



**PBS Producer Guidelines  
for  
Children's Content**

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Updated October 2010**

**The following standards and guidelines apply to programs and digital content designed solely for children.**

**Issued by:  
Children's Programming  
and Interactive  
PBS**

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## **I. Producer Guidelines for Children's Content**

The following are guidelines for producers prepared by the Children's Programming and Interactive Departments at PBS. Producers must adhere to these guidelines, as well as to the processes and procedures set forth below for creative and standards reviews, input, and approval at the various stages. Please keep in mind that the following summarizes the most common areas of concern and should not be considered to be all inclusive of Standards and Practices guidelines. These guidelines are being provided to you solely for your use in undertaking work on behalf of PBS, and may not be used for any other purpose, nor distributed to anyone other than those individuals employed by the Producer who are responsible for the creation of PBS programming, in accordance with any and all expectations of confidentiality pertaining to materials supplied by PBS to Producer.

## **II. Parental Guideline Rating System Information**

According to the Parental Guideline Rating System, these shows are rated TV-Y. The shows are also designated E/I. *This program is designed to be appropriate for all children.* Whether animated or live-action, the themes and elements in this program are specifically designed for a very young audience. This program is not expected to frighten younger children.

Although PBS KIDS does not use a ratings system online, all PBS KIDS Internet content should be appropriate for all children. All themes and content pieces are designed for an audience between the ages of 2-12, and each site is designed to be navigable by the target ages for that program and site. PBS KIDS Internet content is all COPPA-compliant, contains few links to outside content (all of which are reviewed), and is insulated with PBS KIDS bridge pages which alert visitors when they are leaving the site. The PBS KIDS Online Privacy Policy is accessible at [pbskids.org/privacy](http://pbskids.org/privacy)

### III. Educational Guidelines

In addition to high production and entertainment values, PBS children's content is distinguished by its solid educational value. Across our schedule, PBS seeks to provide our 2-8 year old viewers and visitors with engaging and appropriate content covering all aspects of child development and early learning. We routinely review our existing line-up to ensure that our schedule offers age appropriate coverage of social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language development and sufficient focus on major curriculum areas including: literacy and reading, math, science, geography, and history.

The following standards apply:

- A) **All programs accepted for our children's schedule must have explicit age-appropriate educational goals that are clearly incorporated into the program's storylines, character development, Website content and outreach materials.** Educational goals should emanate from the main point of the program and should not feel "forced". In addition, there should be consistency among the learning goals for each component of a program's total package. Educational goals may cover cognitive or affective development and/or a specific curriculum area.
- B) **All programs should make use of child development and early learning research and best practices in selecting educational goals appropriate for the age range of the intended viewer.** PBS has adopted a "Child Development and Learning Framework" that is used to assess the developmental appropriateness of programming, Internet and educational outreach content for children 0-8 years of age.  
[pbsparents.org/childdevelopment](http://pbsparents.org/childdevelopment)
- C) **All programs are required to include early childhood education consultants and advisors as on-going members of the production "team" to ensure that the program and Website are designed to meet the intended educational and entertainment goals.**
- D) **All producers are encouraged to conduct on-going formative and periodic summative evaluations of the programs and Websites to determine whether educational and entertainment goals are being met.** These evaluations at a minimum should include focus group testing with children of the intended age range. Programs with specific embedded curriculum are also encouraged to gather data on the impact of the program on children's learning.
- E) **All programs are required to have an Website on [pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org) with content that extends both the educational and entertainment value of the program.** As noted above, the Internet content and navigation should be consistent with the program's content in target age range and educational goals.
- F) **All programs and sites are encouraged to provide related educational outreach materials that can be used directly by children and/or parents and teachers working with children at home and at school.** As noted above, outreach materials should be consistent with the program's content in target age range and goals. In addition, the outreach materials should provide users with educational messages and, ideally, opportunities for hands-on learning activities rather than simply promoting the program.
- G) **Programs and Websites receiving *Ready To Learn* funding to support production are expected to offer the highest level of educational content in a manner that also assures engagement of the target audience.**

- The content for all Ready To Learn funded content must be based on sound educational research, both in terms of concept development and proven efficacy of the program in impacting the learning skills of the viewers;
- The producer is required to conduct evaluation of impact of the program and digital content on children's learning;
- The content must meet age or grade appropriate learning standards for the specific educational goals and curriculum area(s) of focus;
- The producer team must include educational advisors who have attained national prominence in the early learning field of study and practice; and
- Educational outreach materials created for all properties must be of the highest quality, designed for home and school use as extensions of the program's curriculum. Materials for children must be accompanied by teacher and parent guides to appropriate use of the program and outreach extensions.

