

INFORMATION SHEET 07 - (30th March 2026)

FILM SOCIETIES AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

The Film Society in the 21st century could now reasonably be called The DVD Society because actual celluloid film is rarely if ever seen in use by film societies today.

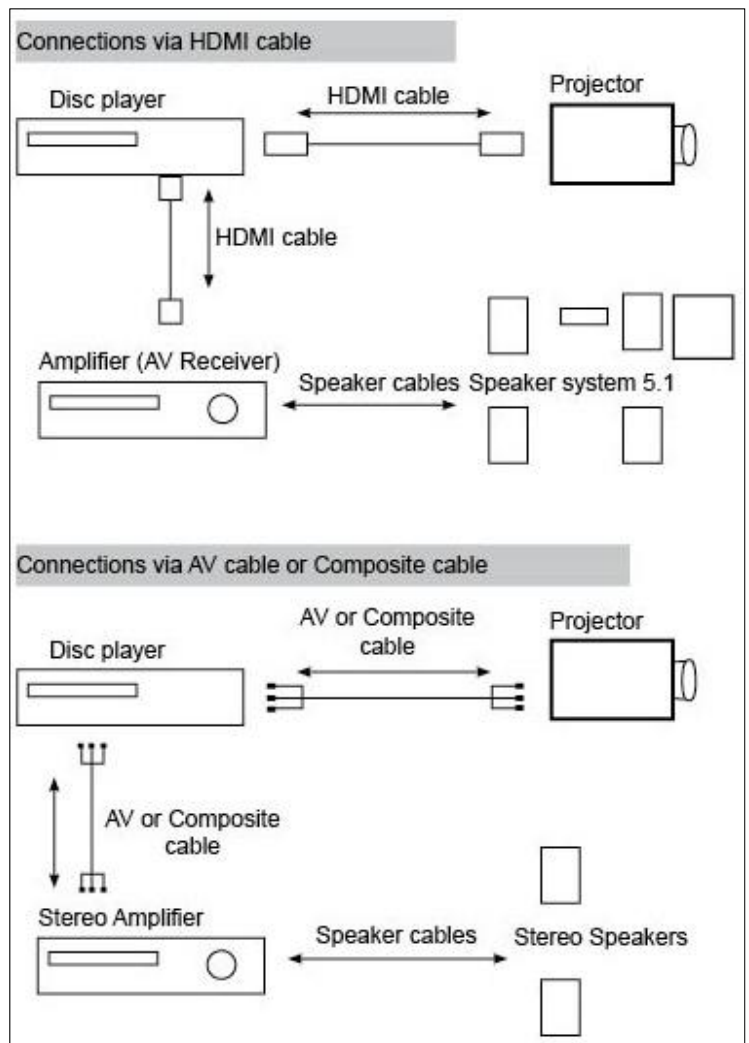
Today, with few exceptions, film societies use digital technology to show movies via DVD (Digital Video Disc) or DCP (Digital Cinema Package) and possibly with modern digital projectors and 'cinema like' sound systems if they have been keeping up with developments in technology.

The purpose of this Information Sheet is to assist those wanting to start a **new film society** from scratch to acquire the right equipment and for **an existing society** wanting to upgrade their equipment for a better viewing experience.

To do this we'll step through the various items of equipment you need for a rewarding viewing experience.

What's needed;

1. A disc player – either a DVD, Blu-ray or 4K blu-ray player
2. A projector – of at least full HD specifications (more on this later)
3. A sound system – comprising an amplifier and speakers
4. A projection screen – designed to maximise /enhance the projected image.



Today's equipment is connected via either HDMI, AV or Composite cables between player, projector and sound system -

• Terminology in Digital film technology -

DVD – Digital Versatile Disc or Digital Video Disc.

Blu-ray – refers to the blue colour of the higher quality blue laser technology used to create them.

4K Blu-ray or UHD Blu-ray or Native 4K – refers to the resolution width in pixels i.e. approx 4000 (3840 on 4K discs, players and UHD 4K TVs).

