

When classifying sex, we apply our guidelines to the same standard regardless of the sexual orientation of the activity being portrayed or referenced.

People, especially parents, are concerned about introducing sexual material or concepts to children at too early an age, and our classification standards across the categories are designed to support young people's development of healthy attitudes towards sex.

With the exception of wildlife documentaries, in which there may be scenes of animals mating, content rated U is unlikely to feature any sexual material stronger than kissing.

PG-rated content can feature a certain amount of innuendo and rude humour, but such material will typically relate to the concept of sex rather than any specific act. Sex may be implied, such as a couple making their way to the bedroom and starting to kiss, but the scene is unlikely to go much further than that.

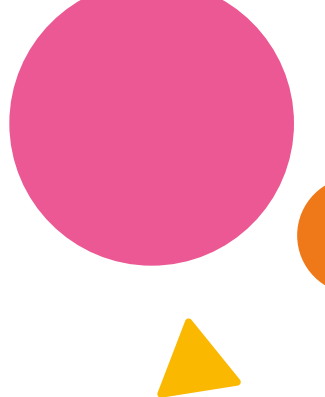
From our research, we are mindful of the level of knowledge a young teenager is likely to have with regards to sex, as well as what the key concerns and expectations of their parents are with regards to the sexual content their child may encounter. Our standards at 12A/12

reflect this, allowing for brief or implied scenes of sex, including masturbation, but nudity must be brief and stronger sexual material is likely to require a higher rating. Sex references may be rude – and infrequently crude – but should not detail sex acts or behaviours that may negatively impact a young teen audience's perspective of healthy sexual relationships.

Sex scenes at 15 can be occasional or prolonged and include nudity, but strong detail, such as sight of erections, should only be brief. There may also be crude humour and sex references, although content that features an extensive focus on more complex sexual practices, including BDSM, is likely to require an 18.

Whatever the rating, the appearance of a sex scene can sometimes be embarrassing or awkward when viewing with others. In the worst case, it could even be harmful to a child's development. Our content advice is there to help audiences choose what's right for them and their family.

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





Shaped By You.

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 Sex



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.

There may be very mild sex references or sexual behaviour (for example, kissing).

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.

Sexual activity may be implied, but should be discreet and infrequent. There may be mild sex references and innuendo only.



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.

Sexual activity may be portrayed briefly and discreetly. Moderate sex references are permitted, but frequent crude references are unlikely to be acceptable.



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.

Sexual activity may be portrayed, but usually without graphic detail. There may be strong sex references, but frequent crude references are unlikely to be acceptable. Content that, when taken as a whole, has the primary purpose of sexual arousal is unacceptable.



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



In The Heights

mild bad language, sex references

Based on the award-winning stage musical from Hamilton creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, *In The Heights* is a celebration of community and identity during a period of change and challenge for the predominantly Dominican residents of Washington Heights in New York City.

In The Heights is centred around the son of Puerto Rican immigrants, Usnavi, who works in a small convenience store at the heart of his community. We follow the ensemble of characters around him as they chase their dreams and hope to find love, while the impact of gentrification makes it increasingly difficult for them to make ends meet.

A core classification issue for the film is occasional sex references and innuendo. These are often incorporated into the lyrics and physicality of the musical numbers. In the opening number, for instance, Usnavi introduces us to his daily routine and the various things he sells in his store by rapidly listing the

items – including condoms. Later, there is a scene set in a salon in which a group of women sing about the gossip and hearsay circling the neighbourhood, including who slept with whom, and whether a handsome employee of the local cab company has a “big taxi”.

According to our Classification Guidelines, sex references at PG should be mild and undetailed. While stronger material may be alluded to, it should be done in a manner that is unlikely to be understood by younger audiences, such as through the use of innuendo. The rapid pace of *In The Heights*' lyrics – drawing on rap and hip-hop – alongside the near-constant movement of the camera, performers and dancers means the sexual material is rarely dwelt upon. The moments of innuendo are comic but not crude, and the overwhelmingly positive, feel-good nature of the film means these moments come across as cheeky rather than sleazy. We classified the film PG for mild bad language, sex references.

FILM

Classification date
27/05/2021

Director(s)
Jon M. Chu

Genre(s)
Drama, Musical, Romance

Approx. running minutes
137m



12A

Mean Girls

moderate sex references, language, discrimination

Tina Fey's *Mean Girls* – based on Rosalind Wiseman's novel *Queen Bees and Wannabes* – introduced the world to the Plastics, 'fetch', and endlessly quotable comic dialogue on its release in 2004. The latest iteration, released in 2024, is an adaptation of the stage musical version of the story, and stars Angourie Rice, Renée Rapp and Auli'i Cravalho.

