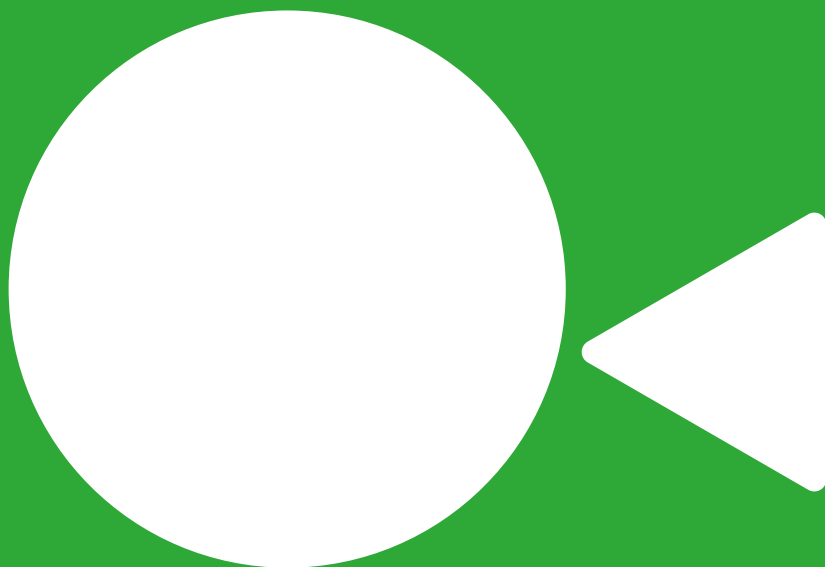


bbfc View what's
right for you



BBFC Guide to
Language

BBFC Guide to Language

We understand from our research that a key concern for people in the UK is the normalisation of bad language or gestures which younger audiences may repeat, without understanding the offence it may cause to others. We therefore classify language and gestures at each category in line with broad public opinion.

The extent of offence a word, expression or gesture may cause can depend upon the context in which it occurs. Additionally, an individual's response can vary according to their age, gender, race, background, beliefs or the expectations they bring to the content.

As some words have multiple meanings, our approach is nuanced and assesses how the word, expression or gesture is being used.

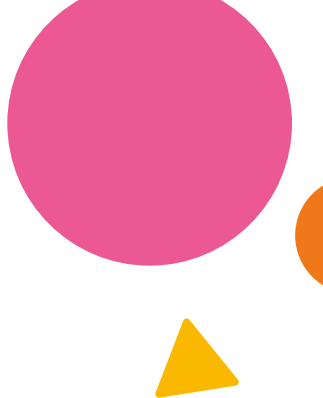
Our Compliance Officers will always consider the manner in which language is delivered. For example, in some cases, language delivered in an aggressive, directed or sexual manner will be rated at a higher category than uses delivered in a comedic or self-referential manner.

We also consider the frequency of language in relation to the content's length. For example, infrequent use of strong language ('f**k') is permitted at 12A/12 in a feature-length film, but fewer uses will be permitted in an episode of a TV series.

Our research has also shown that if language is identifiable despite being bleeped, disguised or clearly implied through 'wordplay', it should be classified as if it is spoken. Similarly, audiences are often well aware of the meaning behind acronyms (for example, 'WTF') and so we classify pronounced uses of these as if the term is spoken.

When classifying content not in the English language, we assess the language as it appears in the subtitles. Certain non-English language words, however, are well known to many English-speaking audiences and we will therefore classify these terms in line with their English equivalents.

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 Language



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 bad language. Frequent use may result in a higher age rating.

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.

There may be mild bad language 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.

There may be moderate bad language. Strong language may be permitted, depending on context and frequency within the content as a whole.



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.

There may be strong language. Very strong language may be permitted depending on the context and frequency.



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



Sonic The Hedgehog 2

mild violence, language

Sega's iconic blue hedgehog sped onto the big screen at the start of 2020, becoming one of the most successful video-game to film adaptations to date. A sequel followed in 2022, and saw Sonic team up with his friend Tails to tackle the return of the evil Dr. Robotnik and a new adversary, a powerful echidna named Knuckles.

Similar to the first film, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* features fast-paced action spectacle laced with humour. Alongside this, a key classification issue was bad language. At PG, this is an area of concern for many parents who worry about what words their children may pick up and repeat. Our standards for language are therefore based on widespread public consultation and research, with more offensive terms resulting in higher ratings.

Sonic The Hedgehog 2 includes use of the terms 'screw', 'butt' and 'hell', which are containable at U in their respective contexts. There is also a use of 'crap', which requires a PG rating under our guidelines. Additionally, there is a use of implied bad language in the form of the term 'a-hole'. Although the full word is not said, it is strongly implied.

When making classification decisions regarding implied terms, we generally treat the implied use as if the character has actually said the word. Participants in our 2021 language research said that, in most cases, audiences know or will identify the word from the implied term or acronym, and so the level of offence can often be the same. The use of 'a-hole' in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* therefore contributed to us classifying the film PG for mild violence, language.

