

TRANSCRIPTION AND TIME CODES FOR SUBTITLES

Time-coded scripts are crucial to creating a subtitled video project. The videos need to be properly transcribed to secure the time codes directly from the master tape. The process is the same as for standard transcription used for voiceover, which includes a time code for each section of the script; however transcription for subtitle files requires much more detail.

Time codes for subtitles need to be placed every line or every-other-line (every 1 or 2 lines) within the script, while transcription for voiceover can be done in larger segments. After transcription, each .stl file in English will contain text to fill 1-2 lines on the screen and each file will be assigned a file name and its time code information.

Subtitled text fits into the video on the lower portion of the screen in an area called the "action-safe zone." This means that subtitles placed in this area will not interfere with the action on the screen, such as the faces of the speakers, or the material being presented. The action-safe zone can ONLY support 2 lines of text.

The transcription guides the engineer in placing the subtitle files in the correct position on the video. Without

the proper time codes the audio engineer will not know where the .stl (subtitle) files belong (unless he's fluent in foreign languages and can wing it).

Each line of text in a subtitle file contains a limited number of characters. This is often problematic for languages such as Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese and others that tend to expand by as much as 30% during translation. This means the translator will need to adapt the translation to fit the screen as he/she is translating the material. The final subtitle does not always match the original English sentence exactly, but instead conveys the essence of the sentence.

Also, the structure of a sentence is often reversed in the translated subtitle file; the material that appears at the

The screenshot shows a software interface for editing subtitles. At the top, there are instructions for viewing and printing the file. Below, a subtitle is displayed with two lines of text: "We've seen now the possibilities we have" and "Мы уже видели, какие у нас есть ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ". A magnifying glass is positioned over the time code field, which contains the following text: "0001 02:16", "01:00:05:29", and "01:00:08:20". The interface also shows a status bar at the bottom with various settings like "Sec 1", "2/22", "At 1.7\"", "Ln 4", "Col 1", "REC", "TRK", "EXT", "OVR", "Russian (Ru)", and a small icon.

***To view this file you should have :**

- Small fonts installed on this system.
- The Arial font installed on this system.
- The scale factor selected to 100%.
- The web layout view selected.

***To print this file :**

- Select the file-print menu options to display the print dialog.
- Locate the zoom grouping and set the 'scale to paper size' option to the appropriate size.
- Press okay to print.

478.1

We've seen now
the possibilities we have

Мы уже видели, какие у нас есть
ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ

478.1

0001 02:16
01:00:05:29
01:00:08:20

Sec 1 2/22 At 1.7" Ln 4 Col 1 REC TRK EXT OVR Russian (Ru)

front end of the original English sentence may appear at the back end of the translated sentence, due to the sentence structure of the target language.

Here's an example of both text expansion and sentence structure changes for Spanish: Let's say a travel video's original English says "the town's central square...". This piece contains just 4 words in the original English. However, the Spanish translation becomes "Plaza del Centro de la Ciudad" and requires 6 words. Notice too that the word for "town" is now at the end of the sentence, rather than towards the beginning. While in this case it is a small line, in larger sentences, the translator would need to make a judgment call to make sure the subtitle files fit the time allotted.

The item above shows a screen shot of a typical subtitle file. This one is for a dental video being subtitled in Russian. After the video was transcribed with time codes, the translation was done inside the actual subtitle file.

In the first shaded gray box you will notice the first 2 lines in English. This is the maximum amount of text that can fit on the screen for the first subtitle. It reads "We've seen now the possibilities we have..." but it is not a complete sentence. The remainder of the sentence is contained in the second subtitle file. During transcription the author always tries to identify a "natural" break in the text before completing a sentence on the next subtitle file – this isn't always easy to do.

Notice the second gray shaded box to the right of the English text. It contains the necessary time codes or this section. In this case it contains:

0001 02:16
01:00:05:29
01:00:08:20

It looks cryptic, but contains valuable information for this particular .stl file. The "0001" is the file name (there can be hundreds or even thousands of these, depending on the length of the video).

The 0001 is followed by "02:16". This number indicates the duration of the subtitle. In this case it lasts for 2:16 seconds. When we translate this sentence into an expanding language such as Spanish, our text needs to match this

duration. As you can imagine, with text expanding by 30% when translated, this can be a challenge.

After the duration, you will notice 2 additional time codes in this same gray box. They are 01:00:05:29 and 01:00:08:20. This indicates the "time-in" and "time-out" aspect of the subtitle. The 01:00:05:29 is when you first see the subtitle, and the 01:00:08:20 is when it disappears and the next subtitle file follows right behind it.

Every video has a timeline. The time-in and time-out of the subtitle file indicates exactly where it belongs on the video timeline.

For a VO (voiceover) this is not as much of an issue – standard time codes are fine for a VO script, because a voice can be time compressed to fit, or the script adjusted to fit as necessary. There's an inherent bit of wiggle-room with a VO script - but there is no wiggle-room with a subtitle script.

You may be wondering, "Why can't you just speed up the subtitle files so they play faster?" Sounds good at first, but the human eye can only process what it is reading at a certain pace. As the speed of the subtitles increases, the brain processes less of the information, or gets lost.

Have you ever watched the beginning of Star Wars "In a galaxy far, far away..." and found yourself losing your place as you read the intro? Been there, done that... (however in this case it's because the text gets smaller and smaller as it disappears into the galaxy and our eyes try to follow it – and we have to go back and find where we left off, which has already disappeared into oblivion by the time we regain our focus). The same principal applies with speeding up subtitle play rates – it just doesn't work. The eyes miss things that travel too quickly, especially when the brain has to process and absorb the information.

It is these things that make it so very critical to have a properly time-coded script. The time-in and time-out aspect of the code is essential for placing the subtitle files, and text may need to be adjusted to fit appropriately, yet still retain the original message.

A well-crafted subtitle project always starts with proper transcription.