



# TV rating and methodology process

We rate our TV providers based on four main criteria: value, content, equipment and features, and customer experience. Each criteria will have a score from 1–5, in half-star increments. These four scores will be automatically applied to a weighted average to create our “Staff rating score,” which is applied to the brand overall.

★ **Important note:** This methodology is *not* the same as the editorial content that goes in your review. Editorial considerations will influence the score, and a lot of the research you conduct to calculate a star rating will also be relevant to the review. However, this rating system should not be at the forefront of your review. We created this methodology to help standardize our scores and rankings, but you should still use your expertise as a researcher to write your review!

## Contents

### Contents

#### Primary, secondary, and editorial considerations

#### Methodology spreadsheet

##### Channel data tab

#### Content (35%)

##### Primary consideration (for each use case)

##### Editorial considerations (for each use case)

##### Average/final content score

#### Value (25%)

##### Primary consideration 1 – price per channel

##### Primary consideration 2 – channel quality

##### Secondary consideration – channel quality

##### Average the two scores

##### Editorial considerations

#### Equipment and features (25%)

##### Watch

##### Record

##### Find

##### Final equipment and features score

#### Customer experience (15%)

#### Final star rating

## Primary, secondary, and editorial considerations

Throughout the methodology, we will ask you to make score calculations based on primary considerations (PCs), secondary considerations (SCs), and editorial considerations. In general, the primary consideration is the most important metric related to the criteria. You will find a star rating for this first, then apply secondary and editorial considerations to adjust the final star rating.

Note that not all criteria will use all three types of considerations to calculate a star rating. Some may have multiple primary considerations that are averaged together to get the final score. Others will have only a primary consideration that is influenced by editorial considerations, and some ratings are based solely on your editorial judgment.



## Methodology spreadsheet

Use our [TV star rating spreadsheet](#) to input the information and calculate (almost) everything automatically. Please keep the following instructions in mind when using the spreadsheet.

- Fill out the channel data tab, which will help automatically calculate scores in both value and content. To do this, put a "1" if the provider offers this channel and a "0" if they don't in the column beneath the provider.
- Each criterion has its own tab to keep track of the score.
- Columns highlighted in gray will populate automatically once you have input the required information.
- Final star ratings for each criterion should be added manually after you've made all editorial considerations. These columns are highlighted in the color of their criteria.
  - Content
  - Value
  - Equipment and features
  - Customer experience
  - For criteria that have multiple primary considerations with scores that you adjust manually before averaging, columns to add the score are generally highlighted in a darker version of the criteria color.
- Some columns have been hidden to make things easier. But if you want to see the full calculations, you can expand them.



**SPREADSHEET:** A callout box with the paper clip icon denotes how information throughout these instructions will work in the star rating calculation spreadsheet. However, I will still cover how we reached these calculations in detail to help you understand the methodology.

## Channel data tab

The first tab on the TV ratings spreadsheet is called "Channel data." This is where we store channel information for TV providers. If you fill out the channel data for your provider, it will help automatically calculate some of the score considerations for Value and Content.

Here's some relevant information for that spreadsheet:

- Use the highest-tier plan's channel list to evaluate the provider.
- Our "top 100 channels" list is taken from the Variety top 100, plus PBS and C-Span. The channel list you have to fill out still only has 100 channels because we removed Nick at Nite and Adult Swim, which are accounted for with Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network, respectively.)
- Rows 9-108 list the top 100 channels. If the provider offers that channel, put a "1" in the provider's corresponding column. If it doesn't offer it, put "0."
- Rows 2-8 will keep count of the top channels and channels in each category for your reference. You don't need to remember this information, as it will populate in the other tabs automatically.

?

## Content (35%)



All the information for this consideration should populate automatically once you fill out the "Channel data" tab on the spreadsheet!

Content is evaluated based on the ability to watch certain kinds of programs. To account for the fact that different viewers will pay for TV for different reasons, we've separated content into five different use cases:

