

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION GUIDELINES



Contents

- Introduction
- Why impactful copy matters
- Writing impactful descriptions
- Genres
- Where will descriptions be used?
- Technical specifications
- Why it matters
- Key takeaways
- Any questions?

Introduction

Research has shown that the programme description is a key deciding factor for viewers – so it's our chance to sell it to them.

Descriptions should reflect the programme, BBC iPlayer's brand (more on this on page 7) and the BBC as a whole. It should also fit in with our [editorial guidelines](#).

A companion to our [picture guidelines](#), this is designed for production teams to get the best outcome for their programmes, and our audiences.



Entertainment

The Wall

Players take on television's biggest opponent, The Wall. Expect colossal wins and heartbreaking losses in the game show that can change people's lives in the drop of a ball.

18 Episodes Available



Start Watching
Series 2: Episode 7

Why impactful copy matters

When audiences are browsing, they want programmes that match their mood. To help them decide, the tone of the description needs to reflect the tone of the programme.

Which would you rather watch?

The Terror



Start Watching
All episodes available now

Drama retelling Captain Sir John Franklin's lost expedition to the Arctic in the nineteenth century.

The Terror



Start Watching
All episodes available now

A chilling tale based on one of polar exploration's deepest mysteries. From Ridley Scott.

Writing impactful descriptions

Write for BBC iPlayer's voice

Confident

bold

clear

proud

Passionate

loves TV

enthusiastic

excited

Open

honest

warm

inclusive

Sharp-witted

cheeky

playful

surprising

Down to earth

human

relatable

understandable

Write for BBC iPlayer's voice



Beauty
Glow Up: Britain's Next Make-Up Star
Jaw-dropping transformations as Stacey Dooley searches for a make-up master

Open



Entertainment
Meet the Khans: Big in Bolton
Move over Kardashians, the Khans are here to share their fast and fabulous family life

Confident



Entertainment
Eurovision Song Contest
It's the riotously ridiculous Grand Final from Rotterdam. And everyone's invited

Passionate



Comedy
Staged.
David Tennant and Michael Sheen make drama out of a crisis

Sharp-witted



Documentary
Muhammad Ali: A Life in Ten Pictures
He was one of the world's most photographed men - but private snaps reveal a new story

Down to earth

The Target Audience

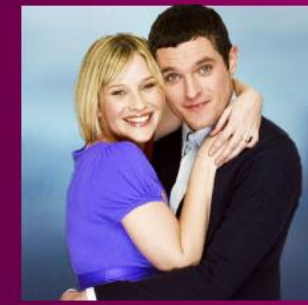
As well as continuing to delight existing iPlayer users, the service also aims to grow by attracting more people who don't currently use BBC iPlayer – or the BBC – very often.

While iPlayer caters for all audiences, not everything is for everyone. That means we can speak to a programme's audience where appropriate.

BBC iPlayer has a lead role in reaching:

- Under 35s
- People outside the south east
- Non-traditional BBC audiences

These audiences have a wide range of tastes and high expectations of their streaming services.



Make it engaging

You know your programme – don't shy away from making bold statements

DO

- ...reflect tone and mood of the programme
- ...pack what's interesting into the first couple of sentences
- ...make it feel pacy by using short sentences
- ...show don't tell its genre (genre tags are added separately)

DON'T

- ...give spoilers
- ...assume the audience knows the show
- ...use standard openers like 'in this two part series...'

Write simply

The concepts you describe can still be complex but the words and sentence structure need to be accessible and straightforward.

