



CANADA'S CENTRE
FOR DIGITAL AND
MEDIA LITERACY

Understanding the Rating Systems

Rating systems can be helpful when trying to choose appropriate movies, but with many different systems in use in Canada, they can also be very confusing. To help make sense of the differences, here's an overview of all the systems currently in use.

Movies for theatrical release

Before feature films are released for viewing in Canadian theatres, they're rated by provincial and territorial classification boards. These ratings can vary from one jurisdiction to another.

Movies on video

Videos designed for home rentals in Canada can have up to three different ratings on the box. The three systems in use are:

- Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Ratings All movies of U.S. origin are rated by the MPAA. Some videos have this American rating printed on the video jacket or the cassette label.
- Film Classification Board Ratings Manitoba, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces require the theatrical rating of their own film classification boards on the video jacket.
- Canadian Rating System for Home Videos This voluntary rating appears on many videos sold or rented in Canada. The ratings are an average of all the classifications assigned by the provincial and territorial film boards.

Problems with movie ratings

Ratings do not always accurately reflect the content of a movie, or its appropriateness for certain ages. Even movies rated Family (F) or General (G) are not always suitable for young kids.

Because there's a dearth of F- or G-rated movies, many parents opt for movies rated PG (Parental Guidance) to show young children. The problem is, many PG movies contain explicit language, sexual content and violence.

For Canadians, one of the biggest problems is that the classification systems often contradict each other. For example, some films for theatrical release are rated R by the MPAA and several Canadian film classification boards. But when those movies are released on video, often the *Canadian Rating System for Home Videos*, which averages all the provincial and territorial ratings, will give them an 18A and even 14A rating (suitable for people 14 and older).



Parents should be aware that a 14A rating doesn't necessarily mean that a film is appropriate for 14-year-olds, or even older teens.

In the provinces where the film classification board rating must appear on the video, the rating may be more lenient than the classifications given by both the *MPAA* and the *Canadian Rating System for Home Videos*.

The bottom line is that the rating doesn't really tell you much about what's in a movie. Getting information from others about the content of a film is a lot more helpful. When in doubt, you can talk to other people who've seen it, read newspaper reviews, use one of the many Internet movie review sites for parents, or watch the movie yourself first - so you'll know what you're getting.

