

Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2020

Dated X 2020

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Minister for Justice

GUIDELINES FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF COMPUTER GAMES

Introduction to the Guidelines

Background

Classification decisions are made by the Classification Board. Its decisions can be reviewed by the Classification Review Board. Administrative support for both Boards is provided by the Australian Government Attorney General's Department.

Classification categories

The Act names the classification categories for computer games, and the Code describes them. The categories are:

G

PC-13+

MA 16+

R 18+

X 21+

RC

Classification criteria

The Act

Under the Act, each of the following matters must be taken into account in classifying computer games:

- (a) the standards of morality, decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults;
- (b) the literary, artistic or educational merit (if any) of the publication, film or computer game;
- (c) the general character of the publication, film or computer game, including whether it is of a medical, legal or scientific character;
- (d) the persons or class of persons to or amongst whom it is published or is intended or likely to be published.

The Code

Under the Code, classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:

- (a) adults should be able to read, hear, see and play what they want;
- (b) minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them;
- (c) everyone should be protected from exposure to unsolicited material that they find offensive;
- (d) the need to take account of community concerns about:
 - (i) depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence; and
 - (ii) the portrayal of persons in a demeaning manner.

Consumer advice

The Act requires the Classification Board to provide consumer advice about the content of computer games it classifies. (The Act gives the Board the option whether to provide consumer information.) This information helps consumers make informed choices.

The Guidelines

Using the Guidelines: Essential principles

Three essential principles underlie the use of the Guidelines:

the importance of context

assessing impact

The six classifiable elements

Each classification category takes a similar form. It begins with an impact + means test that determines the threshold for the category. It then lists the four classifiable elements, with a statement limiting the content of each element.

Importance of context

Context is crucial in determining whether a classifiable element is justified by the story-line or themes. In particular, the way in which important social issues are dealt with may require a mature or adult perspective. This means that material that falls into a particular classification category in one context may fall outside it in another.

Assessing impact

The Guidelines use the following hierarchy of impact:

NONE-G

mild / moderate-PC 13+

High-MA 15+

Very high-R 18+

Excessive-X 21+

Assessing the impact of material requires considering not only the treatment of individual classifiable elements but also their cumulative effect. It also requires considering the purpose and tone of a sequence.

Impact may be higher where a scene or gameplay sequence

contains greater detail, including the use of close-ups and slow motion

uses accentuation techniques, such as lighting, perspective and resolution

uses special effects, such as lighting and sound, resolution, colour, size of image, characterisation and tone

is prolonged

is repeated frequently

is hyper realistic

is highly interactive

Impact may be lessened where reference to a classifiable element is verbal rather than visual. Also, some visual impacts have less impact than others: for example, an incidental depiction may have less impact than a direct one.

Interactivity and computer games

Interactivity is an important consideration that the Board must take into account when classifying computer games. This is because there are differences in what some sections of the community condone in relation to passive viewing or the effects passive viewing may have on the viewer (as may occur in a film) compared to actively controlling outcomes by making choices to take or not take action.

Due to the interactive nature of computer games and the active repetitive involvement of the participant, as a general rule computer games may have a higher impact than similarly themed depictions of the classifiable elements in film, and therefore greater potential for harm or detriment, particularly to minors.

The classifiable elements

The six classifiable elements in a computer game are:

1) Themes

2) Violence

3) Sex

4) Language

5) Drug use

6) Nudity

The classification takes account of the context and impact of each of these elements, including their frequency and intensity, and their cumulative effect. It also takes account of the purpose and tone of a sequence, and how material is treated.

Classification Board's application of the Guidelines

Classification decisions are made by the Classification Board. Its decisions can be reviewed by the Classification Review Board.

In making classification decisions, the Board is required to apply these Guidelines.

G - Everyone

Impact test

Classifiable elements

THEMES

No themes

VIOLENCE

No violence

SEX

No Sex

LANGUAGE

No Coarse Language

DRUG USE

No drug use

NUDITY

No nudity

PC-13 RESTRICTED TO TEENS OVER 12

Impact test

The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified PC-13 should be no higher than moderate.

Note: Material classified PC-13 may contain material which some children find confusing or upsetting, and may require the guidance of parents or guardians. It is not recommended for playing by persons under 15 without guidance from parents or guardians.

Classifiable elements

THEMES

The treatment of themes should generally have a moderate sense of threat or menace and be justified by context.

VIOLENCE

Violence should be moderate and infrequent, and be justified by context.

