

# **BOARD OF FILM CENSORS**

## **FILM CLASSIFICATION GUIDELINES**

### **Preamble**

1. These Guidelines have been prepared to raise awareness and understanding of the Board's film classification process. This is not a legal document and is not intended to limit in any way the Board's exercise of functions under the Films Act (Cap 107). While care has been taken to define the content concerns and classification categories, the Board reserves the right to classify any film in such manner as it deems fit.

### **Introduction**

2. The Film Classification Guidelines aim to reflect community standards while ensuring that due consideration is given to the film's artistic, educational or literary merit. The purpose of classification is to protect the young while allowing more choice for adults.

3. When making a classification decision for a film, the Board takes careful consideration of the film's content as well as all other relevant factors and concerns. The description of each of the classification categories and the indication of the suitable audience in terms of age may be found in these guidelines. To clarify the usage of words in the guidelines, a glossary of terms is included.

4. There are five ratings in the film classification. They are:

- G - General
- PG - Parental Guidance
- NC16 - No Children below 16 years of age
- M18 - Mature 18, for persons 18 years and above
- R21 - Restricted to persons 21 years and above

5. G and PG categories are advisory ratings while NC16, M18 and R21 are enforceable by law. Cinema operators are required to obtain a licence to screen NC16, M18 or R21 films. They should ensure that the age restriction is enforced.

6. In exceptional cases, a film may not be allowed for all ratings (NAR) when the content of the film undermines national interest or erodes the moral fabric of society.

### **General Principles**

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

- Generally accepted social mores
- Need to protect the young
- Racial/religious harmony
- National interest
- Treatment of theme, content and context
- Evaluation of impact

a. Generally Accepted Social Mores

Films screened must be sensitive to the standards of morality, decency and propriety acceptable to the general public.

b. Need to Protect the Young

For the lower ratings, particular attention will be paid to content that may be harmful to or unsuitable for the young.

c. Racial/Religious Harmony

As Singapore is a multi-racial and multi-religious society, films that denigrate any racial or religious group, or create misunderstanding or disharmony amongst the races are not allowed for all ratings.

d. National Interest

Films deemed to undermine public order, national security and/or stability will be disallowed for all ratings.

e. Treatment of Theme, Content and Context

How a film is classified depends on its theme or message, presentation of content, and the context in which scenes are presented.

f. Evaluation of Impact

The impact of a film or a scene will be evaluated based on the presentation, duration, frequency, degree of visual and audio details, and their cumulative effect.

The impact may be stronger where a scene:

- Is shown in greater detail; uses close-ups and slow motion
- Uses special effects such as lighting, sound, colour, or size of image to heighten emotions
- Is prolonged and/or frequent
- Is more explicit than implied
- Is realistic rather than stylised
- Is one in which the local audience can identify with
- Is visual rather than verbal or written.

8. In classifying films, due consideration will be given to the artistic, educational or literary merit of the film.

## Major Content Concerns

9. This part of the guidelines spells out content concerns that are applied in different degrees at all classification levels. The seven major content concerns are:

- Theme
- Violence
- Nudity
- Sex
- Language
- Drug Use
- Horror

### a. Theme

The acceptability of a theme is determined by its suitability and treatment i.e. the way it is presented and the context in which scenes are presented. Suitability and treatment of a theme is especially important in the lower classification levels. Films dealing with mature content (e.g. drug use, prostitution or homosexuality) would generally be classified as NC16, M18 or R21.

### b. Violence

(i) The depiction of violence may frighten, unnerve, unsettle or invite imitation, especially from children. Therefore, only mild portrayals that are relevant to the plot may be allowed in films meant for children. For the higher classifications, a stronger depiction of violence is permitted if it is justified by context.

(ii) The concerns in violence are:

- Depiction of graphic/gratuitous violence
- Normalising the use of violence as a solution to resolve problems;
- Depiction of violent gangster behaviour (e.g. self mutilation rites);
- Emphasis on violent techniques/acts (e.g. methods of torture, gang-fights, combat techniques);
- Encouraging aggressive and sadistic attitudes towards infliction of pain and violence;
- Explicit and prolonged sexual violence or erotic portrayal of sexual assault /coercion.

### c. Nudity

Nudity is not allowed in G category films. Rear and side nudity is allowed in PG films if it is discreet, justified by context and not meant to titillate. Full frontal nudity may be allowed in the upper categories if it is justified by context and without gratuitous close-ups.

### d. Sex

The level of sexual activity allowed on screen depends on the explicitness and frequency of the activity, its relevance to the storyline and the target audience. Generally, depictions of sexual activity are not allowed for G, PG and NC16.

