



# Standard Abbreviations for Television Access Services

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Earlier this year, Ofcom published a Code on Electronic Programme Guides (EPGs) – the on-screen guides that show information about television channels for those people who watch satellite, cable or digital terrestrial television (such as Freeview).

The Code sets out rules that EPG providers must follow. These include guidance on how to make EPGs easier to use for people who are blind, or deaf, or have difficulty hearing or seeing (or both). One of the rules says that all EPGs must use the same ways of describing programmes with subtitling, signing or audio description. Ofcom thinks this will be less confusing for viewers than if EPGs use different ways.

We have also decided that abbreviations would be better than symbols to describe subtitling, signing and audio description. There are several reasons for this. It could take a long time to agree on symbols, particularly if we want the same approach across Europe. The cable and satellite broadcasters would need to do extra work to make symbols work on the EPGs installed in the set-top boxes they supply to their subscribers. This could take well over a year and cost a lot of money. It is unlikely that the makers of digital terrestrial set-top boxes (used to receive Freeview and TopUp TV services) would be willing to pay for similar work, so people who have already bought such boxes would not be able to see the abbreviations.

We are now asking anyone who is interested to tell us what abbreviations they think should be used by EPG providers. We think that it will be important to make the abbreviations short. EPGs only have a small space to display programme notes, and the abbreviations will need to be included in this space. If the abbreviations are kept short, there is also a good chance that newspapers and magazines may choose to use them too. But newspapers and magazines do not have to follow our rules, and are free to make their own choice.

We will consider all views sent to us before deciding what abbreviations should be used. Broadcasters will then have to supply EPG providers with timely and accurate information about which programmes have access services, and EPG providers will have to include this information in their EPGs. For now, this information will appear in the programme notes, as these can be displayed by most EPGs. After talking to broadcasters, EPG providers and the companies that prepare listings for EPG providers, we think that it will not be too expensive to do this.

If EPG providers use different abbreviations in other parts of their EPGs, they will probably need to make changes to the software used to make EPGs work. This will involve a lot of testing to make sure that the software changes do not cause problems in the way set-top boxes work. After talking to EPG providers, we agree that this work could be quite expensive to do on its own. However, we think that it would not cost too much if it was combined with other planned work to upgrade EPGs. For this reason, we shall not require EPG providers to make these changes until they next make major changes to their EPG software.

If you would like to let us know your views, please send them by 20 January 2005 to Peter Bourton at Ofcom in one of the following ways.

By e-mail to [peter.bourton@ofcom.org.uk](mailto:peter.bourton@ofcom.org.uk).

By fax to 020 7981 3806.

By textphone to 0845 456 3003

By post to:

Peter Bourton  
Content & Standards  
5th Floor  
Ofcom  
Riverside House  
2a Southwark Bridge Road  
London SE1 9HA

We should like to publish your views on our website, but, if you prefer, we will not publish them. Or we can publish your comments without revealing your name. Please tell us which you would prefer.