

ITV SYNOPSIS/BILLING GUIDELINES

Sept 2023

We employ an overarching **ABC** approach to our synopsis/billing writing:

- **Accuracy:** grammar and spelling are correct, descriptions provided are correct.
- **Brevity:** economy in word usage, removing words that don't add anything extra, avoiding repetition.
- **Clarity:** creating descriptions without ambiguity, simple use of language.

Short Synopsis

Do not exceed 90 characters (including spaces and punctuation)

There is limited scope for what information can be included here, but provide information on the main theme. (For series/programme-level synopsis (not episode level), include the genre at the start, too.)

Medium (EPG) Synopsis

Do not exceed 180 characters (including spaces and punctuation)

Provide information on the main theme and main contributors (if stars) where possible. (For series/programme-level synopsis only (not episode level), include the genre at the start, too.)

Encourage the viewer to have a good understanding of the content here, drawing them in to view it. Don't give away the plot in the synopsis, and provide a cliff-hanger where appropriate.

Long Synopsis

Do not exceed 1000 characters (including spaces and punctuation)

Use the same type of information as the EPG, but with more detail.

General Rules

OVERVIEW

- **STAND-ALONE SYNOPSIS:** think of a synopsis (of any length) as something that could also be used as a stand-alone description.
- **INCLUDE THE GENRE:** include the genre if you're writing a programme or series synopsis (if this is not self-evident from the title). *For episodic synopses, see below.*
- **GOOD PLAIN PROSE:** write a synopsis in good plain prose. Think about the target audience of the programme and the type of language that should be used.
- **SCAN TO UNDERSTAND:** can a viewer scan your synopsis and make an informed decision about whether or not to watch the programme? If so, it's done its job.
- **NO SPOILERS!**

GRAMMAR & CONSISTENCY

- **PRESENT TENSE:** describe programmes using the present tense and only use a Capital letter at the start of the sentence and for proper nouns within the sentence.

- **SPACE AFTER FULL STOPS:** always put a single space after full stops, commas and colons (:) or semi-colons (;).
- **WRITING OUT DATES:** write dates mentioned within a synopsis as follows: 2 June 1953.
- **WRITING OUT NUMBERS (i):** write numbers one to nine as words, except where you're referring to a title that consists of digits e.g. '5 Gold Rings' or the numbers refer to measurements e.g. 5 cm, 1%, 9 to 11 (ages).
- **WRITING OUT NUMBERS (ii):** use digits for 10 and above.
- **ACRONYMS:** do not use full stops for acronyms e.g. DCI Vera Stanhope not D.C.I. Vera Stanhope.
- **AND/∆:** do not use the ampersand (&) unless it is part of an official title or name of a company, etc.

FOR EPISODICS:

- **NO TIME STAMPS:** avoid words like 'Tonight' or 'This week' or 'The series continues', as lots of content now goes straight to ITVX and can be viewed anytime.
- **GENERIC DESCRIPTIONS AT START:** avoid generic repeated genre-based descriptions of the series at start of *episode* billing e.g. '*Reality series set in Los Angeles*' or '*Family entertainment show with contestants*.' The genre only needs to be mentioned in a programme or series synopsis.
- **GENERIC DESCRIPTIONS:** avoid generic descriptions at all!
- **DIAL UP THE DRAMA!** If something dramatic happens in the episode, do allude to it (as long as it doesn't spoil the plot!). Use active language to dial up the drama from the start of the description e.g. 'Feeling furious, Sally decides the time has come for a confrontation with Rosie's teacher.' This is better than the passive: 'A confrontation between Sally and Rosie's teacher takes place at the school.'
- **CELEBRITIES:** weave in the names of any celebrities or guest stars who appear **ESPECIALLY** in long-running shows, e.g. Midsomer Murders. It helps attract viewers!