



Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023

Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995

I, Michelle Rowland, Minister for Communications, determine the following legislative instrument under subsection 12(1) of the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*.

Dated 24 October 2023

Michelle Rowland
Minister for Communications

Contents

1 Name	1
2 Commencement.....	1
3 Authority	1
4 Definitions.....	1
5 Determination of guidelines	1
6 Repeal	1
Schedule 1—Guidelines	2
GUIDELINES FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF COMPUTER GAMES	2

1 Name

This instrument is the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023*.

2 Commencement

This instrument commences on 22 September 2024.

3 Authority

This instrument is made under subsection 12(1) of the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*.

4 Definitions

Note: A number of expressions used in this instrument are defined in the Act, including the following:

- (a) participating Minister;
- (b) Board;
- (c) Code;
- (d) computer game.

In this instrument:

Act means the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*.

5 Determination of guidelines

With the agreement of each participating Minister, the guidelines specified in Schedule 1 to this instrument are determined to assist the Board in applying the criteria in the Code when classifying computer games.

6 Repeal

This instrument repeals the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012*.

Schedule 1—Guidelines

GUIDELINES FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF COMPUTER GAMES

Introduction to the Guidelines

Background

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games* (the Guidelines) are a tool for classifying computer games. They help explain the different classification categories, and the scope and limits of material suitable for each category. They are revised from time to time, with extensive community input.

The legal context

The National Classification Scheme (the Scheme) is based on:

- the Commonwealth *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act), and
- a cooperative agreement between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

Under the Scheme, the Commonwealth makes the classification decisions, and the States and Territories enforce them.

The Act contains a National Classification Code (the Code). It also allows Guidelines to be made. By agreement, the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers can vary the Code and the Guidelines.

The Act requires films and computer games to be classified, using the Code and the Guidelines, before they are released or advertised.

Classification decisions are made by the Classification Board or by other methods authorised under the Act (for example, using an approved classification tool). There are avenues for review of certain decisions, including by the Classification Review Board. Administrative support for both Boards is provided by the Australian Government, currently by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

Classification categories

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

- G
- PG
- M
- MA 15+
- R 18+
- 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 computer game;
- (c) the general character of the 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 provision of consumer advice about the content of computer games that are classified by the Classification Board or in accordance with a different method authorised under the Act. 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 test” that determines the threshold for the category. It then lists the six 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:

- very mild - G
- mild - PG
- moderate - M
- strong - MA 15+
- high - R 18+
- very high - RC

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 game-play sequence.

Impact may be higher where a scene or game-play sequence

- contains greater detail, including the use of close-ups and slow motion
- uses accentuation techniques, such as lighting, perspective and resolution

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- uses special effects, such as lighting and sound, resolution, colour, size of image, characterisation and tone
 - is prolonged
 - is repeated frequently
 - is realistic, rather than stylised
 - is highly interactive
 - links incentives or rewards to high impact elements.

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 must be taken 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.

Interactivity may increase the impact of some content: for example, impact may be higher where interactivity enables action such as inflicting realistically depicted injuries or death or post-mortem damage, attacking civilians or engaging in sexual activity. Greater degrees of interactivity (such as first-person gameplay compared to third-person gameplay) may also increase the impact of some content.

Interactivity includes the use of incentives and rewards, technical features and competitive intensity. Except in material restricted to adults, nudity and sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

Computer games will be Refused Classification if they contain:

- (i) illicit or proscribed drug use related to incentives or rewards;
- (ii) interactive drug use which is detailed and realistic.

The classifiable elements

The six classifiable elements in a computer game are:

- themes
- violence
- sex
- language
- drug use
- 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 or by other methods authorised under the Act (for example, by using an approved classification tool). There are avenues for review of certain decisions, including by the Classification Review Board.

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

The Categories

G – GENERAL

Impact test

The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified G should be very mild only.

Note: The G classification is for a general audience. However, it does not necessarily indicate that children will enjoy the computer game. Some G games contain themes, story-lines or game play that do not interest children.

Classifiable elements

THEMES

The treatment of themes should have a very low sense of threat or menace, and be justified by context.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are not permitted.

VIOLENCE

Violence should have only a low sense of threat or menace, and be justified by context.

Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted.

SEX

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

Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

LANGUAGE

Coarse language should be very mild and infrequent, and be justified by context.

