



## **Offensive Language Guidelines**

**March 2024**

## ITV OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

The Ofcom Broadcasting Code requires that broadcasters apply “generally accepted standards” to offensive 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, and there is no absolute right for viewers not to be offended by language used in TV programmes. Ofcom’s most recent research on audience attitudes suggests viewers accept offensive language being used for dramatic impact, for humour, to reflect real life, or to inform and educate. The research also shows increasingly relaxed attitudes about the use of swear words, as long as the strongest language is only broadcast after the watershed, and parents are given sufficient information to inform decisions about what their children watch. But they are increasingly concerned about discriminatory language, particularly around race.

Context is all-important, and the use of offensive language must be justified by its context, eg why it appears in the programme, the nature of the likely audience given the scheduling, what warnings were given, who is speaking and who is being spoken to, the perceived intention or purpose of programme-makers, presenters or contributors, and what the audience expectations are for the schedule slot, the genre of programme, 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. 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 – within the last decade some words have largely dropped out of use, whilst new ones are constantly arriving.

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* amount of offensive language acceptable. After 21:00, the transition to more adult material must not be too abrupt, so focus should be given especially to the early part of those 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.

Ofcom’s research suggests three broad groupings of words –

**Mild** – unlikely to concern audiences in most circumstances and requiring limited context

**Moderate** – greater potential for offence, and a higher level of context required, based on audience reasonable expectations

**Strong** – highly offensive, and clear contextual justification required.  
 In summary, ITV’s expectations pre- and post-watershed are as follows: **Pre-watershed**

- The strongest language (see below) should not appear in any programme, and other offensive language only exceptionally
- Moderate and mild language (see below) should only be used 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 if editorially justified by context

**Post Watershed only (21:00)**

<p>Motherfucker, Cunt</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 clear editorial justification even 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 use of “cunt”.</p>
<p>Gash, Flaps, Beef-curtains, Punani, Pussy Hole, Jap’s eye, Cocksucker, Cum, Nonce, Prickteaser, Slut</p>	<p>These words are regarded as “strong” and are generally unacceptable before the watershed.</p>
<p>Beaver, Clunge, Fanny, Milf, Minge, Ho, Pussy, Slag, Slapper, Skank, Snatch, Whore, Sket, Bloodclaat, Bumberclat, Cock, Dick, Dickhead, Wanker, Prick, Knob, Knob- head, Shag, Tossier, Tool, Twat, Bukkake, Dildo, Jizz, Spunk, Rapey</p>	<p>These words are regarded as “moderate” but are generally inappropriate before the watershed (unless there was particularly strong editorial and contextual justification).</p>

**Discriminatory Language (generally Post Watershed)**

<p>Nigger, Paki, Chink, Chinky, Ching Chong, Slope, Pikey, Gippo, Gyppo, Raghead, Towelhead, Coon, Darcy, Dago, Wog, Golliwog, Golly, Coloured, Negro, Sambo, Spade, Choc Ice, Nig-nog, Gook, Honky, Jap, Kraut, Spic, Wop, Taff, Fenian, Prod, Taig, Polack, Sheeny, Kike, Yid, Heeb, Kafir/Kuffar, Papist, Half-Caste, Jungle Bunny, Uncle Tom, Chinaman, Bud bud, Coconut, Curry Muncher,</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 any time.</p> <p>Specific advice should be sought from a</p>
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<p>Monkey, Paddy, Sheep-Shagger, Tinker, Cracker, Freshy, Jock, Nazi, Oriental, Taff, Uppity, Bible Basher, Hun, Muzzie, Tarrier, Jew</p> <p>Faggot, Homo, Queer, Poof, Ponce, Batty Boy, Nancy, Pansy, Fairy, Bender, Bent, Shirt Lifter, Queer, Queen, Bum Boy, Bumclat, Bummer, Faggot, Fag, Fudge- Packer, Chi-Chi Man, Butt Bandit, Mincing, “that’s Gay”</p> <p>Lezzie, Lezza, Lesbo, Dyke, Muff Diver, Carpet Muncher, Rug Muncher</p> <p>Tranny, Gender Bender, He-She, Chick with a Dick, Shemale, Transsexual</p> <p>Retard, Mong, Schizo, Spastic, Spaz, Spakka, Cretin, Cripple, Special, Window- licker, Vegetable, Div, Mental, Loony, Nutter, Moron, Psycho, Invalid, Deaf and Dumb, Dwarf, Midget, Flid, Handicapped, Mentally Challenged, Tone Deaf, “Wheelchair bound”</p>	<p>senior compliance manager for any inclusion of “Nigger”.</p> <p>Pre-watershed, the use of discriminatory language is acceptable only exceptionally with strong editorial and contextual justification (eg in factual or drama programmes dealing with racism, homophobia or disability as a discussion topic or theme).</p> <p>Some terms may cause more or less offence depending on the user, and the purpose/ context. Some language may be deemed less offensive if used in a “reclaimed” context, rather than as a derogatory term eg “Queer” or “Dyke” as used by some LGBT people.</p> <p>Some 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

<p>Frigging, Frickin’, Shit, Shite, Bullshit Shag, Screw, Tits, Bollocks</p> <p>Arsehole, Bastard, Bellend, Tart, Munter, Slapper, Son of a Bitch, Twat</p>	<p>This language is considered “moderate” but compliance advice should always be sought on inclusion pre-watershed.</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>Arse, Ass, Balls, Bawbag, Bum, Boobs, Bloody, Bugger, Crap, Damn, Goddamn, Piss, Pissed, Pissed off, Sod, Sod off, Effing, Feckin’, Feck</p> <p>Bint, Bitch, Cow, Minger, Git, Old Bag, Ginger, Coffin Dodger, Chav</p> <p>Gammon, Karen, Boomer, Remoaner, Snowflake</p>	<p>There is more viewer tolerance towards occasional use of this mild language before 21:00.</p> <p>Note repetition and cumulative effect – one- off use of a mild term may be acceptable, but repeated uses in the same programme may not be.</p> <p>These “political” derogatory terms are generally regarded as mild.</p>

<p>God, Goddamn, OMG, Jesus, Jesus Christ</p>	<p>“God”, “Oh My God” or “OMG” are generally seen as innocent and inoffensive expressions of emotion or surprise.</p> <p>“Jesus” or “Christ” used as exclamations may still offend some religious people, but are generally viewed as acceptable pre- watershed where the use by the speaker is spontaneous</p>
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	<p>and not intentionally offensive.</p> <p>Religious names combined with other expletives are more offensive, and unlikely to be editorially justified.</p>
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