



Ask the experts



Jack Gittoes lives in an area where broadband can't be accessed

Broadband access

I'm one of many people who live out in the sticks, just too far from the exchange to get broadband. Very few of my neighbours can get it, either, though many want it. Any suggestions?

JACK GITTOES, LYMINGTON

One option is satellite broadband. The problem is that this is very expensive. However, as your neighbours seem keen, you could look into community broadband initiatives for your region; check out the website of Community Broadband Networking, www.cbncan.co.uk.

There have also been initiatives by BT and the Scottish Executive to connect broadband to more isolated 'cluster' areas. You can register your interest in accessing broadband by entering your phone number in the relevant box at www.btwholesale.com/getbroadband. Bear in mind, though, that you'll need to get as many people as you can who don't have access to register before BT will make an area broadband-enabled.

Nickel in mobiles

The handbook for my mobile phone warns that the scroll key may contain nickel and shouldn't come into prolonged contact with the skin because of

Which? focus on Televisions

Setting the picture

How do I fine-tune my TV to get the best possible picture?

First, switch off any picture-enhancement features (such as special contrast or noise reduction) after noting the original settings, so that you can get back to them if you want. Then, turn the colour control right down to get a black-and-white picture. Play a DVD with lots of dark scenes and adjust the brightness so that you can just pick out detail in the darker areas.

Next, find a bright scene and adjust the contrast until the picture is bright enough but not washed out. Go back to the dark scene and, if necessary, readjust till you arrive at a balance you're happy with. With LCD TVs it can be difficult to get good levels of blackness without the bright areas looking washed out (or vice versa), so you may have to compromise.

Finally, find a scene with close-ups of people's faces and adjust the colour so that skin tones look

natural. Some TVs offer colour tone options – if so, typically, neutral will be the correct setting.

LCD versus plasma

What's the difference between LCD and plasma TVs?

LCD TVs come in a much larger range of sizes and tend to use a lot less power than plasma sets – see p41 in this month's test on flat-panel TVs. But the two technologies are strikingly similar. For instance, both process pictures digitally and both can suffer from the same sorts of problem, such as smearing (a ghost-like effect) and juddering.

Cable quality

Does the quality of my Scart leads matter?

Cable quality can influence sound and picture quality. Poor-quality Scart leads tend to pick up more interference from other equipment and atmospherics. You don't have to spend a lot to get a good-quality

TVs have various sockets to connect your set to other equipment, such as digital cameras or computers. Here we explain three of the most useful, which the majority of TVs have. For others, see www.which.co.uk/tvs (click on 'Features explained' under LCD v plasma)



SCART The best way to link a TV to other bits of equipment, such as a DVD player or set-top box. Most sets have at least two. If so, the socket that's labelled 'RGB' will give the best picture



AUDIO (red and white phono) These connect to your hi-fi and can improve your TV's sound quality



VIDEO (yellow phono) or S-video (black Din) For connecting portable equipment such as digital cameras or camcorders. They're usually at the side of your TV. Most sets will have at least the yellow socket; if yours has both, use the one that corresponds to the socket on the lead for the equipment

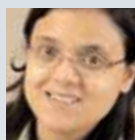
set, but it is worth paying £10 or so. Generally, the thicker the lead the better, as your TV will tend to be less prone to interference, and look for gold-plated connectors. Unplugging the leads from your TV from time to time, and putting them back in, helps prevent the build-up of oxides, which affect how well signals are transferred.

Out of synchron

Is it true that new-technology TVs have a problem with the sound and pictures matching up?

We do check for this when we test TVs and haven't found it to be a problem as far as the TV's internal speakers are concerned. We have occasionally found that sound and

Your consumer questions answered by our experts, plus your chance to share your experiences with fellow Which? members



Shamsun Naher
Money
research assistant
Answers this month's questions



Mike Briggs
Senior product
researcher
Puts televisions in focus

the risk of nickel allergy. How serious is the risk?

