

**This page consists of two documents from Interactive Digit Software Rating Board
regarding a Suggested Criteria for a rating system for interactive media.**

DOCUMENT 1

SUGGESTED CRITERIA FOR A RATING SYSTEM FOR INTERACTIVE MEDIA

Based on four decades of research, the American Psychological Association has concluded that high levels of viewing violence on television is correlated with increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and aggressive behavior. Viewing violence on television also increases desensitization to violence, increases fear of violence, and increases viewers' appetites for violence. (see American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth; Psychology's Response, Volume One Summary Report, American Psychological Association, 1993. Huston et. al. Big World Small Screen, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1992.)

The research on interactive media is scant, and the technology is changing too quickly to give an adequate research base at this time. But, given what is known about violence and television, it is likely that the violence in interactive media will have similar effects. It might affect aggressive behavior and attitudes to an even greater extent than older forms of media because of its arousing nature, realism, and potential for the participant to identify with an aggressive character or victim. Interactive programs are based on experiential learning, which is the most effective learning, whether directed toward constructive purposes or not.

Because depiction of violence are potentially harmful to children, it is imperative to develop a good rating system for interactive media based on psychological research. Age categories should be based on developmental levels. It is suggested that the categories be divided into ages 1-7, 8-12, 13-17 and adult. A further breakdown of below five years old may be advisable. The following factors have been found to have negative effects, and should be considered in developing that rating system: (Note: The first seven factors and the age categories are based on those proposed for rating motion pictures in Wilson, Barbara, Lindz, Daniel, and Randall, Barbara, Applying Social Science Research to Film Ratings: A shift from Offensiveness to Harmful Effects. Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, Fall, 1990. The eighth factor is suggested in Prothrow-Smith, Deboarh, Media Must Tell Truth About Violence, Media and Values, Fall, 1993. The ninth factor is taken from the MPAA guidelines, which assumes that parents want to know this information. Factors ten through sixteen were suggested by Dr. Dorothy Singer based on her research and familiarity with media research for the past twenty-five years.)

1. Is the aggressive behavior rewarded or, alternatively, not punished?
2. Is the aggressive character attractive and/or interesting in a way that would encourage emulation?
3. Is the aggressive character or the victim similar to the intended viewer?
4. Does the violence seem justified (e.g. a "good guy" kills or hurts a "bad guy")? This gives the viewer mixed messages regarding violence.
5. Does the presentation seem real?
6. Are there repeated acts of violence?

7. Is there a combination of sex and violence?
8. Does the violence portray the victim as having no pain or harmful effect from the attack (i.e. the negative consequences to the victim are not shown)?
9. Does the presentation include sex and/or nudity independent of violence?
10. Is a violent act necessary in order to facilitate or forward the plot, or is it a gratuitous act?
11. Is the scene placed in the past or present time? The Westerns or "Knights in Armor" stories seem to have less of a copycat effect because of their connection with the past. The more reality/adventure (detective) shows are more conducive to imitation because of the use of guns and realistic characters and settings.
12. What kinds of special effects are used to enhance a scary scene (music, lighting, special camera effects such as close-ups, zooms)? Should there be concern for younger children in how these effects are used?
13. Is laughter or enjoyment presented along with aggression and violence thereby conveying incorrect messages?
14. Are there alternate ways presented for resolving conflicts (other than fights, shoot-outs, and arguments)?
15. Do we see the grief or mourning of victims' families?
16. Are consequences of violent acts presented such as capture of perpetrator, trial, conviction, jail, etc. ?

Research indicates that the fear-potential of films is largely affected by the age of the viewer. All viewers are affected by the following characteristics, but the effects vary by age group. An effective rating system must address this issue. The characteristics that must be considered include the following:

A. The degree that the threat is visible vs. implied: Research indicates that younger children are likely to be more frightened with visually frightened creatures, whereas older children will be more affected by conceptual aspects, such as motives. The graphic presentation affects all viewers more than implied.

B. Reality vs. fantasy: Younger children are unable to distinguish fully between reality and fantasy.

C. Abstract vs. concrete events: Younger children focus on explicit clues and concrete effects. Older children will be more affected by implied or abstract consequences of events.

D. The degree to which the focus is on the actual threat vs. the victim's emotional reaction to the threat: Younger children are less upset when the focus is not on the violent act or the threat of violence than when the focus is. Older children tend to be frightened by either focus.

