

## This week's issue:

# VIOLENCE AND MEDIA: ARE RATING SYSTEMS NECESSARY?

In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America began rating films. Previously, some movies had been **banned** or censored by the "Motion Picture Production Code" for mature content. Assigning **ratings** may be better than banning films, but rating movies can be **complex**. People disagree about the specific factors that make a film inappropriate for kids. In the United States, movies with nudity and sexual activity are often restricted. However, Europeans are more likely to restrict or censor movies in which violence **occurs**.

Rating systems have changed over the years. For movies, there are now five possible ratings. G stands for General Audiences. It means that there is no sex, violence, or profanity, and the movie is fine for all ages. PG stands for Parental Guidance Suggested. It means that some of the movie content might not be okay for kids. PG-13 gives parents a stronger caution. It indicates that something in the movie might not be okay for kids under 13. R, for Restricted, means children must be accompanied by an adult to even get into the theater. Finally, NC-17 means No One 17 and Under Admitted.

Today, video games, TV shows, and music also get ratings. Those who like the rating systems say they help people decide quickly if a product is right for them or their children. Parents may use ratings to approve or disapprove without having to watch an entire movie or research what a video game is about. On the other hand, a more restricted rating might let parents know to learn more about the product before letting their child see it. Restricted ratings can even prevent children from seeing or buying a game or movie without an adult. Those in favor of rating systems say they help protect all children from inappropriate content. They say this is especially important because there is evidence that watching violent media can lead to more aggressive behavior.

However, some people think ratings are unnecessary. They think it should be up to families to decide what is appropriate. They believe it is important for families to **interact** with their children and actually learn what is in their video games or shows. They may also say that ratings aren't really effective anyway, since young people can get around the rules fairly easily. Also, some children and teens dislike rating systems because they believe they should have the freedom to decide what is best for themselves. Young people may point out, for instance, that some movies include violence only to bring up important issues and share positive messages.

Other people believe in rating systems but think the current ratings are too simplistic or not strict enough. They worry that parents may rely on the ratings without realizing how much violent content is allowed in less restricted movies or games. They say the rating systems encourage movie studios to focus on artificial rules, rather than whether a movie has a good message. For example, a rating might focus on the number and type of violent acts. But a parent might care about whether a character faces appropriate consequences when they hurt someone. Other people simply feel that the American rating systems are not strict enough and that children need better protection from violent content.

What do you think? Should kids be restricted in what they can buy or see? Or are rating systems unnecessary? Do the current rating systems work well? Or do we need a different way of rating movies, games, and shows?



# VIOLENCE AND MEDIA: ARE RATING SYSTEMS NECESSARY?



rating | ban | interact | occur | complex

## USE THE FOCUS WORDS \* and alternate parts of speech

**rating** (noun) a classification, an ordering

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Assigning **ratings** may be better than banning films.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you consider a movie's **rating** when deciding whether or not to watch it? Explain.

**Rating** can also be used as a verb ("rate")! **Rating** movies can be complex!

**ban** (verb) to forbid

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Ratings are an alternative to **banning** or restricting a film.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** If you knew that a movie was **banned**, would that make you want to see it more or less?

**\*ban** (noun) a rule that forbids something

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The school placed a **ban** on disposable plastic water bottles.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Should there be a **ban** on smoking in public places?

**interact** (verb) to communicate, to have social contact with

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Some people believe it is important for families to **interact** with their children and actually learn what is in their video games or shows.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you **interact** differently with your parents when you want them to buy you something? Explain.

**occur** (verb) to happen

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Europeans are more likely to restrict or censor movies in which violence **occurs**.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** In the last movie you saw, would you say that violent scenes **occurred** too frequently?

**complex** (adjective) complicated; of many parts

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Rating movies is **complex** because people disagree about the specific factors that should be included in the rating.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you think rating video games is more **complex** than rating movies? Explain.

**\*complex** (noun) a group of related things connected in complicated ways

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The mayor unified the transportation **complex**, which included trains, buses, and streetcars.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Why might someone want to live in an apartment **complex** instead of a house?