

Technical Screening Toolkit

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1. Quick Start Overview

1.1 What You Need to Run a Screening

A successful screening from a technical perspective can be achieved by paying close attention to 3 main elements:

- Picture
- Sound
- Playback²⁰ (Control)

The Golden Rule: Don't leave testing until the day.

Most technical issues happen because something hasn't been tested. If possible, do a full test screening at least 1–7 days before the event using the same setup intended for the screening itself. Of course, it is not always possible to test content in its entirety. Good practice in this case is to “spot check” the beginning, middle and end of the content provided.

1.2. Basic Signal Chain

Every setup differs; however, all screenings will follow the same basic signal chains²². These are:

1. Picture chain



2. Sound Chain



Think of your screening as two separate systems working at the same time. Once broken down into these elements, identifying potential issues becomes much easier. If something goes wrong, work through the chain step by step.

1. Quick Start Overview

1.3 DVD/Blu-ray

1.3.1 DVD/Blu-ray Basics

Using a DVD or Blu-ray player is a reliable option for many venues. However, there are still restrictions and limitations to consider when using DVD or Blu-ray formats.

DVD and Blu-rays are physical optical discs. They can be played through dedicated players, game consoles or PC drives.

Below is a breakdown of the different disc formats:

DVD	
Introduced	1996
Max Resolution	720 x 576 (PAL) 720 x 480 (NTSC)
Plays on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DVD players Blu-ray players Some game consoles (PlayStation/Xbox) Some computers with disc drives

Blu-ray	
Introduced	2006
Max Resolution	1920 x 1080 (1080p HD)
Plays on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blu-ray players Game consoles (PlayStation/Xbox) Some computers with Blu-ray drives
Note: Blu-ray players can usually play DVDs as well.	

4K Ultra HD Blu-ray	
Introduced	2016
Max Resolution	3840 x 2160 (4K)
Plays on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4K UHD Blu-ray players ONLY Some newer game consoles (PS5/Xbox Series X)
Note: Standard Blu-rays cannot play 4K UHD Blu-rays.	

1. Quick Start Overview

1.3 DVD/Blu-ray

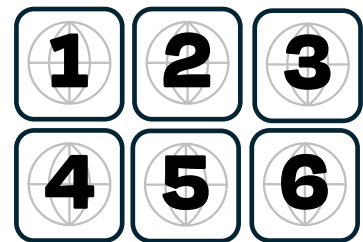
1.3.2 Region Codes

Some people run into problems due to restrictions posed by region coding. Every DVD and Blu-ray comes with a code associated with a specific geographic area. If the code does not match the player, then playback²⁰ will be restricted. Be sure to check the region code settings of your player before purchasing a DVD or Blu-ray.

Disc Region Codes:

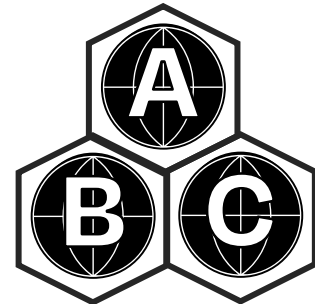
DVDs that will play in UK Players

- Region 2
- Region 0 (Region free)



Blu-rays that will play in UK players

- Region B
- Region Free (A,B & C)



The region code can be found on the back of the case or on the disc itself. Check with any online vendors before purchasing a disc, as some UK vendors may sell non-UK region-coded discs. If there is no code displayed, it may be a region-free copy, as they often won't display regional information.

Anything else may **NOT** play in the UK. Be sure to test the disc in your setup before the screening.

Some players may be “chipped” or “multi-region”, meaning they can play discs from all regions. Whether a player can play any region code should be **checked in advance**. A multi-region player does **NOT** replace the need for a public screening licence.

1. Quick Start Overview

1.4 Video Files

1.4.1 Video Files Basics

Screening films from a video file is becoming increasingly common, especially for short films, festivals and independent distributors. This is due to the ease and cost-effectiveness of distribution. It can give excellent results, but it's also the format most likely to cause issues if not tested.

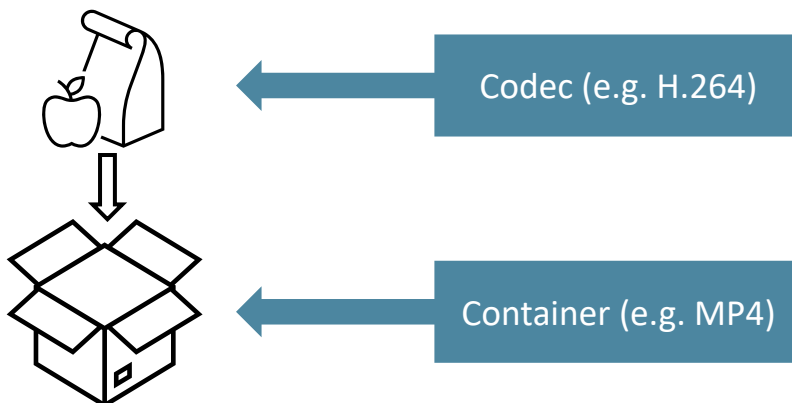
Files can be provided via a USB-stick/external hard drive or by an internet download.

If possible, it is always best to download the video file onto the player, whether a laptop, Blu-ray player or other media player. Playing directly from the drive or streaming may lead to lower performance, stuttering or buffering⁴.

Examples of files you may be provided with are:

- MP4
- MOV
- MKV
- AVI
- WMV
- MPEG

The above examples are containers⁶. It's important not to confuse containers vs codecs⁵. Think of containers as the lunchbox and codecs⁵ as the meal:



1. Quick Start Overview

1.4 Video Files

1.4.2 Codecs & Containers

Now to expand on codecs⁵ and containers⁶. This distinction is important because two files can both be MP4, but one may play perfectly while the other won't, as containers can hold different codecs. The purpose of a codec is to compress raw video data into smaller files or storage, then decompress for playback. When being provided a file, it's important to identify the codec used, as this will dictate the playback²⁰ quality of the film. Below is a simplified breakdown of video codecs and the containers they may be provided in:

Codec	Containers	Quality	*Compatibility
H.264 / AVC	MP4	Good	Excellent
	MOV	Good	Very Good
	MKV	Good	Very Good
	AVI	Fair-Good	Fair
H.265 / HEVC	MP4	Very Good	Fair-Good
	MOV	Very Good	Fair-Good
	MKV	Very Good	Fair-Good
ProRes (422 / 444)	MOV	Excellent	Fair
	MXF	Excellent	Poor-fair
AV1	MKV	Excellent	Good
	MP4	Excellent	Fair

*Compatibility: Compatibility refers to how reliably a file will play on a standard Windows PC using common media players. Higher-quality files are often much larger and may require more powerful equipment to play smoothly. For community screenings, reliable playback is more important than maximum quality. A file may look excellent, but if it stutters or fails to play properly, it is not suitable for screening.