1. **Local networks:** NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, Univision, Telemundo, The CW, UniMas, Cozi, Estrella TV, Comet, PBS
2. **Sports:** NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, ESPN, Univision, TNT, Telemundo, TBS, USA Network, UniMas, ESPN2, Fox Sports 1, Motor Trend, NFL Network, Tru TV, TUDN, Estrella TV, MLB Network, Golf Channel, Showtime, NBA TV, Galavizion
3. **Family and educational:** NBC, ABC, Fox, Univision, Ion, Telemundo, TBS, History, Discovery Channel, Food Network, USA Network, CNN, Me TV, Bravo, The CW, BET, National Geographic, Freeform, Nickelodeon, Animal Planet, HBO, Family Entertainment TV, Sundance TV, Cozi, BBC America, Science, Disney Junior, Cartoon Network, Nat Geo Wild, Disney Channel, Nick Jr., Up, Antenna TV, Estrella TV, Smithsonian, Hallmark Drama, Galavizion, PBS
4. **News and politics:** NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, Fox News Channel, Univision, MSNBC, Telemundo, CNN, The CW, UniMas, Bounce TV, HLN, Cozi, CNBC, Newsmax TV, Weather Channel, Estrella TV, TV One, Galavizion, PBS, C-SPAN
5. **Entertainment and lifestyle:** NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, Univision, HGTV, Hallmark Channel, Ion, TLC, TNT, Telemundo, TBS, History, Discovery Channel, Food Network, INSP, USA Network, Me TV, Lifetime, The CW, Investigation Discovery, TV Land, A&E, Hallmark Movies & Mysteries, Paramount Network, UniMas, AMC, FX, Grit, WE TV, Game Show Network, BET, SyFy, Travel Channel, Oxygen, Freeform, MTV, Comedy Central, Bounce TV, Reelz, HBO, FXX, Adult Swim, VH1, LMN, E!, CMT, OWN, HLN, Start TV, Magnolia Network, BBC America, Ion Mystery, Heroes and Icons, Tru TV, Laff, Pop TV, Up, Antenna TV, Estrella TV, TV One, Comet, Cooking Channel, Defy TV, Showtime, Hallmark Drama, FYI, Starz, Galavizion, PBS

?

To calculate a final value rating, you will find a score (out of 5) for each use case, then average these together for a final content star rating.

### Step 1. Find the channel list for the highest-tier plan and fill out the "Channel data" tab

We will evaluate the highest-tier plan, which should theoretically offer the most channels. Do not include add-ons or any channels for which you have to pay for on top of the listed monthly price.

?



In the "Channel data" tab of the spreadsheet, note which channels the plan offers. If the provider offers this channel, note it by adding 1. If the channel isn't offered, add a 0

instead.

## Primary consideration (for each use case)

The primary consideration for each use case is number of applicable channels. As a team, we assigned a category for each channel in the top 100. For example, Disney Channel would fall into the "Family and educational" use case. Some channels may fall into two categories. For example, a channel may offer local content and sports. The number of channels in each category will calculate automatically as you fill out the channel data.

The PC rating is calculated by the number of channels available for the plan in that use case divided by the total number of channels we have assigned to that use case. For example, we have identified 12 local channels in the top 100. If a plan offers 9 of those channels, their local channel rating would be  $9/12$ , or  $3.75/5$ .

 The score for each use case will calculate automatically in the "Content" tab in the columns labeled "Rating." Note: if you didn't fill out the channel data tab, this won't work.

?

## Editorial considerations (for each use case)

Adjust the rating for each use case based on your editorial expertise. Round each rating to the nearest 0.25, and write the score as a number out of 5 (i.e.  $4.25/5$ ). You may wish to consider

- The popularity or quality of the available channels
- What channels are offered on lower-tier plans (the base score is calculated on the highest-tier plan)
- For sports, consider the availability of league-specific add-ons (i.e. MLB Extra Innings, NBA League Pass, etc.), as well as RSNs.
- Available add-ons and premium channels

 Add the final score for each use case, rounded to the nearest 0.5, under the columns labeled "Final [use case] rating." These are D, G, J, M, and P for local channels, sports, family, news, and entertainment, respectively.

## Average/final content score

The star rating for content is an average of the scores for each use case. Once you have the average, use your editorial expertise to round to the nearest half-star and assign a final content star rating.

 The average content rating will calculate automatically in column Q. Assign your final rating in column R.

?

## Value (25%)

Value assesses what customers get for their money.

### Primary consideration 1 - price per channel

Our first primary consideration for value is price, specifically the monthly price per channel.

Because TV providers usually have multiple plans and promotional pricing, we decided to calculate the average monthly price over 2 years for three different plans. Here's our reasoning:

- Average monthly price over 2 years: Using this price gives credit to companies with really great promotional offers, while also taking price hikes into account.
- Evaluate three plans: Some providers have better deals on their basic plans, while others shine with their premium.

**Step 1. Find the provider's pricing page. If you need to input an address to see prices, find one on Zillow or another similar site**

Because TV providers offer different rates in different markets, we'd like to keep track of where our pricing information comes from.



