

**ABC CODE OF PRACTICE  
1 JANUARY 2024**



# TRUST AND THE ABC

The ABC plays an essential role in Australian life. It is trusted by the Australian people to inform, entertain and educate them, tell their stories, and hold power to account on their behalf.

For more than nine decades the ABC has built the trust of its audiences by maintaining the highest editorial standards of any media organisation in Australia.

To fulfil its Charter, the ABC must create innovative and challenging content and pursue strong public interest journalism. In doing so, the ABC will at times cause offence, discomfort, even outrage. Brave public broadcasting can ruffle feathers. It can also bring people together, reflect the nation back to itself, disinfect with sunlight, and give a platform to diverse communities and perspectives.

This Code of Practice sets out the fundamental standards the ABC must adhere to in order to prioritise and strengthen the trust of its audiences. They are drawn from the ABC Editorial Policies, a detailed handbook for journalists and content makers available in full at [abc.net.au/edpols](http://abc.net.au/edpols).

The Code of Practice represents the ABC's public commitment to high standards. It serves as a promise to audiences of what they can expect of their national public broadcaster.

It also serves as a promise of rigorous accountability to the Australian public. The ABC will engage with feedback and complaints in good faith, reflect on its performance, and respect the decisions of the ABC Ombudsman's Office and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

## SCOPE

This Code of Practice has been developed by the ABC and notified to the ACMA as required by section 8(1)(e) of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983*. By law, the ACMA has the power to investigate complaints alleging that content on an ABC broadcasting service has failed to comply with the Code of Practice, if the complainant has first complained directly to the ABC and has not received a response within 60 days or is dissatisfied with the response they received.

Accordingly, the Code of Practice applies to all content broadcast by the ABC on its free-to-air domestic television and radio broadcasting services. It does not apply to the ABC's digital media services. Like all ABC content, those services are subject to the comprehensive principles and standards set out in the wider ABC Editorial Policies.

## INTERPRETATION

The Code of Practice is to be interpreted and applied:

- with due consideration of the relevant principles outlined in the Editorial Policies, and any associated guidance notes;
- with due regard for the nature of the content under consideration in particular cases; and
- in ways that maintain independence and integrity, preserve trust and do not unduly constrain journalistic enquiry or artistic expression.

# CODE OF PRACTICE



## Accuracy

The ABC will make reasonable efforts to ensure that material facts are accurate and presented in context.



## Impartiality

The ABC will gather and present news and information with due impartiality.



## Fair and honest dealing

Participants in ABC content will normally be informed of the general nature of their participation. Where allegations are made about a person or organisation, the ABC will make reasonable efforts in the circumstances to provide a fair opportunity to respond.



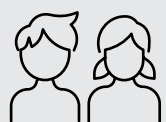
## Privacy

Intrusion by the ABC into a person's private life without consent must be justified in the public interest and the extent of the intrusion must be limited to what is proportionate in the circumstances.



## Harm and offence

ABC content that is likely to cause harm or offence must be justified by the editorial context. Where content is likely to cause harm or offence, having regard to the context, the ABC will make reasonable efforts to provide information about the nature of the content through the use of classification labels or other warnings or advice.



## Children and young people

The ABC will take due care over the dignity and physical and emotional welfare of children and young people (under the age of 18) who are involved in making, participating in and presenting content we produce or commission. Before significant participation of a child or young person in content we produce or commission, or in interactive services we offer, the ABC will consider whether it is appropriate to obtain the consent of both the child/young person and the parent/guardian.



## Classification

The ABC will ensure all domestic broadcast television programs – with the exception of news, current affairs and sporting events – are classified G, PG, M or MA15+ in accordance with the guidelines below. More details, including time zone charts setting out when programs of each classification are permitted on each channel, are available at [abc.net.au/classification](http://abc.net.au/classification).

# CLASSIFICATION GUIDELINES

## G – GENERAL

**Themes:** The treatment of themes should be discreet, justified by context, and very mild in impact. The presentation of dangerous, imitable behaviour is not permitted except in those circumstances where it is justified by context. Any depiction of such behaviour must not encourage dangerous imitation.

**Violence:** Violence may be very discreetly implied, but should:

- have a light tone, or
- have a very low sense of threat or menace, and
- be infrequent, and
- not be gratuitous.

**Sex:** Sexual activity should:

- only be suggested in very discreet visual or verbal references, and
- be infrequent, and
- not be gratuitous.

Artistic or cultural depictions of nudity in a sexual context may be permitted if the treatment is discreet, justified by context, and very mild in impact.

**Language:** Coarse language should:

- be very mild and infrequent, and
- not be gratuitous.

**Drug Use:** The depiction of the use of legal drugs should be handled with care. Illegal drug use should be implied only very discreetly and be justified by context.