1. Quick Start Overview

1.4 Video Files

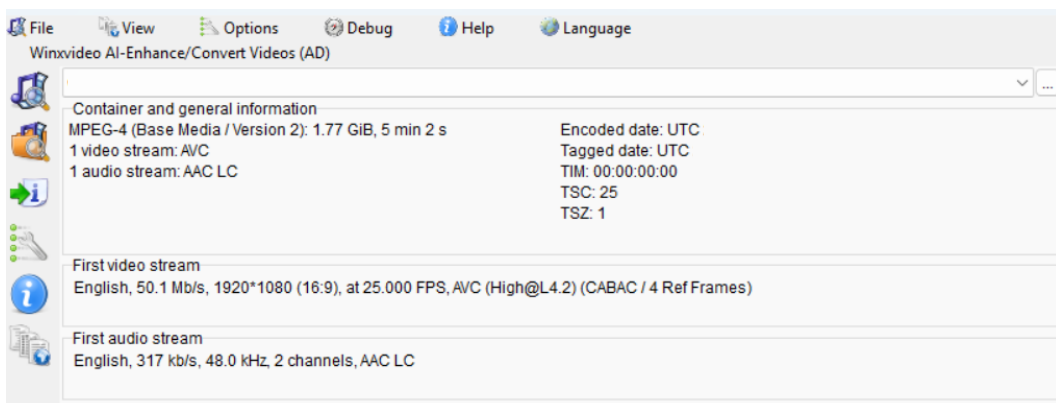
1.4.3 Understanding Video File Elements

Unlike DVD/Blu-rays, video files can come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Picture, sound and size will differ massively. It's important to be able to identify that a file is viable for playback²⁰. To identify if a file is suitable for screening, refer to the 3 main elements:

- **Picture:** 1080p is ideal for most venues (4K files may cause stuttering)
- **Sound:** Stereo is safest (5.1¹ surround can cause sound issues if not equipped)
- **Playback:** Very large files may take longer to copy and may play less smoothly. Confirm subtitles are included or supplied separately and work properly.

Follow **the Golden Rule** – testing will identify issues early. Allow time to contact the provider for alternative versions if required.

An ideal way to quickly identify all elements of a file and if they are suitable for playback is to utilise [MediaInfo](#). This is a free, open-source software tool for Mac and Windows to analyse technical details about video and audio files. Below is an example:



1. Quick Start Overview

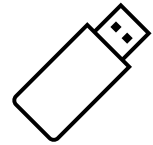
1.4 Video Files

1.4.4 Drive Formats & File Systems

When providing a video file to a venue for screening via a physical drive, a couple of things need to be taken into account to ensure the venue doesn't encounter any issues when downloading the file.

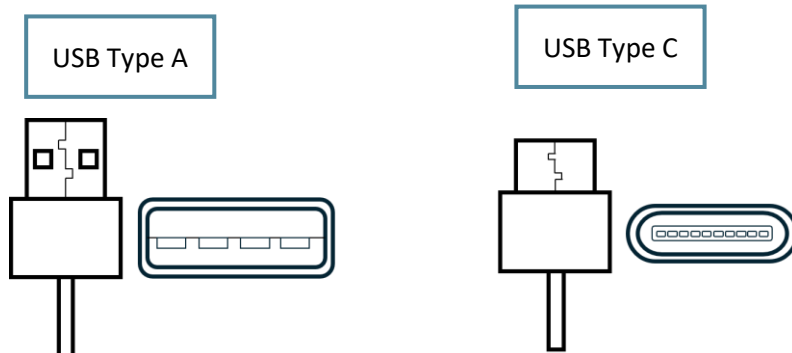
Firstly, check what file system the drive contains. Is it Windows or Apple? If the file system on the drive is not compatible with the venue, this will require transferring the file to a compatible drive before downloading for playback²⁰. This can be time-consuming. The three most common drive formats you will find on a USB drive are:

- NTFS (New Technology File System) – Windows
- APFS (Apple File System) – Apple
- exFAT (Extensible File Allocation Table) - Apple & Windows



To ensure no issues with delivery, ensure the drive is formatted to exFAT. This way, the venue can download the file whether they use Windows or MAC.

Second, take into account the physical connection. An old, uncommon cable or connection may also require the venue to seek alternative cables or adapters. Ask ahead of time what is preferred. The two most common today are:



1. Quick Start Overview

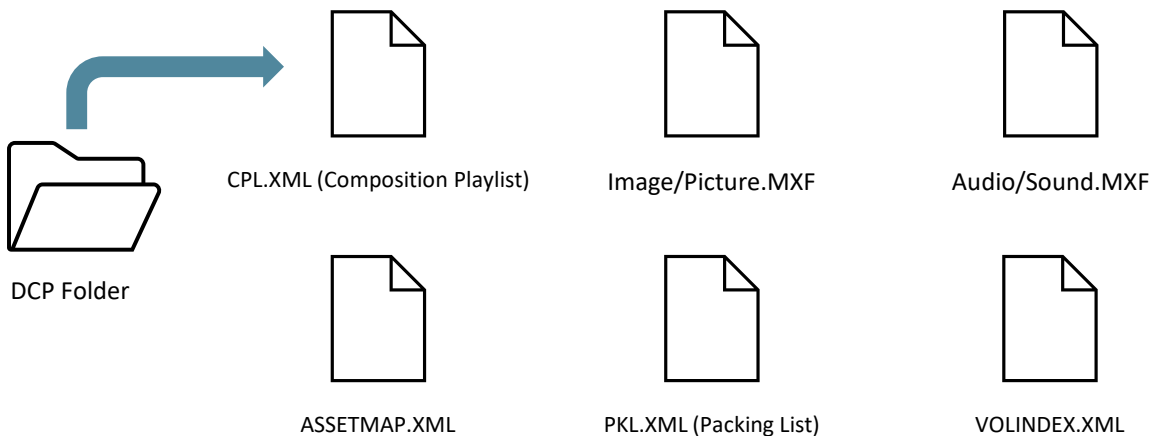
1.5 DCP

1.5.1 DCP Basics

A DCP⁹ is a file format used in commercial cinemas. If you have been provided a DCP, it's generally safe to assume your venue is technically well-prepared.

