# English SDH Files (Subtitles for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired) and Closed Captions (2/2025 V4)

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| ***Note: SDH is similar to Closed Captions in that the file contains verbatim dialogue, character IDs and plot-relevant sound effects. SDH text is center justified and locked in the lower bottom third of the screen. Unlike CC files, SDH text cannot be positioned. The Character Line Limit is 42 and can be no more than 2 lines.*** |

**Updates in red**

* **\*READING SPEED:**

Adults: 20 characters per second / 180-200 wpm (220 wpm max)

Children: 17 characters per second / 120 wpm max.

***Note: Spaces are counted as characters.***

1 line is typically 1-3 seconds

2 lines are typically 3-7 seconds

* **CHARACTER LINE LIMIT:** 42
* **LINE COUNT:** 2 lines is the industry standard and preferred, but, if needed to avoid an awkward break or timing constraints, a speaker ID and/or sound effect could make a 3rd line:

-[tires screeching]

- We have to go now or they’ll find us.

Grab your things! Hurry!

Always ensure the addition of a 3rd line does not cause the subtitle to cover a character’s mouth or a plot-relevant item.

* **MINIMUM GAP:** 2 frames
* **DURATIONS:** Minimum 20 frames, Maximum 7 seconds. Optimal for one full line of text is 2 seconds. Optimal for two full lines of text is 4 seconds.

**\*Reading speed fluctuates with the delivery of the dialogue. If there is time before or after dialogue, starting the subtitle 2-4 frames early is fine, as long as it doesn’t go over a shot cut. The guidelines in this document are for USA English. Character count/wpm could differ with non-EN languages.** Please see Language-specific style guides.

**Please consult your Amazon representative for any clarifications or questions.**

**Overview of general guidelines:**

* **If program content or format has a creative stance that could alter the normal specs/guidelines laid out in this document, e.g., a long duration of inaudible dialogue, please flag and contact the Amazon Representative for guidance.**
* Verbatim dialogue as spoken.
* Convey plot-pertinent background noises and sounds to the fullest extent possible.
* Sound effects should not be included if the sound/source is clear and non-ambiguous.
* Plot-pertinent dialogue always takes precedence over background dialogue.
* Do not censor dialogue.
* \*When editing for reading speed, do not paraphrase, but condense via text reduction.
* SDH must coincide with the corresponding spoken words and sounds and must be displayed on-screen at a speed that can be read by viewers.
* SDH must run from the beginning to the end of a program.
* SDH must not block other important visual content.
* Raise subtitle text to top of screen to avoid clashing with on-screen text or graphics in lower third of the screen.

**\*Proper editing should maintain both the original meaning, content, essential vocabulary, and meet presentation rate requirements.**

**SPEAKER IDs:** All speaker identifications should be mixed case if a **proper noun**, lowercase if not, and inside brackets before the line of dialogue. While this is the general rule, always confirm with supplied production script or per onscreen talent (for unscripted) as some people do not capitalize their names (e.g. bell hooks):

-[Barbara] What are you doing?

-[person 1] Get out of the way!

Do not identify a character until they are named by another character or by another method, i.e., a nametag, a sign, or any other text that identifies the character. Also, if possible, if the person is not identified by name, try to get specific with their role on screen, i.e., [classmate 1], [high schooler 1], [store shopper 1], etc.

If a speaker is in a scene but not visible and starts to talk, if he/she is visible mid-sentence, no need to italicize if it’s obvious the same person is speaking.

**DIALOGUE:** All plot pertinent dialogue must be captioned, and takes precedence over background dialogue. Background dialogue must be included if clearly audible, even if it is not in the supplied script. Abridged text is acceptable due to timing and character line limit. Edit down by removing content rather than paraphrasing wherever possible.

