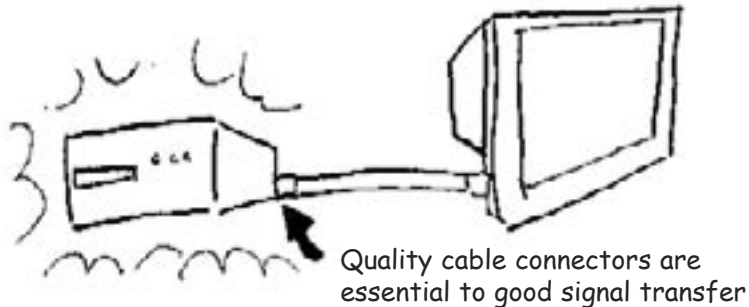


Section 1: Considering Cables: “Interconnects”

All cables are not created equal. Different cables, connectors, how the cable is constructed, all contribute to how well a signal is carried from one component to the next. How well a signal arrives at its destination device determines the quality of picture and sound.

WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT CABLES?

Whether your picture is coming from an antenna, Cable TV, DVD, VCR, DVR, Satellite, or any place else, it needs to leave its source and arrive at your TV. Cables connect the output of one device to the input of the next device or TV. No matter how well the source creates a great picture, your top-of-the-line DVD player for example, that picture has to arrive at your TV without dropping signal or picking up interference along the way.



No matter how good the picture is at the source, it must go through a cable and arrive at your TV without interference or dropping signal.

What happens when cables are unable to carry all the signal that the source is providing? Picture and sound quality suffer. (We’ll focus on video for now.) At its worst, there can be ghost images, snowy interference, color bands, blurry or low contrast, dark pictures, or digital boxes (“artifacts”) that appear on screen.

Sometimes cables are included in the box with your equipment purchase. Mostly, these cables are the simplest cables that can do the job of running the picture and sound. You can tell just by looking at them that their flimsy, thin construction is just a step up from the electrical wire that runs the power from the wall.

If you are using sub-standard cable, it can pick up interference from electrical wires, or any other frequency in the air, like a radio station or a broadcast that reaches your home. What appears is degraded picture quality.

What makes a good quality cable?

Companies that make quality cables have piles of technical literature containing lists of specifications on cables. “Dielectric” “foam core” “oxygen-free”...all sound more techie than most of us care about. What’s the bottom line?

The construction of the cable makes a difference in transferring the sound and picture and makes a difference at how well it keeps out interference.

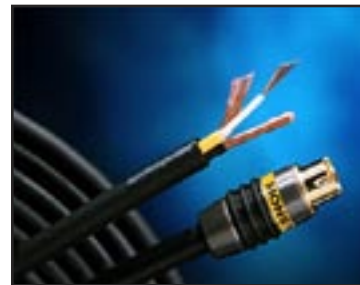
The elements that make a difference in the performance of a cable are:

- What metal the wire/cable makes up the cable. (Usually copper and “Oxygen-free” copper is better).
- How those wires are twisted and the number of wires that make up the cable. (Some are even twisted to run the signal in a particular direction and have arrows to point toward their destination).
- How well the cable is shielded from outside interference.
- What kind of metal makes up the end connectors and
- How well they connect to the terminals. A loose connection loses information/signal before it reaches its destination.

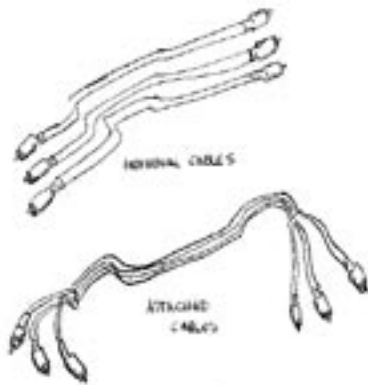


This composite video cable is surrounded by a plastic coating, a layer of metal shielding and then braided metal.

These are examples of how cables are shielded against interference.



In this photo of an S-Video cable you can see the separate cables that carry the chroma and the luminance. Each is separately shielded.




The construction of the cable can also encourage the signal to flow directly and completely to its destination. Be sure you aren't using the flimsy spaghetti-like cables that come in the box with your component. Quality of picture and sound may be lost.

Many people make the mistake of opening their new component, taking out the included cables and hooking it up. The result is picture and/or sound is less than what they saw in the store. Often the included cables are little better than a lamp cord that carries electricity and are often referred to as “spaghetti cable” for their thin, flimsy construction.


Getting the information *to* the next device or TV is half the battle. A cable that does not connect securely will have a signal that cuts out. You may have noticed cables that have “gold connectors”. Gold can conduct (send) a signal better than lesser metals. Again, cables are about getting signal (information) from one device to the next. You want all of the information to arrive. Gold connectors that are designed to create a snug fit by twisting on, or split pins that make better contact with the component’s connection are worth the extra expense.

EXAMPLES OF CABLE CONNECTORS

included cables



upgraded cables



gold transfers signal better; doesn't corrode

difference in cable width

Upgrading cables to better cables will give big results. Note the difference in width (shielding of these included cables than the upgraded cables). The included cables use inferior metals which will not send the signal as efficiently and can corrode relatively quickly ruining not only picture or sound quality, but the jack on your device!

These quality cables use gold and a turbine, twist-on end to connect securely to the device's input or output. Split pins insure contact with the jack, all creating superior signal transfer. Be careful to twist these cables off (not pull). These connections are so snug they'll pull the jack right out of the device..