However, issues can still occur, most commonly relating to delivery, ingestion¹⁴, incorrect versions, or encryption keys, known as KDMs¹⁶ (Key Delivery message). More on KDMs will be covered later. For now, see below for the composition of a DCP package. It's important to have a basic understanding of DCP packages so that you can identify issues early.

A DCP package is made up of several different files. Below is a breakdown of what you might expect to see in a DCP folder:



When ingesting a DCP to a compatible cinema server, the folder must be ingested in its entirety. It's important to note that, depending on the package, more files may be present other than the initial six listed. These may include optional **Metadata files** and/or **Optional Timed Text** in XML or MXF format for subtitles.

Be sure to send the full folder to the screening venue. Some distributors may be able to send DCPs directly to venues, so always check if this is possible first.

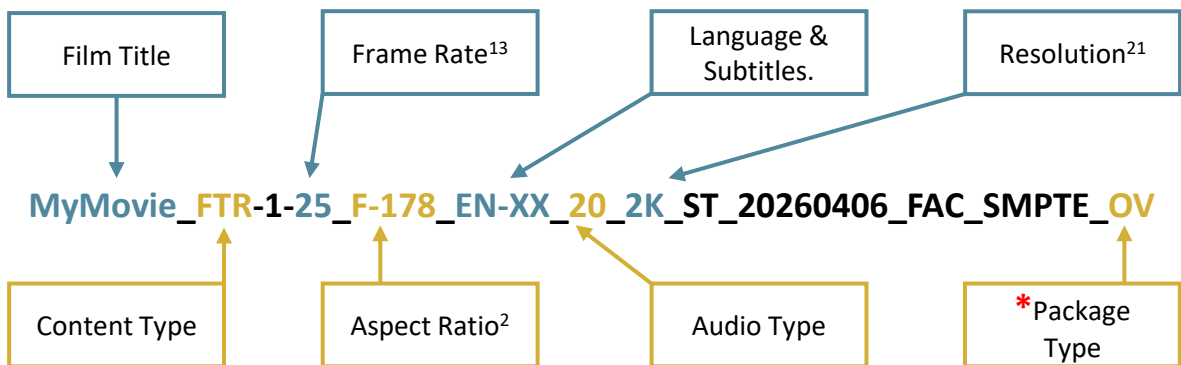
1. Quick Start Overview

1.5 DCP

1.5.2 DCP Naming & CPLs

All DCP⁹ packages should adhere to the Digital Naming Convention. This allows the operator¹⁷ to easily identify the contents of DCP by means of the CPL⁷ (Composition playlist), which acts like a digital “title”. The terminology for DCP naming can be found [HERE](#).

A simplified breakdown can be found below of a CPL title for identifying DCP contents.



Some DCPs will not follow the naming convention. It’s imperative to test content on screen to confirm technical requirements. Confirm the details you need for the screening, i.e. do you require subtitles? Then request as required from the distributor.

More on identifying subtitles can be found in the troubleshooting section, page 25.

* DCP packages come in two types – OV (Original version) and VF (Version file). A VF file is a supplemental package containing new subtitles, dubbed audio, etc. It refers to the original OV package. The VF package must be ingested **IN ADDITION** to the OV for playback.

1. Quick Start Overview

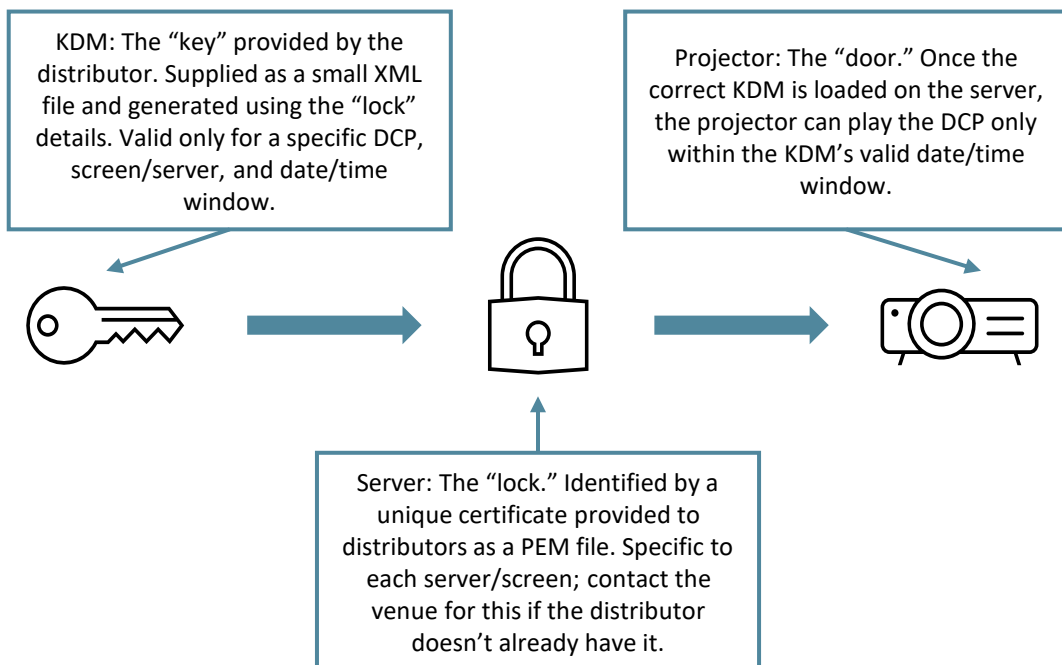
1.5 DCP

1.5.3 KDMs & Encrypted Content

DCP⁹ packages will come either encrypted or unencrypted. In layman’s terms, the DCP will be either locked or unlocked. A locked (encrypted) DCP will require a “key” known as a KDM¹⁶ (key delivery message) to play on a DCP playback²⁰ system. The “lock” in this case is the server/media block, which has a unique certificate that distributors use to generate the KDM. These certificates are typically provided to distributors as PEM files, and the KDM generated will only work on the specific server it was made for.