Scenes depicting sexual activities such as sado-masochism, bondage or sexual violence and paedophilia will be subject to strict review and may only be allowed

under a higher rating, depending on the treatment and context. The content should also not be gratuitous or excessive.

Films likely to encourage deviant sexual activities such as paedophilia, bestiality and necrophilia are not permitted even under the R21 rating.

Films should not promote or normalise a homosexual lifestyle. However, non-exploitative and non-explicit depictions of sexual activity between two persons of the same gender may be considered for R21.

Content considered to be pornographic in nature is not allowed for all ratings.

e. Language

Coarse language and gestures with sexual connotations are not allowed in G films as they are easily imitated by young children. In PG films, mild and infrequent expletives may be permitted. Stronger language is acceptable in NC16 films. When classifying M18 and R21 films, consideration would be given to the degree of offensiveness (i.e. vulgarity and religious association) and frequency of such language.

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

f. Drug Use

Clear, instructive details are not allowed in G and PG films as they can be imitated by the younger audience. Such scenes are more acceptable for higher ratings if they are justifiable by context. Portrayals glamorising or encouraging the use of illegal drugs are not permitted even under R21.

g. Horror

Classification of horror films will take into consideration the impact and shock effect of such films to ensure that younger audiences are protected from disturbing materials.

## **Documentaries**

10. Documentaries will be classified in accordance with the general principles and content concerns expressed in this document. If the information/content is distorted or misrepresented, or requires maturity to comprehend and discern the message and/or intent, the documentary may be given a higher rating.

## **Consumer Advice**

11. Film ratings are usually accompanied by consumer advice. Films classified PG may be given consumer advice where necessary, for example, in the case of horror films. Films rated NC16, M18 and R21 must carry consumer advice.

12. Consumer advice is to be clearly reflected on publicity materials including website synopses, advertisements in newspapers and magazines. 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 film for their children.

## **Trailers**

13. All trailers of films must be submitted for classification. Where the trailer content is not suitable for a general audience, a higher rating will be imposed. Trailers classified as NC16 and above can only be exhibited to persons who meet the stipulated age requirement.

14. Trailers with content not suitable for children should not be shown prior to a G-rated film or a film meant for or targeted at children, or in public places such as video walls.

15. Trailers of NC16 and M18-rated films may be screened during films of a lower rating and/or at cinema lobbies and at video walls. However, in all cases, the content should be suitable for a general audience, including children. Trailers for R21 films can only be shown before films of the same rating. Film distributors should also observe any conditions imposed by the BFC on the screening of the trailers.

## **Publicity Materials**

16. To avoid offending unsolicited viewers and attracting the under-aged, stricter content standards are applied to publicity materials. These materials include posters, banners or billboards displayed in public places, advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Publicity materials for all ratings should conform to community standards and should not offend the general public. Detailed guidelines for print publicity materials are available on the MDA website at [http://www.mda.gov.sg/wms.ftp/filmguidelines\\_promo\\_materials.pdf](http://www.mda.gov.sg/wms.ftp/filmguidelines_promo_materials.pdf).

17. Once a film is classified, posters displayed at public places should clearly display the rating and consumer advice. The display of posters and banners for R21 films should be restricted to cinemas licensed to exhibit R21 films. More sensitivity should also be exercised in the dissemination of publicity materials for films in the lower rating categories as they can be displayed in public places where young audiences are exposed to them.

## **Periodic Review and Implementation of Guidelines**

18. The Board will continue to review guidelines periodically in the light of changes in lifestyle, public expectations and concerns.

1 February 2010

## G (General Viewing)

G-rated films should be suitable for the whole family. They should not be harmful or disturbing to children.

Theme	Themes are suitable for viewers of all ages.
Violence	Mild portrayals of violence are allowed. The occasional mild threat or menace is acceptable if justified by context.
Sex	No sexual activity is allowed. Sexual reference of any kind is unacceptable.
Nudity	There should be no nudity.
Language	No coarse language is allowed.
Drug Use	No references to illegal drugs or drug abuse.
Horror	Treatment of horror should be non-threatening, or tinged with humour. Fright scenes should be mild and not psychologically disturbing.

## PG (Parental Guidance)

PG films may contain elements that may be disturbing to young children. Hence parental guidance is recommended.