* Background dialogue must be indicated with an appropriate identifier—[indistinct chatter]-- if not clearly audible. But be more descriptive as possible: [panicked walla and screams], [excited walla].
* Extraneous dialogue such as “yes,” “no,” “OK,” “thank you,” “oh,” “hey,” “huh” and stand-alone character names should be included. Hesitation utterances such as “er,” “um,” “uh” can be included in SDH files if plot relevant. Use a dash with no space if two characters speak in one event with a maximum of one character speaking per line. Two-speaker lines are center-aligned and center-justified. One speaker lines are center-justified.
* Repetitive dialogue can be included if time permits.

**Both characters on-screen:**

-Wait, Steve.

-What do you want?

**Both characters are in the scene, but one is off-screen:**

-Wait, Steve.

-[Steve] What do you want?

**One character is on-screen on the phone, the other is not on-screen and heard through the phone:**

-When are you coming?

-[John] *I’ll be there in 10 minutes.*

**Do not use ellipsis or hyphens when a sentence is split between two continuous subtitles:**

Subtitle 1: Why would you come here

Subtitle 2: without calling me first?

* **Use two hyphens to indicate abrupt breaks in speech:**

-Don’t do—

-Be quiet!

**Use ellipsis to indicate a pause in between two subtitles or in the same subtitle:**

Subtitle 1: I wanted you to know…

Subtitle 2: I care for you.

Subtitle 1: I need to tell you… but I don’t want you to be alarmed.

Otherwise use correct punctuation:

Subtitle 1: Did you want to be here,

Subtitle 2: or was it a mistake?

**PUNCTUATION:**

* Do not use double spaces.
* Do not overuse exclamation marks.
* Avoid using semi-colons and/or colons. Opt for simple sentence structure to allow quicker reading and easier comprehension.
* Use Interrobangs sparingly. The person should be very excited or shocked, i.e. “You took her where?!”
* Ampersands can be used as an abbreviation. No spaces. For example B&B**.**

**ITALICS:** Italicize dialogue if it is voiceover, or through a device, i.e. phone, television, radio, speaker. **If a person is speaking into a microphone and they are physically in the scene, no need to italicize.** All sound effects should be lowercase and enclosed within brackets: [screeching]

Italicize:

* + Movie titles
  + Book titles
  + Works of art
  + TV shows (for an episode title, use quotation marks)
  + Radio Shows
  + Albums (for a song title, use quotation marks)

Do not italicize poetry. Use quotation marks. **Proper names, such as locations or company names, should not be italicized.**

**SOUND EFFECTS:** should only be included when they are plot-pertinent. ***Important:*** Sound effects should not be included if the sound/source is clear and non-ambiguous: A character is laughing and is onscreen or if you can see someone knocking on a door or turning on a TV or radio.

* Use sound descriptors that capture the mood of a scene, e.g., atmospheric music: [tense music playing] or [vibrant, lively music] or [suspenseful music playing]
* Use a generic identification to describe ambient music. [jazz music playing on radio] [classical music playing through speakers]

**CHARACTER NAMES:** Character name spellings should be verified—especially if there are inconsistencies with supplied materials (i.e., cast list, KNP, production script, and/or end credits). If there are inconsistencies-- or a character name does not appear in the end credits-- further research is preferred before contacting the client for final verification.

**VERIFICATIONS/NOTATIONS:** Notes must be made in the Comments field for cast/crew name verification, character name verification, **\***pronoun verification, song/lyrics client verification, place name verification, brand name verification, episodic consistency timecode reference, feature dialogue timecode reference in bonus, and any to the spec.

***\*Do not assume someone’s gender by their visual representation when identifying a speaker. Ensure that this is verified by the scripts or cast descriptors. If still unsure, contact the Amazon rep.***

**TIMING:** Time to audio, with 2-frames in between events. Subtitles can be spotted in a few frames earlier if extra time is required for IDs. If audio comes in at 12 frames or less before shot change, the in-timecode should begin at shot change. If audio ends 12 frames or less after a shot change, the out-timecode should be two frames before shot change.