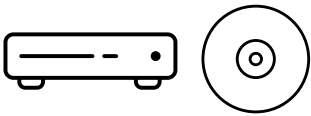
When requesting a DCP from a distributor, ask if the DCP requires a KDM for playback. To create the key, distributors will require the server certificate (often incorrectly referred to as a “projector certificate”), along with the time, date, and the screen/auditorium it’s playing in.

Note: projector, server, and screen are often used interchangeably when referring to the “lock,” but the certificate/KDM is tied to the server/media block.



2. Playback Guides

2.1 DVD / Blu-ray Setup



Before the day of the screening, the DVD/Blu-ray disc should be tested to ensure that the picture and sound are displayed without issues. Follow the picture and sound chain²¹ if encountering any issues.

While DVD/Blu-ray players are commonly used for screenings, their primary function is for home use. As such, it's important to make some changes for a more professional presentation.

Hide the DVD/Blu-ray menu completely by:

- Cueing⁸ the film by pausing at the start (preferably on black) before the doors open
- Use a “Welcome slide” on a separate input¹⁵ if provided until you're ready to start.

Also, be sure to disable any “auto power off” or sleep settings on the player if possible. Some players will have a sleep function by default if they are sitting idle for a period of time.

Ensure to select the correct settings before audience entry, i.e.

- Subtitles are **ON** (If required)
- The correct audio track³ is selected
- Film is the correct aspect ratio² (not stretched)
- Sound is coming through the correct speakers.

Set a volume level before screening that is comfortable. It's important to ensure dialogue is clear.

Note: A full audience will “absorb” sound, meaning the room may seem quieter once people are seated. Allow for this by setting the volume slightly higher than your empty-room test, and re-check levels once the audience is in.

2. Playback Guides

2.2 Video File Setup (Laptop/USB)



Playing from video files poses the most challenging aspect in presenting a clean and professional screening.

Start by saving the film locally, either on the laptop or a dedicated player; don't rely on streaming or playing from USB or drive. This can create unwarranted issues with playback²⁰, including buffering⁴, stuttering and freezing.

- Set laptop display¹⁰ to the correct output¹⁸ (duplicate/extend as preferred).
- Disable notifications, sleep mode and screensaver. The last thing you wanted is the dreaded update mid-screening!
- Open the chosen playback software.

All Windows laptops or Apple products will come with a default player. While these are okay to use, they offer limited options to customise the presentation.

Two alternative players that can be downloaded for free include:

- [VLC player](#) (for Windows & Apple)
- [PotPlayer](#) (For Windows only)

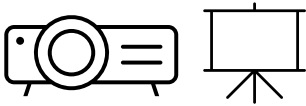
Both players offer far more settings to help you create a professional display. It's recommended to play with the settings to find what works best for your space. They are also capable of playing a much wider variety of file formats and codecs⁵ than default players. Playlists can also be built to display slides, trailers or other pre-show content if required.

Test audio routing to ensure sound is not coming from laptop speakers. This is a simple element to overlook. Set this before audience entry.

Note: Unplugging the laptop from the setup may cause the audio settings to revert. Ensure this is correct before starting the screening.

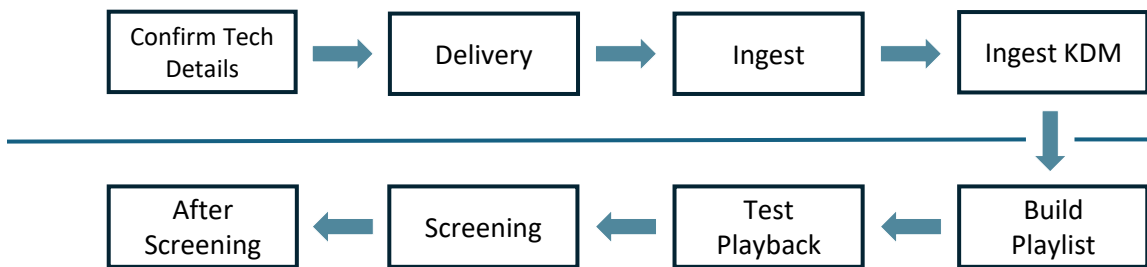
2. Playback Guides

2.3 DCP Setup



2.3.1 DCP Workflow

Now that technical details for the DCP⁹ have been confirmed and the DCP provided, it is necessary to confirm with the venue that everything is ready for the screening. Below is a breakdown of a DCP workflow:



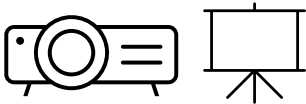
Follow the **Golden Rule** once more here. While the DCP may appear to be correct, it's imperative that you test the DCP on screen ahead of time. As mentioned previously, many DCPs don't follow the naming convention, so the CPL⁷ may not be representative of the actual content. Always kindly ask that the venue tests beforehand to confirm.