Cinema 4K (DCP) – refers to commercial cinema 4K projection files which are 2160 x 4096*.

DCI– Digital Cinema Initiative - refers to the 4K resolution used in commercial cinemas.

DCP – Digital Cinema Package* – as with DCI, also refers to the type of digital file used in commercial cinema projection.

HDR - High Dynamic range refers to the much greater range of colours from whiter whites to blacker blacks and everything in between.

HDMI – High Definition Media Interface – gets more data faster between devices & carries both picture and sound data for your movie between player and projector. This is now the standard connection protocol for digital media components.

Full HD - Full High Definition – refers to the '1080p' resolution standard for Blu-ray discs and equipment such as projectors & disc players.

UHD – Ultra High Definition – refers to the '2160p' standard for 4K Blu-ray discs, players and projectors.

Upscaling – a process using computer algorithms in the player (or projector) to enhance the image quality from say, standard DVD to 480p – to approximately Blu-ray 1080p. Whilst this is an improvement it is not achieving true Blu-ray quality, so it is a compromise; this also applies to 4K (or 4k capable with upscaling) players.

LCD – Liquid Crystal Display – light sensitive panels for displaying images

DLP – Digital Light Processing - is a set of [chipsets](#) based on optical micro-electro-mechanical technology that uses a digital micro-mirror device. It is used various forms in today's projectors.

5.1 — Refers to a Sound system comprising amplifier (AV Receiver) and 6 speakers (1 centre speaker, 2 front speakers, 2 rear surround speakers and 1 sub-woofer speaker (so it's 5 regular speakers and the 1 is the sub-woofer.

5.2 - 7.1 - 7.2 refers to systems with additional speakers and sub-woofers

• The Disc Player & the type of Disc .

In order to discuss the best type of player to use, first consider the type of disc your movie is on, remembering that image quality is primarily, but not only, about resolution – the higher the resolution the better the image (and the soundtrack too).

- DVD player plays DVDs only.
- Blu-ray player plays Blu-rays and DVDs.
- 4K Blu-ray player plays 4k discs, Blu-ray and DVDs.

- DCP Player (software to play a downloaded DCP file from the distributor).

If your movie is on -

1. DVD - the image will be made up of 345,600 pixels (480 pixels x 720 pixels)
2. Blu-ray – the image will be made up of 2,073,600 pixels (1080 x 1920)
3. 4K Blu-ray – the image will be made up of 8,294,400 pixels (2160 x 3840)
4. DCP (Digital Cinema Package) the image will be 4K - i.e. 8,847,360 pixels (2160 x 4096)

The more pixels the better the image quality.

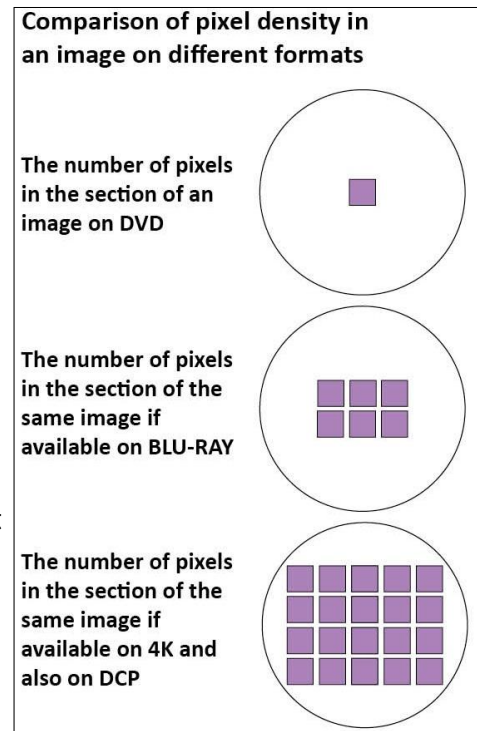
As you can see the Blu-ray image is approx. six times 'better' than DVD and the 4K Blu-ray image is four times better than Blu-ray.

Blu-ray discs, 4K Blu-ray discs and DCP files also deliver richer colours, better blacks and whiter whites (and better soundtracks).