DRUG USE

Drug use should be implied only very discreetly, and be justified by context.

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

NUDITY

Nudity should be infrequent and justified by context.

Nudity must not 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.

PG – PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Impact test

The impact of the classifiable elements for material classified PG should be no higher than mild.

Note: Material classified PG 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 low sense of threat or menace and be justified by context.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are not permitted.

VIOLENCE

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

Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted.

SEX

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

Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

LANGUAGE

Coarse language should be mild and infrequent, and be justified by context.

DRUG USE

Drug use should be infrequent and justified by context.

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

NUDITY

Nudity should be infrequent and justified by context.

Nudity must not 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.

M – MATURE

Impact test

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

Note: Material classified M is not recommended for persons under 15 years of age. There are no legal restrictions on access.

Classifiable elements

THEMES

The treatment of themes may have a moderate sense of threat or menace, if justified by context.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance are permitted.

Simulated gambling is not permitted.

VIOLENCE

Moderate violence is permitted, if justified by context.

Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted

SEX

Sexual activity should be discreetly implied, if justified by context.

Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

LANGUAGE

Coarse language may be used.

Aggressive or strong coarse language should be infrequent, justified by context, and not gratuitous, exploitative or offensive.

DRUG USE

Drug use should be justified by context.

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

NUDITY

Nudity should be justified by context.

Nudity must not 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 15+ – MATURE ACCOMPANIED

Impact test

The impact of material classified MA 15+ should be no higher than strong.

Note: Material classified MA 15+ is considered unsuitable for persons under 15 years of age. It is a legally restricted category.

Classifiable elements

THEMES

The treatment of strong themes should be justified by context.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance are permitted.

Simulated gambling is not permitted.

VIOLENCE

Violence should be justified by context.

Strong and realistic violence should not be frequent or unduly repetitive.

Sexual violence, implied or otherwise, is not permitted.

SEX

Sexual activity may be implied.

Sexual activity must not be related to incentives or rewards.

LANGUAGE

Strong coarse language may be used.

Aggressive or strong coarse language should be infrequent, and not exploitative or offensive.

DRUG USE

Drug use should be justified by context.

Drug use related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use is not permitted.

NUDITY

Nudity should be justified by context.

Nudity must not 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.

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

There are virtually no restrictions on the treatment of themes.

In-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are permitted.

VIOLENCE

Violence is permitted. High impact violence that is, in context, frequently gratuitous, exploitative and offensive to a reasonable adult will not be permitted.

Actual sexual violence is not permitted.

Implied sexual violence that is visually depicted, interactive, not justified by context or related to incentives or rewards is not permitted.

SEX

Depictions of actual sexual activity are not permitted.

Depictions of simulated sexual activity may be permitted.

Depictions of simulated sexual activity that are explicit and realistic are not permitted.

LANGUAGE

There are virtually no restrictions on language.

DRUG USE

Drug use is permitted.

Drug use related to incentives and rewards is not permitted.

Interactive illicit or proscribed drug use that is detailed and realistic is not permitted.

NUDITY

Nudity is permitted.

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

RC – REFUSED CLASSIFICATION

Note: Computer games that exceed the R 18+ classification category will be Refused Classification.

Computer games will be refused classification if they include or contain any of the following:

CRIME OR VIOLENCE

Detailed instruction or promotion in matters of crime or violence.

The promotion or provision of instruction in paedophile activity.

Descriptions or depictions of child sexual abuse or any other exploitative or offensive descriptions or depictions involving a person who is, or appears to be, a child under 18 years.

Depictions of:

- (i) violence with a very high degree of impact which are excessively frequent, prolonged, detailed or repetitive;
- (ii) cruelty or realistic violence which are very detailed and which have a very high impact;
- (iii) actual sexual violence.

Implied sexual violence related to incentives and rewards.

SEX

Depictions of actual sexual activity are not permitted.

Depictions of simulated sexual activity that are explicit and realistic are not permitted.

Depictions of practices such as bestiality.

Gratuitous, exploitative or offensive depictions of:

- (i) activity accompanied by fetishes or practices which are offensive or abhorrent;
- (ii) incest fantasies or other fantasies which are offensive or abhorrent.

DRUG USE

Detailed instruction in the use of proscribed drugs.

