開明

CORRECT: 我也不知道他吃了什麼東西

INCORRECT: 我都唔知道佢食咗咩嘢

2a. Don't translate a name of an artist, street or company to Traditional Chinese, except for those well-known or official names in HK.

EXAMPLE:

CORRECT: 布魯克林 (Brooklyn), 三藩市 (San Francisco), 豐田汽車 (Toyota), Coca-Cola (可口可樂) and 米高積遜 (Michael Jackson), etc.

CORRECT: The Honest Company

INCORRECT: 誠實公司

CORRECT: Lightspeed Venture Partners

INCORRECT: 光速創投

2b. Use the HK local term instead of using a TWN (Taiwan) or CN (China) term.

EXAMPLE:

INCORRECT: 舊金山 (San Francisco), 澳大利亞 (Australia), “酷” (cool), “棒” (great), “麥可傑克森” (Michael Jackson) and “葛萊美” (GRAMMY®), etc.

ENG: Australia

CORRECT: 澳洲

INCORRECT: 澳大利亞

ENG: GRAMMY®

CORRECT: 格林美

INCORRECT: 葛萊美

ENG: The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (Drama)

CORRECT: 茶煲表哥

INCORRECT: 新鮮王子妙事多

ENG: Ali (Movie)

CORRECT: 阿里傳

INCORRECT: 叱吒風雲

2c. While encountering an English name or term that is uncommon or has no official Chinese equivalent in HK, please leave it as is in English.

EXAMPLE:

CORRECT: Bradley Gifford

INCORRECT: 彼特利吉福德 (This is a TWN Chinese name, which is translated based on Putonghua pronunciation, so we keep it as English.)

CORRECT: Morton Street

INCORRECT: 冒頓街

ENG: Holmby Hill

INCORRECT: 荷爾貝山

3. Avoid the following TWN or CN expression/terminology, unnatural construction, and awkward grammar and syntax (examples below). It is better to translate subtitles that are natural and smooth for Cantonese. The subtitle's coherence and term consistency are important too.

EXAMPLE:

CORRECT: 常常被拒絕

INCORRECT: 常常被打槍

CORRECT: 數碼時間囊

INCORRECT: 數位時空膠囊

CORRECT: 售賣同樣商品

INCORRECT: 販售同樣商品

CORRECT: Johnny曾在那裏住過一段時間

INCORRECT: 強尼在那裏待了有一段時間

TWN term and awkward syntax

CORRECT: Slim性格沉靜

INCORRECT: 斯林姆屬於安靜型的

Awkward syntax

CORRECT: 我還在上學的時候

INCORRECT: 當我年輕還在學校時

4. Pay attention to English idioms. Reader might get confused by the incorrect meaning, if an idiom is translated literally.

EXAMPLE:

ENG: I'm trying to shoot for the moon here.

CORRECT: 我想訂下更遠大目標

INCORRECT: 我想摘下月亮