Please note – If your Society is considering screening via DCP download be aware that screening rights for DCP versions are considerably higher than the rights FVFS members pay for DVD versions

Disc prices vary a great deal depending on where and when purchased, how long the disc has been on sale and whether it is discounted. In Australia a Blu-ray version of a movie will be approximately 20% dearer than the DVD version and a 4K version will be another 20%+ dearer. There are exceptions of course – as an example, the recent box office hit 'Barbie' has been released on all three disc formats and at JB HiFi the prices (at time of writing) were - DVD \$15.98, Blu-ray \$19.98 and 4K Blu-ray \$29.98.

Sourcing discs from overseas is usually more expensive and exchange rates will impact what you pay.



• **The Projector**

Your projector is the most expensive piece of equipment **and the most important.**

The purpose of your projector is to create the cinematic feeling of a theatre in your venue; screen size, resolution and brightness are important. Ideally, this is where a 4K projector would be best for sharp detailed visuals rich in colour.

As you'll notice, almost all of our top picks are either native 4K projectors, or achieve a 4K-like image through clever trickery (upscaling) for a higher picture quality. Digital projectors appeared in the 1990's and were big, heavy and expensive. Time and technology has moved on and today we have numerous types and brands available, at realistic prices.

For film societies there are basically four types of projector to consider;

Full HD Projector which provides image resolution of up to 1920 x 1080p (or Blu-ray disc level for comparison)

4K/UHD Projector which provides resolution of 3820 x 2160p particularly when playing a 4K disc to a 4K projector.

Short Throw Projector which can be a good choice if your venue is small.

Long Throw Projector enables you to take advantage of a large venue and a big screen. But the longer the throw, the more expensive the lens.

A projector's 'throw' - the distance between its lens and the screen—is one of its key features and an important way to categorise it. Throw is determined by projector lens, which is classified as either long, standard, short, or ultra-short.

Differences in throw can give otherwise identical projectors very different capabilities.

For example, if you want a big image in small venue, but can't get your projector far enough back to get to achieve this, then you should consider a projector with a short or shorter throw.

Things to consider when choosing your projector -

- **Resolution** - HD (1080p) or 4K (2160p)
- **Brightness** - approx. 1500+ lumens
- **Contrast** - at least 1500:1
- **Light source** - Bulb or Laser (Laser is brighter & lasts longer)
- **Life of light source** - Bulb 2,000+ hours, Laser 20,000+ hours
- **Throw** - the optimum projection distance between the projector and the screen. The larger your venue the longer the throw required; however most projectors are designed for central location in the venue.

- **The Projection Screen**

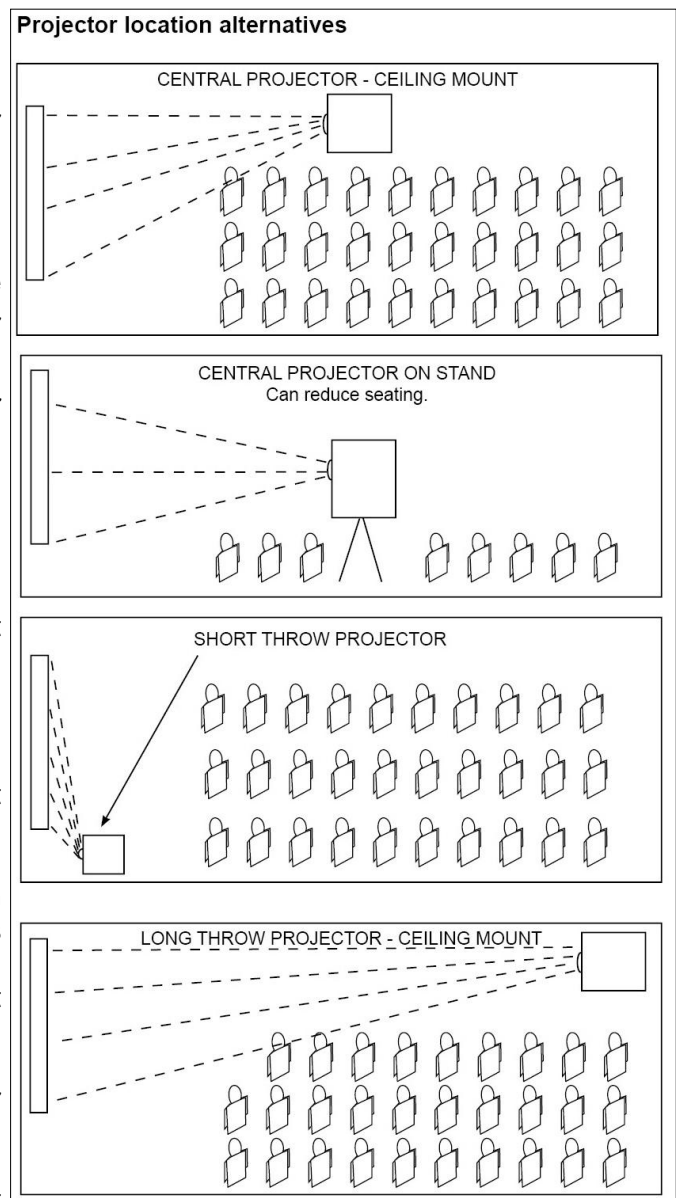
Projection screens provide a flat reflective surface to make the most of the projector's light output.