In the spreadsheet's "Value" tab, add your name to column B. Add the address used to find plan information in column C.

**Step 2. Find the monthly cost(s) and channel counts for the three selected plans**

Here are the three plans to evaluate:

1. The lowest-tier plan. This generally has "Basic" or "Essential" in the name.
2. The second-lowest-tier plan. Whatever is right above the lowest plan.
3. The highest-tier plan. This brand's "Premier" or "Ultimate" TV plan.

For each plan, you need to look for promotional pricing and price hikes, then calculate the average price over a period of 24 months.

If you were to do the math manually, here is what the equation would look like for each plan:

$$X = \{[P1(L1) + P2(L2) + \dots + Pn(Ln)] / 24\} / C$$

Where X is the monthly cost per channel over 24 months, P is the monthly price, L is the number of months for which the price applies, and C is the channel count. Where 1, 2, etc. are the first pricing, second pricing, and so on for a total of (y) price ranges until you reach 24 months.

For example, "Awesome TV" has 100 channels and promotional pricing for 12 months at \$20 per month, then its regular rate is \$40 per month. The average price per month would be \$30. The average monthly price *per channel* would be \$0.30. Your equation would look like this:  $X = \{[(20)(12) + [(40)(12)]] / 24\} / 100$ .



The lowest-tier plan information goes in columns D-M. The medium plan takes up N-W. The highest-tier plan is X-AG. For the lowest-tier plan:

Input the plan name in column D. Include a link to the page where you found the pricing. Add the channel count of the plan to column E.

Price 1 (column F) is the promotional price. Length 1 (column G) is the number of months the promotional price lasts. If the promotion lasts 24 months (or there are no promotions), you will only need to add a single price. If this is the case, add 24 to column G.

If there is a promotional price that lasts less than 24 months, put the number of months of the promotion in column G, then add the second price (or the non-promotional price) to column H, and the remaining months to column I.

In rare cases, a provider may have multiple price hikes in 24 months. If that happens, add Price 3 and Length 3 to columns J and K, respectively.

The final "length" should add up to 24 months to get the average price over 2 years.

Repeat these steps for each of the three plans in the appropriate columns.

### Step 3. Find the average price per channel

Using the price per channel you found in the step above (X), find the average price per channel across all three plans. If you were to do the math manually, here's what your equation would look like:

$$Z=(X1+X2+X3)$$

Where Z is the average monthly price per channel across all plan tiers, X1 is the price per channel for the lowest-tier plan, X2 is the price per channel for the middle plan, and X3 is the price per channel of the highest-tier plan.

EXAMPLE: If a provider's lowest tier plan costs an average of \$1/channel over 24 months, second-to-lowest tier plan costs an average of \$.75/channel over 24 months, and \$.50/channel over 24 months, the equation will state:  $(1+.75+.5)/3$ .



The price per channel is calculated automatically for each plan in columns M, W, and AG. The average price per channel across all three plans is calculated automatically for you in column AH.

?

### Step 4. Assign a PC star rating based on the average monthly cost across all plans, per channel

Once you've found the average cost per channel across all plans, assign a PC rating based on the following:

- 5 ★: <\$0.45
- 4 ★: \$0.45-\$0.65
- 3 ★: \$0.66-\$0.99
- 2 ★: \$1.00+



This is calculated for you in column AI.

## Primary consideration 2 - channel quality



All the information for this consideration should populate automatically once you fill out the "Channel data" tab on the spreadsheet!

To calculate the quality of channels you get with your plan, we use the Variety top 100 channel list, plus PBS and C-Span. (Note: the channel list you have to fill out still only has 100 channels because we removed Nick at Nite and Adult Swim, which are accounted for with Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network, respectively.)

?

### Step 1. Find the channel list for the highest-tier plan

You should have already completed this step to find the Content score. Here's a reminder, just in case.



In the "Channel data" tab of the spreadsheet, note which channels the plan offers. If the provider offers this channel, note it by adding 1. If the channel isn't offered, add a 0 instead.

### Step 2. Determine how many of the top 100 channels the plan offers

Assign a PC rating based on the following criteria:

- 5 ★: 90+

- 4 ★: 75-89
- 3 ★: 60-74
- 2 ★: <60



The number of top 100, top 20, and top channels in each viewer use case will calculate for you automatically in the "Channel data" tab. This is just for your reference.

The top 100 will transfer to the "Value" tab automatically in column AJ, and the PC rating will calculate automatically in column AK.

?

## Secondary consideration - channel quality

Adjust the rank based on how many of the top 20 channels the provider offers.

