

# Online shortform, suitable content and guidance advice

## Introduction

This document provides context, best practice and guidance on what video content is suitable for [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) and when guidance advice should be attached to content. It should be read in conjunction with the BBC's Editorial Guidelines (especially the Harm and Offence section) and the relevant accompanying Guidance notes (e.g. Language, Violence etc). [www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines](http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines)  
It may also be necessary to refer shortform content to Programme Legal advice prior to publication.

The web is a different medium to TV and the audience has different expectations of it. Whereas TV is essentially a passive medium, video on the web is actively viewed by people pressing 'play'; therefore users generally feel more in control of the viewing experience as they actively seek out content.

Different online platforms also carry different user expectations. Broadly speaking, users of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) will expect mainly mainstream material, whereas users of a platform such as the BBC Channel on YouTube are likely to be more tolerant of challenging content.

## G for Guidance

On linear television, the 9pm watershed is a well understood boundary after which stronger content can be scheduled. However, the web is 24/7 and post watershed programmes and more challenging clips can be down-loaded at any time. To enable web users to make informed decisions about what content is appropriate for themselves and for their children, the BBC offers the "G for Guidance" labelling system and a parental lock facility on the iPlayer.

For short-form content, the Executive Producer or Commissioning Executive (for shortform content made by independent companies) is responsible for deciding whether a clip requires a guidance label.

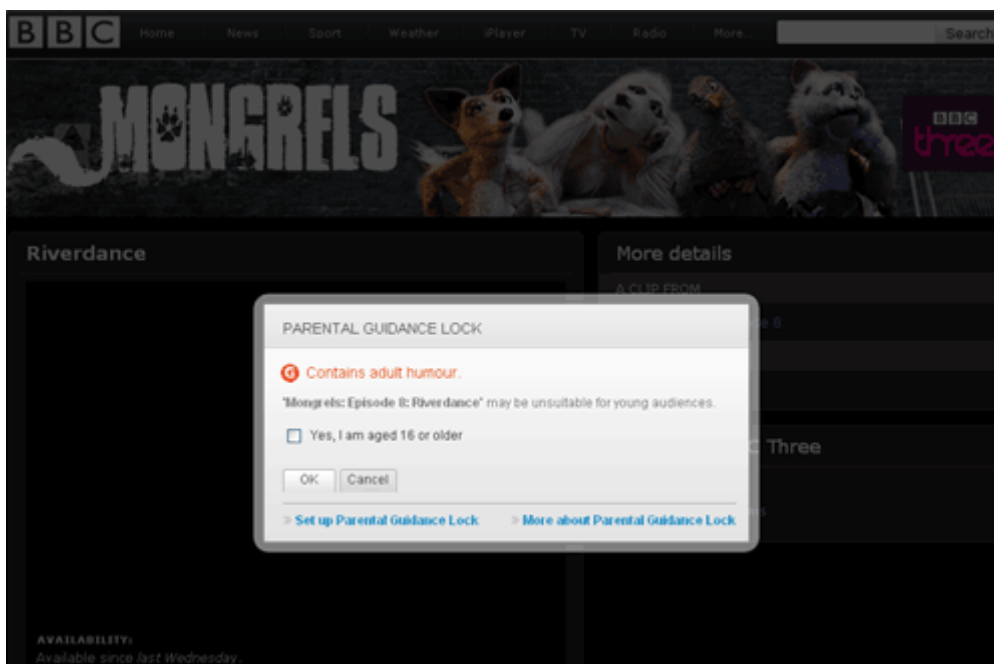
Long form programmes on the iPlayer carry guidance labels when deemed appropriate by the channel Compliance Managers. These may prove helpful for Executive Producers when deciding what, if any, Guidance labels should be applied to shortform content taken from the same programme.



### Protecting children

The BBC has developed and installed a password-protected parental guidance lock for iPlayer. Once activated, this prevents anyone from viewing programmes or clips which carry a guidance label unless the correct password has been entered.