FILM

Classification date
22/03/2022

Director(s)
Jeff Fowler

Genre(s)
Action, Adventure, Comedy

Approx. running minutes
122m



12A



23 Walks

infrequent strong language, moderate sex, sex references

In this tender romantic drama, an ageing man and woman meet and form a connection over a series of walks, bonding over their experiences and shared sense of loneliness.

Language was a key classification consideration for this film. It contains seven uses of strong language ('f**k'), which is more than is typically permitted at 12A/12 – our guidelines state that strong language should be infrequent. However, the context in which language occurs can also be very important for the classification decision.

In *23 Walks*, five uses of strong language are used in quick succession in a scene tinged with comedy, in which a man repeatedly strikes a bush with a branch. He is reprimanding himself for his behaviour and is overcome with regret. The language is therefore self-directed, which our research has shown is less impactful and offensive than uses angrily directed at someone else. The comedy and intent also help to reduce the strength of the language.

Elsewhere in the film there are two further uses of strong language: one of which is comic and whispered, only just being audible, and the other is said quickly in frustration.

Another factor we consider is who is speaking. In *23 Walks*, the strong language is said by older adults who are unlikely to inspire young teens to emulate their behaviour. Our research has shown that for many people, especially parents, a concern with language is content that may normalise it and encourage children to repeat the words they hear on-screen.

In this case, given the speakers are adults and much of it was infrequent, self-directed or comic in delivery, we were able to classify the film 12A for infrequent strong language, moderate sex, sex references.

FILM

Classification date
22/07/2019

Director(s)
Paul Morrison

Genre(s)
Romance, Drama

Approx. running minutes
102m



12A

Gemini Man

moderate violence, infrequent strong language

In 2021 we conducted research into people's views on strong and very strong language. One of the words we tested was 'motherf**ker', which for many people is an offensive term that in most circumstances should be restricted to a 15 age rating. However, in some very rare, exceptional cases, isolated use may appear at 12A depending on the context.

One such example that we tested in the research was Ang Lee's sci-fi action thriller *Gemini Man*, which stars Will Smith as an ageing sniper looking to retire, but finding he has become the target of a relentless assassin that appears to be his younger self.

A host of action sequences containing moderate violence established a baseline 12A rating for the film, but language proved to be the most challenging classification issue. At various points people in the film use the acronym 'AMF' to imply killing or removing someone. Following one use, a character new to the protagonist's world asks what it stands for and is told: 'Adios, motherf**ker'.

We would define the acronym 'AMF' as implied strong language containable at 12A/12, but with the word being spoken it raised the question of whether the film needed to be rated 15. However, the word is only said quietly in a matter-of-fact, explanatory manner and without any aggression or threat intended. It is also only used once in the film. Given this special contextual justification, it was containable under our guidelines at 12A. Participants in our research supported this decision for these reasons, but stressed that such cases should be the exception, with angry, sexualised, directed or repeated uses still better placed at 15.

We classified *Gemini Man* 12A for moderate violence, infrequent strong language.



FILM

Classification date

04/10/2019

Director(s)

Ang Lee

Genre(s)

Action, Science Fiction, Thriller

Approx. running minutes

117m



18

Moffie

very strong language

Moffie is a South African drama, set during the apartheid era, in which a young gay man struggles during his time in the army on compulsory national service.

The key classification consideration for this film came down to ten uses of very strong language ('c**t'). On all occasions in *Moffie*, the term is delivered by the same character: a brutal drill sergeant who exerts his authority over the scared young conscripts by abusing them verbally with his favoured phrase. None of this is comic 'banter', and all uses are aggravated by the aggressive tone attached. In this context, the language reflects the power imbalance between the sergeant and the young men, and is intended to denigrate and degrade.

In our language research conducted in 2021, this word emerged as the one people in the UK found the most offensive. It is therefore the term that is treated most cautiously under our guidelines, and should only occur infrequently at 15. Uses that are aggravated, such as being used in an aggressive, directed or sexual manner – especially by a man towards a woman – are most likely to result in an 18 classification decision.

Whilst the film's treatment of issues such as racist behaviour and homophobia, as well as a depiction of suicide, were containable within the framework of a 15 under our guidelines, the very strong language ('c**t') took the film to an 18.

We classified *Moffie* 18 for very strong language.



FILM

Classification date
24/02/2020

Director(s)
Oliver Hermanus

Genre(s)
Drama

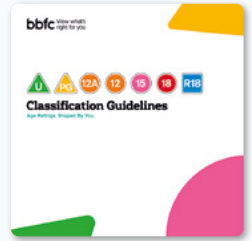
Approx. running minutes
104m

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

85%

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

Trust in BBFC age ratings has grown to

90%

among parents/caregivers in the last five years

97%

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

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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