

DVD SCREENINGS and DVD FAQs

This is a collection of FAQ, many of which have been published in ReelNews starting from issue 75, and deal with DVD and rights issues. FAQ on other topics can be found in Information Sheet 14.

Q1. What is the best DVD equipment to buy and what will it cost? (Added Nov 2006 – updated Jul 2009)

A. New models are coming out every day and prices are dropping rapidly, so specific recommendations will be out of date almost immediately.

The DVD Player

The more expensive players don't seem to play any better or more reliably than the cheap \$50 ones, although they do have more features. Just ensure it will play DVDs from all regions and provide the outputs you need such as digital 5+1 audio and S-Video. A separate video output is useful if you require a monitor, and separate stereo audio outputs are necessary if you intend to attach wireless headphones or stereo amp. If you wish to play CDs you will have to play these in a DVD player, because if you are using a 5+1 speaker system, you will be using a digital audio connection and you will not be able to connect a CD player which does not usually have such an output.

If you have a Full HD projector you should consider an "Upscaling" DVD player which can produce almost Full HD quality over an HDMI output lead from normal definition DVDs

The Audio

The minimum audio system would be a cheap stereo amp feeding 2 main speakers (but don't forget to "downmix" the 5+1 sound to stereo in the player). It is much preferred to have a central "speech channel" as well, in which case a full 5+1 Dolby system can be justified. \$300 for the "receiver" and another \$800 for 5 speakers and subwoofer should be possible. Many movies don't make use of the rear "surround sound" speakers although the DVDs are marked as "5+1" Dolby. You could easily omit the two rear speakers without significant loss – especially if it is necessary to set the speakers out every screening and have cables strung out across doorways.

The Projector

The video projector is the most expensive component - yet the one which is dropping in price the fastest – and is the most critical component.

- Resolution. There are many "native" resolutions on offer, SVGA (800x600), HD (1280x720), SXGA (1280x1024), but the greater resolution you can get, the better. The recommended system is a full HD projector which can project 1920 x 1080 pixels, and are now available for under \$3000.
- Ratio. Many movies are in widescreen (1.88:1) or at least 16:9. Most DVDs assume 16:9, so ensure the projector handles 16:9 at high quality. The "standard" ratio movie image is 4:3.
- True high definition is 1920 x 1080 pixels, which is widescreen with 16:9 aspect ratio. This can be either interlaced or progressive scan, (1080i or 1080p respectively). Interlaced is an older technology to match existing systems. Always use 1920 x 1080p if possible.
- A high resolution projector will achieve best results with a high definition player (Blu-ray) and HDMI cable. Blu-ray players and some DVD players are capable of "upscaling" and a normal DVD played on such equipment should give a resolution approaching that of 35mm projectors. High definition equipment is, not surprisingly, more expensive than lower resolution, although the gap is narrowing.
- Digital projectors used in commercial cinemas are often quoted as 2K or 4K resolution, the latter resulting in an image of even better quality, but the cost would be prohibitive for most film societies.
- Brightness. Depends on your desired screen size and whether you intend to screen outdoors. As most film societies screen in a darkened room 1200 ANSI Lumens should be enough for

most situations.

- Contrast. The greater the better, especially when there is ambient light around, but 1500:1 should be adequate for most situations.
- Lamp cost and life. Some are expensive, but life-spans are often up to 2,000 hours or more. Some projectors have an “economy” setting which will prolong the lamp life, if you don’t need full brightness.
- LCD or DLP?. Each has its own drawbacks. LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) can suffer the so-called “flyscreen” effect of small gaps between the pixels, but the use of multi-LCD panels has reduced this. DLP (Digital Light Processing) projectors can have a different problem – a flicker effect – caused by the colour wheel running at 2 x speed but most now run at a preferred 4 x speed, which minimises the problem.
- Inputs. Should have S-Video as a minimum. Component video may be better but takes longer to set up each time, with greater possibility of error. High definition systems use HDMI. (High Definition Media Interface) which is fully digital through to the projector.
- Noise. Check that the fan noise is low.
- Placement. Most projectors are designed for projecting from the centre of the room so don’t expect to be able to project from your old projection box unless you pay more for a longer lens. Even so, having the operator in the audience has the advantage that he can always get the focus and sound right – Correct?
- Running cost. This may involve regular cleaning to remove dust from the optical path and the rare cost of replacing a globe. (May be \$300 - \$800). However, over the lifetime of 2000 hours for a typical globe, this represents a running cost of under 50c per hour and almost 1000 screenings – a “lifetime” for most film societies.
A reasonable budget for a projector capable of filling a 4 metre wide screen might be \$2000 - \$3000 depending on resolution and brightness.