Testing beforehand ensures:

1. That the DCP package has been ingested¹⁴ successfully
2. That the DCP contains the correct content (subtitles, audio description, etc.)
3. That the KDM¹⁶ is correct and the DCP is ready for playback²⁰

2. Playback Guides

2.3 DCP Setup



2.3.2 Running Order & Playlists

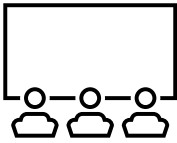
A DCP⁹ projector utilises playback²⁰ in two forms: either direct playback of the content or via a playlist. A playlist is basically a **pre-set sequence**, like a show schedule, that tells the cinema system what to play and in what order. If your screening includes trailers, intros or a Q&A, provide a **running order** to the venue so they can build a playlist. An example of a running order which would include an in-person intro and Q&A is below:

Launch Condition	Time	Content	Light	Name of file/format	Tech notes
Doors Open	18:00	Welcome Hold slide (Audience entry)	Full light	DCP	“Welcome to My Movie” Slide
Go from organiser	18:20	FilmHub Scotland Trailer (1m)	Lights off	DCP	Lighting mid/down. Straight into trailer
Trailer end	18:21	Welcome Hold Slide (In-person introductions)	Lights on stage	DCP	Stage spot/Mics live. Transition to generic launch slide.
Intro end	18:30 (Estimate)	My Movie Feature (1hr30)	Lights off	DCP “My Movie”	Lights off, film play
Film Ends	20:00 (Estimate)	Welcome Hold Slide (Q&A)	Full lights	DCP	Welcome slide left on screen. Light up. Mics live for Q&A

A running order can be as simple as bullet points listing the order of the content. However, the more detail, such as the running order above, the better. This ensures there are no miscommunications or complications on the day.

3. Presentation

3.1 Setting Up the Space



When setting up the space, refer to the 3 main elements:

- **Picture:** Check sightlines from the front row, back row and side seats. Ensure the screen is high enough so people at the back can see over those in front. Avoid putting seats too close to the screen, as this will cause the image to look pixelated¹⁹ or uncomfortable for the front row audience. Ambient lighting is the biggest factor affecting projector image quality. Where possible black-out your windows and turn off or dim the lights closest to the screen.
- **Sound:** Consider the position of your speakers. Don't have seating too close to speakers, where it may be audibly uncomfortable. Also, be sure to check the sound from both the front and back of the space. Is the audio and dialogue clear?
- **Playback:** Where possible, ensure control of playback²⁰ is out of sight of audience members.

3.2. Creating a “Cinema Atmosphere”

If available, it's always good to utilise music in the space for audience entry, as this lends to a more inviting environment.

Additionally, varying lighting levels can lend to a more professional and rewarding experience for viewers. Not all spaces will have the availability of dimming lights; however, play around with lighting to match the order of screening. Think of lighting in 3 states – **UP** (Full light for audience entry/exit), **MID** (Half-light for pre-show/trailers), and **DOWN** (No light for film).

3. Presentation

3.3 Aspect Ratios

When considering how the film will look on screen, the aspect ratio must be taken into account. This is always represented as the width-to-height ratio. For example, the standard for most HDTV, PC monitors & laptops is 16 units wide by 9 units high (16:9) or 1.78 times its height (1.78:1). Standard 2K resolution is 1080 X 1920 pixels. To find the aspect ratio, divide the height by the width: $1080 \div 1920 = 1.78$. Below are the most common aspect ratios in film today:

4:3/1.33:1

Original standard film & TV shape. Common in classic films.

1.66:1

Introduced in the 1950s in Europe as a widescreen alternative to 4:3. Common in European & older arthouse films.

16:9/1.78:1

Developed in the 1980s-90s as a compromise for HDTV. Now standard in most modern applications.

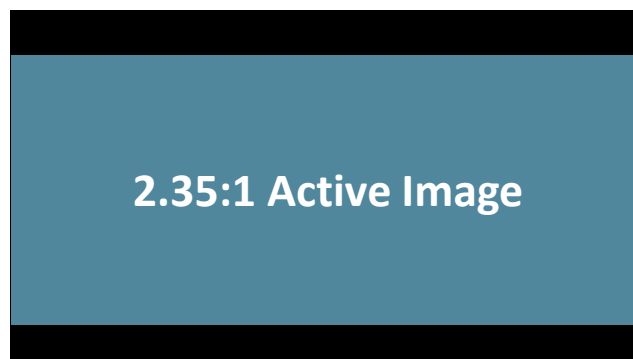
1.85:1

Introduced in the 1950s in the US. A widescreen theatrical format to compete with television. Common in most modern films.

2.35:1

Often grouped with 2.39 "Scope". Originated in the 1950s with CinemaScope for cinematic widescreen films. Still common in big-budget movies today.

Now, how does this affect the way a film is presented? Consider your screen in relation to the film. If you're viewing on a 16:9 display, how will other aspect ratios appear? In most cases, black bars are added to fill the unused space, preserving the image's correct proportions and preventing distortion. Here's how **2.35:1** should appear on a **16:9** screen:



3. Presentation

3.3 Aspect Ratios (Continued)

If the image is appearing distorted, zoomed or stretched, check the display and player settings first. Many devices automatically scale the picture to “fill the screen”, which can cause stretching or cropping. Look for settings such as Auto, Original, Fill Screen. Black bars are normal and often mean the image is being displayed correctly. Below is an example of how a display or projector may zoom a **2.35:1** film to “fill screen”, causing the picture to be zoomed and the picture cropped on a **16:9** display.



While aspect ratios on DVD/Blu-ray and DCP are usually consistent, video files can be unpredictable, especially when combining multiple videos with different aspect ratios into one file. Best practice is to keep each element separate and use a playlist (e.g. in VLC or PotPlayer) so the player can correctly detect and display each file as intended.

Subtitles are a great way to identify if your film is being displayed correctly. Use them as a reference; are they too low and cut off?

4. Pre-screening Test

4.1 Picture Test

This confirms the audience will see a correctly framed, sharp image. Most picture issues are caused by the wrong input being selected, poor focus, or incorrect aspect ratio settings.

- Projector/display is on and the correct input selected
- Image is centred, level and fills the screen correctly
- Focus is sharp (check subtitles)
- Image is not cropped or stretched (aspect ratio correct)

4.2 Sound Test

This ensures the audience can clearly hear dialogue. Sound problems are one of the most common issues in screenings and are often caused by incorrect audio routing or incorrect input selection on the sound system.

- Sound system powered on & correct input selected
- Sound coming through the correct speakers
- Dialogue is clear (test a speaking scene)
- No buzzing, distortion, or delay

4.3 Playback Test

This ensures the correct version of the film is ready to play, subtitles are enabled if needed, and the playback device will run reliably without interruption.