**LINE BREAKS:** Line breaks must follow correct syntax if possible.

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| **Correct** | **Incorrect** |
| The flower pot is broken,  and we need a new one. | The flower pot is broken, and  and we need a new one. |

Do not break a prepositional phrase.

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| **Correct** | **Incorrect** |
| The cat jumped  through the hole in the fence. | The cat jumped through  the whole in the fence. |

Do not break an auxiliary verb from the word it modifies

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| **Correct** | **Incorrect** |
| She should have checked  before she left. | She should  have checked before she left. |

Do not break a person’s name or title.

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| **Correct** | **Incorrect** |
| Mr. and Mrs. Doug Carter  are invited to the party. | Mr. and Mrs. Doug  Carter are invited to the party. |

Keep complete sentences on one line, if possible.

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| **Correct** | **Incorrect** |
| The cat jumped.  It landed on a chair. | The cat jumped. It landed  on a chair. |

**DIALECTS AND MISPRONUNCIATIONS:** Dialects and accents are transcribed per audio and scripts, if available. Deliberate misspellings and mispronunciations should be treated in the same way, i.e. per the audio and script. Non-standard dialogue (unusual speech patterns, stammering) must be included or identified.

**FORCED NARRATIVES (FNs):** Forced Narratives are not required for SDH unless there is extensive non-English dialogue and the final proxy is semi-texted, or if on-screen text (principal photography) is in non-English and is plot-pertinent.

* FNs should be in all-caps.
* Duration of the FN subtitle should match the on-screen duration, unless key dialogue overlaps.
* Full SDH files should contain language and speaker tags as needed, but these tags should not be included in the original version FN file.  Any deviation from this specification should be discussed in advance with your Amazon representative.

**NON-OV DIALOGUE:** Whole conversations in a language other than the OV language should not be captioned if there are burn-ins in the texted masters.

* The first time the burn-ins start, an identifier such as [in German] should be included.
* If the language isn’t meant to be understood, an identifier such as [speaking German] should be included at each scene change.
* If unable to determine the language being spoken, use [speaking other language].
* Foreign words should be included in translations with correct spelling and punctuation.
* Accents are acceptable for SDH files, e.g. ë, ï, oe, ù.
* Foreign words or phrases should be italicized unless they have become part of common usage. If the word or phrase exists in the approved reference material unitalicized, it is part of common usage and should not be italicized. Do not italicize foreign locations.

**NUMBERS**: Write-out 1 to 10 (e.g. one, two, three). Represent 11 or above written numerically (e.g. 11, 12, 13). If a number begins a sentence, write it out. These rules are flexible in some cases for aesthetic purposes.

* **Dates** should be written per audio, but no need to include words like “the” or “of.” If the audio is “The 5th of June,” the subtitle would read, “5th March” or “June 5th.”
* Write **Decades** as numerals, i.e. 1960s or the ‘60s.
* **Centuries** should be written as “19th Century, 15th century.”
* **Age** - If a person says she’s in her forties, the spelled-out version is preferred, but if space is tight, it is acceptable to say, 40s but not ‘40s.

**ACRONYMS:** Acronyms must be checked for accurate punctuation against approved reference material and/or official websites (i.e. www.fbi.gov). If an acronym is part of a character or company name listed in the end credits, use the punctuation and spelling in the credits.

**QUOTES:** Use double quotation marks without spaces and single quotation marks for quotes within quotes (e.g, “Charlie said it: ‘Everything is okay.’”) Quotation marks should be used at the start and end of a quote and not at the start of every subtitle. In Americanized files, closing quotes should follow the period/full stop (e.g., “Jack.”)

* If the punctuation is not part of the quote, it should be outside the quote. (e.g., He could not bear to use the word, “love”.) Use quotes for dialogue that is being read and for song titles.
* If the quote extends beyond more than one subtitle, use an open quote at the beginning of the first subtitle, at the start and of sentences within the quote and an end quote at the end of the last subtitle.
* Use quotes for emphasis: “He “claims” the book is new.