#### IV. Entertainment Standards Guidelines

PBS takes great pride in creating content that educates and entertains children ages 2-8. In recognition of the popularity of our programming with children, and because of our commitment to the welfare of children, we strive to be socially responsible in the programs and Websites we create. PBS takes care not to frighten children or provoke anxiety by creating programs that contain realistic depictions of anti-social or ethically confusing behavior. The following standards apply:

- A) We avoid mean-spirited storylines that could threaten a child's sense of well-being.** For example, stories about kidnapping, stories that use real world situations which put characters at risk, or putting characters in dark environments that suggest sadistic or masochistic treatment of humans or animals are not allowed.
- B) Gratuitous physical and psychological violence is not permitted in children's content.**
- C) Potentially instructive presentation of dangerous or illegal behaviors that could be easily copied by a child is avoided.** For example:
  - 1. Characters are not shown swallowing pills or capsules.
  - 2. Characters who are children are not shown using hazardous household items such as razors, kitchen knives, or matches. If adults are shown using such implements, they are to do so in a manner that reflects proper safety guidelines for the items in question.
  - 3. Characters are not shown doing dangerous, easily mimicked activities, such as hitting each other, placing bags and other foreign objects over heads or mouths, or throwing knives at each other.
- D) We are sensitive and thoughtful when stories involve race, color, ethnicity, mental and physical disabilities, age, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and/or gender in children's programming.** There will be no racial and/or gender slurs, insulting or demeaning stereotypes, or dialogue that demeans, discredits, or defames an individual or group.
- E) We avoid glamorizing anti-social behaviors such as physical violence or name-calling, and make it clear that such behaviors have negative outcomes and lead to consequences, including disciplinary action and reprisal.** In addition, these activities are not portrayed in such detail as to be instructional or to invite imitation.
- F) The use, simulation, and/or the implied taking of drugs, alcohol, or smoking is not permitted in children's programming unless it is a program designed to prevent substance abuse.**
- G) Inappropriate language involving any level of profanity and related vulgarities is not permitted in children's content on-air or online.** Religious names or symbols, used in a profane or disrespectful manner, are not allowed. "God," "Jesus," "Buddha," "Mohammed," and "Holy Mary" are examples of sacred names that are not to be used as expletives.

The use of "bleeps" to imply profanity is not allowed in children's

content, unless it is in a program designed to prevent the use of profanity. In addition, abbreviated or leading phrases that suggest vulgarity such as “What the...” or “Holy...” should be avoided.

- H) The use of animals is in conformity with accepted standards of humane treatment.** Discretion, taste, and restraint should be used whenever depicting the realistic aspects of animals’ life cycles: predator/prey consequences, stalking, ambush, kills, carrion, bodily functions (i.e. marking territory), birth, and egg-laying.
- I) Gratuitous grossness is to be avoided.** Overly gross imagery, and in particular, overly gross imagery that is not necessary to the plot, will not be allowed.
- J) Scenes or discussions of a character (human or animal) using the toilet, either in a restroom or in other places, are discouraged, unless it is germane to the plot of the story or activity.** Any reference to a character using the toilet will be handled with sensitivity.
- K) Viewer-generated content (for example, submissions to Websites) should generally follow the same guidelines as listed above.** Any exceptions should be discussed with PBS editorial staff.

## V. Development and Pitching

PBS KIDS is committed to reviewing every proposal submitted for our consideration and want to make this process as simple as possible.

Please note that PBS is a membership organization that provides national programming, distribution and technical services to our member stations. We do not produce the programs you see on our air. We can only work with experienced producers who are capable of managing all aspects of a project's development and production.

It is also important to note that the PBS KIDS schedule is determined one to two years in advance, so please keep this in mind when submitting programs that are timely in nature.

### **SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL**

**Step 1:** After carefully reviewing proposal guidelines, prepare submission materials for mailing.

**Step 2:** Your proposal materials must be accompanied by a signed proposal release form and an informational summary sheet. **PBS cannot review a proposal until these forms are on file.** Download here: [http://www.pbs.org/producers/pbs\\_submissionsummaryandrelease.pdf](http://www.pbs.org/producers/pbs_submissionsummaryandrelease.pdf). (PDF; [Adobe Reader](#) required). If you are submitting multiple proposals, please include one executed release and summary sheet for each project.

