

INFOCOMM MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

FILM 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 standards¹. The classification ratings and considerations for deriving them are also applicable for licensed service providers offering the following:

- i. Free-to-air Television Services;
- ii. Linear channels of Nationwide Subscription Cable and Internet Protocol Television Services;
- iii. Over-the-Top Services;
- iv. Video-on-Demand Services; and
- v. Niche Services.

2. The provisions set out in the Guidelines have to be applied in spirit and should be read in conjunction with other relevant legislation, regulations, codes and/or licence conditions. Examples included in the Guidelines are not exhaustive.

Classification Ratings

3. The purpose of classification is to protect the young from mature content while allowing more viewing choices for adults.

4. There are six classification ratings. They are:



General - Suitable for persons of all ages



Parental Guidance - Suitable for persons of all ages but parental guidance is recommended for younger viewers



Parental Guidance for Children below 13 - Suitable for persons aged 13 and above but parental guidance is advised for children below 13



No Children below 16 years of age - Restricted to persons aged 16 and above



Mature 18 - Restricted to persons aged 18 and above



Restricted 21 – Restricted to persons aged 21 and above

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

5. G, PG and PG13 are advisory ratings, while NC16, M18 and R21 are age-restricted ratings enforceable by law. In exceptional cases, a film may be refused classification 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 that will be refused classification.

6. Film exhibitors and distributors are required to obtain the relevant licences to exhibit or distribute films. Exhibitors and distributors 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

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

a. Generally Accepted Social Norms and Values

Classification should be sensitive to social norms and values that are generally acceptable to members of the public.

b. Need to Protect the Young

For the lower ratings, particular attention should be paid to content that may be harmful or unsuitable for the young, such as depictions of potentially dangerous imitable behaviour.

c. 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. Films that present a skewed perspective of any race or religion are likely to be given a higher or restricted rating as greater maturity is required to discern such content. Films 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.

d. Public Order and National Interest

Films deemed to undermine public order, or is likely to be prejudicial to national interest will be refused classification.

8. When classifying a film, the IMDA considers the film's theme, the presentation of content, and the context in which scenes are presented, as well as the film's artistic or educational merit.
9. A film 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 (as appropriate) to all of the following:
 - (a) 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;
 - (b) the use of special effects, such as lighting and sound, resolution, colour, size of images, characterisation and tone;
 - (c) the realism of any depiction, portrayal, image, dialogue, reference or commentary;
 - (d) whether the matter has greater cultural or political significance or is of particular public controversy in Singapore at the time of classification or reclassification;
 - (e) whether accentuation techniques are used, such as lighting, perspective and resolution;
 - (f) whether the depiction, portrayal or an image, or dialogue, reference or commentary, is prolonged or repeated frequently;
 - (g) whether the material encourages interactivity; and
 - (h) whether the material is visual or verbal.

Content Concerns

10. The IMDA's assessment of a film includes the following seven content elements:

- a. Theme and Message

Classification must take into account the treatment of theme(s) and message(s) in a film. For the advisory ratings, theme(s) and message(s) should be presented and treated sensitively due to the potential impact on the young. Films that center on mature theme(s) or content would generally be classified NC16, M18 or R21. Films that contain distorted or misrepresented discussions or depictions of a subject matter (including historical events), may be classified at a higher rating or refused classification.

- b. Violence

The degree and nature of violence in a film will impact the classification rating. Depictions of violence may frighten, unsettle or invite imitation, especially from children. Therefore, only mild depictions of violence may be allowed in films meant for children. For the higher ratings, stronger depictions of violence are permitted. However, films that contain detailed or gratuitous depictions of extreme violence or

cruelty; detailed instructions on methods of crime or killings; or excessive or exploitative depictions of sexual violence will be refused classification.

c. Nudity

The extent and context of depictions of nudity are classification considerations. There should be no nudity at a G rating. At a PG or PG13 rating, depictions of rear or side profile nudity in a non-sexual context may be presented. There can be exceptions for films which feature infrequent and non-sexual depictions of female upper body nudity at a PG13 rating, e.g. films containing footage of historical events, tribal ways of life, or medical/health programmes. Upper body frontal nudity in a non-sexual context is allowed under NC16. Depictions of full frontal nudity may be featured at M18 or R21. Exploitative depictions of nudity will be refused classification.

d. Sex

Classification of depictions of sexual activity in films depends on its explicitness, frequency, and relevance to the storyline. Generally, there should be no depictions of sexual activity at the G and PG ratings.