Users are prompted to activate the parental lock system the first time they attempt to download a BBC video on their computer - a box appears asking them to confirm they are 16+ and if they wish to set up a parental guidance lock or not.



The BBC promises that its CBBC and CBeebies sites are safe for unsupervised browsing. Outside of these and other sites aimed at young teens the BBC considers its web audience to be 16+.

## **Suitable Content**

Online content should represent the programme's brand, values and editorial narrative or purpose.

For example, it would be inappropriate to put online an outtake from a pre-watershed, family-friendly show such as *Strictly Come Dancing* in which the presenter uses strong language, even with a guidance warning attached to the clip. But a clip from an established post-watershed show such as *The Thick of It*, could contain strong language as audiences expect this sort of content from such a well-known adult comedy series. Remember, the clip would still need to carry an appropriate guidance label if it contained strong language.

Outtakes and other material that hasn't been broadcast as part of the original programme can be used as shortform content as long as they are within the established expectations of the audience.

## **Context and Contributors**

In selecting clips, content makers should think carefully about the impact of the clip and whether, taken out of context, a clip distorts the editorial narrative of a show. Factual and factual entertainment programmes in particular need to be aware that a clip taken out of context and posted online must still meet editorial guidelines on fairness, accuracy, right of reply etc. For example, a clip criticising a person or a business can be misleading if the broadcast programme concludes that the criticism was unfair and the person or business in question was exonerated.

Special care needs to be taken with factual and factual entertainment clips posted prior to linear broadcast. Content makers must ensure that clips posted prior to linear broadcast are legally and editorially compliant and do not adversely impact on the programme itself. Key elements such as right to reply, fairness and accuracy may change shortly before linear broadcast and any shortform content posted prior to linear TX needs to be selected with those considerations in mind.

Context is particularly important when the content includes actions that could be imitated. Taken out of context and without showing possible consequences or repercussions, shortform content has the potential to unwittingly encourage imitable behaviour. Executive producers should think carefully about the possible impact of such shortform content (see "Imitation" below).

Content makers should assess the potential impact of selected clips on contributors, especially if clips are sensational or potentially embarrassing. Clips featuring contributors often attract a great deal of comment on the web and contributors can be un-prepared for negative responses; sometimes asking that clips be taken down to prevent further comment.

Clips should be a fair reflection of the overall contribution of an individual and of the editorial narrative of the programme. Obviously, content-makers will want to post arresting and sensational moments but they should also ensure that such clips are fair to the contributors – for some audiences, this may be the only content they will see from the programme.

Clips posted prior to broadcast can lead to contributors expressing unease with the programme as a whole, or, in extreme cases, prompt contributors to withdraw from programmes, so judicious selection is important.

Content-makers should be especially sensitive to the exposure given to younger and more vulnerable contributors. Despite giving informed consent, it can often be hard for young, disadvantaged or vulnerable contributors to genuinely understand the potential impact that broadcast or published content may have on their lives. These factors should be taken into account when selecting which clips to post.

Executive Producers should also consider whether the clips should be taken down after a given length of time. Ideally, clips and programme pages will be online in perpetuity, as a permanent record of the original BBC programme. However, there will be instances in which the lives and circumstances of contributors have changed so considerably that it is necessary to review whether it is still fair and appropriate to leave a clip featuring them online in perpetuity.

## **GUIDANCE LABELS**

The BBC has developed a comprehensive set of guidance labels which are applied when necessary to long form programmes by the channel Compliance Managers. The full list can be found in the appendix at the end of this document (*BBC Guidance Advice*).

For pre-watershed programming, or content associated with the pre-watershed schedule, guidance labelling should not be necessary. By definition, such content should normally be free of issues that would require flagging to an audience, and users should not expect advance warning before accessing such content online. (Exceptions to this are labels for distress or flashing images).

A Guidance label does not have to be automatically applied to a clip simply because the original programme was broadcast post-watershed; the EP should make a decision on the content of the clip alone.

Guidance labels are divided into two groups. In the linear world, **Level 1 ‘Dentons’** (codes which start with V, L, D & S) require on-air announcements while **Level 2** guidance (codes beginning with W) deliver text only information on EPGs and the i-Player/web programme pages.

