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**BBFC Guide to
Violence**

BBFC Guide to Violence

From animated slapstick adventures to brutal torture scenes, scenes of violence can thrill, amuse or distress depending on their presentation. When classifying violence we take into account a range of factors, including the level of detail; whether it is stylised, comic, fantastical or realistic; its frequency within the content as a whole; and the context in which it occurs.

Blood, injury detail and gore will also impact the classification, especially if they derive from violent acts. In some cases, injuries or gore can result from non-violent contexts, such as medical procedures, and may therefore receive a lower rating.

We are mindful of how the consequences of violence are portrayed. Content may depict graphic injuries or scenes which dwell on a victim's pain or suffering. These can be particularly distressing to watch, and may therefore receive a higher age rating.

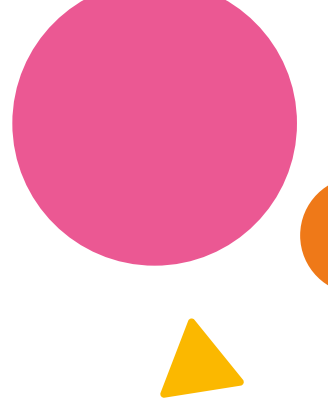
Classification decisions also take into account any detailed portrayal of violent techniques that may be easily copied, or any glamorisation of easily accessible weapons, such as knives.

We also consider specific forms of violence. For example, sequences of domestic abuse – including emotional, psychological or physical abuse – may receive a higher rating, and will be noted in our content advice. It is rare that such material will be permitted at U or PG, as we are conscious of the impact realistic violence may have on children if it occurs in locations they should associate with feeling safe, such as the home or school.

Content consisting specifically of sporting violence, such as wrestling, is also unlikely to be permitted at U or PG because of audience concerns around young children imitating on-screen action.

While largely a visual issue, we also consider verbal references to violence. The more detailed and potentially disturbing a description may be, the higher the likely rating.

To find out more, see the case studies included in this guide for examples.





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Our latest guidelines consultation
involved 12,000 people.



To find out more about our age
ratings, content advice and new
Classification Guidelines go to
bbfc.co.uk/about-classification

How each age rating deals with Violence



Universal

U-rated content is suitable for audiences of all ages, although not all U-rated content is aimed at children.

Children's content should be set within a positive framework and should offer reassuring counter-balances to any violence, threat or scary scenes. Generally a U is unlikely to unsettle a four-year-old, although it is impossible to predict what might affect any particular child.

Violence should be very mild and justified by context (for example, comedic, animated, wholly unrealistic). Injury detail should be very mild, brief and undetailed.

Parental Guidance

General viewing, but some scenes may be unsuitable for young children

PG-rated content is suitable for general viewing. A PG should generally not unsettle a child aged around eight, although parents and caregivers should be aware that some scenes may be unsuitable for more sensitive children.

Violence will be mild, with more impactful moments permitted if justified by context. Injury detail, including sight of blood, should be brief.



12A/12

Cinema content classified 12A and video content classified 12 contain material that is not generally suitable for children aged under 12.

No one younger than 12 may be permitted to attend a 12A cinema screening unless they are accompanied by an adult. Adults planning to take a child under 12 to a 12A should consider whether the main feature is suitable for that child. To help them decide, we recommend that they check the BBFC's content advice for the film in advance. No one younger than 12 may rent or buy a 12-rated video.

There may be moderate violence, but it should not dwell on detail. Occasional blood and injuries may be shown, but gory images should be infrequent and justified by context (for example, medical detail, fantasy).



15

Suitable only for 15 years and over

No one younger than 15 may see 15-rated content in a cinema. No one younger than 15 may rent or buy a 15-rated video.

Violence may be strong but there should not be sustained focus on the infliction of pain or victims' suffering. The strongest gory images may occur if justified by context (for example, war, medical detail). Prolonged sadistic violence is unlikely to be acceptable.



18

Suitable only for adults

No one younger than 18 may see 18-rated content in a cinema. No one younger than 18 may rent or buy an 18-rated video.

Adults should be free to choose their own entertainment. Exceptions are most likely where material or treatment appears to us to risk harm to individuals or, through their behaviour, to society. For example, the detailed portrayal of violent or dangerous acts, or of illegal drug use, which may cause harm to public health or morals.



Case studies



Wonka

mild threat, violence, implied bad language

A young chocolatier with dreams of opening his own shop arrives in a city famous for its sweets, only to clash with the established business cartel controlling the market through underhand means. Inspired by the works of Roald Dahl and 1971's *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory*, this playful fantasy prequel stars Timothée Chalamet as the eponymous Willy Wonka.

