

How to Use the Guidelines

02

2.1 (p.22)

Introduction

2.2 (p.23)

Roles and Responsibilities

2.3 (p.25)

Editorial Justification

2.4 (p.26)

Other Sources of Advice

2.1 Introduction

These Editorial Guidelines apply to all content broadcast or published by the BBC whoever creates or makes it and wherever in the world and however it is made or received. They set out the standards expected of everyone making or presenting our content or output (terms used interchangeably throughout). The Guidelines are rooted in the practical experience of decades of journalism and output production. They are intended to help anyone producing our content deal with difficult editorial issues. They are an important part of what makes the BBC distinctive and trusted, and the standards in them apply to all content that carries the BBC brand.

The Guidelines set out our regulatory and ethical obligations, which often go further than the law. There will be occasions when content is judged legally safe to broadcast, but still raises regulatory or reputational risks for the BBC. In these circumstances the BBC seeks to behave ethically. While lawyers and the Editorial Guidelines provide advice, editorial responsibility and the final decision whether to broadcast or publish remains with the editorial management of the BBC and ultimately with the Director-General, who is the editor-in-chief.

Any proposal to step outside the Editorial Guidelines must be editorially justified. It must be discussed and agreed in advance with the divisional director or, for independent production companies, with the commissioning editor. Director Editorial Policy and Standards must also be consulted.

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Content Producers and their Managers

- 2.2.1** Knowledge of the Guidelines is an essential professional skill and everyone who makes BBC content is contractually required to familiarise themselves with them and abide by them.
- 2.2.2** When applying the Guidelines, individual content producers are expected to make most of the necessary judgements, but some issues require careful consideration at a higher level. No one should hesitate to ask for advice, and the Guidelines therefore advise, and sometimes require, reference to more senior editorial figures, Editorial Policy or specialists such as lawyers or safety experts. The BBC's reputation rests on sound decision-making, and the referrals system is a mechanism which ensures that complex editorial decisions are properly considered. Some of these referrals are mandatory.
- 2.2.3** Editors and managers must be prepared to discuss areas of concern and be ready to offer guidance. They must support producers and other staff in the editorial management of their content, including the effective supervision of on-air talent.

Referrals

- 2.2.4** Referrals lie at the heart of the BBC's editorial process and are a source of its strength. No one involved in the making or presenting of our output should hesitate to refer editorial dilemmas.
- The more important or contentious the issue, the higher the referral needs to be. It is your responsibility to be aware who you should refer to.

- 2.2.5** The Editorial Guidelines specify a number of Mandatory Referrals. These may be to senior editorial figures within the output division, Editorial Policy or, on occasion, other areas of the BBC.
- Mandatory Referrals are part of the BBC's editorial management system. They are an essential part of the process to ensure compliance and must be observed.
- The Mandatory Referrals are summarised at the start of each section of the Guidelines. However, they must be read in the context of the relevant cross-referenced guidelines to be fully understood.
- 2.2.6** In the nations and regions the relevant director or controller should be informed of any issue that is a Mandatory Referral to Director Editorial Policy and Standards.
- 2.2.7** On occasion, the Editorial Guidelines suggest or require referral to an internal BBC resource that independent producers are unable to access. In such cases, independents should make the BBC commissioning editor or equivalent aware.
- 2.2.8** Any significant breach of the editorial standards in the Guidelines, such as unforeseen events in a live broadcast, should be referred promptly to an appropriate senior editorial figure.

Editorial Policy

- 2.2.9** The Editorial Policy team, led by Director Editorial Policy and Standards, gives advice on how to work within the Guidelines at every stage of the production process of every type of content. The earlier that potentially contentious content is referred the better. Advice is available 24 hours a day.

In addition to the referrals specified in each section, Editorial Policy should normally be consulted on how to interpret or apply the Editorial Guidelines.

Editorial Compliance

2.2.10

Responsibility for editorial content – and for ensuring that it complies with the Editorial Guidelines – lies with output teams. Our compliance obligations require that all content that is not live is reviewed before broadcast or publication, and the results of that review recorded and kept. Separate Guidance is available for live output. Most news output is normally treated as live. All live programmes that include pre-recorded inserts are treated as live. The Editorial Guidelines, referrals and advice from Editorial Policy can inform the judgements that are essential to the editorial compliance of BBC output. Legal advice may also be necessary.

See Guidance online: [Live Output](#)

Advice on the compliance process is available from the heads of Editorial Standards and/or compliance managers in each output division.

2.3

Editorial Justification

2.3.1

The concept of editorial justification recurs throughout the Editorial Guidelines and is central to the application of our values and standards.

It is a judgement in the particular circumstances of each case whether the editorial purposes of our output or actions outweigh any potential negative impact on our audiences and people in our output (or, where relevant, those closest to them). It includes, but is not limited to: balancing the privacy of individuals against the public interest in revealing information about them; the use of potentially offensive output in appropriate contexts against the obligation to avoid unjustified offence;

the BBC's right of freedom of expression;
and the audience's right to receive information.

The Editorial Guidelines

2.3.2 These Editorial Guidelines are supplemented by further Guidance, which is available on the BBC Editorial Guidelines website. The Guidance contains additional information about how the Guidelines can be applied and interpreted. New Guidance is written when necessary.

2.4 Other Sources of Advice

2.4.1 When producing BBC output, issues may arise that overlap with, or are separate from, editorial concerns. The BBC has specialist internal advisers on legal, data protection, safety, pronunciation, international filming, health and child protection matters, who should be consulted as appropriate. BBC News maintains bureaux around the world, a political research team and a head of statistics.

Contracts with independent production companies should define where legal liabilities lie and independent production companies should take independent legal advice as appropriate. However, independent production companies may refer legal questions of an editorial nature through their commissioning editor who may discuss them with Programme Legal Advice.

The BBC has a separate legal team in Scotland who can advise on Scottish legal issues.

2.4.2 **Any decision to proceed with content contrary to BBC legal advice must be referred to the divisional director and Director Editorial Policy and Standards.**

2.4.3

Any content producers intending to produce output about Northern Ireland or significant projects involving the Republic of Ireland, should notify Director Northern Ireland of their proposals at an early stage. Content producers outside Scotland and Wales should inform the director of the relevant nation of their plans to produce programme material which is based in the relevant nation or which deals significantly with national issues or themes.