Criteria

Products in the Universal category would not contain anything not generally acceptable for people of all ages. At the same time, a game receiving this rating is not automatically appropriate for

young children. For example, games in this category could contain animated violence or the use of language which some might find objectionable even though it is in common usage.

Products in the Teen category could contain realistic or animated violence, profanity, scenes with brief nudity or the depiction of casino-like gambling that could include betting.

Products in the Mature category may contain content which should be examined before allowing anyone under 17 to use. There could be stronger depictions of real or animated violence than are found in the Teen category, as well as profanity, actions showing the use of alcohol and tobacco, or drugs and sexual themes and/or animated nudity.

Products in the Adult Only category are likely to contain graphic real violence in the extreme, as well as sexual themes and more graphic depictions of sexual behavior.

In the space below, please share comments on these general criteria:

Universal:

Teen:

Mature:

Adults Only:

Descriptors

In addition to the ratings categories, IDSRB raters will be able to require that one or more descriptors be applied to a package to provide further information on game content. The descriptors are: mild animated violence; animated violence; realistic violence; blood and gore; mild profanity; profanity; non-suggestive nudity; animated nudity; sexual themes; realistic nudity; use of tobacco and/or alcohol; gambling; and use of illegal drugs.

Non-Suggestive nudity from:	Universal to Teen
	Teen to Mature
	Mature to Adults only
Non-Suggestive nudity from:	Universal to Teen
	Teen to Mature
	Mature to Adults only
Animated Nudity from:	Mature to Adults only
Sexual Themes from:	Mature to Adults only
Use of Tobacco & Alcohol from:	Mature to Adults only

Gambling from: Teen to Mature
Mature to Adults only
Use of Illegal Drugs from: Mature to Adults only

Icons

I have attached two icon samples and would appreciate input regarding development of icons similar in format to these.

Conclusion

Interactive Digital Software Association's philosophy in designing this system has been to provide information to consumers, but not to dictate purchasing decisions for them. IDSA believes that the combination of ratings with descriptors will provide the necessary information to enable a consumer to make an informed purchasing decision.

I would like to hear your thoughts on the rating system described herein. I have attached a comment form for your convenience and would appreciate your returning it to me by June 17. I know this is a terribly short time frame for something of this importance. But IDSA is still trying to make the rating system operational by August and to do so we must begin the time consuming process of clearing and registering the trademarks. Please give me a call if you have any questions about this material. Meanwhile, thank you for your advice, time, and prompt attention to this letter.

Sincerely,

Arthur Pober
Executive Director
Interactive Digital Software Rating Board

DOCUMENT 2

INTERACTIVE DIGITAL SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

June 9, 1994

Ms. Lilli Friedland
2050 Century Park East, Suite 1403
Los Angeles, CA 90067

Dear Ms. Friedland:

Over the last few months, I have appreciated a continuing dialogue with you as the Interactive Digital Software Rating Board worked to develop a rating system for interactive entertainment software products. I wanted to share with you the status of our work and get your input on some of the preliminary decisions we have made.

Categories

IDSRB has concluded that there should be four rating categories:

- * Universal, generally appropriate for all ages
- * Teen appropriate for individuals 13 and older
- * Mature, appropriate for individuals 17 and older
- * Adults Only, appropriate for adults

It should be noted that none of these have cleared trademark searches yet and so must be viewed as preliminary.

In the space below, please share with us your general impressions of the rating categories:

Universal

Teen

Mature

Adults Only

In your opinion what criteria or critical scenes would move the

Animated Violence from: Universal to Teen

Teen to Mature

Mature to Adults only

Realistic Violence from: Teen to Mature
Mature to Adults only

Blood and Gore from: Mature to Adults only

Mild Profanity from: Teen to Mature
Mature to Adults only

Profanity from: Teen to Mature
Mature to Adults only

I hope that whatever we propose will take into consideration all types of media, not only those intended for entertainment, but also those that are educational and services-oriented such as news. I hope we will be able to work together with APA staff and offer psychological expertise and research to the entertainment industry at this crucial time.

The methodology for differential weightings for the different variables to be used in any rating systems will take longer time to develop and may have political implications. It may be most prudent for this informal group to suggest variables based on psychological research and quantifiable measures, such as the number of violent acts within a game. A valuative rating system will probably take considerable consideration.

Please let me know your thoughts about these efforts and whether you would be willing to participate! Looking forward to hearing from you.

This article was downloaded from the website of APA Division 46 – Media Psychology at www.APADiv46.org