Guidance labels are grouped in distinct categories covering the most common types of challenging content such as strong language, violence, sexual content etc. The higher code numbers in each group should be used to reflect greater seriousness or frequency of the relevant issue in the content and only one label should be used from each category per clip.

For technical reasons, only two labels can be applied to a clip online.

In cases where more than two issues exist, the over-riding two issues should be the ones labelled.

Executive Producers need to select the most appropriate label for online content while ensuring, as far as possible, that their use in the online world is consistent with their use in the linear world.

### **Language**

WL – Language may offend

L1 - Some strong language

L2 - Strong language

L3 - Very strong language

Executive Producers should read the BBC Editorial Guidelines and accompanying Language Guidance for more detailed advice on strong language:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/harm-and-offence/language>

Use of the strongest language - ‘fuck’ (and its derivatives), ‘motherfucker’ or ‘cunt’ – is a mandatory referral to the relevant output Controller. Use of the word ‘cunt’ is a mandatory referral to Director, BBC Vision.

If approved by the relevant output Controller, one or two uses of ‘fuck’ should be labelled as “Some strong language” (**L1**). More frequent usage should be labelled

“Strong language” (L2). Any use of ‘motherfucker’ or ‘cunt’ should be labelled “Very strong language” (L3).

In selecting clips, shortform producers should consider carefully what kind of language is included - the exact words; how they are used (eg conversationally, humorously, aggressively); who uses them; to whom they are directed; how frequently the language occurs. All these are important factors in determining potential offence and therefore the need (or not) for a guidance label.

The occasional use of mild or moderately strong terms, within the usual expectations of a well known programme brand, should not require a label. This includes (but isn’t limited to) the occasional use of words like ‘bloody’, ‘bugger’, ‘bastard’, ‘shit’, ‘dickhead’, and ‘bollocks’. More frequent use of such language, spoken with emphasis or aggression, may require a label but this should be considered in terms of the clip as a whole. For example, a drama clip might contain moderate violence or sexual content as well as moderately strong language. In this case, the guidance label ‘Adult themes’ (W2) might be more appropriate than the label ‘Contains language which some might find offensive’ (WL).

Likewise, a comedy clip may contain themes, as well as language, that are too strong for a family audience. In this case, ‘adult humour’ (W1) would be more appropriate than a label which refers only to strong language.

Strong language is not the only consideration when it comes to the online labelling of challenging language. There are terms which cannot be classed as “strong language” but which, nevertheless, may be offensive to certain members of our audience.

Language which has the power to offend includes terms of racist or ethnic abuse, sexual and sexist abuse, abuse relating to sexuality, pejorative terms aimed at illness or disabilities and derogatory or careless use of holy names or religious terms. In these cases, the content label ‘Contains language which some might find offensive’ (WL) is often the most appropriate.

## **Violence**

WV - Moderate violence

V1 - Some violence

V2 - Prolonged violence

V3 - Graphic violence

V4 - Sexual violence

The BBC Editorial Guidelines set out useful considerations in determining what level of violence is being portrayed.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/harm-and-offence/violence>

Context is an important consideration when using a clip featuring violence. Taken out of context, a violent act can appear more extreme than in the original linear programme and a guidance label may be appropriate.

Online content which requires the labels “Prolonged Violence” (**V2**), “Graphic Violence” (**V3**) or “Sexual Violence” (**V4**) should be considered very carefully. These labels are largely given to late night content only – usually movies or acquired content - where the context of a broader narrative makes such strong content editorially justified.

The label “Moderate violence” (**WV**) covers punching, hitting, ‘western’ or action style scenes with black eyes, cut lips, bruised noses etc. The label “Some violence” (**V1**) should be used when the content contains more graphic images such as broken bones, strangulation, graphic stabbing, shooting, setting on fire etc. Sound effects of blows, stabbings, cries of distress etc can add significantly to the impact of a clip and should be taken into account when considering which label to use.