- +0.5 ★: All 20
- No change: 16-19
- -0.5 ★: <15



In the "Value" tab, the number of top 20 channels will appear in column AL, and the adjusted star rating will appear in column AM.

## Average the two scores

Average the ratings you calculated for cost per channel and channel quality.



This rating will be calculated automatically in column AN.

## Editorial considerations

Use editorial considerations to adjust the final score, and round the final star rating to the nearest half-star. Here are some things you may wish to consider:

- Fees
- Add-on price and availability
- Broadcast fees, sports fees
- Promotional pricing
- Bundle availability
- Standout plans (good or bad)
- Number of plan options



Add the final value rating to column AO.

?

## Equipment and features (25%)

We evaluated equipment and features based on three primary considerations:

1. Ability to **watch** your shows (40%)
2. Ability to **record** your shows (35%)

?

### 3. Ability to **find** your shows (25%)

For each consideration, we evaluated both how hassle-free it is to perform the activities, and how much it costs to do so.

To avoid user confusion on why the average score for each sub-criteria doesn't match up with the final score (and to avoid having to explain the weighting), we've opted to give each sub-criteria a "word score" instead of a number rating. You'll see this reflected in the tiers communicated in each section.

- 4.1–5 ★: Excellent
- 3.1–4 ★: Great
- 2.1–3 ★: Good
- 1.1–2 ★: Fine
- <1★: Bad

## Watch

Watch is the ability to access your TV at home and on the go.

### Step 1. Go through the checklist

Begin with a rating of 4 and move through the checklist.

- Is the first set-top box free?
  - Yes: No change in score
  - No: -1 point
- How much does it cost to get additional set-top boxes?
  - < \$8: +0.5 points
  - \$8.01-\$9.99: no change in score
  - \$10+: -0.5 points
- Does the provider have an app that lets you watch on the go?
  - Yes: No change in score
  - No: -1 point
- What is the service type? (Speaks to picture quality)
  - Satellite: +0.5 points
  - Other: No change in score

### Step 2. Adjust the score up or down based on your editorial considerations

Consider the following:

- App quality (rating on the app store)
- Customizability and quality of equipment
- Set-top box capability (picture quality, etc.)



In the "Equipment and features" tab, fill out the information in columns B-H to automatically calculate a "Watch" score in column I. Add the final score based on your editorial considerations in column J. The "word score" will fill in automatically in column K.

## Record

The record consideration deals primarily with DVR.

### Step 1. Find available DVR storage

First, assign a score based on the number of DVR hours that are available at *no extra cost*.

- 5 ★: 200+
- 4 ★: 100–199
- 3 ★: 21–99
- 2 ★: 1–20
- 1 ★: 0

Next, assign a score based on the *maximum available* DVR storage.

- 5 ★: 451+
- 4 ★: 300–450
- 3 ★: 150–299
- 2 ★: 0–149



Enter available DVR hours in columns L and N of the spreadsheet. The scores will populate automatically.

### Step 2. Average your DVR hour scores

If you did the math manually, your equation would look like this:

$$(A+B)/2$$

Where A is the score based on the base DVR hours and B is the score based on the maximum available DVR hours.



This number will calculate automatically in column P.

### Step 3. Adjust the score

Due to the complexity of DVR features, you will have to keep track of the math yourself on this one. Begin with the score you calculated in step 2, and add to or subtract from the score based on the following considerations:

| Score adjustment | Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subtract 1       | DVR access fee<br>No DVR upgrade options                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Subtract 0.5     | Bad/confusing upgrade options<br>Hidden number of storage hours (including hours/cost after the promotional period)<br>Complaints on multiple public forums about the DVR feature<br>Usability issues in testing (where applicable)<br>No cloud DVR or no local DVR                                    |
| Add 0.5          | Auto-magical commercial skipping<br>Simultaneous recording capability<br>72-hour replay<br>Extras, like hiding scores of games not watched, highlights, screen-in-screen mode, etc.<br>Option to purchase the equipment outright<br>Option to download for viewing on the go (without internet access) |
| Add 1            | At least 15 simultaneous recordings at the highest price point                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

**Note:** Adjust the score for each consideration. For example, if there is both commercial skipping and 72-hour replay, add 0.5 points for each.

Once you've done this, make any final editorial considerations and determine a final score. You may wish to consider the following questions:

- If you start recording during the middle of a movie/show, will it allow you to watch/skip from the beginning, or only from where you hit "record?"
- Can you set shows to record from your phone, or do you have to be home?

