

# INFOCOMM MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY VIDEO GAME CLASSIFICATION GUIDELINES

## Preamble

1. The Guidelines sets out the general principles and content concerns that the IMDA considers in its classification process and aims to reflect community standards<sup>1</sup>.
2. The provisions set out in the Guidelines have to be applied in spirit and should be read in conjunction with applicable legislation and/or licence conditions. Examples included in the Guidelines are not exhaustive.

## Classification System and Ratings

3. The purpose of classification is to protect the young from mature content while allowing wider choices for adults.
4. There are two classification ratings. They are:



Advisory 16 – Suitable for persons aged 16 & above



Mature 18 – Restricted to persons aged 18 and above

5. Advisory 16 (ADV16) is an advisory rating, while Mature 18 (M18) is an age-restricted rating enforceable by law. In exceptional cases, the IMDA will refuse to classify a game if the content: undermines public order or is likely to be prejudicial to national interest; denigrates any racial or religious community; promotes feelings of ill-will or hostility between different racial or religious groups; and so on. Please refer to the section at the end of this document for more details on content where classification will be refused.
6. All video games, including exempt video games (refer to Annex B for details), that are contained within a disc, tape, storage device or other article or thing, and which is for distribution in Singapore, will need to be declared to the IMDA via the use of an online declaration system.
7. Distributors of video games are automatically class-licensed, and must enforce the relevant age restrictions and adhere to the licensing conditions, as well as any additional classification conditions imposed by the IMDA.

## General Principles and Considerations

8. In general, the IMDA's classification decisions are guided by the following principles/considerations:

---

<sup>1</sup> Community standards refer to the community's views on acceptable content derived through consultations or surveys.

- i. Generally Accepted Social Norms and Values  
Classification should be sensitive to social norms and values that are generally acceptable to members of the public.
- ii. Need to Protect the Young  
Particular attention should be paid to content that may be harmful or unsuitable for the young, such as depictions of potentially dangerous imitable behaviour.
- iii. Racial/Religious Harmony  
Classification should be sensitive to the concerns of different racial or religious groups and the need to safeguard racial and religious harmony. Mild racial or religious stereotyping may be classified at a lower rating while stronger depictions will require a higher rating. Games that present a skewed perspective of any race or religion are likely to be given a restricted rating as greater maturity is required to discern such content. Games that are likely to denigrate any racial or religious group, or promote feelings of ill-will or hostility between different racial or religious groups will be refused classification.
- iv. Public Order and National Interest  
Games deemed to undermine public order, or is likely to be prejudicial to national interest will be refused classification.
- v. Treatment of Theme and Content  
When classifying a video game, the IMDA considers the game's theme, the presentation of content, and the context in which scenes are presented, as well as the artistic or educational merit.
- vi. Evaluation of Impact  
A game or a scene is evaluated based on the presentation, duration, frequency, degree of visual and audio details, and their cumulative effect. In classifying (or refusing classification of) any material, due regard will be given to (as appropriate) all of the following:
  - i. the detail contained in a depiction, portrayal or an image, or a dialogue, reference or commentary, including the use of close-ups and slow motion;
  - ii. the use of special effects, such as lighting and sound, resolution, colour, size of images, characterisation and tone;
  - iii. the realism of any depiction, portrayal, image, dialogue, reference or commentary;
  - iv. whether the matter has greater cultural or political significance or is of particular public controversy in Singapore at the time of classification or reclassification;
  - v. whether accentuation techniques are used, such a lighting, perspective and resolution;
  - vi. whether the depiction, portrayal or an image, or dialogue, reference or commentary, is prolonged or repeated frequently; and
  - vii. whether the material is visual or verbal.

## **Player Control**

9. The choices made by a player may cause a game to perform in ways that a game publisher or developer cannot control or adequately anticipate. For instance, a player may choose to repeat a brief section of the game over and over again, or cause onscreen characters to behave out of character.

10. When assessing content in games, the IMDA will consider the net effect of the game as a whole. The IMDA does not take into consideration the repetitive potential of any part of the game that the developer did not anticipate.

## **Third Party Modification**

11. Third-party modifications are outside the control of a game publisher and developer. Practices of third-party modification are commonplace among game-playing audiences but do not need to be considered by the IMDA in the classification of a game, even if the game includes tools for third-party modification.

## **Content Concerns**

### **Advisory 16**

12. The Advisory 16 rating indicates that a game is suitable for persons aged 16 and above.

13. These games may contain the following:

a) Violence

- Moderate level of violence. This refers to realistic but not excessively graphic violence with depiction of blood.

b) Sex

- Portrayal of implied sexual activity.

c) Nudity

- Nudity without details, e.g. no nipples, genitalia or pubic region (includes hair).
- Still or moving images which may be mildly suggestive e.g. scantily-clad women in bikinis or lingerie.

d) Language

- Coarse language such as the use of the expletive “fuck”.

e) Drug or Psychoactive Substance Abuse

- Depiction of drug or psychoactive substance abuse which is incidental to the game and not realistic.

f) Depiction of Horror

- Depiction of frightening and disturbing sequences, or any abhorrent phenomena, whether natural or pertaining to the supernatural.