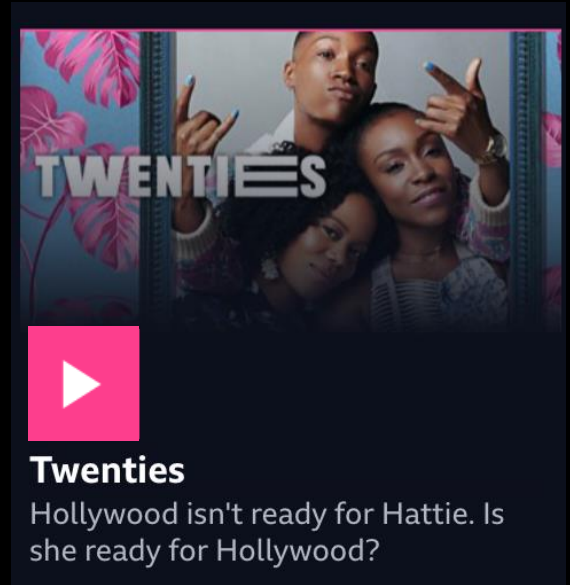
DO

- ...keep it short
- ...be aware that the target reading age for BBC iPlayer is 11. You can check the reading age of your copy online using tools such as [Web FX](#)

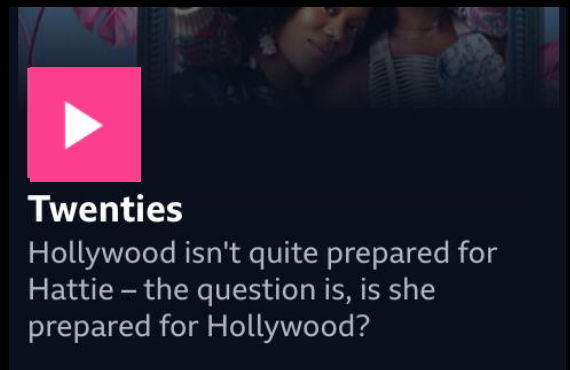
DON'T

- ...explain every little thing that happens in the show
- ...use cliches - unless it's justified

Age 11/12 ✓



Age 14/15



Make the most of episode descriptions

DO

- ...remember your programme has a life beyond TX; standard BBC iPlayer availability is now 12 months or longer. Descriptions need to reflect this, so don't mention 'this week' or 'tonight'
- ...make copy specific – highlight why a viewer should watch that particular episode
- ...mention big guests and exclusives - descriptions can be updated after TX (if necessary) when big names have been confirmed
- ...mention teams, contestants or specific rounds in games and quizzes, so the audience can tell the episodes apart. **No spoilers** though!
- ...be up to date as possible for news/current affairs, focusing on the latest developments

Use each field well

DO

- ...ensure medium and short synopses are different - the longer ones should build on the information in the shorter one
- ...give enough information to allow flexibility. If there are two storylines, one could be used for a short description, and one can be used in the medium synopsis
- ...put key information at the start, in case the description is cut off on some platforms
- ...make use of episode titles - is it easier for the audience to find the right episode via date, number or a title?

DON'T

- ...repeat the title or genre

Add a final polish

DO

- ...ensure it meets the BBC's editorial guidelines
- ...check for spellings and typos
- ...check you're referring to organisations in the same way they refer to themselves. I.e NASA not Nasa

DON'T

- ...use 'we'
- ...be London or England-centric (for example, naming London boroughs while referencing 'Scotland')
- ...mix up your tenses
- ...overdo it with the number of questions in your programme descriptions.

Tips for programme titles

- **Don't be too mysterious if you're going for a broad audience.** Titles help them understand what the programme is about
- **Do keep it short.** Long titles get cut off in iPlayer, which reduces their impact and looks messy



Football's Darkest Secret: this title gives you immediate clues about the programme. 'Football' adds context; 'darkest secret' sets the tone.

Genres

Making the most of descriptions - by programme genre

Drama

- Dramas are distinctive pieces – copy should be confident and passionate
- Add elements of mystery, emotion and tension
- Identify the key hook of the drama – what makes it different?
- Try to mention it if a major talent is involved

Crime Drama

Time

A prisoner consumed by guilt, an officer with an impossible choice. What does it take to survive? A tense story of punishment and principles, starring Sean Bean and Stephen Graham.