## **Upsetting or Disturbing Content**

D1/WD - Some upsetting scenes

D2 - Upsetting scenes

D3 - Disturbing scenes

W8 – Horror

*Upsetting* content (**D1 & D2**) can appear and be labelled in content taken from or associated with pre-watershed programming if it has strong editorial justification. This can include short scenes of war footage, historical or archive accounts of real events (eg the holocaust) and actuality of real events such as ethnic cleansing, terrorist action, famine, disease, natural disasters, and general footage of suffering and distress.

Upsetting scenes or Disturbing Content can also include scenes of animal killing and butchery; animal cruelty and culturally specific practices such as bullfighting or ritual slaughter. Audiences are particularly sensitive about scenes showing animal cruelty so shortform content taken out of context should be selected carefully and labelled appropriately.

*Disturbing Scenes* (**D3**) is an appropriate label for adult content which includes darker, psychologically challenging material. The label “Disturbing scenes” alerts the audience to content that may create a more profound reaction than usual in post-watershed material, both factual and fictional.

The label “Horror” (**W8**) should be applied to post-watershed material in the horror genre such as vampire movies or supernatural or disturbing content.

### **Adult Humour/Adult Themes**

W1 - Adult humour

W2 - Adult themes

Content that is aimed at older teenagers and adults may sometimes require an ‘adult humour’ or ‘adult themes’ label.

These labels are usually appropriate when audiences need to be advised about a range of content that is not suitable for family audiences, rather than a single or dominant issue such as strong language or violence. For example, a clip containing some moderate language, moderate violence and / or sexual references would be most appropriately labelled Adult Themes (**W2**).

Comedic material such as stand-up routines, panel shows etc which contain content which is not suitable for a broad family audience such as strong sexual innuendo or moderately strong language can be labelled “Adult Humour” (**W1**).

### **Sex / Nudity**

S1 - Some sexual content

S2 - Sexual content

S3 - Explicit sexual content

W3 - Some nudity

The labelling of sexual content refers to material which is essentially adult in portrayal, representation or discussion.

More general material relating to sexual behaviour such as sexual terms and references, sexual themes or discussions or scenes depicting sexual behaviour but not portraying or representing sexual acts should be labelled as “Adult themes” (**W2**) or, if appropriate, “Adult Humour” (**W1**).

The label “Some sexual content” (**S1**) is appropriate for material which portrays sexual intercourse or a sexual act; this is content which could not be shown pre-watershed.

In linear broadcasting, labels informing viewers/users of “Sexual content” (**S2**) or “Explicit sexual content” (**S3**) are usually only applied to late night content, most frequently films or other acquired programming. Executive producers should have clear editorial justification for posting an online clip which requires a “Sexual content” or an “Explicit sexual content” label.

Full frontal nudity, both male and female, will usually require the label “Some nudity” (**W3**) but only if it is not associated with any other sexual content. For example, a scene depicting sexual intercourse and featuring full frontal nudity should be labelled “Some sexual content” only.

Clips from natural history programmes or factual/factual entertainment programmes where nudity is editorially appropriate and readily understood by audiences, will not



require a “Some nudity” guidance label. But in clips associated with programming where nudity is not expected by the audience or is not an integral part of the narrative, the label “Some nudity” is appropriate.

### **Drugs / Imitation / Medical Scenes**

W4 - Scenes of drug use

W5 - Graphic drug use

W6 - Behaviour could be imitated

W7 - Graphic medical scenes

Shortform content featuring drug use will usually require the label “Scenes of drug use” (**W4**) if it is the only challenging issue featured in the material. If drug use is simply one of several issues contained within the shortform material eg moderate language, or sexual scenes, a label such as “Adult themes” (**W2**) is more appropriate.

“Graphic drug use” (**W5**) is the appropriate label for content which includes explicit scenes of drug preparation or of actual drug taking.

Special care should be taken with content requiring the label “Behaviour could be imitated” (**W6**). Shortform content should avoid giving a “masterclass” on dangerous behaviour such as hanging or other methods of suicide or self-harm or on techniques to construct or use harmful implements or compounds.