Films that depict alternative sexualities, e.g. homosexuality, should be sensitive to community values. Films that centre on alternative sexualities may be classified at highest rating of R21. Non-explicit depictions of sexual activity between persons of the same gender may be featured at R21 rating.

Films containing depictions of sexual activities such as sadomasochism, bondage, orgies or sexual violence will be subject to strict review and may only be allowed at the higher ratings, depending on the treatment and context.

Films containing explicit depictions of deviant sexual activities (e.g. paedophilia, bestiality and necrophilia) or exploitative depictions of sexual activities will be refused classification.

e. Language

The classification of coarse language depends on the strength of the language, the context in which it is used, as well as community and cultural sensitivities associated with its usage.

Coarse language, rude gestures, and gestures with sexual connotations must not be featured in G films as they are easily imitated by young children. In PG13 films, there may be infrequent use of expletives such as 'f**k'.

Stronger language is acceptable at higher ratings, with due consideration given to the degree of offensiveness and frequency of usage. This includes coarse language that offends community and cultural sensitivities.

Chinese films meant for theatrical release should generally be in Mandarin, in line with the Speak Mandarin Campaign. Films with dialect content are allowed on a case-by-case basis.

f. Drug and Substance Abuse (including Psychoactive Substance Abuse)

Films rated G should have no references to or depictions of drug and substance abuse. Films rated PG and PG13 may only feature infrequent or discreet references or depictions of drug and substance abuse, as these may have a negative influence on the young. Depictions of drug and substance abuse may be featured at NC16, M18 or R21, depending on the frequency and level of details. Films with content that promote drug or psychoactive substance abuse, or includes detailed and instructive depictions of drug or psychoactive substance abuse will be refused classification.

g. Horror

In classifying films containing horrific or disturbing content, the IMDA will take into consideration the impact of such depictions to ensure that young audiences are protected.

Consumer Advice

11. After a film is classified, an appropriate consumer advice may be given to highlight the stronger content elements within the film. This is to ensure that viewers have the necessary information to make informed choices. It also serves as a guide for parents to decide on the suitability of a film for their children. Films classified G do not require consumer advice. Films classified PG may be accompanied by consumer advice where appropriate. Films rated PG13, NC16, M18 and R21 must carry consumer advice.

12. The classification rating and consumer advice must be clearly visible and legible in advertisements, trailers, and points of ticket sales or distribution.

Trailers

13. Trailers of films are assessed and classified in the same manner as films. For trailers, intense scenes may be concentrated within a shorter duration of time. In such cases, the impact may be heightened, hence the trailer may be given a higher rating than the film.

14. Trailers can only be shown prior to films of a similar or higher rating. For example, a PG-rated trailer cannot be screened before a G-rated film.

15. Trailers rated PG13 and above must not be screened in public places, such as video walls, where there may be inadvertent exposure to young audiences.

16. Trailers of R21-rated films can only be shown before R21-rated films.

17. Film exhibitors and distributors must also observe any conditions imposed by the IMDA on the screening of the trailers.

Advertisements

18. 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. Extra care should be exercised in determining the display location of advertisements containing horrific or disturbing content.

19. Once a film is classified, advertisements should display the rating and consumer advice clearly. The display of advertisements for R21 films should be restricted to venues licensed to exhibit R21 films. For more information, please refer to the “Guidelines on Promotional Materials for Films” available on the IMDA website.

Exemptible Content

20. Specific types of films, such as children’s programmes or recordings of arts and cultural performances, are exempted from classification. The exemption applies only to films that fall within the pre-defined categories and does not include any material that is listed as ‘non-exemptible’. For more information, please refer to the “Films Exemption Guidelines and Categories” available on the IMDA website.

