

EBU

OPERATING EUROVISION AND EURORADIO

R 128

LOUDNESS NORMALISATION AND PERMITTED MAXIMUM LEVEL OF AUDIO SIGNALS

Status: EBU Recommendation



Geneva
November 2023

Document History

EBU Committee	TC	
Drafting Group	PLOUD	
First published	February 2010	
Revised	August 2011	V2; relative gate changed from -8 to -10 LU
	June 2014	V3; Target level (-23 LUFS) tolerance changed to ± 0.5 LU (except Live-programmes)
	August 2020	V4; Tolerances updates and references to R 128 s1 and s2 added
	November 2023	V5; References to R 128 s3, s4 and Tech 3401 added

Publication Keywords: Audio levels, loudness, normalisation, permitted maximum level.

Acknowledgement

EBU technical publications are the work of experts from EBU Members, Associate Members and third parties consisting of international standards bodies, industry partners, academic institutions and independent consultants.

Their contribution to EBU technical publications is a very generous act by the individuals concerned and by their employers. The EBU appreciates their efforts and thanks them most sincerely.

This document has been produced with the assistance of the following entities:

EBU Members: Florian Camerer (ORF), Andrew Mason (BBC R&D), Askan Siegfried (NDR), Bosse Ternstrom (SR), Erik Lundbeck (SVT), Mikko Hahkio (YLE), Matthieu Parmentier (France Television), Bernard Gabus (RTBF), Andrzej Bialczyk (TVP), Tin Jonker (NPB), Gabriel Leuzinger (SRG SSR), Jean-Paul Moerman (VRT), Bjørn Aarseth (NRK), Daniele Airola Gnota (RAI), Frank Lott (BR), Kimio Hamasaki, (NHK)

Third parties: Richard van Everdingen (Delta-Sigma-Consultancy), Eelco Grimm (HKU Utrecht), Thomas Lund (Genelec), Esben Skovenborg (tc electronic), Mike Kahsnitz (rtw), Ralph Kessler (pinguin Ingenieurbüro), Gerhard Spikofski, Gerhard Stoll (IRT), Mark Pascoe (Dolby), Paul Tapper (NuGen Audio), Alessandro Travaglini (FOX Italia), Scott Norcross (CRC), Mauro Falcone (FUB), Antoine Hurtado (Isostem)

EBU Project Manager: Frans de Jong

Loudness normalisation and permitted maximum level of audio signals

The EBU has studied the needs of audio signal levels in production, distribution and transmission of broadcast programmes. It is of the opinion that an audio-levelling paradigm based on **loudness** is needed.

The EBU recommends the measurement of the average loudness of a programme ('Programme Loudness') for the normalisation of audio signals. The 'Maximum True Peak Level' of an audio signal should be used to check compliance with the upper technical limit of the signal chain. The measures 'Loudness Range', 'Maximum Momentary Loudness' and 'Maximum Short-term Loudness' can be used to further characterise an audio signal as well as to fulfil the aesthetic needs of each programme/station depending on the genre(s), the target audience and the distribution platform.

The EBU, considering:

- a) *that peak normalisation of audio signals has led to considerable loudness differences between programmes and between broadcast channels;*
- b) *that the resulting loudness inconsistencies between programmes and between channels are the cause of the most viewer/listener complaints;*
- c) *that, when used to read peaks in the usual way, the QPPM (Quasi-Peak Programme Meter) specified in EBU Tech 3205-E [1] does not reflect the loudness of an audio signal, and that the QPPM is not designed to indicate a long-term average;*
- d) *that with the proliferation of digital production, distribution and transmission systems, the permitted maximum level of an audio signal specified in ITU-R BS.645 [2] is no longer appropriate;*
- e) *that measuring audio programme loudness has been defined in ITU-R BS.1770 [3], introducing the measures LU (Loudness Unit) and LUFS (Loudness Units, referenced to Full Scale)¹;*
- f) *and that the level-gated measurement of Programme Loudness defined in ITU-R BS.1770 Eq.(7) (which hence measures foreground loudness) is advantageous to improve the loudness matching of programmes with a wide loudness range;*

recommends:

- g) that the measure **Programme Loudness** shall generally be used to normalise an audio signal;
- h) that the **Programme Loudness Level** shall be normalised to a **Target Level** of **-23.0 LUFS**. Where attaining the Target Level is not achievable practically (for example, live programmes), a tolerance of **±1.0 LU** is permitted. A broadcaster should ensure that a deviation from the Target Level towards the limits of the tolerance does not become standard practice;
- i) that for the implementation of Loudness workflows (for example, in Quality Control environments) a tolerance of **±0.2 LU** is allowed in order to take account of measurement errors;
- j) that in special cases the Programme Loudness Level may be normalised to a Target Level *lower* than **-23.0 LUFS** on purpose. This exception shall be clearly indicated to ensure that such a lower Programme Loudness Level is not compensated;

¹ LUFS' is equivalent to 'LKFS' (which is used in ITU-R BS.1770). The EBU uses 'LUFS' which is compliant with international naming conventions.

