



## **Offensive Language Guidelines**

**August 2020**

## OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

The Ofcom Broadcasting Code requires that broadcasters apply “generally accepted standards” to language in programmes, to ensure that:

- material that may cause offence is justified by context
- children are protected from unsuitable material by appropriate scheduling

There are no “banned” words in the Code. Any use of offensive language must be justified, and considered in its context eg why it appears in the programme, the nature of the likely audience given the scheduling, and their expectations. These expectations can vary according to the schedule slot, the genre of programme concerned, and the channel.

Offensive language is a part of British culture, and ITV is proud that its programmes are at the heart of that culture, and reflect British society. But many viewers are still concerned by such language appearing on television, especially before the “watershed” at 21:00. This guidance is informed by research on viewer attitudes published by Ofcom, and by previous Ofcom adjudications. It provides general guidance for all programmes on ITV channels, and the examples of offensive words are not exhaustive.

Any use of offensive language is always both an editorial and a compliance issue, and should be considered carefully and discussed with commissioners and compliance advisors. Producers should not assume that a post-watershed slot of itself makes *any* offensive language acceptable. After 21:00, the transition to more adult material must not be too abrupt, so careful consideration should be given especially to the early part of programmes starting at 21:00.

Producers should also not assume that any offensive language can be dealt with for pre-watershed broadcast simply by “bleeping” or “dipping” that language. Excessive or repeated language, even masked, may still render the tone of some programming unsuitable for pre-watershed broadcast, and further editing (ie completely removing some dialogue or images) may be required.

### Pre-watershed

- The strongest language (see below) should not appear in any programme, and stronger language only exceptionally
- Mild language (see below) should only be used sparingly, and only where editorially justified by the context
- No offensive language should appear in children’s programmes

### Post-watershed

- The strongest language should generally be avoided in programmes likely to still attract a significant “family” audience (eg *I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here*, *Britain’s Got Talent*)
- For programmes starting at 21:00, the strongest language should generally be avoided in pre-title and recap sequences, and in the early part of the programme
- Offensive language should only be included where editorially justified by the context

## Post Watershed (21:00)

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| <p>Cunt, Motherfucker</p> <p>Fuck, Fucking</p>  | <p>These words are regarded as the “strongest” offensive language, and should never be used before the watershed. They require strong editorial justification post-watershed.</p> <p>In programmes starting at 21:00, “fuck” and “fucking” should generally be avoided in pre-titles sequences and recaps, and used only sparingly in early scenes.</p> <p>Specific advice should be sought from a senior compliance manager for the inclusion of “cunt”.</p> |
| <p>Twat, Pussy, Gash, Beaver, Fanny, Minge, Snatch, Flaps, Beef-curtains, Clunge, Bloodclaat, Punani</p> <p>Milf, Ho, Prickteaser, Slag, Skank, Slut, Whore, Sket</p> <p>Cock, Cocksucker, Bellend, Dick, Dickhead, Wanker, Prick, Nonce, Knob, Knob-head, Tosser, Tool, Bastard</p> <p>Bukkake, Dildo, Jizz, Rapey</p> | <p>These words are regarded as “strong” offensive language, and are generally unacceptable before the watershed (other than with particular editorial and contextual justification).</p>  |

## Discriminatory Language (generally not before 21:00)

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| <p>Nigger, Paki, Chink, Chinky, Slope, Pikey, Gippo, Gyppo, Raghead, Towelhead, Coon, Darcy, Dago, Wog, Golliwog, Coloured, Negro, Sambo, Spade, Choc Ice, Gook, Honky, Jap, Kraut, Spic, Wop, Taff, Fenian, Prod, Taig, Polack, Sheeny, Kike, Yid, Heeb, Kafir/Kuffar, Papist</p> <p>Faggot, Homo, Queer, Poof, Batty Boy, Nancy, Pansy, Fairy, Bender, Shirt Lifter, Queer, Bum Boy, Bumclat, Bummer, Faggot, Fudge-Packer, Chi-Chi Man</p> <p>Lezzie, Lezza, Lesbo, Dyke, Muff Diver, Carpet Muncher, Rug Muncher</p> <p>Tranny, Gender Bender, He-She</p> <p>Retard, Mong, Schizo, Spastic, Spaz, Spakka, Cripple, Midget, Special, Windowlicker, Vegetable, Div, Mental, Loony, Nutter</p> | <p>Derogatory racial and religious terms, or those derived from historical racial terms, or those about LGBT or disabled people, require strong editorial and contextual justification at <u>any</u> time.</p> <p>Specific advice should be sought from a senior compliance manager for the inclusion of “Nigger”.</p> <p>Pre-watershed, the use of discriminatory language is acceptable only exceptionally with strong editorial and contextual justification (eg in the context of factual or drama programmes dealing with racism, homophobia or disability as a theme).</p> <p>Some derogatory terms (eg “mental”, “nutter”, “loony”) may cause less offence if used lightheartedly and/or without intention to insult, but not if applied to people with learning difficulties.</p> |
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## Pre-Watershed

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| <p>Effing, Frigging, Frickin', Feckin', Feck</p> <p>Shit, Bullshit</p> <p>Shag, Screw</p> <p>Bitch, Tart, Bint, Munter, Slapper</p> <p>Arsehole, Son of a Bitch</p> <p>Tits, Balls, Bollocks, Piss, Pissed, Pissed off</p> | <p>Language in this section is still potentially unacceptable pre-watershed, and compliance advice should always be sought on its inclusion.</p> <p>Some terms may be less acceptable where there is less audience expectation of this language appearing in the particular genre of programme.</p>  |
| <p>Bugger, Crap, Sod, Sod off, Damn, Goddamn</p> <p>Bonk</p> <p>Arse, Ass, Bum, Boobs</p> <p>Cow, Minger, Git, Old Bag, Ginger, Coffin Dodger</p> <p>Bloody</p>  | <p>There is greater viewer tolerance towards occasional use of this mild language before 21:00.</p> <p>Repetition and cumulative effect – where a one-off use of a mild term may be acceptable, repeated uses in the same programme cause more offence and might not be justified.</p> <p>No offensive language should be used in children's programmes.</p>   |
| <p>God, OMG, Jesus, Christ</p>   | <p>"God", "Oh My God" or "OMG" are generally seen as innocent and inoffensive expressions of emotion or surprise.</p> <p>Other uses of religious names as exclamations or expletives can cause offence to religious viewers, and are acceptable pre-watershed only with editorial and contextual justification eg where the use by the speaker is not to be intentionally offensive.</p> <p>Religious names combined with other expletives are particularly offensive and unlikely to be editorially justified at <u>any</u> time eg "Jesus fucking Christ".</p> |

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