3 Episodes Available



Start Watching

Series 1: Episode 1

Comedy

- Talent becomes of key importance when it's a personality-led show
- It's always more important to get the tone right than to explain the plot
- Don't try and be as funny as the show
- If it doesn't come across implicitly, you can mention the sub-genre e.g. comedy drama, sketch comedy etc

Staged

David Tennant and Michael Sheen star as themselves - two bickering actors making a drama out of a crisis. Can their fragile egos survive working from home and virtual Hollywood?

14 Episodes Available

News/current affairs

- If there is a key presenter, lean into their reputation and talent.
- Current affairs programmes have a wide range of tones, from distressing experiences to lighter subjects. Make sure you reflect the tone of your programme
- Avoid hyperbole – let the facts speak for themselves



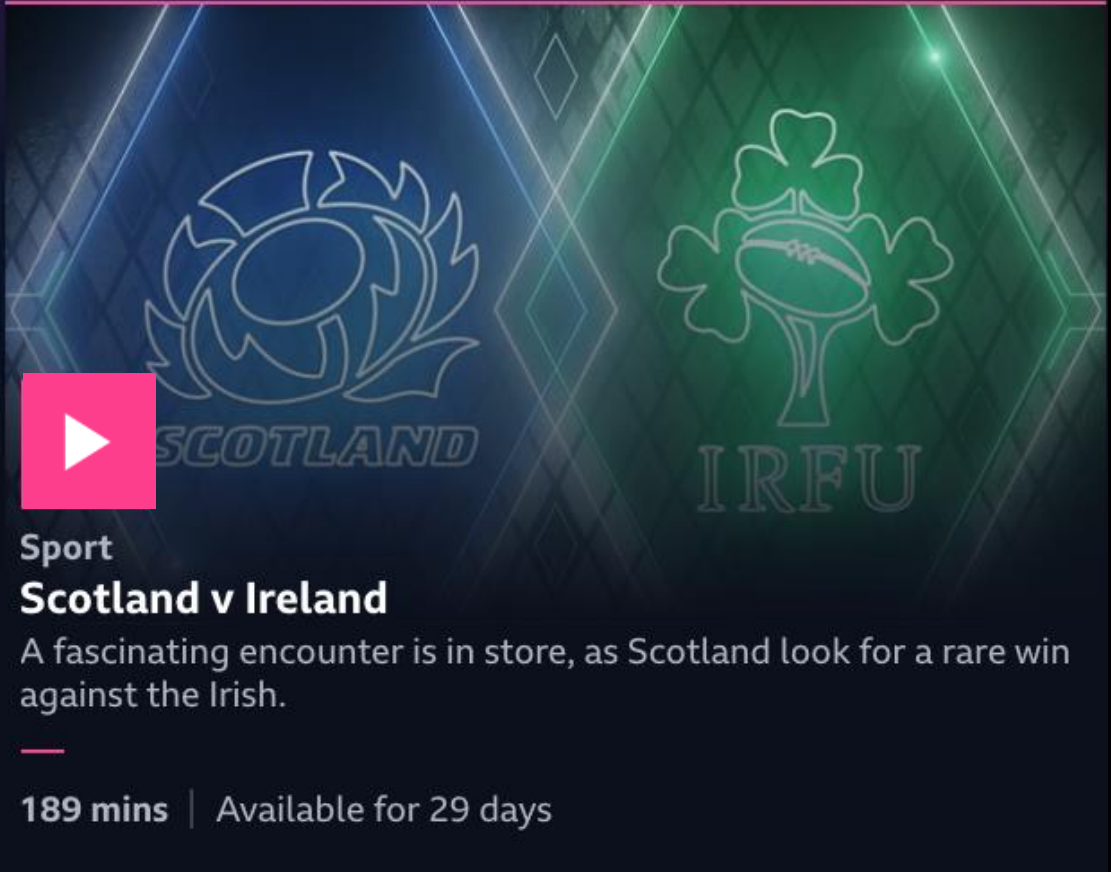
Dominic Cummings - The Interview

Inside the heart of government – the controversial figure with his own take on Number 10

Sport

- Assume a level of knowledge among the audience. Specific terminology can be used
- Audiences are passionate about sport, so share their passion in the copy
- Ensure details are up-to-date as possible, especially for live events. But **no spoilers!**

Featured

A promotional graphic for a Scotland vs Ireland rugby match. The background is dark blue with glowing green and blue geometric patterns. On the left is the Scotland thistle crest with the word 'SCOTLAND' below it. On the right is the Ireland shamrock crest with the word 'IRFU' below it. A red play button icon is overlaid on the left side.