Theme	<p>Themes should generally have a low sense of threat or menace, and be justified by context. Special attention should be paid to their impact on children.</p> <p>More serious themes such as crime and revenge may be featured but care needs to be taken as the audience may include children.</p>
Violence	<p>Moderate portrayals of violence without details, may be allowed, if justified by context.</p> <p>Portrayals of violence should not dwell on cruelty, infliction of pain or torture of any kind.</p>
Sex	<p>Sexual activity may be implied, and should be infrequent.</p> <p>Only mild sexual references (e.g. kissing and caressing) and innuendoes are allowed.</p>
Nudity	<p>Discreet portrayal of back nudity is allowed if it is brief and in a non-sexual context. Discreet and fleeting side profile nudity may be allowed in a non-sexual context.</p> <p>Infrequent portrayal of frontal nudity of the upper body may be allowed only under exceptional circumstances and in a non-sexual context. For example, films which feature historical or dramatised events such as the World War II Holocaust, tribal ways of life, or health programmes.</p>
Language	<p>Infrequent coarse language is allowed if it is relevant and justified by context. Examples are "bitch" and "asshole". The word "fuck" is allowed if used infrequently.</p>
Drug Use	<p>Only discreet references to illegal drug use are allowed on the condition that such references do not promote or endorse drug abuse and should be justified by context.</p>
Horror	<p>Frightening sequences should not be prolonged or intense.</p>

## NC16 (No Children Under 16)

NC16 films are restricted to persons 16 years old and above. Such films may have more mature themes and/or more explicit scenes.

Theme	Portrayal of mature themes (eg. gangsterism and transvestism) may be allowed, provided they are treated with discretion and appropriate to those 16 years and above.
Violence	The portrayal of infliction of pain and injuries may be allowed if it is not prolonged or detailed. Explicit sexual violence is not allowed.
Sex	Non-explicit depiction of sexual activities may be allowed but should not be detailed or prolonged.
Nudity	Infrequent, brief and discreet portrayal of non-sexual frontal nudity may be allowed if justified by context.
Language	Infrequent use of expletives such as "motherfucker" and "cunt" may be allowed if justified by context.  Coarse language which offends community and cultural sensitivities should not be allowed; examples are "chee bye", "puki mak" and "pundai".  Continued aggressive use of strong language and verbal sexual abuse is unacceptable.
Drug Use	Drug taking may be shown but clear, instructive detail is unacceptable. The film as a whole must not promote or encourage drug use.
Horror	Films with disturbing or gory scenes without strong details may be allowed.  Frightening scenes which are more prolonged may be allowed.

### **M18 (Mature 18)**

M18 films are restricted to persons 18 years and above. Films rated M18 may contain mature themes but the treatment must be appropriate for young adults.

Theme	Portrayal and exploration of mature themes are allowed.  Homosexual theme/content as a sub-plot may be permitted, if discreet in treatment and not gratuitous.
Violence	Realistic depiction of violence and gore with strong impact is allowed if justified by context. However, the portrayal should not be excessive, gratuitous or exploitative.
Sex	Sexual activity may be portrayed if justified by context and without strong details. Depiction of occasional, mild sexual activity (i.e. kissing and hugging) between persons of the same gender may be permitted if justified by context and not gratuitous.
Nudity	Full frontal nudity with moderate detail is acceptable if justified by context.  No close up of genitalia is allowed.
Language	Coarse language is allowed if it is not excessive.
Drug Use	Depiction should not promote or endorse drug abuse.
Horror	Prolonged and/or intense sequences that invoke fear and/or terror may be permitted.

## R21 (Restricted 21)

R21 films are restricted to adults 21 years old and above. Films with mature themes and which contain scenes of a higher intensity in terms of realism and explicitness can be permitted under this classification.

Theme	Strong portrayal of mature themes is allowed.
Violence	Strong and realistic depictions of violence and gore are allowed if justified by context.
Sex	<p>Simulated sexual activities are allowed if they are not excessive.</p> <p>Explicit images of sexual activity need to be justified by context.</p> <p>Real sexual activities (e.g. actual penetration, ejaculation) are not allowed.</p> <p>Explicit portrayals of homosexual acts are not allowed.</p> <p>Films likely to encourage an interest in abusive or unnatural sexual activity (eg. paedophilia, incest and anal sex) are not permitted.</p> <p>Films with themes involving deviant sexual activities (e.g. sado-masochism, bondage or sex involving violence) will be subject to strict review and are likely to be disallowed.</p>
Nudity	Full nudity is permitted but should not be excessive. Close ups of genitalia should be contextually justifiable.
Language	Frequent use of strong coarse language may be allowed.
Drug Use	Instructive details of illegal drug abuse are not allowed.
Horror	<p>Depiction of intense horror, and sustained threat or menace may be permitted if contextually justified.</p> <p>Portrayals of extreme abhorrent activity that may offend and cause great discomfort may be disallowed.</p>