NOTE: During 2007 the FVFS made available to members a DVD projector package including projector, 2 DVD players, stereo amp and 2 speakers, all wired up in a portable carry case, for under \$1000.

Note 2: In ReelNews #86 (Jan 2010) we recommended the HD projector, Epson EW TW3000, and in ReelNews #88 (June 2010) Whitehorse Film Society noted that it had been upgraded to EW TW3500 for under \$2,600. Both were recommended by PC User magazine.

Q2: Why can't I charge for single admission to a film society screening? (Mar 2007)

A: A film society that screens in a public venue is operating in a non-theatrical environment. Film societies are defined as non-profitmaking organizations which screen to financial members of the film society. The appropriate screening rights in this case are the non-theatrical screening rights that either come with the hire of the film or DVD or have been negotiated separately. Offering paid admission to a screening makes it a theatrical screening where rights payments are generally more expensive or determined as a percentage of the total door sales.

Q3. I cannot see any video picture on my video projector, so how do I adjust the settings on my DVD player? (Aug 2007)

A. I assume you are using S-Video or component video and the video output setting has been changed in the DVD player. It is possible to select SETUP accidentally in the DVD player especially if there is interference from another remote controller, and in the worst scenario can reset the video output mode to something other than the one you are using.

To restore the picture, connect an RCA “video” lead between the video player and the video projector – but note that you may need to change the video input mode on the projector. Then you will be able to see the image to change the player SETUP back to the required output mode. Then don’t forget to restore the video projector back to the preferred setting.

The composite video output mode is always present, so keep an emergency RCA lead handy for this purpose.

Q4. I cannot get any sound from the amplifier in my DVD setup. (Aug '07 – updated July '09)

A. Many DVD players have a volume control and a “mute” button on the remote controller which controls the sound level going to the amplifier – certainly the analogue and sometimes the digital sound. You may have activated either control accidentally, or even more subtle, another remote controller may have interfered with your setting and changed the level without you realizing it. In

one case I saw a channel select button on a set-top-box reduce the volume on a nearby DVD player. Believe me, it took some time to clarify that problem.

Q5. *Our society would like to present An Inconvenient Truth as a special screening to raise the awareness of these issues in the community. We are hoping to give out some info from local service providers (like electricity, water & green energy places, etc) about things people can do right now to reduce carbon emissions. But I wondered about logistics of letting people enter without being members. Roadshow Entertainment are booking the movie for us and they ask that people coming are members or guests. How do things like film festivals run when run by a film society? Is there some allowance for encouraging new people to turn up that might not ordinarily? Do you think we need to ask everyone to join, or can they be a 'visitor'? It would be nice if people could come along without joining because we would like a lot of people to see the movie, but don't want to go against regulations. We see this as a good opportunity to encourage new interest in the society as well as see a really interesting movie with a good message. (Aug 2007 - updated Jul '09)*

A. This is a topic that many societies have grappled with over the years. And it is often discussed at our AGM discussion sessions.

A condition of borrowing 16mm films and DVDs (or paying the \$55 for DVD screening rights) is that film society screenings are "non-theatrical", i.e. to members only. If there are visitors they are not to be charged single admission to a screening. So that is the definition, all you need do is operate in a way that does not break with that concept – and not in a way which allows visitors to come over and over for free, upsetting the paying member!

As you correctly say, film societies need to be able to admit the occasional guest or visitor so new potential members can "come and try it" or a member may have someone staying with them they would like to bring along. Some societies like to run free "come-and-try-it" screenings to attract new members, using occasions such as you describe. If you have any doubts about a particular occasion it is best to speak to the distributor who is supplying your film or granting the DVD rights. They are the ones that could be upset if they think you are pulling a swifty! Alternatives used by societies to allow for the occasional visitors range from donations to supper charges (but the donation must be voluntary and any paid-for supper optional). Any non-member should be limited in the number of times they can come without joining. Another acceptable option is short term memberships such as 3 or 6 monthly, for "say" 35% or 60% of the cost of a full membership. But they must be for consecutive screenings.