The film follows teenager Cady, whose travelling and homeschooling has left her out of touch with the social dynamics of modern high schools and their cliques. Taken under the wing of the school's 'Queen Bee', Regina George, Cady finds her own behaviour becoming increasingly toxic as she gains popularity.

A key bone of contention between Cady and Regina is their affection for a boy, Aaron. As hormones and desires rage, the film leans into more sexualised language and behaviour. From Sex Ed classes to riotous song and dance routines, *Mean Girls* explores teen desires in various ways.

For example, in a musical number entitled 'Sexy', Regina's friend Karen advocates for dressing in risqué costumes for Halloween parties.

Our research has shown that parents are particularly concerned around the normalisation of overtly sexualised behaviour at U or PG. At 12A/12, however, there is more room to explore sexualised behaviour, so long as it reflects the level of knowledge most young teens are likely to possess. Our guidelines at 12A/12 allow for moderate sex references and even occasional crude humour, which ably encapsulates the content in *Mean Girls*. The film's humour and fast-moving musical sequences reduce the impact of the sexual content, which itself does not feature strong or crude details that would require a higher rating. We therefore classified *Mean Girls*, 12A for moderate sex references, language, discrimination.



FILM

Classification date
20/12/2023

Director(s)

Samantha Jayne, Arturo

Genre(s)

Comedy, Musical

Approx. running minutes

112m



15

Lady Chatterley's Lover

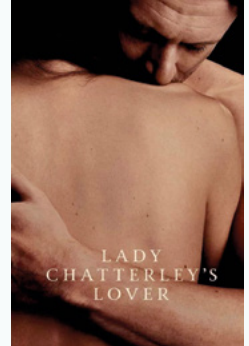
strong sex, nudity, language

D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has been the subject of multiple film and television adaptations over the years, since it was first published in the 1920s. Netflix's 2022 version stars Emma Corrin as Connie, the eponymous wealthy married woman, with Jack O'Connell as Oliver, the gamekeeper with whom she has a passionate affair.

Given the novel's long history and previous adaptations, audiences knew to expect scenes of a sexual nature when approaching this latest iteration. From a classification perspective, however, some of the sex scenes were challenging, such as an extended sequence in a forest in which Connie and Oliver play with power dynamics and sexual language that alludes to BDSM. The scene, however, does not feature explicit detail and there is never any question over consent or communication between the two. Instead, it shows how their desire transcends class and social status.

Context is similarly integral to how nudity is depicted. One particular sequence features extended full frontal nudity as the two lovers run through the rain in the landscape surrounding Oliver's cottage. Elsewhere, they have sex in fields and forests. Their nudity is therefore evocative of the natural world, and contrasts Oliver to Connie's husband, who is involved in factories and industrial development.

Our research has shown that people are more accepting of sex scenes and nudity at 15 when they promote healthy portrayals of sexual relationships, compared to more exploitative or pornographic material. Participants in our guidelines research were supportive of a 15 rating for these reasons. While strong, the sex scenes in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are not graphic and are often tender and romantic. We classified the film 15 for strong sex, nudity, language.



FILM

Classification date
17/10/2022

Director(s)
Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre

Genre(s)
Drama, Romance

Approx. running minutes
126m



18

Paris, 13th District

strong sex

Paris, 13th District is a French drama from director Jacques Audiard, in which the romantic lives of four people become entangled.

While strong sexual content can often be permitted at 15, certain factors may mean that an 18 is required. This can include the frequency or duration of sex scenes, the level of detail, or the context and tone in which they occur. Portrayals of sex are also more likely to be acceptable at 15 if they promote positive and healthy attitudes towards sex, whereas those which are more complex may indicate an 18 is more appropriate.

Paris, 13th District includes a number of strong sex scenes featuring breast and buttock nudity, different positions, as well as visual and verbal references to oral and anal sex. Although the strongest sexual detail is not seen, the frequency and thematic focus on sex was a major classification consideration.

Our research has found that, while sex references may be frequent at 15, more pornographic scenes could result in an 18 rating. In *Paris, 13th District*, one of the protagonists discovers that there is a well-known porn star that she bears a striking resemblance to. Although initially embarrassed by this, the woman becomes increasingly interested in her doppelganger's work, and spends portions of the film watching pornographic videos and eventually making contact with her. Whilst some of the detail during these sequences is hidden, the implication of this material leaves a strong impression.

The woman is also seeking to increase her experience of sexual pleasure, leading to her experimenting with a romantic partner in a positive and consensual encounter. However, the use of pornography as a device to aid with this journey of sexual enlightenment lends the film a maturity which our research has found is most suitable at 18.

We classified the film 18 for strong sex.

FILM

Classification date
29/09/2021

Director(s)
Jacques Audiard

Genre(s)
Drama

Approx. running minutes
105m

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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