### **NAR (Not Allowed For All Ratings)**

Films that contain materials that erode the moral fabric of society, undermine national interest and/or stability, or create disharmony among various racial and religious groups will not be allowed for commercial screening. These include:

Theme	Themes that promote issues that denigrate any race or religion, or undermine national interest, and/or stability.  Themes that glorify undesirable fetishes or behaviour (e.g. paedophilia and bestiality).  Promotion or glamourisation of homosexual lifestyle.
Violence	Detailed or gratuitous depictions of extreme violence or cruelty.  Detailed instructions on methods of crime or killings.
Sex	Exploitative and pornographic sexual acts.  Depictions of obscene and/or unnatural sexual activities (e.g. bestiality, necrophilia and paedophilia).  Real sexual activity (e.g. actual penetration).  Gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions of sexual activity including fetishes or practices which are offensive or abhorrent.
Nudity	Exploitative and excessive nudity.
Language	Language that denigrates religion or is religiously profane (e.g. Jesus F**king Christ).
Drug use	Materials glorifying or encouraging drug abuse.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>Coarse language:</b>	Crude and/or offensive language lacking refinement or taste.
<b>Denigrate:</b>	To belittle or distort in a negative way the character of a person/race/religion
<b>Depiction:</b>	Representation, and/or portrayal on screen.
<b>Detail:</b>	Treatment of or attention given to the amount of audio or visual information in the representation of a subject. Detail can include close-ups, repeated, prolonged or slow motion visuals.
<b>Deviant sex:</b>	Sexual behaviour or activities that are not considered socially acceptable. Examples are paedophilia, bestiality, necrophilia and orgies.
<b>Discreet:</b>	Subtle, not explicit, lacking in details and close-ups.
<b>Disturbing:</b>	Upsetting or troubling.
<b>Drug abuse:</b>	Improper or excessive use of drugs.
<b>Excessive:</b>	Beyond reasonable limits, especially in terms of detail, duration or frequency.
<b>Expletive:</b>	An exclamatory word or phrase that is obscene or profane.
<b>Explicit</b>	Language or depiction with strong details, usually relating to sex and violence.
<b>Exploitative:</b>	Appearing to take advantage of or abuse the situation for the enjoyment of viewers or for sensationalism; lacking moral, artistic, or other values.
<b>Fetish:</b>	An object, an action or a non-sexual part of the body which gives sexual gratification.
<b>Gratuitous:</b>	Materials which are 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 inspired by images or acts that are frightful and shocking.
<b>Implied:</b>	Depiction of a subject in which an act or thing is inferred or indicated without actually being seen.
<b>Incite:</b>	To stir up or provoke strong emotions and actions.
<b>Intensity:</b>	The degree or extent to which a subject matter is acute or strong (The intensity of a scene depends on the duration, the audio/visual effects, language, context and the proximity from which the shot was taken).

<b>Justified by context:</b>	Where the depiction is relevant and necessary for the integrity and continuity of the film.
<b>Mature themes:</b>	Issues dealing with adult life, including adultery, alternative lifestyles, promiscuity, suicide, drug dependency, etc.
<b>Moderate:</b>	Depiction that features some details and may have some impact that is kept within reasonable limits, which is generally acceptable.
<b>Nudity:</b>	Nudity can consist of frontal or rear nudity, above and below the waist for both sexes. It is determined by the details of nudity shown, and also by other factors including the duration of visuals, repetition, close-up shots and clarity.
<b>Offensive:</b>	Material that causes outrage or disgust to most people.
<b>Pornography:</b>	The depiction of erotic behaviour intended to cause sexual excitement.
<b>Sexual activity:</b>	An act performed with another for sexual gratification. May include foreplay.
<b>Sexual Connotation:</b>	Words or gestures that imply sexual activity.
<b>Sexual violence:</b>	The act of sexual assault or aggression, in which the victim does not consent e.g. rape.
<b>Sexual simulation:</b>	Imitation or enactment of sexual activity that is not real but looks realistic.
<b>Strong:</b>	Detailed depiction likely to have high impact on viewers.
<b>Suggestion:</b>	Mild, discreet treatment of a subject in which an act or object is hinted at, generally through discreet manner, rather than the whole picture.
<b>Tone:</b>	The quality of mood, such as sadness, humour, menace, lightness, or seriousness.
<b>Transvestism:</b>	The lifestyle in which a person adopts the clothes and behaviour of the opposite sex for purposes of emotional or sexual gratification.
<b>Treatment:</b>	The way in which material is handled or presented.