**Step 3:** Mail, email or fax your submission to:  
Brad Pettingell  
Senior Program Associate, Children's Programming  
PBS Headquarters  
2100 Crystal Drive  
Arlington, VA 22202  
fax: (703) 739-8656  
Email: [bwpettingell@pbs.org](mailto:bwpettingell@pbs.org)

**Step 4:** Proposals and tapes receive initial review by the PBS KIDS Programming staff. This process takes 4-6 weeks. We regret that we cannot offer detailed feedback on every project received. PBS is not obligated to return proposal submissions and PBS is not responsible for lost or damaged materials. Please retain copies of all submitted items as they will be recycled or discarded upon completion of review.

**GUIDELINES:** The following elements are expected:

#### **Project Proposal:**

- Synopsis - briefly outline the subject and story of the program or the larger context out of which the story evolved.
- Treatment (Required) - clearly communicate how the television program will unfold from beginning to end. Include details on characters, story structure, theme, style, format, voice, and point-of-view.
- Episodic descriptions
- Project timetable - provide a schedule of all phases of production.
- Interactive elements - explain how you plan to enhance your project through a companion Web site, broadband, or other applications. Discuss specific elements of the proposed site and provide information on the web production team and budget. For guidelines, see PBS' Web Production Manual: <http://projects.pbs.org/confluence/display/PX/Production+Requirements>.
- Budget - include an itemized list of project costs and any funds and in-kind support raised to date.



- Key Personnel - provide detailed biographies or resume information of the key project staff (i.e., producer, director, writers, designers, etc.) as well as experts, consultants and talent.
- Business Plan - explain the current status of the project; discuss your plans for completing it; identify potential funding resources; and indicate approach being taken to secure funding.
- Sample Work - if possible, include samples of previous work that best exemplify your production ability and are relevant in style and subject to the current project.
- Educational goals - incorporate the work of educational advisors and/or research to support the program's specific objectives. Program proposals should include plans describing how the educational and entertainment value of the program content will be extended through online, outreach and print activities.

Proposals are evaluated on an ongoing basis. They are judged on many criteria, including (but not confined to) the quality of the proposal or completed work, the credentials of the production team, and the needs of the schedule. All projects for consideration will fall within the process that is described below.

The submission process begins with an initial review by our program development team. Because the number of proposals we receive varies greatly, we do not have a standard time-frame in place for a response. We are committed, however, to contacting producers about their proposed projects as quickly as possible, usually within 4-6 weeks.

Following the initial review, if a program meets our standards and mission, it is further reviewed by the entire children's programming department. This group works with a cross-departmental team to determine which projects should move forward to a commissioning round, which occurs annually for children's programming.

During the commissioning round meetings, programs and proposals are approved for broadcast and/or funding, and all final greenlighting decisions are made. Producers are notified shortly thereafter.

## **VI. Deliverables**

For television programming, all premises, outlines, scripts, storyboards, and rough cuts require review and approval. All testing and focus group research will also be reviewed.

For online content, all content outlines, site maps and wireframes, designs, alpha versions, and beta versions require review and approval. All usability testing will also be reviewed.

In all events, producers must schedule enough time for the PBS review and approval process at the script and storyboard stage for series or content outline, design, and alpha phase for Websites, and must be flexible so that changes can be made prior to final delivery.

Exceptions to these guidelines are rarely granted by PBS and require approval.

As a series commences, PBS Programming and Interactive will meet with the series producers to review deliverables and set a review timeline.

### **Technical Information**

Information regarding technical standards for television series on PBS can be found at the PBS Red Book site:

<http://www.pbs.org/producers/redbook/>

Technical standards for building pbskids.org sites, apps and other digital content can be found in the PBS KIDS Web Production Manual:

<http://soup.pbskids.org/webmanual/>

Passwords are available upon request from the PBS Kids Interactive department.

### **Contacts for Programming**

Linda Simensky, Vice President, Children's Programming – (703) 739.5040 [lsimensky@pbs.org](mailto:lsimensky@pbs.org)

Paul Siefken, Director, Children's Programming – (703) 739.5178 [pesiefken@pbs.org](mailto:pesiefken@pbs.org)

Brad Pettingell, Senior Program Associate – (703) 739 8138 [bwpettingell@pbs.org](mailto:bwpettingell@pbs.org)

### **Contact for Interactive**

Sara DeWitt, Vice President, PBS Kids Interactive - (703) 739.5486 [sdewitt@pbs.org](mailto:sdewitt@pbs.org)

Silvia Lovato, Director, PBS Kids GO! Interactive – (703) 739.8660 [slovato@pbs.org](mailto:slovato@pbs.org)

## **VII. PBS KIDS Programming Stunts**

### **Overview**

Programming stunts are an important part of the PBS KIDS strategy for increasing viewership, garnering press attention, fulfilling our educational mission and reinforcing the PBS KIDS and PBSKIDS GO! brands.