Periodic Review and Implementation of Guidelines

21. The Film Classification Guidelines shall come into effect on 29 April 2019 and it replaces the version that took effect from 15 July 2011. The IMDA may from time to time revise or update the Film Classification Guidelines to ensure that it is in line with community standards and social norms.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Act of intimacy:	A physical expression of romantic or sexual attraction, usually in the form of sensual touching.
Alternative Sexualities:	Sexual identities or preferences that stand in contrast to the social norm of heterosexuality.
Coarse language:	Foul, crude or offensive language. Strong coarse language includes terms such as “motherfucker”, “cunt” etc, while stronger terms are culturally offensive expletives such as “kan ni lao bu”.
Dark themes:	Issues or topics that tend to be grim, depressing, macabre or dismal.
Denigrate:	To belittle, sully or negatively distort the character of a person, race, or religion.
Depiction:	Representation or portrayal on screen.
Detail:	The amount of audio or visual information in the representation of a subject, including close-ups, repeated, prolonged or slow motion visuals.
Deviant sexual activities:	Sexual behaviour or activities that are not considered socially acceptable by reasonable members of the public. Non-exhaustive examples include paedophilia, bestiality, and necrophilia.
Discreet:	Subtle, non-explicit visual cues or verbal references that are lacking in details.
Disturbing:	Upsetting or troubling.
Drug/Psychoactive Substance Abuse:	Improper or excessive use of drugs or psychoactive substances. Psychoactive substance means any opioid, cannabinoid, sedative, hypnotic, cocaine, other psychostimulant, hallucinogen or volatile solvent, but excludes alcohol, coffee and tobacco.
Excessive:	Beyond reasonable limits, especially in terms of detail, duration or frequency.
Expletive:	An exclamatory word or phrase that is obscene, rude or offensive.

Explicit	Language or depiction with strong details, in relation to nudity, sex and violence.
Exploitative:	Taking advantage of or abusing the situation, for sensationalism; lacking moral, artistic, or other values.
Fetish:	A form of sexual desire where gratification is derived from atypical means, such as from an object or a specific behaviour.
Gratuitous:	Unwarranted or uncalled for, and included without the justification of either a defensible story-line or artistic merit.
Horror:	A strong feeling of fear or distress caused by depictions that are frightful and shocking.
Mature themes:	Issues typically pertaining to adult life, including adultery, alternative sexualities, gender identities, promiscuity, suicide, drug/substance abuse, etc.
Moderate:	Depiction that features some details and may have some impact that is within reasonable limits.
Offensive:	Material that causes outrage or disgust to reasonable members of the public.
Sexual activity:	An act performed for sexual gratification. May include foreplay.
Sexual violence:	The act of sexual assault or aggression, which the victim does not consent to.
Strong:	Detailed depiction that is likely to have a high impact on viewers.
Theme:	A concept or subject matter that is portrayed or explored within the film.
Tone:	The quality of mood, such as sadness, humour, menace, lightness, or seriousness.

Treatment:

The way in which material is handled or presented.

CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS

How a film is rated depends on its theme and the frequency and intensity of the classifiable elements including theme, horror, language, nudity, sex, drug and substance abuse, and violence.

Theme

Rating	Guidelines
G	Themes should be suitable for viewers of all ages, including young children, and generally promote positive social values, e.g. family bonding, respect for elders.
PG	Themes should generally have a low sense of threat and be suitable for children aged below 13 years.
PG13	Themes should be suitable for teenagers aged 13 years and above. Dark themes such as horror or child abuse should be treated with discretion.
NC16	Mature themes that are appropriate for viewers aged 16 years and above. Themes such as self-harm or euthanasia should be treated with discretion.
M18	Stronger portrayal and exploration of mature themes. Homosexual theme or content as a sub-plot, if discreet in treatment and not gratuitous.
R21	Stronger and more explicit portrayal and exploration of mature themes. Films that portray, as a main theme, same-sex marriage or parenting will be subject to strict review.

Violence

Rating	Guidelines
G	<p>Depictions of violence should be mild, with occasional mild threat.</p> <p>No depictions of dangerous or harmful behaviour that could be imitated by children.</p>
PG	<p>Depictions of violence without details.</p> <p>Depictions of violence should not dwell on cruelty, infliction of pain or torture.</p>
PG13	<p>Depictions of violence with some details.</p> <p>Depictions of violence can include some infliction of pain and injury but should not be detailed or prolonged.</p>
NC16	<p>Depictions of violence and gore with moderate details.</p> <p>Depictions of torture with some details should be infrequent and brief.</p> <p>Brief, infrequent and non-detailed depictions of sexual violence.</p>
M18	<p>Depictions of violence and gore with strong details.</p> <p>Infrequent depictions of torture with strong details.</p> <p>Non-explicit depictions of sexual violence.</p>
R21	<p>Frequent depictions of violence and gore with strong details.</p> <p>Depictions of torture with strong details, if not exploitative or gratuitous.</p> <p>Non-excessive depictions of sexual violence.</p>