Material promoting or encouraging proscribed drug use.

Computer games will also be Refused Classification if they contain:

- (i) illicit or proscribed drug use related to incentives or rewards;
- (ii) interactive drug use which is detailed and realistic.

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.
In-game purchases linked to elements of chance:	Digital goods or services determined by chance, including Paid Loot Boxes, that can be acquired within a game: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) using real world currency; orb) using in-game virtual currency, items or credits that can be purchased using real-world currency.
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.
Paid Loot Box:	A virtual container, however described: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) that can be purchased or unlocked using real world currency or using in-game virtual

	<p>currency, items or credits that can be purchased using real world currency; and</p> <p>b) that rewards players with an in-game digital item or items, where the exact reward the player is to receive is not disclosed to the player prior to purchase.</p> <p>Note: Paid Loot Boxes may be known by other names in the computer game industry including but not limited to prize crates and card packs.</p>
Real World Currency:	<p>Real world physical and digital currency, including cryptocurrency.</p> <p>Note: This does not include tokens, credits or other in-game items and currencies that cannot readily be redeemed or exchanged for value outside the game environment.</p>
Sexual Activity:	Matters pertaining to sexual acts, but not limited to sexual intercourse.
Sexual Violence:	Sexual assault or 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.
Simulated Gambling:	<p>Interactive activity within a game that:</p> <p>a) resembles or functions like a real world age restricted betting or gambling service; and</p> <p>b) does not provide rewards that can be redeemed for real world currency or traded to other players in-game for real world currency.</p> <p>Note: For example, interactive activity within games that resembles or functions like real world commercial casinos, slot machines, lotteries, sports betting services or other betting services will be simulated gambling.</p>
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.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Issued by authority of the Minister for Communications

Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995

Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023

Authority

The *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (Classification Act) forms part of cooperative arrangements between the Commonwealth, states and territories under the National Classification Scheme.

The *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023* (Games Guidelines) are made under section 12 of the Classification Act, which provides that the Minister may, with the agreement of each participating state and territory Minister, determine guidelines to assist the Classification Board in applying the criteria in the National Classification Code. If the Minister and each participating Minister agree to an amendment of the guidelines, the guidelines are taken to be amended accordingly.

On 22 September 2023 the Games Guidelines were unanimously agreed to by participating Ministers.

Purpose and operation

The Games Guidelines are used, in conjunction with the National Classification Code, to classify computer games. They help to explain the different classification categories for computer games distributed in Australia and the scope and limits of material suitable for each category.

Updates to the Games Guidelines will address growing community concern about children accessing gambling-like content in computer games, especially games containing simulated gambling and paid loot boxes, and the potential harms associated with these products. Currently such games receive consumer advice labelling including ‘in-game purchases’ and ‘simulated gambling’, but there is no mandated classification for gambling-like content.

The introduction of mandatory classifications for gambling-like content in computer games was proposed by the 2020 Review of Australian classification regulation (the Stevens Review). The Stevens Review recommended a minimum classification rating of MA15+ (Mature Accompanied – legally restricted to persons under the age of 15 unless they are in the company of a parent or guardian) for games exclusively containing simulated gambling and PG (Parental Guidance – not recommended for persons under the age of 15 without guidance from a parent or guardian) for games containing paid loot boxes.

However, since this time stronger evidence has emerged around the potential harms associated with gambling-like content in computer games, which has resulted in higher recommended mandatory minimum classifications for games containing these products.

A 2022 review conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies on *Harms associated with loot boxes, simulated gambling and other in-game purchases in video games: a review of the evidence* found associations between paid loot boxes, in-game purchases and simulated gambling mechanics, and problem gambling. It also found evidence of links to other harms including internet gaming disorder, financial harms, emotional and behavioural problems.

Further research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies on *What is the link between video gaming and gambling?* in 2022, using data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, found a causal link between young people who played simulated gambling games and the uptake of real world gambling as young adults.

The Games Guidelines will introduce mandatory minimum classification ratings of:

- (a) M (Mature – not recommended for persons under 15 years of age) for computer games containing in-game purchases linked to elements of chance (e.g. paid loot boxes), and
- (b) R 18+ (Restricted – legally restricted to adults 18 years and older) for computer games containing simulated gambling (e.g. social casino games).