Things to consider are the -

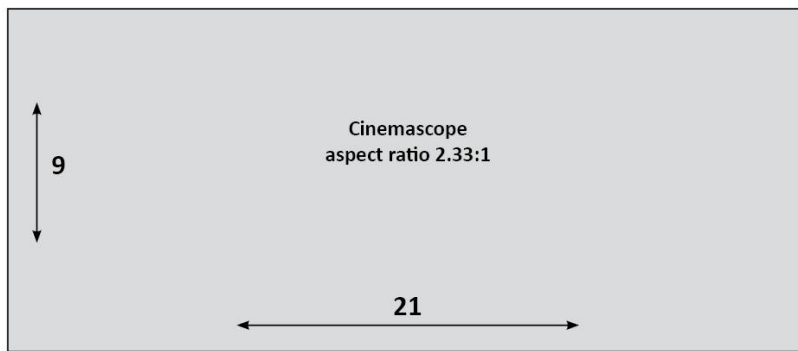
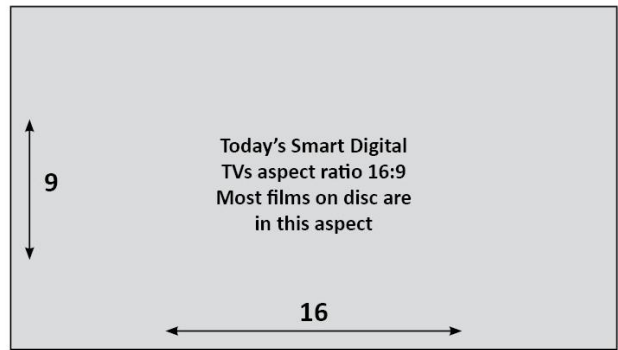
Gain – which is the amount of reflected light the screen puts out

Dimensions and aspect ratio of the screen i.e. typically 16:9 (standard ratio for today's TVs) or 2.35:1 (cinemascope) which is the most common ratio for movies in cinemas.

Throw – the distance between the projector and the screen – important to know when choosing the screen to fit your venue, taking into account the size of your venue and the throw of the projector.



Colour – screens are usually white which is best for brightness, but also come in grey which can be better for contrast in bright environments.



- **The Sound System**

A good film soundtrack is as important as the image for the best rendering of the filmmaker's intentions and for audience enjoyment.