Film festivals usually pay more for their films so they can charge for admission - up to \$400 per film - on a commercial rental basis. It is unusual that a festival runs using 16mm film these days, although they may use DVD, and if they do so using NTLC items they need special clearance from the NFSA.

The other factor to consider is how the screening is promoted. In many ways this is the most important aspect as this is what could be misconstrued or find its way back to the distributor. Use film titles by all means in your promotion, but always promote the society and membership. Have a phone number for enquiries. But don't promote individual admission. If you want to run a free event, check with the distributor that it is ok with them.

Q6. *Will the DVD players supplied as part of the FVFS DVD Projector Package play region 2 DVDs? (Nov 2007)*

A. Yes. All players have been tested on DVDs from all regions. A word of warning though. If you have obtained a region 2 DVD because there is no region 4 (Australian) version available this probably means there is no Australian distributor and hence no-one in Australia in a position to grant you clearance to screen the DVD. See the next FVFS information sheet about obtaining DVDs from overseas.

Q7. *What is the longest lead I can use between my DVD player and the projector? (Mar 2008)*

A. I assume you are using S-Video (sometimes called SVHS) which is a good compromise between the poorer composite video (RCA lead) and the three leads required for component video. Generally the longer the lead the more the signal degrades, and hence the poorer the picture. So the real question is how long can the leads be without the picture being unacceptably degraded? Retailers such as Dick Smith and Jaycar have S-Video (SVHS) leads available in lengths between 1.5m and 10m and I find all these lengths satisfactory, but not having tested longer lengths I cannot

comment further.

Q8. Can I sell single admission tickets at the door at film society screenings or as a fundraiser? (Mar 2008 – updated Jul 2009)

A. The film societies conduct “non-theatrical” screenings for their members and the screening rights included with the borrowed 16mm films and DVDs, or the ACOFS negotiated DVD rights, reflect this. The understanding is that no single admission tickets are sold. Attendance is limited to members or non-paying guests.

Film festivals and 35mm film societies may operate “theatrical” screenings or have special agreements with the suppliers which may allow a proportion of single ticket sales, but in these cases a higher rights payment is usually payable for the screening.

Q9. Why does the sound cut out when I switch from one DVD player to another? (Mar 2008)

A. I presume you are using a “Receiver” to decode the digital audio into 5 + 1 surround sound. When switching between two digital audio streams the receiver can lose synch and usually relies on the break in signal as a cue to reset. However, if the break is too short the receiver may not be triggered and sound output can be lost. The solution is simple. Ensure that any switchover between players (and digital sound sources) has an obvious break – briefly pause on a neutral position when switching over. It will not be obvious to the audience, but the receiver will be triggered to re-synchronize.

Q10. The DVD projectors supplied by the FVFS can be set to a Standard or Widescreen ratio. When running a multi-DVD event, how can I change the ratio quickly between DVDs without stopping the show? (Mar 2008)

A. You can't change between projected ratios without going to the on-screen menu and selecting the new ratio. However, you may not need to. If you set both the projector and the DVD player/s to "Standard Ratio" instead of using the "Widescreen" option, the result on screen will automatically be at the correct ratio for the film being screened whether Standard or Widescreen or anything in between. While most of your audience will not pick any loss in quality, there is a clear advantage when running a mixed ratio screening. You also remove that continual doubt over whether you have selected the right ratio for the film being screened!

Q11. How do I know when the picture on the screen is at the right ratio? (July 2009)

A. It is not always easy to identify when an actor is too tall or too fat – the common complaint to an incorrect screen ratio.

To ensure you have the picture at the right ratio when setting up, pause the film when you see something round such as a clock or car wheel (but make sure it is square on to the camera or it will be distorted). Then measure the width and height to check the object is perfectly round (height = width). Make sure it is within the movie itself as sometimes the menu or intro to the movie is a different ratio!

Q12. Several DVDs we have used have stopped half way or jumped sections.

A. Try investing in a DVD repair kit available from most retailers. They remove all fingerprints and most scratches which can cause this behavior. At least use a soft cleaning kit (soft optical cloth) and clean all DVDs before use. Only wipe from the center out, not around the DVD as the data is written around the DVD in a long spiral and any marks along the spiral will cause more problems than radial marks.