Sport

Scotland v Ireland

A fascinating encounter is in store, as Scotland look for a rare win against the Irish.

189 mins | Available for 29 days

Entertainment

- For chat or variety shows, the guests are of key importance
- Descriptions should be fun and relaxing
- Sharp-witted here means touches of humour, but not elaborate puns
- When the format doesn't change, there's no need to explain it each time
- For celebrity specials, you should mention the key guests in the copy

The Apprentice

Bust-ups and boardroom battles in Britain's toughest job interview.

Factual

- As factual shows vary in weightiness, it's especially important that the tone of the copy reflects the tone of the show
- Talent is of key importance when it's a major name e.g. Stacey Dooley
- Dial up the passion for presenter-led pieces - it is about the journey of discovery they lead the audience on

Hunting the Essex Lorry Killers

How 39 deaths and a global investigation exposed a multi-million-pound smuggling ring

Lady Boss: The Jackie Collins Story

The 80s bonkbuster queen who enthralled millions with her one-woman literary empire

Where will descriptions be used?

We use the descriptions provided by production teams to sell and describe episodes, series and programmes on iPlayer.

They're also used in marketing materials.

Where will descriptions be used?

BBC iPlayer – brand descriptions

- Brand descriptions (called series synopses in Silvermouse) should sum up the entire series, give a sense of tone, and mention any key details about the show.
- They are designed to help hook the audience - and get them to press play - without getting too bogged down in detail.
- Note: standalone one-off programmes don't need a brand description.



Comedy

Starstruck

A drunken fling gets awkward when Jessie discovers her hook-up is a film star. As if life isn't complicated enough. Can they stumble through and make it work? With Rose Matafeo.

12 Episodes Available



Start Watching

Series 1: Episode 1

Where will descriptions be used?

BBC iPlayer – episode descriptions

BBC iPlayer short description

Used in schedules and episode guides, and the first thing audiences see. Should feature the most important information.

Can couple Dan and Alison pick the right strategy and leave with a fortune?

BBC iPlayer medium description

Used on programme and episode playout pages. Should provide more information, and complement/extend what was in the short description.

Married couple Dan and Alison aim to answer the questions, pick the right strategy, and leave with a fortune as they tackle the mighty Wall.

BBC iPlayer long description

Visible on BBC iPlayer on web only.