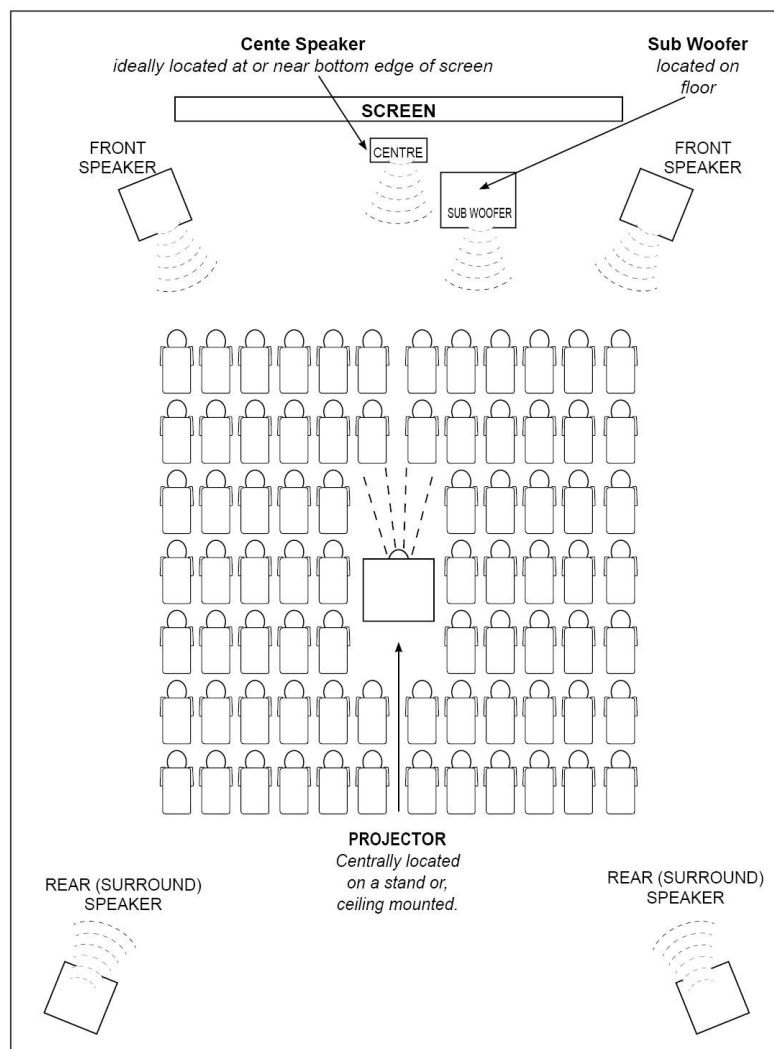
So, a good sound system is an investment in the best viewing experience.

Options are -

1 - a standard stereo amplifier and two speakers

2 - an AV Receiver-Amplifier with a 5.1 or 5.2 or 7.1 speaker set-up

Typical Projection set-up with a 5.1 sound system



- **Summary and suggestions . . .**

If you are starting a film society from scratch or up-grading, and **depending on your budget** – buy the best you can get . . .

For an Entry level system -

Blu-ray player,
HD (high definition 1080p) Projector
Standard stereo amplifier and two speakers.

For a Mid-range level system . . .

Blu-ray player,
HD (high definition 1080p) or 4K (UHD) Projector
AV 5.1 receiver (amplifier)
6 speakers . . .

For a High End System . . .

4K blu-ray player
4K (UHD) Projector with Laser light source
AV 5.1 receiver (amplifier)
6 speakers . . .

Prices (Approx. range and indicative at the time of publication and can change frequently as can availability)

- Blu-ray Players - \$100 - \$300
- HD (1080p) Projectors - \$500 - \$1500
- 4K (UHD) Projectors - \$2000 - \$8000
- AV Receiver (amplifier for 5.1 surround sound system) with 6 speakers - \$700 - \$3000+
- Stereo amplifier and two speakers (from an Op Shop or 2nd hand dealer) up to \$300.
- Speakers – too many options to indicate prices here, but speaker sets are often packaged and matched with the AV Receiver/Amplifier – this can be the best and easiest way to acquire speakers

D.I.Y. by all means, however if it all seems too hard, talk to home cinema specialists such as

[`The Big Picture People`](#) and/or [`Just Projectors`](#) and/or [`Selby`](#)