Broadband speeds: consumer guide

As we do more and more online – such as watching TV programmes or playing games – there is a greater choice of broadband packages available than ever before, with many offering much faster speeds than before.

This guide gives advice on getting the right speed for you, and has troubleshooting tips if you are not getting the speeds you expected.

Your Broadband Speed

Although your broadband package will have a headline speed (e.g. "up to 8 or 20Mb per second"), you are unlikely to be able to get this speed all of the time.

Most big ISPs have signed up to a Code of Practice which ensures that your provider gives you information about the speed you can expect to get. Under this Code, ISPs have committed to:

- provide you with an estimate of the maximum speed you can get at point of sale;

- explain clearly and simply how technical factors (such as how far you live from the exchange) may slow down the speed that you may get and give you help and advice if you can do something yourself at home to improve the situation; and

- offer an alternative package (if there is one) or let you out of any contract, without any penalties, if the actual speed is a lot lower than their original estimate.

When getting or changing a broadband service, check whether your ISP has signed up to the Code and make sure you get an estimate of the maximum broadband speed you can get.

Mobile broadband

The Code of Practice doesn't currently cover mobile broadband. Speed of mobile broadband depends on factors such as coverage where you are, distance from the transmitter and the number of people using it in the same location. They can vary a lot depending on the time of day and where you are. If you are experiencing problems with your mobile broadband service then ask your provider to see if they can improve the situation.

Contact details

If you are thinking of taking out a broadband service and would like to find out which ISPs have signed up to the Code of Practice, please visit our website or call the Ofcom Advisory Team.

If you don't think your ISP is following the Code, please let us know.

Ofcom Advisory Team
Phone: +44 (0)300 123 3333
Facsimile: +44 (0)300 123 0811
Textphone: +44 (0)300 123 2024
Welsh Line: +44 (0)300 123 2023

www.ofcom.org.uk

How to speed up your broadband service

- If your broadband speed is slower than you expected, **your ISP should be able to give you advice** on speeding it up. Some broadband services can be affected by electrical interference and your ISP should be able to recommend ways that his can be reduced (e.g. fitting additional filters to your telephone sockets);

- You may find that **your broadband speed is a lot slower at some times of the day**. Like the roads, internet speed depends on how much other people are using it. At peak times (usually afternoons and evenings) your broadband speed may be slower;

- Your speed might be being cut by your ISP if you have breached their **fair usage policy**. If your speed has been cut in this way then you may want to contact your ISP and ask them why and how you can avoid being affected in this way in the future. Your ISP may offer a download monitor to help measure your usage.

- Moving to **a faster broadband package** can help. Most households can now get superfast fibre or cable broadband which offers much faster speeds than older broadband delivered over copper telephone lines. Ask your ISP whether you can get a higher speed package.

- **Switching your ISP** may improve speeds, particularly if your ISP doesn't offer superfast broadband. Comparison websites and 'best buy' guides can provide consumers with an indication of ISPs with good speed performance, and also let you know whether other customers are happy with that ISP.

- **Don't forget upload speeds** (the speeds at which you send data from your computer) particularly if you often upload big files like photos or videos to sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Some services offer faster upload speeds than others.

Fair Usage & Traffic Management Policies

Many ISPs manage the traffic on their network by slowing down certain types of internet traffic, for example, peer-to-peer downloads. Or some customers may have their speeds temporarily reduced if they have been using the internet heavily.

If ISPs do this, they must explain their rules clearly on their website, in an obvious place (such as in Frequently Asked Questions).

Ofcom has published research which shows that ISPs vary in their performance. Read the research here.