- Correct version loaded (DCP, DVD/Blu-ray, Video file)
- Film queued at correct start point (no menus or desktops visible)
- Subtitles enabled if required
- Playback device won't sleep or power off
- Film plays smoothly for at least 1–2 minutes
- Operator knows how to start, pause and restart quickly

4. Pre-screening Test

4.4 Screening Day Checklist

(DCP, DVD/Blu-ray, Video File)

This checklist helps ensure the screening runs smoothly and prevents last-minute technical issues. Aim to arrive early enough to complete setup and testing without rushing, around 1–2 hours before doors open to the audience.

1. Before Doors Open	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Projector/display powered on & correct input selected
<input type="checkbox"/>	Image aligned, framed correctly, and in focus
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sound system powered on & correct input selected
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dialogue checked at screening volume
<input type="checkbox"/>	Film loaded and queued at the correct start point
<input type="checkbox"/>	Subtitles enabled (if required)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Playback device set to prevent sleep/power saving
<input type="checkbox"/>	Remote/mouse/controls working (spare batteries available)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Running order confirmed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Backup copy of film available where possible

2. During Doors Open	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Welcome slide &/or holding screen displayed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Operator remains near playback controls
<input type="checkbox"/>	Final check: film ready to start on time
3. Film Start	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Start playback at the scheduled time or go from the organiser
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor first 1–2 minutes (picture, sound, playback)
4. During Screening	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Avoid changing settings during the film
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be ready to pause or restart if required

5. Troubleshooting

5.1 Handling a Technical Issue

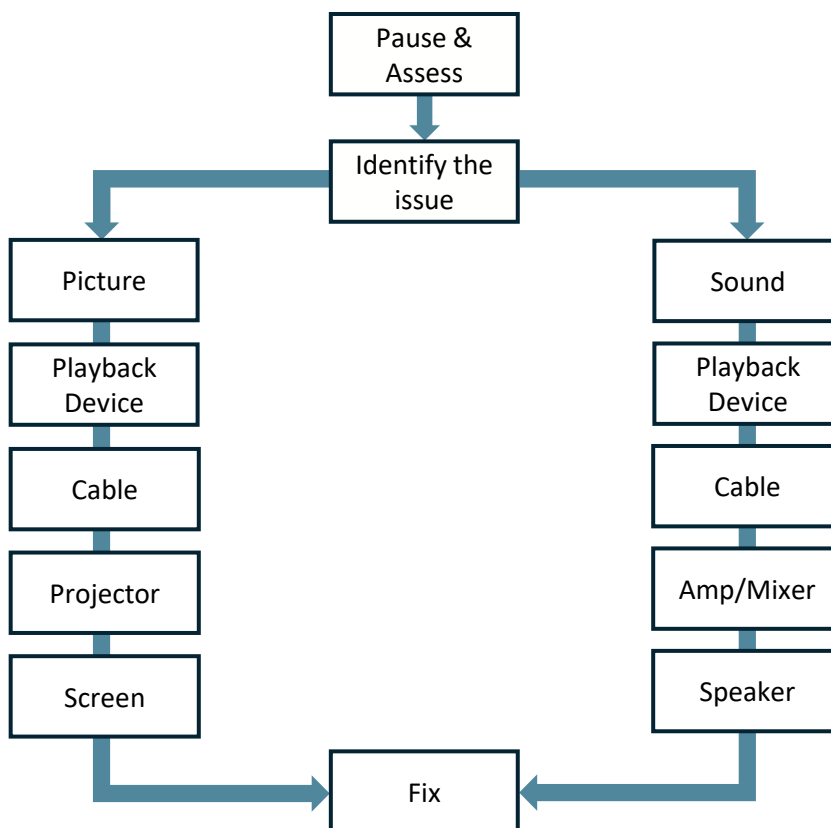
To solve a technical issue, particularly during a screening, the key is to follow the picture and sound chains, working along the signal chain²².

The first step is to pause and assess. During a screening, the presence of an audience can create pressure; it's key to remain calm and take your time.

Start at the source and work outward toward the screen/speakers.

If the delay is longer than a few minutes:

- Communicate clearly with the audience
- Give an estimated restart time
- Offer a short break if needed



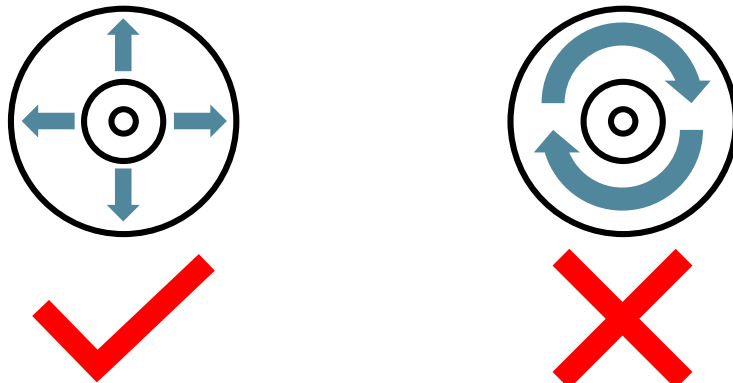
5. Troubleshooting

5.2 Issue with the Source

5.2.1 DVD/Blu-ray

If there is an issue, and assuming no problems have been identified with the player, player settings or region code, the disc itself may be damaged. A scratched disc can lead to a failure to read/play, or to stuttering or freezing during playback²⁰.

Start by checking the disc for scratches, dust or fingerprints. To clean, use a **dry microfibre cloth** and wipe it gently from the centre outward in straight lines like below:



If the disc is still presenting problems playing or reading, procure a replacement. Some venues may create a backup file for testing, depending on licensing and permissions.

When this is done, the disc is “ripped” to a digital file. Two free software programs available for both Windows and Apple are: [MakeMKV](#) and [Handbrake](#).

Note: Always ensure any video file used for public screening is supplied by the distributor/rights holder and/or covered by the correct licence.

5. Troubleshooting

5.2 Issue with the Source

5.2.2 Video File

If an issue has been identified as the video file itself, start by trying to play the file in another video player and/or playing another video file in the same player. If the video file still fails to open, then there may have been an issue with the download.