Add the final record score to column R. The "word score" will fill out automatically in column S.

## Find

Find is the ability to navigate your TV interface, find what you want to watch, and hide content you don't want kids to find.

This score is based solely on your editorial opinion, but use these criteria as guidelines to assign a score:

- Remote features:
  - Does it have a voice function?
  - Does it have channel buttons?
- Channel guide experience:
  - Does the channel guide show both the logo and name of each channel? (This communicates ease of search. If the channel guide has only one, consider a lower score.)
  - How much of the program description can you see before you choose a channel?
- Parental controls:
  - How simple is the basic usability of parental controls?
  - How easy and customizable is it to hide previews and descriptions of inappropriate content from children (as opposed to only blocking the show itself from selection)?
- DVR:
  - How easy is it to find your recorded shows?
- On-demand:
  - How easy is it to see or sort by free/included vs. premium content?

Add your "Find" score to column T. The "word score" will populate automatically in column U.

## Final equipment and features score

### Step 1. Apply a weighted average to the scores

The final equipment and features score is a weighted average of the three criteria scores. If you did the math, here's what your equation would look like:

$$\star = (W \cdot 4) + (R \cdot 35) + (F \cdot 25)$$

Where W is the watch score, R is the record score, and F is the find score.

### Step 2. Use editorial opinion for a final score

Using this averaged score, make any final editorial adjustments.

The average score will calculate automatically in column V. Round to the nearest half-star

## Customer experience (15%)

The customer experience score is based mainly on your expertise as a researcher and user of the internet. Do some research and choose a star rating for this category.

### Step 1. Look into some of the following resources to help you in your research:

- Customer reviews:
  - Switchful reviews
  - Google reviews
  - Yelp reviews
  - Others
- Authoritative research:
  - ACSI
  - News headlines
  - Trustpilot
  - Down detector
- Look for social proof:
  - Reddit
  - Quora
  - Twitter
  - Other forums/social platforms
- Hands-on research:
  - Visit website
  - Contact customer service
- Get creative!

?

?

### Step 2. Assign a score based on the following rubric:

| Score | Installation                                                                                                                                                                                        | Contracts                                                                                                                                                                                   | Customer service                                                                                                                          |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5 ★   | Free self-installation option<br>Free professional installation<br>Installation is available in 3 days or less.<br>The installation window is under 4 hours.                                        | No contract is required.                                                                                                                                                                    | Customer service has multiple ways to get help.<br>Customer sentiment is great!                                                           |
| 4 ★   | Professional installation under \$50<br>Self-installation is available for free.<br>Installation is available in less than a week.<br>The installation window is under 4 hours.                     | There may be contracts, but they aren't longer than one year and your rate will not increase during your contract.<br>There is a contract-free option, but you have to pay extra per month. | Customer service is above average<br>there are few or no consistent complaints from customers.                                            |
| 3 ★   | Professional installation is \$50-90.<br>Self-installation charges a fee, or there is no self-installation option but professional installation is free.<br>Installation is available in 10 days or | There is a two-year (or less) contract for service, but your rate will not increase during your contract.                                                                                   | Customers seem generally satisfied<br>the odd complaint here and there<br>may be consistent complaints<br>are generally not deal-breakers |

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | less.<br>You may have to be home for an entire 8-hour period for the installation window.                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                 |
| 2 ★ | Installation over \$90<br>There is no self-installation option and professional installation charges a fee. It takes longer than 10 days to get the internet installed.<br>Installation windows are longer than 8 hours.           | You have to sign a contract and pay steep cancelation fees.<br>Your promotional rate may increase during the length of your contract. | There are serious, regular complaints from customers.<br>Phone lines have long wait times, there is no in-person chat option.                                                     |
| 1 ★ | Installation leaves serious damage to the home.<br>There are common complaints about extra and excessive installation charges that were not made known before the installation occurred.<br>Installation required multiple visits. | Contracts go over 24 months and incur serious ETFs.<br>Your rate goes up during the length of your contract.                          | Customer service is unreachable and non-responsive.<br>There are multiple, serious complaints about issues not being resolved, customer service acting unethically, upsell plans. |



Add your customer experience rating to column B in the "Customer experience" tab.

## Final star rating



The final rating for each criterion will populate automatically in the "Final star ratings" tab and calculate a weighted and unweighted final score. You will also see a place to add editorial notes in this tab. Please make any notes here about your scores or other considerations you made in your evaluation.

## Resources

- [TV methodology spreadsheet](#)
- [TV review template](#)

