

How to watch TV shows and films online

 [Print this guide](#)

There are an ever growing number of providers and websites that allow you to 'stream' TV programmes and films to your computer, tablet, phone or TV on demand (rather than waiting for them to be broadcast live). As long as you have the right technology and a reliable internet connection you are able to binge watch box sets to your hearts content!

In this guide we look at the basics you will need to get going on watching films and TV programmes online in the safest way possible.

What technology do you need?

The technology you will need will vary slightly depending on what streaming service(s) you are using so it is best to check this out on their website first (here are the devices are supported by [Netflix](#)). In general you will need:



- **A reliable and fast(ish) internet connection.** The recommended minimum download speed is about 1Mbps (megabits per second) to watch standard quality content. If you want to watch in high definition (HD), then you'll need a faster speed than this (at least 5Mbps). You can still watch videos if your speed is slower than this, but you may experience buffering (the programme or film will load in small sections) or the video quality will be reduced. If you aren't sure what your speed is you can use this [handy tool](#).
- **A generous data allowance.** A two hour film in standard quality requires about 1GB (gigabytes) of data (by comparison you can browse the internet for 40 hours for the same amount of data). So if you are using mobile data to watch videos then beware as you can quickly go over your data allowance! Some services allow you to download a film or programme while you are on a wi-fi connection then watch it when you are offline (this can be useful if you want to watch a film while you are travelling for example).

And then either a:

- **A Smart TV or streaming media player, set top box, computer or games console.** This article from [Which?](#) provides recommendations for buying a Smart TV as well as a description of the other options listed. or a...
- **A computer with speaker or a [cable](#) that you can use to connect to your TV.** You can stream on your tablet or smartphone but the picture will be small.

Choosing a streaming service

You should be careful about the sites you choose to download or watch films from as their legality may be questionable. **If you live in the UK and you want to watch TV shows and movies live** (as they are being broadcast) you will need a [TV licence](#), although this will also allow you to access [BBC iPlayer](#). The most popular streaming services in the UK include: Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime, Now TV, and Sky.

If you aren't sure which service is best for you then many services offer an initial free trial period. Make a note of when the trial ends so you remember to cancel it if you don't wish to continue otherwise you may start being charged. Keep an eye on offers on the [Money Saving Expert website](#) for the current latest deals and offers. It is also worth checking if your broadband provider offers discounted access to any streaming services. If you are looking for particular films then the [Find Any Film website](#) will search all the legal film

sites and suggest the cheapest options.

Watching free movies and videos

It isn't always necessary to subscribe to a streaming service to watch great video content online, here are a few free services (but you may need to create an account):

- [The Internet Archive](#) A not-for-profit organisation with a searchable database of movies and moving image content. Watch for free on their site or download to watch later.
- [ITV](#) You can sign up to watch shows for free as long as they aren't being broadcast live and you don't mind watching the ads!
- [YouTube](#) is a great place to watch a wide range of videos, but there is a lot on there so add a good search term and look for the videos with the highest number of views!

Whenever you do anything online remember to keep yourself safe and legal. If you find a deal that is good to be true, do your research before signing up. If you aren't sure then it is best to be cautious!

Last updated: January 2025

Next steps


- ▶ [How to connect a computer to a TV](#)
- ▶ [How to watch BBC programmes online](#)
- ▶ [How to check your internet speed](#)

See what our learning courses are like

Try our free "Digital Essentials" course



Digital Unite

 [0800 228 9272](tel:08002289272)

 du@digitalunite.com

[Get in touch](#)

[Privacy policy](#)/ [Equality and Diversity Policy](#)

[Terms of use](#)/ [Cookie policy](#)



Our learning platforms

[Digital Champions Network](#)

[Inspire](#)



Our newsletter

Research, resources, insights and offers.