STEVEN HODGES, STEVENAGE

Nickel is used not just in the scroll key but also to enhance the appearance of mobile phones, where it obviously comes into contact with the skin. Although there have been a few reported cases of it causing an allergic reaction, both Nickel UK and Allergy UK say the risk is minimal – it applies mainly to people who are very sensitive to nickel and even then only if they use the phone for a long time. If you're worried, check whether the coating of your phone contains nickel; as a general rule, avoid phones with shiny exteriors – plastic is best. Using

your phone in a carrying case will increase protection. You could also consider a phone that you can use hands-free. You should also avoid wearing Bluetooth earpieces.

Tyre safety

Should I fit the least-worn tyres to the rear or the front of a car?

ERIC STANLEY, PERTHSHIRE

The industry view used to be that it was safer to fit the least-worn tyres at the front. The theory was that if a front tyre punctured, you'd lose control of the steering and therefore of the car. But tyre manufacturers' tests now show it's generally easier to control the front axle than the rear and that you're more likely to lose control if something happens to the back tyres. So the advice is to fit the least-worn tyres to the back.

Postage costs

My wife bought a catalogue online for £1.50 and was charged £2.95 for postage. When the catalogue arrived, we found that the postage fee was in fact just 90p. Is it legal for companies to charge more than the actual value of postage?

IAN BOULDEN, MILTON KEYNES

It depends on how an offer is worded. If the advert specifies how



Ian Bouden: postage price query

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much postage you will have to pay, and you're charged more, the company is guilty of giving a misleading price, and you can report it to your trading standards department. However, most offers give a price that covers postage and packing, so unless you ask the supplier to break down the figures, you won't know how the costs are split. If you're concerned, check before you agree to sign up.

Phone call

Can you recommend any phones that are suitable for someone who is disabled?

MARIE EVANS, ALTRINCHAM

We haven't tested any phones specifically, but the Royal National Institute for the Deaf has. It suggests the Mybelle 650 (which has good-sized buttons, loud amplification and an easy-to-use memory store feature, and was also good in hands-free mode) and the cordless Amplidect 250 (which, again, has easy-to-use buttons and good amplification plus a long battery life). Both can be used with a hearing aid. Visit www.rnid.org.uk to find out more (click on 'Shop'). The Royal National Institute for the Blind (www.rnib.org.uk), too, has general advice on what to look for, plus models, and you could also try www.withandwithoutwires.com.

Finally, Ricability, an independent charity that tests products and services for older and disabled people, has a booklet called *Stay in touch* that you may find useful. You can download a copy of it at www.ricability.org.uk.

Your say

Share your stories with fellow members

Ticket agencies

You replied with boos and hisses when we asked for your views on booking fees

What you told us

'The booking fees scam has become a bandwagon, with more and more organisations charging them. One gets no value for these payments. Whatever next? Will shops try to charge us for going into them to buy their products?'

NEVILLE, LONDON NW4

'I recently bought two tickets and was appalled at having to pay an additional £9 agency fee for each ticket. I expect to pay a charge, but feel it would be fairer if it was one charge for one transaction.'

ALISON, EXETER

'I'm very unhappy at being charged a booking fee. Is this the only business where it costs more to buy over the internet than less? After one bad experience, I resolved never to pay a booking fee, which means only buying tickets at the theatre itself. Hence, we now go to the theatre less often.'

NICHOLAS, BY EMAIL

'It really annoys me that cinemas charge booking fees for using their booking websites. This is similar to when banks used to charge for internet banking.'

SAM, BY EMAIL

Next month

Been bothered by builders? Left feeling drained by plumbers? Had problems with planning? Share your home-improvement experiences with fellow members.

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pictures are out of synch when we have linked a TV to external hi-fi speakers in the lab, but most of us wouldn't be aware of it when watching at home.

Screen burn

What is screen burn and does it affect the new flat-panel TVs?

Screen burn is where a ghost image of a channel's logo is left on the screen when you switch to another channel or turn the TV off. The problem doesn't affect LCD TVs but plasma TVs (and the old, cathode-ray sets) are susceptible. However, broadcasters have toned down the brightness of their logos, and the latest plasma TVs boast screen-cleaning technologies to combat the effect. In a specially arranged test we found that a logo burnt on to the screen after a day's continuous viewing disappeared fairly quickly, and only one of six plasma TVs in that test showed signs of permanent screen burn after a week's continuous viewing.