VIDEO FILE WON'T OPEN

The video file may be corrupted from a partial upload or download. Start by downloading the file again from the same source, as there may have been an issue with the initial download. If the issue persists, request the file again from the sender. Be sure to specify to **RE-UPLOAD** the file.

VIDEO FILE STUTTERING OR FREEZING DURING PLAYBACK

If the video file opens but presents issues in playback²⁰, the file provided may be too large for the equipment. Request a lower spec version. To identify if a file is too large, utilise **MediaInfo** or simply check “properties” (Windows) / “Get info” (Apple).

Look out for the GB size of the file and quality, i.e., 2K or 4K.

A simple rule here is if it's a feature film and the file is under 2GB, it may look poor. If it's over 30GB, test early and avoid playing directly from USB.

VIDEO FILE STORED ONLINE AND PLAYBACK IS AFFECTED

A common problem can stem from streaming the film online, rather than downloading it prior to the screening. This requires a stable internet connection. Many spaces suffer from poor signal or dropouts from the internet, which may lead to problems in playback.

Run a test early to ensure your internet has the capacity to stream video files effectively. **ALWAYS** download the file if the option is available. Request from the sender if not.

5. Troubleshooting

5.2 Issue with the Source

5.2.3 DCP

Part 1

If the venue is having trouble with the provided DCP⁹, assuming there is no issue with the equipment, the DCP/KDM¹⁶ may be the source.

DCP WON'T INGEST

If the DCP is failing to ingest¹⁴ or is “corrupt”, firstly, check that the file contains all the necessary folders as per page 10. This may require moving the files yourself if they are not located in the same folder.

Secondly, there may be an issue with the download. DCP files tend to be large; without a stable internet connection, downloads often cause issues. Re-download from the same source. Always check that the size of the file you have downloaded corresponds with the download link. If the problem persists, request the distributor to **RE-UPLOAD** the package and download again, or ask for a physical drive to be sent.

KDM DOES NOT UNLOCK THE DCP

If a KDM has been supplied but the DCP is still locked, check the KDM details. Firstly, check that the KDM is for the version of the DCP you have been supplied. The KDM will target not only the server/projector, but also the specific version of the DCP. This can be identified by the title of the DCP or CPL⁷, mentioned on page 11. Provide the distributor with the title/CPL, such as below:

MyMovie_FTR-1-25_F-178_EN-XX_20_2K_ST_20260406_FAC_SMPTE_OV

If it's not the correct version, a new key can be provided for the DCP you currently have OR the other version of the DCP may be sent as a replacement.

5. Troubleshooting

5.2 Issue with the Source

5.2.3 DCP

Part 2

KDM DOES NOT UNLOCK THE DCP (continued)

Secondly, confirm the date and time, as these can often cause issues. The quickest way to check this is through the venue/cinema Content Management System. If you have access to the KDM¹⁶ file, you can also check the details directly in the XML/text file. It may look intimidating, but you only need a couple of details. Use CTRL + F (Windows) or Command + F (Mac), search for “valid”, and you should find something like the example below:

```
<ContentKeysNotValidBefore>2026-05-01T00:00:00+00:00</ContentKeysNotValidBefore>  
<ContentKeysNotValidAfter>2026-05-02T23:59:00+00:00</ContentKeysNotValidAfter>
```

From this, we can see that the key is valid from the 1st of May at 12:00 am to the 2nd of May until 11:59 pm.

DCP CONTENT IS INCORRECT

If the DCP⁹ does not contain the required content, such as subtitles, request the correct version from the distributor. Once again, refer to the title/CPL⁷ to discern what content is within the DCP.

The **GOLDEN RULE** is imperative here, as not all DCP titles will be representative of the content.

One thing to highlight here is the difference between captions. DCPs will be provided as either **Open captions (OCAP)** or **Closed captions (CCAP)** for hard-of-hearing accessibility. These provide descriptive subtitles for both audio and dialogue. Open captions are visible to everyone on screen, whereas closed captions are not visible unless “activated” or using personal caption devices. Check that your venue can play Closed Caption DCPs if you require captions.

5. Troubleshooting

5.2 Issue with the Source

5.2.3 DCP

Part 3

DCP CONTENT IS INCORRECT (Continued)

If the DCP⁹ is in a foreign language, English subtitles will be required for translation. Going back to the DCP name & CPL title, you can identify if the film has the required language/subtitles:

MyMovie_FTR-1-25_F-178_EN-XX_20_2K_ST_20260406_FAC_SMPTE_OV

Language and subtitles are highlighted in red. The first abbreviation refers to the language, and the second abbreviation refers to the subtitle. These are defined by the International Organisation of Standards (ISO) language names. Take a look [HERE](#) for a list.

