

Festival-Ready Films: The Audiovisual Translation Checklist for International Filmmakers

You've shot, edited and graded your film—bravo! But before you rush off to submit to **Cannes, Sundance, Venice, Berlin, or Toronto**, there's one thing you *mustn't* overlook: your **audiovisual assets**.

Translating your film isn't just about adding subtitles—it's about making your work *watchable, accessible* and *festival-ready* for *global* audiences, juries, and press.

Let's break down what each of the Big 5 film festivals expect when it comes to **subtitles, SDH (subtitles for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing), audio description, dubbing, and overall accessibility**—plus some final tips to make your project stand out.

1. Are Subtitles Always Required? (Short answer: YES.)

All five major festivals require **subtitled versions** for any film that's not in the primary language of the festival or not in English.

| Festival | Subtitles Required? | Notes |
|----------|---|---|
| Cannes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES | Non-French films must have French or English subtitles . Subtitles must be burnt-in , not soft. PNG subpicture files = X . |
| Sundance | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES | All non-English films must have English subtitles for all screenings. Closed captions (CC) are required for accessibility. |
| Venice | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES | All non-Italian films must have Italian or English subtitles . Even Italian films with strong dialects may require Italian SDH. |
| Berlin | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES | Selection screeners must have English subtitles unless the original is in English. The final version should include SDH or additional accessibility on request. |
| Toronto | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES | Non-English films must have English subtitles . TIFF strongly encourages SDH and audio description (AD) to improve accessibility. |

 **If your film has dialogue, it needs subtitles - preferably professional, perfectly timed, and tailored to your audience.**

□ 2. What About SDH (Subtitles for the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing)?

Festivals are increasingly prioritising accessibility. If you're aiming to be inclusive (and tick all the technical boxes), **SDH is a smart move** - and sometimes mandatory.

- **TIFF** encourages SDH subtitles and may require them for platform screenings.
- **Sundance** now *requires* CC for online and in-person screenings.
- **Cannes**, **Venice**, and **Berlin** are less prescriptive, but SDH is *highly recommended*, especially if your film is distributed afterwards.

💡 **Top Tip:** SDH includes speaker IDs, sound effects, and music cues. They're not just "captions", they're a crafted storytelling tool.

🎧 3. Is Audio Description Needed?

Audio Description (AD) narrates what's happening visually for blind or low-vision audiences. It's not mandatory everywhere yet, but some festivals are **leading the charge** on accessibility:

- **Sundance:** *strongly encouraged* for all films.
- **TIFF:** Audio Description (AD) is required for English-language content.
- **Others:** Optional, but an excellent way to stand out and futureproof your content.

🗣️ If you're preparing AD, make sure the script is well-written and that it's recorded with professional narration and pacing.

🌐 4. Translation Tips for Festival Submissions

When subtitling or dubbing your film:

- **Use professional subtitle translators**, not automatic captions. Festivals will *notice* and penalise amateur subs.
- For SDH, make sure your **timing is spot-on**, your labels are accurate, and the tone matches the scene.
- **Avoid "one size fits all" translations.** Adjust nuance, idioms, and tone for each target audience. What sounds fine in English might fall flat in Italian or French.

If your film is multi-language, subtitling in English **with SDH** is your safest bet.

5. Delivery & Formatting: Don't Drop the Ball Here

Each festival has their own **file requirements**, so it's not just about *what* you subtitle—it's *how* you deliver it:

- **Cannes:** Burnt-in subtitles (no .srt/.xml) in DCP. SDH optional.
- **Venice:** DCPs should follow strict SMPTE guidelines. Provide subtitles in advance for quality checks.
- **Berlin:** DCP + ProRes accepted. Use the ISDCF naming convention. Can supply a separate caption file (.xml/.srt) if requested.
- **Sundance:** Upload your DCP, then separate CC/SDH and AD files for accessibility platforms.
- **Toronto:** Submit SDH and AD alongside your final film. Plan 48+ hours ahead of screenings.

Final AVT Checklist Before Hitting “Submit”

Here's a pre-submission checklist just for **audiovisual translation and accessibility**:

General

- Film is exported in the correct DCP or ProRes format for each festival
- Film has been quality-checked for sync, sound and resolution

Translation

- Subtitles are complete, proofed, and **professionally translated**
- You've included subtitles for **all dialogue** (including off-screen, voiceover, and phone calls)
- Translations reflect **tone, humour, slang, and cultural references** accurately

Accessibility

- SDH subtitles are timed, tested, and burned-in if required
- If available, Audio Description is scripted and recorded professionally
- Captions and subtitles comply with the festival's specific **tech guidelines**

Delivery

- All subtitle and AD files are clearly labelled (SRT, VTT, XML, WAV, etc.)
- You've formatted your file names correctly using ISDCF or festival naming conventions

- You've included all subtitle and accessibility files during upload or shipping
-

Final Thoughts: It's Not Just Translation, It's Presentation

Translation and accessibility are part of your film's **global identity**. Get them right, and you won't just meet requirements, you'll reach more audiences, impress more programmers, and boost your chances of selection.

□ Want help creating subtitle files, SDH, or audio description for your film? Let's chat. It's what I do - and I love helping stories travel.