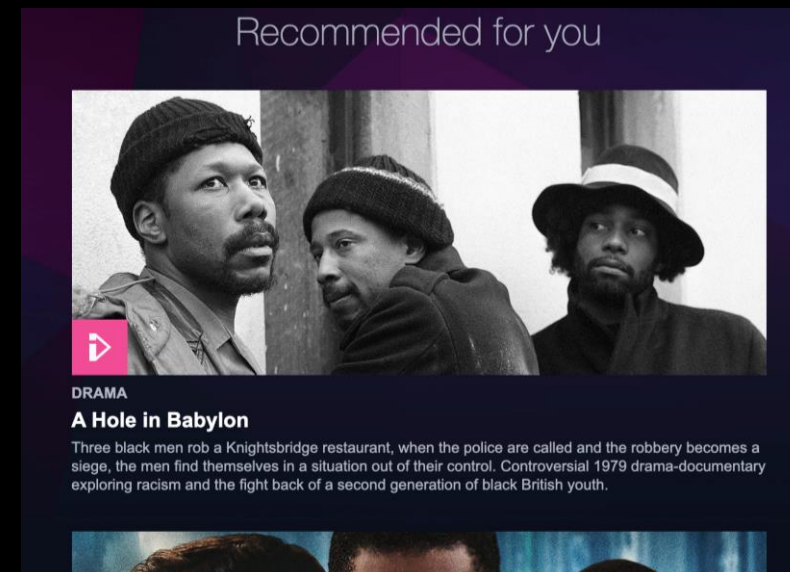
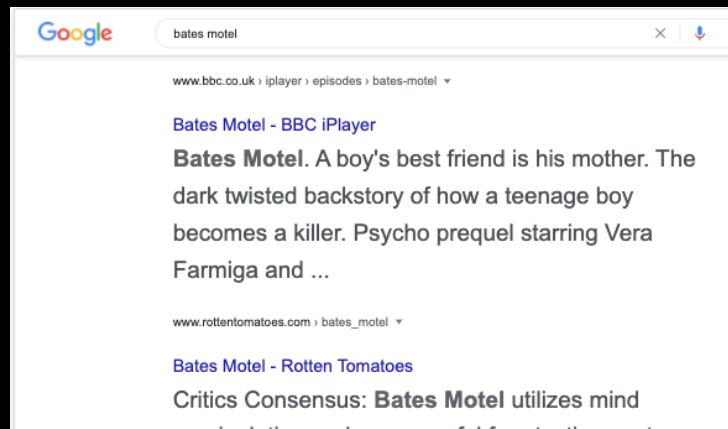
Not intended to list every single thing that happens. No website links or credits needed. In many cases, repeating the medium synopsis is enough.

Married couple Dan and Alison aim to answer the questions, pick the right strategy, and leave with a fortune as they tackle the mighty Wall. They would love to have a big family holiday as, in seven years together, they have never been able to afford one.

Hosted by EastEnders star Danny Dyer, with questions voiced by TV legend Angela Rippon.

Where will descriptions be used?

Other platforms



Search engines

Pulled up in search results on Google, Bing etc. A major source of traffic for BBC iPlayer.

Electronic Programme Guides (EPGs) and listings magazines

Contributes to programme description on TV services (e.g. Virgin Media, Sky, Freeview), and print magazines (e.g. Radio Times).

BBC email newsletters

Personalised emails delivered to 2 million subscribers, and driving 50,000+ views a week. The 'Recommended for you' email is one of the biggest direct traffic sources to BBC iPlayer.

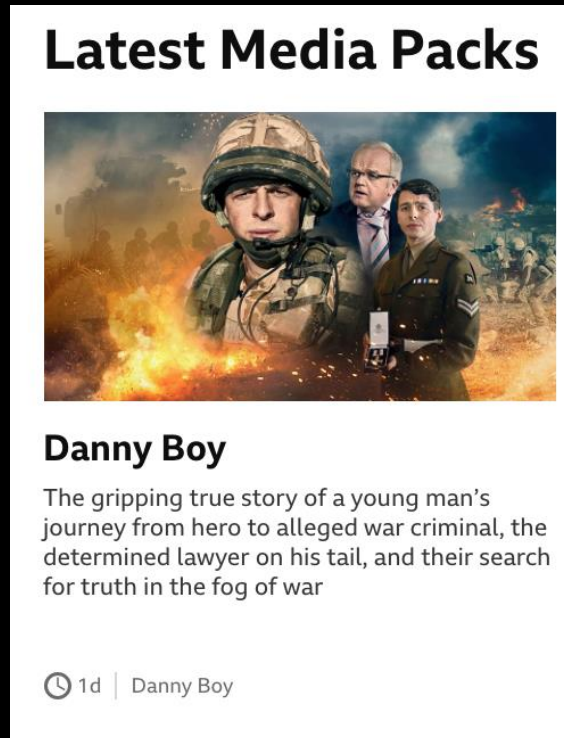
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Other platforms



