

BBC HD: IN-DEPTH GUIDE

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1. HD? Let Me Introduce You

HD (high definition) is the latest in a long line of major improvements in television technology, which has moved from black-and-white analogue to widescreen colour over the last 50 years. HD gives you exceptionally clear, crisp pictures with vivid colours and up to five times more detail than standard definition.

More and more programmes are being made in HD and most new flat-screen televisions (LCD and plasma) are able to show them: look for the 'HD Ready' logo on the box. The BBC is helping to lead HD development in the UK so that residents will be able to enjoy the benefits of this new technology.

2. What Do I Need to Get HD?

To watch programmes in HD, you will need the following:

- An 'HD Ready' TV
- An HD Receiver (a digital box that is designed to receive HD)
- An HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface) cable
- A satellite dish or cable connection (from an HD service provider)



Step One: HD Ready TV



First, buy your HD Ready TV. These are easily identifiable by the official HD Ready logo:



If you're in any doubt whether or not a TV you're thinking of buying is HD Ready, go to this website and check it on the database: www.hdready.org.uk

The two main HD standards are currently 1080 and 720. Currently the BBC broadcasts in 1080. Although all HD Ready TV sets can show both standards, for optimum picture quality, you'll need to choose equipment which matches the signal you're receiving.

You can choose to buy a standalone HD TV or one which has an HD receiver built in (this is called an integrated TV). At the moment, integrated TVs are only available with freesat built in but this may change with the introduction of Freeview HD to the market. With a standalone HD TV, you'll need a separate receiver which you can purchase independently or through your service provider (next section).

Note that an HD Ready TV won't turn a standard definition programme into an HD one; you will only get the full detail of an HD picture if the programme is broadcast in HD and you have an HD service installed.

Step Two: HD Receiver



An HD receiver is a digital box that is designed to receive HD broadcasts. You might already have an integrated TV with an HD receiver built in. If not, you can buy a separate HD receiver from a satellite company (Sky or freesat), from a cable company (Virgin Media), or from an electrical retailer – see Step Four.

Step Three: HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface) Cable



Most recent pieces of audio-visual equipment produced in the past few years have been connected using SCART leads. Because HD transmits in greatly increased detail, if you have a standalone HD receiver, you'll need an HDMI cable to connect it to your HD Ready TV. If you have an HD integrated TV, you won't need an HDMI cable, as the HD receiver will already be built in. HDMI stands for High Definition Multimedia Interface and is no more complicated to connect than your existing SCART lead. Simply look for the marked output/input points on the back of your equipment and plug it in. The HDMI cable currently has a 19 pin connection and uses digital signals thus ensuring the best quality transmission of signal from one piece of equipment to the other.

The latest version of HDMI cable is 1.3 so ask for that if you want to make sure you have the very most up to date, but the earlier versions of the HDMI cable currently in the shops will work perfectly well with equipment on sale at the moment.

Step Four: HD Service Providers



If you do not already have a satellite dish or cable connection, one can be installed by an HD service provider*. At the moment, there are three** service providers available: Sky, Virgin Media and freesat. For Sky and freesat, you'll need to have a satellite dish installed outside your home and for Virgin, you'll require a cable connection.

Satellite

Sky: as BBC HD is a free-to-air channel, you don't pay a subscription for BBC HD on Sky's HD service. To get Sky's HD service you will need a Sky+HD box and a satellite dish. Sky's subscription HD service offers a further 30 HD channels, two additional free-to-air channels and a choice of on-demand HD programmes. For more information, visit www.sky.com/hd or call 0844 241 1614.

freesat: this subscription-free digital satellite TV service from the BBC and ITV includes the BBC HD channel. To get freesat, you make a one-off payment for the HD digital box and installation. For more information, visit www.freesat.co.uk or call 0845 313 0051.

Cable

Virgin Media: an HD subscription package which includes the BBC HD channel is available on cable. HD on-demand programmes are also available. To get Virgin Media HD, you need a V+ HD digital box. For more information, visit www.virginmedia.com or call 0845 840 7777.

If you already use Sky and Virgin Media, you'll need to up-grade to their HD service and buy one of their HD receivers. If you use freesat, you'll need to buy one of their HD receivers. Contact your service provider to find out more.

Coming Soon in 2009 – Many programmes from the BBC HD channel will also be available on the BBC iPlayer on Virgin Media in 2009 (to watch these, you'll need a cable connection and a V+ HD digital box; remember to follow steps one to four, above, to ensure you are properly connected).

**It is also possible to buy an HD receiver and satellite dish from a retailer and arrange installation through an independent satellite installer. Once you have bought, installed and set up this receiver and dish to receive all available free-to-air channels you should be able to watch the BBC HD channel (provided you have followed steps one, two and three, above).*

***HD will also start to be available on Freeview depending on where you live, from early 2010. For more information go to www.freeview.co.uk*

3. Surround Sound

Surround sound – also known as 5.1 sound – is the latest improvement in audio technology, which has progressed from mono sound to stereo sound, and now surround sound. It expands and deepens sound quality and gives the audience a three-dimensional experience. HD Ready TVs have stereo speakers built in already and these will deliver good sound quality. However, if you want to take full advantage of the home cinema experience, you may want to buy a 5.1 surround sound system (five speakers and a subwoofer) that is compatible with your HD set up (ask your retailer if you're not sure). To ensure that you use the correct connections, read the manual that comes with your 5.1 surround sound system. True 5.1 can only be obtained by connecting a lead from either the optical or spdif output (or, on some home cinema systems, the HDMI cable) from the HD receiver to the home cinema amp; any other means of connecting will produce stereo sound.

4. Welcome to BBC HD!

The BBC HD channel launched in December 2007 and was the UK's first free-to-air high definition television channel. It is currently available on satellite and cable. The channel features a broad range of quality programmes from across the BBC channels, including spine-tingling drama, heart-stopping nature epics, and the very best of sport, entertainment and music programming in beautiful detail and exquisite sound.

BBC HD currently broadcasts for 9 hours a day between 4pm and 1am, with extended coverage for live events.

The channel brings all the excitement of HD to your favourite BBC programmes – from Planet Earth to Nature's Great Events, Heroes to Hustle, Wimbledon to Six Nations, Later...with JoolsHolland, Electric Proms and Strictly Come Dancing; and for the younger generation, much-loved programmes like In the Night Garden and MI High.

5. FAQs

The BBC HD website has an FAQ section to help answer any further questions you may have: www.bbc.co.uk/bbchd