Despite his gentle nature and good intentions, in one scene Wonka is accosted by the Chief of Police who has been ordered by the cartel to intimidate him. The policeman does so by dunking Wonka's head repeatedly into a nearby fountain, and he is seen briefly struggling to breathe with his head under the water. As Wonka regains his composure, it is implied the policeman hits him over the head with a truncheon.

Despite the violent acts, the intensity of the scene is lessened by its humour. The policeman comes across as comically inept, at first delivering the verbal warning while Wonka's head is underwater, meaning he cannot hear.

The policeman apologises for his actions, and then threatens that if Wonka continues to sell chocolate in the town he'll get "more than a bonk on the head", before releasing that he was supposed to say that after hitting Wonka on the head. He asks for Wonka to wait, and our hero politely obliges while the policeman draws his truncheon and swings it towards Wonka. The scene cuts before the weapon makes contact, leaving the audience to imagine the blow rather than showing it.

The comic intent of the scene mitigates the strength of the violence we see, because it is clearly played for laughs and without clear malice on the part of the attacker. However, dunking someone's head underwater can be dangerous and the scene is nonetheless too detailed to be containable at U. However, the context and presentation means that we were able to classify it PG for mild threat, violence, implied bad language.

FILM

Classification date
28/11/2023

Director(s)
Paul King

Genre(s)
Action, Comedy, Musical

Approx. running minutes
116m



12A

Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings

moderate violence, fantasy threat, bloody images, language

The 25th instalment of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), *Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings*, is an origin story in which a young martial arts master is forced to confront his past when his estranged father draws him into the search for a mythical village.

As with many films in the MCU, action set-pieces feature heavily in *Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings*. A 12A rating was established from the outset, when a man harnesses the power of fantastical devices to battle an army. Blue energy blasts rip through the dense ranks of soldiers, delivering impactful blows and crunchy body slams. One soldier is hurled into the air and lands upside down, with a sound suggestive of broken bones. However, the sequence moves very quickly, tracking a character's kinetic movements and obscuring stronger details of violence with dust.

Violence in *Shang-Chi* fuses the MCU's fantastical action with elements of martial arts, incorporating fighting styles and imagery which speak to the

protagonist's Asian heritage. One of the biggest set-pieces in the film, and another indicator of 12A violence, is a fight sequence which takes place on a bus when Shang-Chi and his friend are attacked. The scene showcases choreographed and heavily stylised hand-to-hand combat as the hero weaves in and out of the bus and around its nervous passengers. It's a high-octane sequence, with the bus careering out of control down a busy San Francisco street, adding a sense of impending threat to the violence. Slow-motion effects also isolate and emphasise certain moves. However, there is no focus on injuries or death, and moments of humour keep the sequence – and the film – light and fun.

We classified *Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings* 12A for moderate violence, fantasy threat, bloody images, language.

FILM

Classification date
24/08/2021

Director(s)
Destin Daniel Cretton

Genre(s)
Action, Fantasy

Approx. running minutes
127m



15

The Suicide Squad

strong bloody violence, gore, language, brief drug misuse

From DC, *The Suicide Squad* follows a group of super-villains who are released from prison and sent on a dangerous mission in exchange for lighter sentences. The anti-heroes must use their extraordinary abilities to overcome a host of enemies, both human and monstrous.

We regularly classify films in the superhero genre aimed at young viewers, but occasionally a film will be aimed at older audiences and push the boundaries of violence at the 15 / 18 borderline.

James Gunn's *The Suicide Squad* is the second entry into the *Suicide Squad* franchise. We had classified the first instalment 15 for sustained threat, moderate violence in 2016, but this sequel upped the levels of violence and gore considerably. *The Suicide Squad* features stabbings, shootings, beheadings, impalements and sequences in which people's bodies are torn apart in visceral detail – including by one of the film's unconventional heroes, a large humanoid shark.

Although bloody violence occurs frequently throughout the film, the darkly comic and anarchic tone reduces the impact, preventing lingering upset over the results of violence. The fantastical context is important too, with the use of special effects and imagined creatures distancing the carnage from reality.

We also tested *The Suicide Squad* in our 2024 guidelines research and people agreed with the 15 rating, recognising the strength of the violence but feeling the comedy, fantasy and fast-moving action meant an 18 was not required.

We classified the film 15 for strong bloody violence, gore, language, brief drug misuse.



FILM

Classification date

20/07/2021

Director(s)

James Gunn

Genre(s)

Fantasy

Approx. running minutes

132m



18

Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood

strong bloody violence

Set in 1969, Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood* follows a struggling actor, Rick Dalton, and his faithful stunt double, Cliff Booth, as they try to resurrect their movie careers.

Similar to Tarantino's earlier film, *Inglourious Basterds*, *Once Upon A Time... In Hollywood* takes history as its basis but depicts an alternate course of events. In the film, Rick lives next door to actress Sharon Tate, who was brutally murdered by followers of cult leader Charles Manson. The film builds to that tragic night, but in a darkly comic twist the cult members accidentally enter Rick's house rather than Tate's, where Cliff and Rick proceed to kill them and unwittingly save Tate and her friends.