The Games Guidelines have no financial implications.

Details of key updates in the Games Guidelines are set out in [Attachment A](#).

Consultation

As part of the Stevens Review, a full public submission process occurred between 8 January 2020 and 19 February 2020. During this six-week period, 104 submissions were received and the Government also undertook targeted consultations with state and territory governments, industry and community groups.

A further public consultation process on the proposed Games Guidelines was undertaken from May to June 2023, following targeted consultations with state and territory governments and key stakeholders, including representative bodies for the computer games industry. During the most recent public consultation process, 22 submissions were received from a range of industry, community and advocacy groups, as well as the Federal Member for Denison.

Impact analysis

The Office of Impact Analysis assessed the proposed introduction of mandatory minimum classifications for gambling-like content in computer games as having no more than minor regulatory impacts (OBPR22-03305).

Commencement and sunseting arrangements

The Games Guidelines will commence on 22 September 2024. The delayed commencement date will provide time for industry to adjust to the new classification requirements.

The Games Guidelines are a legislative instrument for the purposes of the *Legislation Act 2003* (Legislation Act). In accordance with subsections 44(1) and 54(1) of the Legislation Act, they are not subject to disallowance or sunseting because the Classification Act facilitates the establishment or operation of an intergovernmental scheme involving the Commonwealth and one or more of the states, and authorises the instrument to be made by the Minister for the purpose of the scheme.

Statement of compatibility with human rights

As section 42 of the Legislation Act does not apply to this instrument, being exempted under subsection 44(1) of the Legislation Act, a statement of compatibility with human rights is not required under section 9 of the *Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011*.

Details of the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023* and changes to the guidelines

Section 1 – Name

This section provides that the name of the instrument is the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2023* (Games Guidelines).

Section 2 – Commencement

This section provides that the entirety of the instrument commences on 22 September 2024.

Section 3 – Authority

This section states that the instrument is made under subsection 12(1) of the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act).

Section 4 – Definitions

This section includes definitions used in the instrument and includes a note directing readers to some of the expressions used that are defined in the Act.

Section 5 – Determination of guidelines

This section determines that the guidelines specified in Schedule 1 to the instrument are determined under subsection 12(1) of the Act to assist the Board in applying the criteria in the Code when classifying computer games.

The newly determined Games Guidelines specified in Schedule 1 reproduce the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012* and include mandatory minimum classification ratings of:

- (a) M (Mature – not recommended for persons under 15 years of age) for computer games containing in-game purchases linked to elements of chance (e.g. paid loot boxes), and
- (b) R 18+ (Restricted – legally restricted to adults 18 years and older) for computer games containing simulated gambling (e.g. social casino games).

Specific details of how these mandatory minimum classification ratings are given effect in the Games Guidelines are identified below.

The participating Ministers agreed to the Games Guidelines on 22 September 2023 through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General.

The Games Guidelines will apply to classification decisions on and from 22 September 2024.

Section 6 – Repeals

This section repeals the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012*, which will occur on 22 September 2024.

Schedule 1 – Guidelines

The Games Guidelines are specified in Schedule 1 to the instrument and, as described above in the note to section 5, reproduce the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012* with the inclusion of mandatory minimum classification ratings to address gambling-like content.

To give effect to the mandatory minimum classification ratings, the Games Guidelines include the following changes to the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games 2012*.

G (General) category

Under the heading ‘Themes’, a second line is inserted to clarify that in-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are not permitted.

PG (Parental Guidance) category

Under the heading ‘Themes’, a second line is inserted to clarify that in-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are not permitted.

M (Mature) category

Under the heading ‘Themes’, two additional lines are inserted to clarify that in-game purchases linked to elements of chance are permitted and that simulated gambling is not permitted.

MA 15+ (Mature Accompanied) category

Under the heading ‘Themes’, two additional lines are inserted to clarify that in-game purchases linked to elements of chance are permitted and that simulated gambling is not permitted.

R 18+ (Restricted) category

Under the heading ‘Themes’, a second line is inserted to clarify that in-game purchases linked to elements of chance and simulated gambling are permitted.

List of Terms

Under the list of terms, new definitions are included for the terms ‘In-game purchases linked to elements of chance’, ‘Paid Loot Box’, ‘Real World Currency’ and ‘Simulated Gambling’.