14. The Advisory 16 rating label is to be self-printed and affixed on the exterior of the game packaging. The label must carry the ‘ADV16’ rating marking and the advisory “Suitable for 16 & Above”. A sample of the label is available on IMDA’s website for reference.

### **M18 – Mature 18**

15. The M18 rating indicates that the game is restricted to persons aged 18 and above. These games may contain the following:

a) Theme

- Treatment and exploration of mature themes appropriate to persons aged 18 and above.
- Content that requires the player to engage in illegal activities or play the role of a criminal, but without detailed instructions for committing crimes.
- Some homosexual content, if discreet in treatment and not gratuitous.

- b) Violence
  - Depictions of realistic violence, such as killing, maiming or causing other serious injury to humanoid characters.
- c) Sex
  - Portrayal of non-detailed sexual activity with some frontal nudity.
  - Depictions of same-sex kissing and hugging.
- d) Nudity
  - Depiction of topless nudity or occasional full frontal nudity. Nudity should not titillate or be the main feature of the game.
  - Still or moving images which may be sexually titillating (but does not contain nudity), e.g. scantily-clad women shown in a manner that is sexually suggestive, but not excessive or gratuitous.
- e) Language
  - Frequent use of strong coarse language, such as "motherfucker", "cunt", and "cocksucker".
- f) Drug or Psychoactive Substance Abuse
  - There may be realistic depiction of drug or psychoactive substance abuse, if it does not promote abuse.

16. When a game is rated M18, a rating label must be obtained from the IMDA and affixed on the exterior of the game packaging along with a self-printed consumer advice, which will be included to highlight the elements which contributed to the rating of the game. Examples of consumer advice include "Violence", "Sex", "Nudity", "Sexual References", "Coarse Language", or "Drug Use".

### **Refused Classification**

17. The following material (whether a depiction, portrayal or an image, or a dialogue, reference or commentary) are prescribed as materials that would be refused classification, for the purposes of section 16(1)(e) of the Films Act:

- a) any material that undermines or is likely to undermine public order, or is likely to be prejudicial to national interest;
- b) any material that promotes or is likely to promote feelings of ill-will or hostility between different racial or religious groups in Singapore or is denigrating any racial or religious community;
- c) any material that is likely to cause feelings of enmity, hatred, or hostility between different communities in Singapore;
- d) any material that is about or promotes:

- i. deviant sexual behaviour; or

*Examples*

- Depictions of practices such as bestiality or necrophilia.
- Depictions of or provision of instruction in paedophile activity.
- Depictions of activity accompanied by fetishes, group sex or practices which are offensive or abhorrent.

- ii. sexual behaviour that does not reflect current community attitudes and values in Singapore.

*Examples*

- The promotion of homosexuality.
- Excessive depictions of sexual activity between individuals of the same gender.

- e) any material containing —

- i. Detailed or gratuitous depictions of extreme violence or cruelty;  
ii. Detailed instructions on methods of crime or killings; or  
iii. Excessive or exploitative depictions of sexual violence.

- f) any material that includes exploitative depictions of sexual activity;

- g) any material that includes exploitative nudity; or

- h) any material that promotes drug or psychoactive substance abuse, or includes detailed and instructive depictions of drug or psychoactive substance abuse.

18. For the purpose of determining the impact of the above content such that they are to be refused classification, regard must be given to (as appropriate) the matters as set out in para 8.vi. under the “General Principles and Considerations” section of this document.

### **Advertisements**

19. Advertisements are typically displayed in locations accessible to the general public, including young children. To minimise discomfort to unsolicited viewers and protect the young, strict content standards are applied to advertisements. Detailed guidelines for publicity materials are available on the IMDA website. Extra care should be exercised in determining the display location of advertisements containing horrific or disturbing content.

20. Once a video game is classified, posters displayed at public places should display the rating and consumer advice. This is to provide more information for consumers to make informed decisions. It also serves as a guide to parents about the suitability of a video game for their children.

### **Video Games Demonstrations and Promotional Films**

21. ADV16 and M18 video games, and any related promotional films containing classifiable elements should not be publicly exhibited except in a restricted demonstration area. No part

of a video game demonstration inside a restricted demonstration area should be visible to any person outside the area.

22. Where an ADV16 or M18 game is being demonstrated, the restricted demonstration area shall prominently display a notice equivalent to the following:

- a) in the case of a ADV16 video game assigned a classification rating “ADV16”, the following words: “UNSUITABLE FOR PERSONS UNDER 16”; or
- b) in the case of a video game assigned a classification rating “M18”, the following words: “RESTRICTED TO PERSONS AGED 18 AND ABOVE”.