The unexpected wish-fulfilment fantasy of saving Tate and despatching her murderers also provides relief from the growing tension that the previous scenes have steadily built. The manner of their

deaths is also blackly comic, with Cliff and Rick using a can of food, Cliff's dog and a flamethrower to gory effect. Cliff has also ingested drugs prior to the home invasion, and his stoned demeanour coupled with the hapless would-be killers' incompetence lends the scene a darkly comedic tone.

Our guidelines at 15 allow for strong violence, but there should not be a sustained focus on the infliction of pain and injury. During the attack, a woman stabs Cliff in the leg and he retaliates by slamming her head against walls and furniture over and over again in gratuitous fashion, until much of her face is caved in. Despite the outrageous humour, the graphic imagery and brutality of the violence by one of the film's protagonists meant the film required an 18, and so we classified the film 18 for strong bloody violence.

FILM

Classification date
06/11/2019

Director(s)
Quentin Tarantino

Genre(s)
Drama, Comedy

Approx. running minutes
155m

BBFC Classification Guidelines. Shaped by you.

We provide age ratings and content advice for films and other content in line with our published Classification Guidelines.

With more content more accessible than ever before, it is imperative that our age ratings and content advice provide a trusted guide that people can rely on when choosing what to watch, whether at the cinema, on DVD and Blu-ray or on Video on Demand (VoD) services.

Every four to five years, we speak to thousands of people from all over the country to explore what matters to them when it comes to classification. In our most recent guidelines research, 12,000 people took part – the highest number of participants we have ever consulted – providing us with a very robust set of findings to help ensure our standards continue to reflect the views of UK audiences. Here's what we found:



Classification Guidelines

To read the latest edition of the full BBFC Classification Guidelines, visit our website at bbfc.co.uk

87%

of parents agree with BBFC age rating decisions all or most of the time

97%

of people see a benefit to age ratings for some or all audiences

Trust in BBFC age ratings has grown to

90%

among parents/caregivers in the last five years

85%

trust BBFC age ratings to indicate whether content is suitable for themselves or their family

81%

of people want consistent age ratings across cinema, DVD and Blu-ray and Video on Demand/streaming services

99%

recognise at least one BBFC age rating symbol (78% recognise them all)

About the BBFC



The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is the independent film and video regulator for the UK. We are here to help everyone choose age-appropriate films, videos and websites, wherever and however they watch or use them.

We do this primarily through our widely recognised and trusted age ratings and content advice.

Every BBFC age rating decision and every piece of content advice is based on our Classification Guidelines, which we refresh every four to five years through an extensive consultation with thousands of people across the UK. This gives us an unmatched insight into what audiences find acceptable for different age groups.

The result is a transparent, well-understood and trusted classification system that gives people the best information to help them choose what to view and to protect children and vulnerable adults from harmful content.

We are not-for-profit and are funded through the fees we charge for our services.

We classify:

- films, trailers, advertisements and other content for theatrical (cinema) release on behalf of local authorities who licence cinemas under the UK's licensing legislation¹
- video works distributed on physical media under the Video Recordings Act 1984 (VRA)
- video content distributed on Video on Demand and streaming services (VoD) under a voluntary, self-regulatory service
- commercial and internet content distributed via the UK's Mobile Networks under a voluntary, self-regulatory service

As well as being based on consultation with thousands of people across the UK, our guidelines incorporate other relevant research, expert advice and our accumulated experience. The guidelines, and our practice in applying them, pay particular attention to changes in audience expectations, attitudes and concerns and to changes in the law.

Here, and throughout the guidelines, we take video content to include films, programmes and other content released on DVD and Blu-ray and on VoD services.

We take responsibility for applying the guidelines to all content submitted to us, to ensure their application and interpretation is consistent, fair and reasonable. From time to time, issues may arise that are not addressed directly in the guidelines. Where such issues occur, we will deal with them in line with the standards expressed and implied in these guidelines. The guidelines are not a legal document and should be interpreted in the spirit of what is intended as well as in the letter.

We will provide, on request, guidance on the interpretation and application of these guidelines.

¹Since 31 March 2016 the BBFC has sub-contracted the assessment of cinema advertisements for commercial goods and services to the Cinema Advertising Association, while retaining responsibility for classifying, on behalf of local authorities, films, trailers, public information films and charity campaigns, and other cinema content.

Our guiding principles

To protect children and vulnerable adults from potentially harmful content

To empower consumers, particularly parents and those with responsibility for children, to make informed viewing decisions

To enable content to reach the widest possible audience appropriate for the theme and treatment

To support the right of adults to choose their own entertainment as long as it remains within the law and is not potentially harmful

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