**Nudity:** Nudity outside of a sexual context should be:

- infrequent, and
- not detailed, and
- not gratuitous.

## PG – PARENTAL GUIDANCE

(Parental Guidance recommended for people under 15 years)

**Themes:** The treatment of themes should be discreet and mild in impact. More disturbing themes are not generally dealt with at PG level. Supernatural or mild horror themes may be included.

**Violence:** Violence may be discreetly implied or stylised and should also be:

- mild in impact, and
- not shown in detail.

**Sex:** Sexual activity and nudity in a sexual context may be suggested, but should:

- be discreet, and
- be infrequent, and
- not be gratuitous.

Verbal references to sexual activity should be discreet.

**Language:** Coarse language should be mild and infrequent.

**Drug Use:** Discreet verbal references and mild, incidental visuals of drug use may be included, but these should not promote or encourage drug use.

**Nudity:** Nudity outside of a sexual context should not be detailed or gratuitous.

## M – MATURE

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(Recommended for people aged 15 years and over)

**Themes:** Most themes can be dealt with, but the treatment should be discreet and the impact should not be strong.

**Violence:** Generally, depictions of violence should:

- not contain a lot of detail, and
- not be prolonged.

In realistic treatments, depictions of violence that contain detail should:

- be infrequent, and
- not have a strong impact, and
- not be gratuitous.

In stylised treatments, depictions of violence may contain more detail and be more frequent if this does not increase the impact.

Verbal and visual references to sexual violence may only be included if they are:

- discreet and infrequent, and
- strongly justified by the narrative or documentary context.

**Sex:** Sexual activity may be discreetly implied.

Nudity in a sexual context should not contain a lot of detail or be prolonged.

Verbal references to sexual activity may be more detailed than depictions if this does not increase the impact.

**Language:** Coarse language may be used.

Generally, coarse language that is stronger, detailed or very aggressive should:

- be infrequent, and
- not be gratuitous.

**Drug Use:** Drug use may be discreetly shown.

Drug use should not be promoted or encouraged.

**Nudity:** Nudity outside of a sexual context may be shown but depictions that contain any detail should not be gratuitous.

## MA15+ – MATURE AUDIENCE

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(Not suitable for people under 15 years)

**Themes:** The treatment of themes with a high degree of intensity should not be gratuitous.

**Violence:** Generally, depictions of violence should not have a high impact.

In realistic treatments, detailed depictions of violence with a strong impact should:

- be infrequent, and
- not be prolonged, and
- not be gratuitous.

Depictions of violence in stylised treatments may be more detailed and more frequent if this does not increase the impact.

Depictions of sexual violence are permitted only if they are not frequent, prolonged, gratuitous or exploitative.

**Sex:** Sexual activity may be implied.

Depictions of nudity in a sexual context which contain detail should not be exploitative.

Verbal references may be more detailed than depictions if this does not increase the impact.

**Language:** Coarse language may be used.

Coarse language that is very strong, aggressive or detailed should not be gratuitous.

**Drug Use:** Drug use may be shown but should not be promoted or encouraged.

More detailed depictions should not have a high degree of impact.

**Nudity:** Nudity should be justified by context.

# COMPLAINTS

If you are concerned that content on an ABC broadcasting service has failed to comply with the Code of Practice, you are welcome to make a complaint.

Complaints must be submitted to the ABC in the first instance. You can submit your complaint online at [abc.net.au/contact/complain.htm](http://abc.net.au/contact/complain.htm) or by writing to:

ABC Audience Support  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
GPO Box 9994  
Sydney NSW 2001

Your complaint should:

- include your name and email or postal address;
- specify the ABC content which concerned you, including the time, date and channel or station;
- be made within three months from the date the content was first made available or, if made after three months, explain why you believe the ABC should nevertheless investigate the matter;
- provide a short summary of what concerned you.

The ABC endeavours to respond to simple complaints within 30 days and more complex, significant complaints within 60 days. Some complaints may take longer to finalise due to their complexity and the availability of staff.

The ABC will generally not respond to complaints which:

- are or become the subject of a legal claim;
- are anonymous, offensive, abusive, frivolous, vexatious or not made in good faith; or
- are submitted more than three months from the date the content was first made available.

If you are dissatisfied with the ABC's response to your complaint, or if you have not received a response within 60 days, then you are entitled to complain to the ACMA. You can do so by using the complaint form at [acma.gov.au/broadcasting-complaint-form](http://acma.gov.au/broadcasting-complaint-form) or by writing to:

Australian Communications and Media Authority  
PO Box Q500  
Queen Victoria Building  
NSW 1230



GPO Box 9994  
in your state/territory capital

Phone 13 9994  
Fax 02 8333 5344  
TTY 1800 627 854  
[abc.net.au](http://abc.net.au)