23. Those below the age of 18 should not be allowed to enter a restricted demonstration area where a M18 video game is being exhibited.

### **Implementation and Periodic Review**

24. The Video Game Classification Guidelines shall come into effect on 29 April 2019 and replace the version that took effect from 28 April 2008. The IMDA may from time to time revise or update the Video Game Classification Guidelines to ensure that it is in line with community standards and social norms.

**Glossary Of Terms**

<b>Coarse language:</b>	Foul, crude and/or offensive language. Strong coarse language includes terms such as “motherfucker”, “cunt” etc.
<b>Denigrate:</b>	To belittle, sully or negatively distort the character of a person, race, or religion.
<b>Depiction:</b>	Representation or portrayal on screen.
<b>Detail:</b>	The amount of audio or visual information in the representation of a subject, including close-ups, repeated, prolonged or slow motion visuals.
<b>Deviant sexual activities:</b>	Sexual behaviour or activities that are not considered socially acceptable by reasonable members of the public. Non-exhaustive examples include paedophilia, bestiality, and necrophilia.
<b>Disturbing:</b>	Upsetting or troubling.
<b>Drug/Psychoactive substance abuse:</b>	Improper or excessive use of drugs or psychoactive substances. Psychoactive substance means any opiod, cannaboid, sedative, hypnotic, cocaine, other psychostimulant, hallucinogen or volatile solvent, but excludes alcohol, coffee and tobacco.
<b>Excessive:</b>	Beyond reasonable limits, especially in terms of detail, duration or frequency.
<b>Explicit:</b>	Language or depiction with strong details, in relation to sex and violence.
<b>Exploitative:</b>	Taking advantage of or abusing the situation, for sensationalism; lacking moral, artistic, or other values.
<b>Fetish:</b>	A form of sexual desire where gratification is derived from an atypical means such as from an object or a specific behaviour.
<b>Gratuitous:</b>	Unwarranted or uncalled for, and included without the justification of a defensible story-line or artistic merit.
<b>Horror:</b>	A strong feeling of fear or distress that is caused by depictions that are frightful and shocking.



<b>Implied:</b>	Depiction of a subject in which an act or object is inferred or indicated without actually being seen or expressed.
<b>Mature themes:</b>	Issues typically pertaining to adult life, including adultery, alternative sexualities, gender identities, promiscuity, suicide, drug/substance abuse, etc.
<b>Moderate:</b>	Depiction that features some details and may have some impact that is kept within reasonable limits.
<b>Offensive:</b>	Material that causes outrage or disgust to most reasonable members of the public.
<b>Sexual activity:</b>	An act performed for sexual gratification. May include foreplay.
<b>Sexual violence:</b>	The act of sexual assault or aggression, which the victim does not consent to.
<b>Strong:</b>	Detailed depiction that is likely to have a high impact on viewers.
<b>Theme:</b>	A concept or subject matter that is portrayed or explored within the game.
<b>Treatment:</b>	The way in which material is handled or presented.

**Exempt Video Games**

“Exempt video games” are games that do not contain the following depictions or descriptions:

- a) any matter likely to cause offence to any race or religious group in Singapore;
- b) any religious belief or teaching;
- c) psychoactive substance abuse or addiction, explicit criminal acts, terrorism or violence, or other anti-social behaviour (such as images promoting the consumption of illicit drugs), gambling or any matter which promotes unlawful activity;
- d) any depiction or description of sex, sexual matters or nudity of any kind (including images of persons in revealing or titillating attire);
- e) violence or coercion in association with sexual activity (such as images of bondage or rape);
- f) acts of torture, cruelty or violence (such as gory images of dismemberment, bloody wounds or impaled bodies);
- g) any depiction of sexual behaviour that does not reflect current community attitudes and values in Singapore;
- h) fetishes or deviant sexual practices (such as images of paedophilia, bestiality or necrophilia);
- i) any coarse language, any frightening or disturbing sequences, or any depiction or description of abhorrent phenomena, whether natural or pertaining to the supernatural;
- j) any act, image or message of any kind which is unsuitable for persons below 16 years of age (such as frequent use of coarse language);
- k) any express or implied reference to, or comment on, any candidate, any political party, any election, any referendum, any member of any Legislature, any government or previous government or any opposition to any government or previous government, whether that candidate, political party, election, referendum, member of any Legislature, any government or previous government or opposition is in Singapore or elsewhere;
- l) any matter —
  - i. to demonstrate support for or opposition to the views or actions of any person, group of persons or any government;
  - ii. to publicise a cause or campaign

Exempt video games need not be affixed with any labels, upon furnishing the required information to the IMDA.