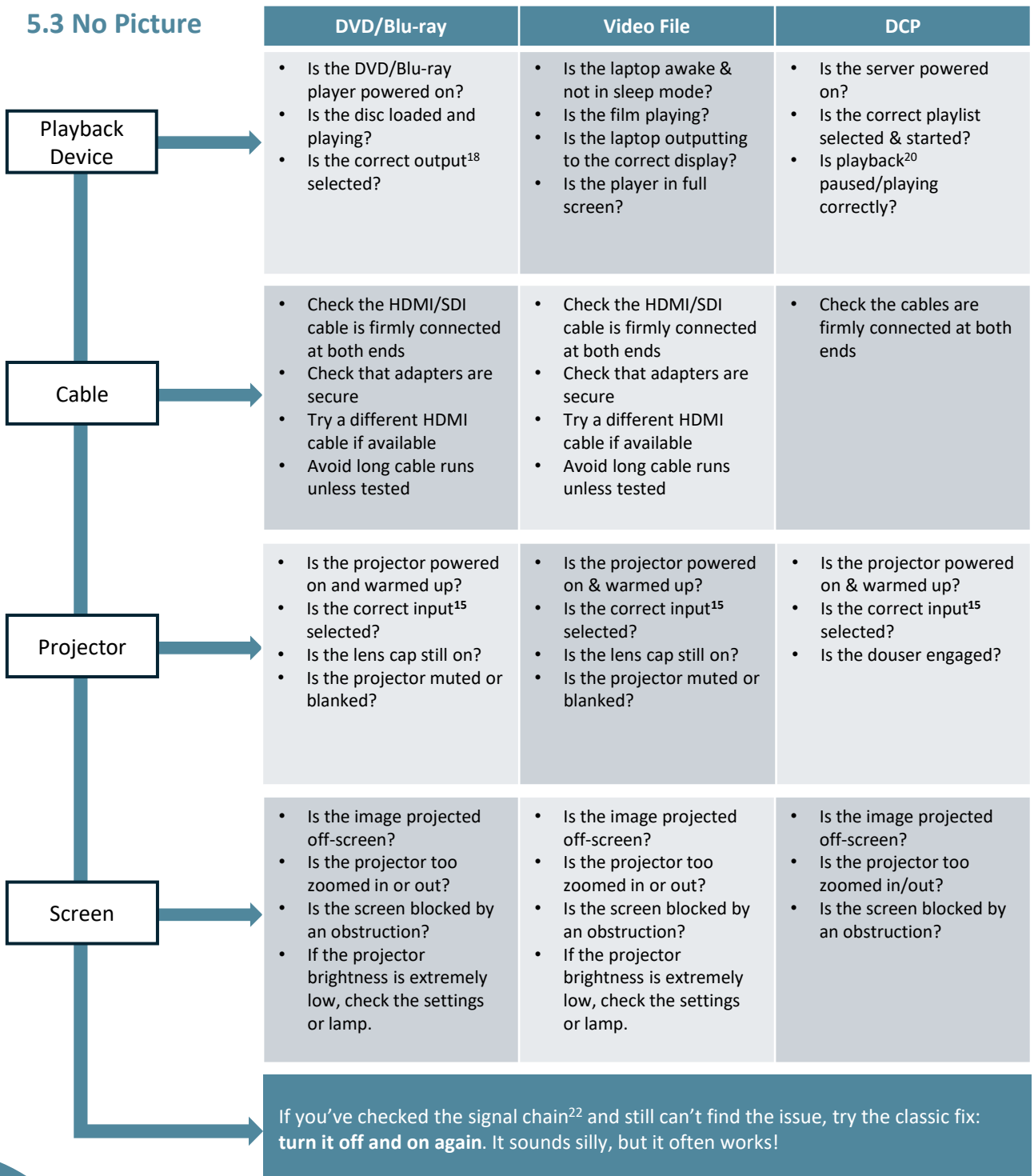
The above example defines that the film's language is **EN**, for English. **XX** shows that there are no subtitles in this DCP. If **XX** appears first, this means either there is no dialogue in the movie, or more likely, the language hasn't been defined when making the DCP.

If, for example, you are showing a French movie to an English audience, you would be looking for **FR-EN** in the title/CPL⁷. French is the dialogue language, and English is the subtitles for translation.

There may be cases where you are sent a film without foreign language subtitles. This is a quick way to identify that you have the right version early in the process.

5. Troubleshooting

5.3 No Picture



5. Troubleshooting

5.3 No Sound

	DVD/Blu-ray	Video File	DCP
Playback Device	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the player muted? Is the correct audio track³ selected? Is the player output¹⁸ set correctly? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the film playing & not muted? Is laptop volume up? Is the correct audio output¹⁸ selected? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the playlist playing correctly? Is the correct audio format selected (stereo/5.1¹)? Is the cinema processor set to the correct format?
Cable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The HDMI/audio cable is secure at both ends If using a separate audio output¹⁸, check the correct port Try a different cable if available Check that adapters are connected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The HDMI/audio cable is secure at both ends Try a different cable if available If using a 3.5mm jack, is the plug fully inserted? Check that adapters are connected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm server output¹⁸ connections are secure Check audio feed connections Confirm no cables have been knocked loose
Audio/Mixer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amp/mixer powered on Correct input selected Master volume up Channel faders¹¹ up and not muted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AV receiver/amp/mixer powered on Correct input¹⁵ selected (HDMI input matching player) Check surround mode (try stereo if unsure) Volume up, not muted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cinema processor/amp powered on Correct format selected (stereo/5.1¹) Check channel mapping preset is correct Confirm volume is at standard level
Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speakers powered on (if active) Speaker cables are connected firmly Test left/right speakers If only music/no dialogue: centre channel issue (surround setup) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speakers powered on (if active) Speaker cables are connected firmly Test with another audio source if possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check speaker amps are powered Confirm processor routing is correct

If you've checked the signal chain²² and still can't find the issue, try the classic fix: **turn it off and on again**. It sounds silly, but it often works!

6. Glossary

6.1 Glossary of Common Terms

No. / Term	Simple Definition
1. 5.1	Surround sound which uses six speakers
2. Aspect Ratio	The shape of the image proportional between height & width
3. Audio Track	A selectable sound option (e.g. language or commentary)
4. Buffering	Playback pausing while the file loads more data
5. Codec	The type of video &/or audio compression inside a file
6. Container	The file wrapper that holds video and audio
7. CPL	Composition Playlist. A DCP file that tells the server how to play the movie
8. Cue	To prepare the film at the correct start point, ready to press play
9. DCP	Digital Cinema Package. A professional cinema film format used in commercial cinemas
10. Display	The projector or screen showing the film image
11. Fader	A slider on a sound desk or mixer used to control volume
12. Focus	The sharpness of the projected image
13. Frame Rate	The speed the film plays at frames per second (FPS)
14. Ingest	Copying a file onto a cinema server so it can be played
15. Input	Where picture or sound is sent from a device (e.g. HDMI output)

6. Glossary

6.1 Glossary of Common Terms

No. / Term	Simple Definition
16. KDM	Key Delivery Message. A time-limited digital key used to unlock an encrypted DCP
17. Operator	The person controlling playback during the screening
18. Output	Where picture or sound is sent from a device (e.g. HDMI output)
19. Pixel	Picture element. The smallest building block of a digital image. Dots or squares that make up the image
20. Playback	Playing and controlling the film (pause, stop, play)
21. Resolution	The quality/detail of the image (measured in s by width x height)
22. Signal Chain	The full connection path from playback device to projector/display and speakers