PBS KIDS defines a programming stunt as a special presentation of programming that involves a deviation from regular scheduling and is supported by custom promotional packaging. A programming stunt can be as short as one hour or can take place over the course of several weeks and can involve a single program title or a collection of titles with a common conceptual thread among them. A stunt should be more than just a mini-marathon of a particular program. Concepts for stunts should focus on characters, storylines and curriculum in a way that emphasizes the distinctive qualities of the properties involved.

Generally, programming stunts should target either the PBS KIDS preschool audience or the PBS KIDS GO! school-age audience. While some concepts and themes may be broad enough to speak to both audiences in the same stunt, the promotional packaging should be tailored to the appropriate age group during the programming stunt.

### **Preschool Stunts**

Because preschoolers and their parents are more sensitive to changes in their schedules, PBS KIDS limits the number of programming stunts aimed at preschoolers, focusing primarily on days when youngsters' daily schedules are already altered, like on national holidays. However, holidays that do not impact work/life schedules, like Halloween, Earth Day and Valentine's Day, are still options for preschool programming stunts. Generally, programming stunts that significantly alter the regular PBS KIDS preschool schedule are limited to two hours.

### **PBS KIDS GO! Stunts**

Because it has a more manageable two-hour time block and it has a more flexible audience of school-age kids, PBS KIDS GO! allows for more frequent stunts than the PBS KIDS preschool lineup. Although the general strategy of targeting national holidays to reach larger audiences also applies to PBS KIDS GO!, stunt concepts can work for any given day provided they speak to the show's distinctive educational and entertainment qualities.

### **Interactive**

Whether targeting a preschool audience or a school-age audience, all programming stunts should be supported with a corresponding custom interactive component on pbskids.org.

### **Stunt Proposal Process**

Concepts for programming stunts can be proposed either by PBS KIDS or by individual producers. Concepts and creative for producer-driven stunts must be vetted and approved by the PBS KIDS programming, brand management and interactive staffs according to the delivery timeline below, and all rights and clearances for the special use of the program must be obtained.

Similarly, PBS KIDS-driven stunt concepts must be vetted by the producers of the programs involved in the stunt, and PBS will work with producers to make sure all rights and clearances for the special use of the programs are obtained.

Custom promotional packaging for stunts falls under the area of "content," so all promotional packaging for stunts must also be approved by PBS program management to ensure adherence to PBS technical, legal and regulatory standards.

**Stunt Delivery Timeline:**

- 9 months prior to air – Stunt concept submitted
- 8 months prior to air – Stunt concept has been approved by PBS KIDS programming, brand management and interactive and added to the stunt scheduling calendar
- 5 months out – promotional plan finalized, first draft of stunt rundown of episodes and packaging concept submitted, online content plan submitted
- 3 months prior to air –
  - ❖ Rundown of stunt episodes and packaging is submitted for approval to PBS program management
  - ❖ Program Acceptance Agreement is submitted for approval to PBS Program Management
  - ❖ Full description of stunt is provided and approved for announcement to stations in week-by-week scheduling posting
- 2 months prior to air –
  - ❖ Program offer is posted for stations
  - ❖ Final creative approvals of promotional packaging from PBS KIDS brand management complete
  - ❖ Final approvals of stunt rundown and packaging from PBS Program Management complete
- 6 weeks (30 business days) prior to air – Packaged programming stunt is delivered to PBS Media Library
- 2 weeks prior to air – final online content delivered/launches on pbskids.org to promote tune in

**Dates of Interest**

Calendar dates of interest for program stunts include (but are not limited to): Labor Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving (Friday after), December holiday season, President's Day, MLK Day, Valentine's Day, Earth Day, Memorial Day, and the Summer season.

**Contacts for Stunts**

Paul Siefken – PBS KIDS Programming, [pesiefken@pbs.org](mailto:pesiefken@pbs.org), (703) 739.5178

Shawn Halford – PBS Program Scheduling, [shalford@pbs.org](mailto:shalford@pbs.org), (703) 739.5247

Sharon Philippart – PBS KIDS Marketing and Communications, [shphilippart@pbs.org](mailto:shphilippart@pbs.org), (703) 739 5391

Nina Walia – PBS KIDS Interactive, [nwalia@pbs.org](mailto:nwalia@pbs.org), (703) 739.5186

Nina Galcius – PBS KIDS Program Management, [nmgalcius@pbs.org](mailto:nmgalcius@pbs.org), (703) 739.5303