Shortform content should also taken account of imitable behaviour involving careless and potentially harmful use of domestic appliances such as light sockets, knives, scissors, washing machine, fridges; scenes of fighting techniques such as martial arts moves and weaponry or head-butting, ear claps etc.

The label “Graphic medical scenes” (**W7**) would include extended, detailed shots of surgery or other medical procedures.

Some medical footage, whether factual or fictional, could be accurately labelled as “upsetting scenes” or “disturbing scenes” if it is part of material which contains other challenging content. Shortform content taken from well-established pre-watershed medical dramas should not, in general, merit a label of “Graphic medical scenes”.

### **RFI - Flashing images**

Flashing images (including flash photography) and strobe lighting effects can cause photo-sensitive epilepsy.

Online clips including flashing lights/strobe effects should be tested with a *Harding* machine. Only clips which fail the Harding test and cannot subsequently be corrected should carry an RFI label, and then *only* with the prior agreement of the relevant output controller.

### **Advice**

The Channel Compliance Managers are available to give advice on appropriate content labels.

## **APPENDIX: BBC GUIDANCE ADVICE**

Detailed below are the categories of challenging content which will be provided with guidance information for linear transmission and video-on-demand services.

**Only Level 1 'Dentons' should receive an on-air announcement. These are codes Vn, Ln, Dn, Sn and RFI and are marked in bold.**

Level 2 Text-only guidance must not receive an on-air announcement. They are codes Wn.

For text purposes, the long-form description should be used where space allows. The short-form description is to be used on Electronic Programme Guides (EPGs) or elsewhere where space is limited.

### **LEVEL 1 'DENTONS' (which receive an on-air announcement)**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Long form</b>	<b>Short form for EPGs etc.</b>
Violence		
<b>V1</b>	contains some violent scenes	Some violence
<b>V2</b>	contains prolonged violent scenes	Prolonged violence
<b>V3</b>	contains graphic violent scenes	Graphic violence
<b>V4</b>	contains scenes of sexual violence	Sexual violence
Language		
<b>LA</b>	contains adult humour	Adult humour
<b>L1</b>	contains some strong language	Some strong language
<b>L2</b>	contains strong language	Strong language
<b>L3</b>	contains very strong language	Very strong language
Distress		
<b>D1</b>	contains some scenes which some viewers may find upsetting	Some upsetting scenes
<b>D2</b>	contains scenes which some viewers may find upsetting	Upsetting scenes
<b>D3</b>	contains scenes which some viewers may find disturbing	Disturbing scenes
Sex		
<b>S1</b>	contains some scenes of a sexual nature	Some sexual content
<b>S2</b>	contains scenes of a sexual nature	Sexual content
<b>S3</b>	contains explicit sexual scenes	Explicit sexual content
<b>RFI</b>	contains scenes of Repetitive Flashing Images (e.g. strobe lighting)	Flashing images

### **LEVEL 2 TEXT-ONLY GUIDANCE (which DO NOT receive an on-air announcement)**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Long form</b>	<b>Short form for EPGs etc.</b>
<i>WV</i>	contains scenes of moderate violence	Moderate violence
<i>WL</i>	contains language which some may find offensive	Language may offend
<i>WD</i>	contains some scenes which some viewers may find upsetting	Some upsetting scenes
<i>W1</i>	contains adult humour	Adult humour
<i>W2</i>	deals with adult themes	Adult themes
<i>W3</i>	contains some nudity	Some nudity
<i>W4</i>	contains scenes of drug use	Scenes of drug use
<i>W5</i>	contains graphic scenes of drug use	Graphic drug use
<i>W6</i>	contains behaviour which could be imitated	Behaviour could be imitated
<i>W7</i>	contains graphic medical scenes	Graphic medical scenes
<i>W8</i>	contains horror	Horror

NB: LA and 01 are both Dentons and receive on-air announcements. W1 and WO are Level 2 text-only guidance and do not receive on-air announcements (even though they have the same description as their Level1 counter-parts).