- k) that the measurement shall be made with a loudness meter compliant with ITU-R BS.1770 (including the level-gating method described in equation (7)) and EBU Tech 3341 [4];
- l) that the audio signal shall generally be measured in its **entirety**, without emphasis on specific foreground elements such as speech, music or sound effects;
- m) and that the **True Peak Level** of a programme shall not exceed **-1 dBTP** (dB True Peak) during production (linear audio), measured with a meter compliant with ITU-R BS.1770 and EBU Tech 3341. The measurement tolerance is **±0.3 dB** (for signals with a bandwidth limited to 20 kHz). Permitted Maximum True Peak Levels may be lower for different distribution systems and data reduction rates. A broadcaster should check EBU Tech 3344 [5] for details;

The EBU further recommends:

- n) that the measure **Loudness Range** (measured in compliance with EBU Tech 3342 [6]) may be used to evaluate the loudness variation of a programme², its potential subsequent dynamic treatment and the dynamic integrity of a distribution path;
- o) that **Maximum Momentary Loudness** and **Maximum Short-term Loudness** (measured in compliance with EBU Tech 3341) may be used to determine if a programme exceeds the upper loudness tolerance limit of the target audience;
- p) that **Loudness Metadata** shall correctly indicate the actual Programme Loudness. Additional metadata may be used by the broadcaster to ensure a playback loudness level deviating from the Target Level (for example, for programmes according to item j));
- q) that production and normalisation of **short-form content** (adverts; promos etc.) should be made in compliance with EBU R 128 s1 [7];
- r) that guidance for the normalisation of **content for streaming** is given in EBU R 128 s2 [8];
- s) that guidance for **Loudness in Radio** is given in EBU R 128 s3 [9] and EBU Tech 3401 [10];
- t) that guidance for **Loudness normalisation of Cinematic Content** is given in EBU R 128 s4 [11];
- u) that audio processes, systems and operations concerning production of programmes should be made in compliance with EBU Tech 3343 [12];
- v) and that audio processes, systems and operations concerning distribution and reproduction of programmes should be made in compliance with EBU Tech 3344.

Definitions

Programme:	An individual, self-contained audio-visual or audio-only item to be presented in Radio, Television or other electronic media. An advertisement (commercial), trailer, promotional item ('promo'), interstitial or similar item ("Short-form Content") shall also be considered to be a programme in this context.
Programme Loudness:	The integrated loudness over the duration of a programme - Programme Loudness Level is the value (in LUFS) of Programme Loudness.

² For programmes shorter than 1 minute, the use of the measure Loudness Range is not recommended due to too few data points (Loudness Range is based on the Short-term-Loudness values (3-seconds-window)).

Loudness Range (LRA):	The distribution of loudness within a programme
Maximum True Peak Level:	The maximum value of the audio signal waveform of a programme in the continuous time domain

References

- [1] EBU Tech 3205-E *'The EBU standard peak-programme meter for the control of international transmissions'*
- [2] ITU-R BS.645 *'Test signals and metering to be used on international sound programme connections'*
- [3] ITU-R BS.1770 *'Algorithms to measure audio programme loudness and true-peak audio level'*
- [4] EBU Tech 3341 *'Loudness Metering: 'EBU Mode' metering to supplement loudness normalisation in accordance with EBU R 128'*
- [5] EBU Tech 3344 *'Guidelines for Distribution and Reproduction of Programmes in accordance with EBU R 128'*
- [6] EBU Tech 3342 *'Loudness Range: A measure to supplement loudness normalisation in accordance with EBU R 128'*
- [7] EBU R 128 s1 *'Loudness Parameters for Short-form Content (Adverts; Promos etc.)'* supplement 1 to EBU R 128
- [8] EBU R 128 s2 *'Loudness in Streaming'*; supplement 2 to EBU R 128
- [9] EBU R 128 s3 *'Loudness in Radio'*; supplement 3 to EBU R 128
- [10] EBU Tech 3401 *'Guidelines for Radio production and distribution in accordance with EBU R 128'*
- [11] EBU R 128 s4 *'Loudness normalization for Cinematic Content'*; supplement 4 to EBU R 128
- [12] EBU Tech 3343 *'Guidelines for Production of Programmes in accordance with EBU R 128'*