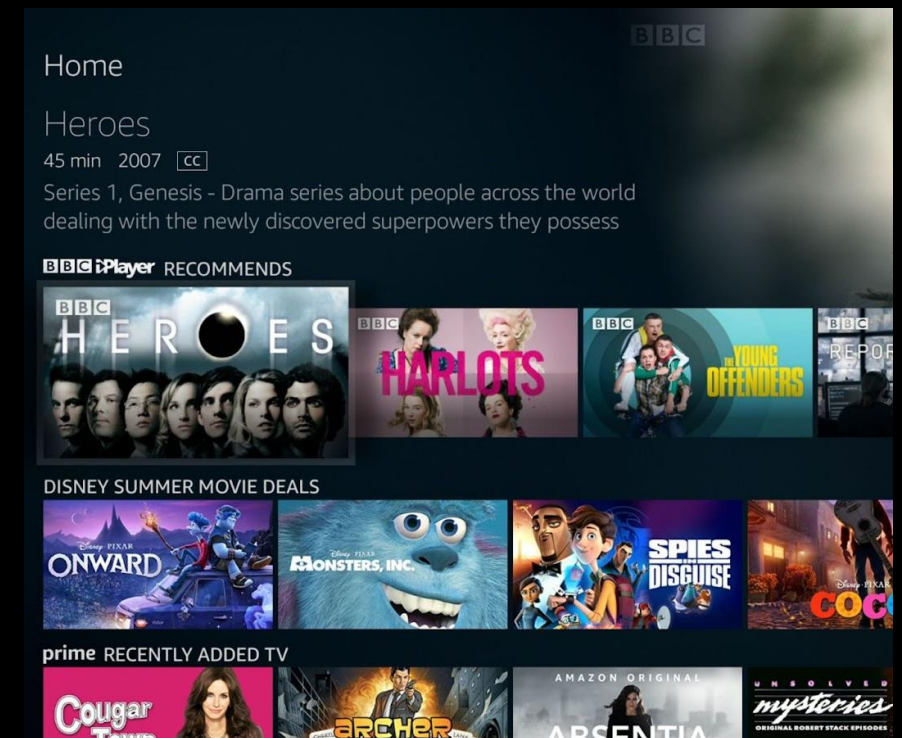
Social media

Used to create posts on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram Twitter, and more.



Media Centre

Provides information for press organisations to help publicise programmes.



Third-party platforms

iPlayer content is syndicated to Samsung, Amazon, Google, Apple and more. Descriptions are sent along with video files and images.

Where will descriptions be used?

Also used internally for...

- Picking and captioning images
- Internal research projects
- Internal comms

...and much, much more.



Technical specification

Simple technical guidelines so deliverables can be used across
the widest number of media outlets

Character counts

Following these recommendations will result in the best presentation of your programme on iPlayer.

Maximum Limits

(mandated for technical reasons)

- **Episode short description:** up to 89 characters
- **Episode medium description:** up to 180 characters
- **Brand description:** up to 180 characters

Recommendations

(programme description form will allow longer if necessary)

- **Programme titles:** up to 48 characters
- **Episode long description:** up to 400 characters

Programme description form guidance

Submit your programme descriptions:

- as early as you like
- no later than 16 days before TX/iPlayer release

Programme descriptions are usually submitted via Silvermouse.

[Find out more about submitting your descriptions](#)

We recommend the option to submit a description for the series as well as individual episodes.

Copy – key takeaways

MAKE IT ENGAGING

Reflect the mood, and put the most interesting/grabby bit first

Skip info that isn't relevant to the audience

WRITE SIMPLY

The average iPlayer reading age is 11

Simple writing – not simple concepts

MAKE THE MOST OF EPISODE DESCRIPTIONS

What makes this episode unique?

Remember 12 month availability – your programme has a life after TX

IMPACTFUL TITLES

Are you talking to an audience in the know – or trying to entice new viewers?

Keep it short but sweet

USE EACH COPY FIELD WELL

Build upon information as the viewer gets more engaged

Avoid repetition

ADD A FINAL POLISH

Check spellings and tone of voice

Any questions?

For further information visit the [BBC Production and delivery website](#).

Contact your commissioner – who can work with the iPlayer Editorial Team to provide advice on optimising your copy for iPlayer.

Thank You