Sexual violence should be mild and discreetly implied, and be justified by context.

SEX

Sexual activity should be mild and discreetly implied, and be justified by context.

LANGUAGE

Coarse language should be moderate and infrequent, and be justified by context. (EG. "OH, Sh!t")

DRUG USE

Drug use should be infrequent and justified by context.

Prescription Drug use related to incentives or rewards is permitted. (EG paracetamol = Pain Killer)

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

NUDITY

Nudity should be infrequent and justified by context.

Nudity may be related to incentives or rewards.

Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.

MA 16+ - MATURE ACCOMPANIED

Impact test

The impact of material classified MA 16+ should be no higher than high.

Note: Material classified MA 16+ is considered unsuitable for persons under 16 years of age. It is a legally restricted category.

Classifiable elements

THEMES

The treatment of strong themes is permitted.

VIOLENCE

Violence is permitted.

Strong and realistic violence may be frequent or unduly repetitive. (EG, First Person Shooter)

Sexual violence, Should be Moderate and overtly implied, and be justified by context.

SEX

Sexual activity may be implied.

Sexual activity may be related to incentives or rewards. (16 is legal age)

LANGUAGE

Strong coarse language may be used.

Aggressive or strong coarse language should be infrequent.

DRUG USE

Drug use should be justified by context.

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is permitted.

NUDITY

Moderate Nudity permitted

Nudity may be related to incentives or rewards.

R 18+ - RESTRICTED

Impact test

The impact of material classified R 18+ should not exceed high.

Note: Material classified R 18+ is legally restricted to adults. Some material classified R 18+ may be offensive to sections of the adult community.

Classifiable elements

THEMES

No restrictions on the treatment of themes.

VIOLENCE

Violence is permitted

Actual sexual violence (including paedophilic or "snuff") is not permitted.

Implied sexual violence that is visually depicted is permitted.

SEX

No restrictions on sexual activity (excluding paedophilic or "snuff" activities)

LANGUAGE

No restrictions on language.

DRUG USE

No restrictions on drug use

NUDITY

No restrictions on nudity

X21+

Note: Any computer games that are paedophilic or "snuff" will be Refused Classification.

Violence:

violence with an extreme degree of impact which are excessively frequent, prolonged, detailed and repetitive

Cruelty and realistic violence which are very detailed and which have an extreme impact.

Implied sexual violence related to incentives and rewards.

SEX

Depictions of actual sexual activity are permitted.

Depictions of simulated sexual activity that are explicit and realistic are permitted.

Depictions of practices such as bestiality/incest.

Gratuitous, exploitative and offensive depictions of:

activity accompanied by fetishes or practices which are offensive and abhorrent

incest fantasies or other fantasies which are offensive and abhorrent.

Note: Some of the terms used in this category are defined in the List of Terms at the end of these Guidelines.

LIST OF TERMS

Note: Words which are used in the Guidelines but which are not contained in this List of Terms take their usual dictionary meaning. Refer to the latest edition of The Macquarie Dictionary.

Coercion:

The use of threat or power to force agreement to sexual activity.

Demean:

A depiction or description, directly or indirectly sexual in nature, which debases or appears to debase the person or the character depicted.

Elements:

Themes, violence, sex, coarse language, drug use and nudity.

Exploitative:

Appearing to purposefully debase or abuse for the enjoyment of others, and lacking moral, artistic or other values.

Fetish:

An object, an action or a non-sexual part of the body which gives sexual gratification.

Intensity:

Strength of the treatment or subject matter; strength of engagement or involvement.

Interactivity:

The quality of being interactive. Providing or capable of providing for user participation that enables some measure of control in relation to user action, data input and commands. The user's participation may influence outcomes that in turn, may affect what options are available to them for subsequent interaction.

Offensive:

Material which causes outrage or extreme disgust.

Sexual Activity:

Matters pertaining to sexual acts, but not limited to sexual intercourse.

Sexual Violence:

Sexual assault and aggression, in which the victim does not consent.

Sexualised Violence:

Where sex and violence are connected in the story, although sexual violence may not necessarily occur.

Themes:

Social issues such as crime, suicide, drug and alcohol dependency, death, serious illness, family breakdown and racism.

Treatment:

The way in which material is handled or presented.

Violence:

Acts of violence; the threat or effects of violence.

Note

1. All legislative instruments and compilations are registered on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments kept under the Legislative Instruments Act 2020.