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| Subtitle 1: I said, “Good night, good night.”  Or if it extends to more than one subtitle:  Subtitle 1: “The leaves are green  Subtitle 2: and the sky is so blue.” |

**SONGS:**

* All song lyrics are in italics. Use an uppercase letter at the beginning of each sentence, not each line.
* Subtitle all audible song lyrics that do not interfere with dialogue.
* Use ellipses when a song continues in the background but is no longer subtitled to give precedence to dialogue.
* **Punctuation: Commas are fine to use mid-lyric, as needed. Only use exclamation marks and question marks at the end of a lyric, not a period.**
* Use song title identifiers when applicable - song titles should be in quotes, for example **[Paula Abdul sings "Forever Your Girl"]**.
* Use the name of a musical number or classical piece only if widely known, for example [“The Nutcracker Suite” playing].
* If lyrics cannot be verified or are difficult to understand, a song ID only can be used. [♪ Carrie Underwood sings “Ever, Ever After”]. Song IDs are in quotes. (Song lyrics have one music note at the beginning and end of each subtitle and two music notes at the end of the last verse. **Also, note that the word on the second line is lowercased because it is part of the first sentence:**

Subtitle 1; ♪*Just find who you love*♪

Subtitle 2: ♪***t****hrough true love’s kiss*♪♪

* Use ellipsis if a song fades out. Do not use a music symbol if it fades out or is interrupted.
* When using identifiers in songs, the identifier comes before the music symbol: [both] ♪*Summer loving*♪

**Theme/Soundtrack Music:** When music reflects the mood of a scene, always describe. For example: [tense music plays] or [upbeat music plays] or [ominous music plays], etc.

**COMPANY CREDIT: Do not include.**

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**ENGLISH CLOSED CAPTIONS**

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| ***Note:* Closed Captions follow the same guideline as SDH files. The two main formatting differences with closed captions are the character count per line is 32 and text can be positioned under the speaker, i.e., left, right and center.** SDH is recommended for OTT platforms as CC can have slight variations in buffering time on different players. |

* **\*READING SPEED:**

Adults: 20 characters per second / 180-200 wpm (220 wpm max)

Children: 17 characters per second / 120 wpm max.

1 line is typically 1-3 seconds

2-3 lines are typically 3-7 seconds

* **CHARACTER LINE LIMIT:** 32
* **LINE COUNT:** Industry standard for traditional Closed Captions is 3 lines.
* **MINIMUM GAP:** 2 frames
* **DURATIONS:** Minimum 20 frames, Maximum 8 seconds. Optimal for one full line of text is 2 seconds. Optimal for two full lines of text is 4 seconds
* **\*Reading speed fluctuates with the delivery of the dialogue. If there is time before or after dialogue, starting the caption 2-4 frames early is fine, as long as it doesn’t go over a shot cut. The guidelines in this document are for US English. Character count/wpm could differ with non-EN languages.**

**Overview of general guidelines:**

* Verbatim dialogue as spoken.
* Convey plot-pertinent background noises and sounds to the fullest extent possible.
* Sound effects should not be included if the sound/source is clear and non-ambiguous.
* Plot-pertinent dialogue always takes precedence over background dialogue.
* Do not censor dialogue.
* When editing for reading speed, do not paraphrase, but condense via text reduction.\*
* Closed Captions must coincide with the corresponding spoken words and sounds and must be displayed on-screen at a speed that can be read by viewers.
* Closed Captions must run from the beginning to the end of a program.
* Closed Captions must not block other important visual content.
* Raise caption text to top of screen to avoid clashing with on-screen text or graphics in lower third of the screen.
* PositioningCaptions should be placed as close as possible to the speaker.

**\*Proper editing should maintain both the original meaning, content, essential vocabulary, and meet presentation rate requirements.**

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| Caption 1 - Speaker is on the left and on-screen.  Line 1 Of all the places in the world…  Line 2 you had to come here.  Caption 2 - Speaker is on the right and on-screen.    Line 1 Leave me alone. |