Sex

Rating	Guidelines
G	Brief displays of affection (e.g. brief kissing).
PG	<p>Displays of affection (e.g. kissing and caressing).</p> <p>Brief, infrequent and discreet references to sexual activity.</p> <p>Brief, infrequent and mild sexual innuendoes.</p>
PG13	<p>Brief, infrequent and discreet depictions of sexual activity.</p> <p>Infrequent and non-detailed use of sexual humour or sexual innuendoes, including crude hand gestures and sexual imagery.</p>
NC16	Non-detailed and non-prolonged depictions of sexual activity.
M18	<p>Depictions of sexual activity without strong details.</p> <p>Non-explicit depictions of mild sexual activity or acts of intimacy (e.g. kissing and hugging) between persons of the same gender.</p>
R21	<p>Non-excessive and non-exploitative depictions of sexual activities.</p> <p>Non-explicit depictions of sexual activities between persons of the same gender.</p> <p>Depictions of sexual activities such as sadomasochism, bondage or orgies will be subject to strict review.</p>

Nudity

Rating	Guidelines
G	There should be no depictions of nudity.
PG	Brief or discreet depictions of full rear nudity in a non-sexual context.
PG13	Brief or discreet depictions of side profile nudity in a non-sexual context. Infrequent or brief depictions of female upper body nudity in a non-sexual context under exceptional circumstances, e.g. historical or dramatised events such as wars, genocides, tribal ways of life, or medical/health programmes.
NC16	Infrequent, brief and discreet depictions of female upper body nudity in a non-sexual context.
M18	Full frontal nudity with moderate detail (eg. without close-up of genitalia) is acceptable, if justified by context, and not excessive.
R21	Non-exploitative and non-excessive depictions of full frontal nudity.

Language

Rating	Guidelines
G	There should be no use of coarse language.
PG	Use of mild coarse language such as “shit”, “bitch” and “asshole”.
PG13	Infrequent use of coarse language such as the expletive “fuck”.
NC16	Infrequent use of strong coarse language, such as the expletives “motherfucker”, “cunt”, “chee bye”, “lan jiao”, “puki mak” and “pundai”.
M18	Frequent use of strong coarse language such as the expletives “fuck” and “motherfucker”. Infrequent use of very strong coarse language, such as “kan ni lao bu chee bye”.
R21	Frequent use of very strong coarse language.

Drug and Substance Abuse (Including Psychoactive Substance Abuse)

Rating	Guidelines
G	There should not be any reference to or depiction of drug and psychoactive substance abuse. Consumption of alcohol or tobacco products should not be promoted.
PG	Discreet references to drug and psychoactive substance abuse.
PG13	Brief, infrequent and discreet depictions of drug and psychoactive substance abuse.
NC16	Infrequent and brief depictions of drug and psychoactive substance abuse with moderate details.
M18	Infrequent depictions of drug and psychoactive substance abuse with strong details.
R21	Frequent depictions of drug and psychoactive substance abuse with strong details.

Horror

Rating	Guidelines
G	Brief and infrequent depictions of horror without any sense of threat, e.g. tinged with humour.
PG	Brief or infrequent depictions of horror with a mild sense of threat.
PG13	Depictions of horror with a moderate sense of threat. Infrequent and non-detailed depictions of disturbing scenes.
NC16	Depictions of horror with a sustained sense of threat. Detailed depictions of disturbing scenes should be brief or infrequent.
M18	Strong depictions of horror with sustained sense of threat. Frequent, detailed depictions of disturbing scenes.
R21	Depictions of extreme abhorrent activity (e.g. explicit depictions of cannibalism) that may cause great discomfort should be infrequent or brief.

REFUSED CLASSIFICATION MATERIAL

- I. 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 —
 - Detailed or gratuitous depictions of extreme violence or cruelty;
 - Detailed instructions on methods of crime or killings; or
 - Excessive or exploitative depictions of sexual violence;
- f. any material that includes exploitative depictions of sexual activity;
- g. any material that includes exploitative nudity;

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

II. 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 9 under “General Principles and Considerations” of this document.