Another suggestion is that you try another player. Some are more susceptible to scratches or out-of-tolerance DVDs than others. Oddly, the cheaper the player the more reliable they seem to be in this regard!

Your experience demonstrates one reason for buying your own DVDs. New ones are guaranteed to be free of scratches and marks, as well as being able to test them in advance and preview the extras. As well, you will end up with a DVD which can be placed in the society library for members to borrow at any time later.

Q13. When I screen a “Widescreen” DVD, how do I remove the dark areas above and below the image?

A. The short answer is “You can’t”, or more accurately, “You shouldn’t”. There are actually several ways but you should resist them!

The traditional TV screen is a “standard ratio” of 4x3 which is a very good match for the older standard “classic” movies. This includes the older 4x3 video projectors classed as “data projectors” such as the Toshiba T50 and T60 as supplied by the FVFS in 2008.

If you run a DVD of a 4x3 ratio movie through a 4x3 ratio projector onto a 4x3 ratio screen everything matches perfectly as long as the player and projector are both set to “normal”. However, things get more complicated when you screen a DVD of a Widescreen movie (16x9) or even wider Cinemascope (2.4 to 1 ratio). A Widescreen movie is approximately 30% wider than a standard ratio image so must be accommodated within the screen area without distortion. As stated in another FAQ, it is best to keep the 4x3 projector set to “Standard” relying on the projector to make all the adjustments. Note that not all projectors and players have the same settings or the same names for the settings.



The Interpreter, as intended in 16x9 ratio.

There are many ways to set up the player, only one of which is correct.



Zoom or Pan and Scan retains the proportions but cuts 33% off the width. WRONG

1. ZOOM (Never use this)

The movie image is increased in size so its height matches the height of the projected image. The picture proportions are maintained so about 30% of the picture is lost to the left and right of the image. As the film director has assumed you will see all of his picture, you should never use Zoom.

NOTE: The M Censorship rating logo has been added to the original images to show the effect of distortion on something round.

2. PAN and SCAN (Never use this)

This is an intelligent variation of Zoom, where the visible part of the image is moved left and right depending on where the relevant action lies. This format is often used by commercial TV channels when transmitting widescreen pictures over normal ratio TV channels.

3. LETTERBOX (Recommended)

This is the best setting. The image is adjusted in size so that the width fits the normal 4x3 ratio TV screen, resulting in black bars across the top and bottom of the screen. This is to be expected, and is the only way to see a widescreen movie in the correct ratio on a standard ratio screen. SBS usually transmit their widescreen movies in this format. Of course the image will fit the newer TV screens perfectly as they are 16x9 ratio, as are the newer HD video projectors. A Cinemascope movie, however, will still be displayed with black bars at the top and bottom of the screen, even with a widescreen, as they are up to 2.4 to 1 ratio.



Letterboxing retains all the image in the right proportions. Just zoom it out on a big screen.

4. FULL SCREEN (Never use this option)

In this setting the image fits the screen perfectly left to right but instead of having the black bars, the image is stretched vertically to fit the height of the screen resulting in a deformed image. No doubt you will have seen the long tall cowboy on the long legged horse!



Full screen stretches the image to fit a 4x3 screen and distorts it.

WRONG

A similar mistake is often made when a standard ratio image is stretched to fill a widescreen TV. I have seen this many times in pubs and clubs, where the announcer seems uncommonly fat (30% wider than usual in fact!)



Buster stretched to fit a 16x9 image (ie distorted) WRONG



Buster in a normal 4x3 image on a 16x9 screen.

IN SUMMARY

Set the DVD player output or TV type to Standard 4x3 or widescreen 16x9 depending on the TV screen or projector capability and select “letterbox” or “LB” in preference to “pan and scan”, “zoom” or “full screen”.

To get the most from the projector set it to “normal”.

If you have any concern that your final image may be distorted, play a DVD and check that no part of the image is lost. Then pause when you see the first round object (viewed flat-on to the camera) such as a car wheel or clock, and check that it is actually round on screen.

If you are worried that the black bars top and bottom of the screen, upgrade to a 16x9 ratio screen and zoom the image to fill the screen.

Please email the editor if you have any ideas you want to try out on us or have other questions.

For further information, or to lodge a FAQ of your own email admin@fvfs.org.au