

Guidance for Using Content and Trigger Warnings

What exactly are content and trigger warnings?

“*Content* warnings are verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive content. These notices flag the contents of the material that follows, so readers, listeners, or viewers can prepare themselves to adequately engage or, if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing.”

“*Trigger* warnings are a specific variety of content warnings that attempt to forewarn audiences of content that may cause intense physiological and psychological symptoms for people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other anxiety disorders.”

<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching-sandbox/wp-content/uploads/sites/853/2021/02/An-Introduction-to-Content-Warnings-and-Trigger-Warnings-Draft.pdf>

Why do we need them?

They empower people to engage with content in a safe, consensual, informed way.

“The inclusion of content warnings is neither restrictive (it does not label anything as off-limits to teach) nor coddling (it does not assume that students cannot handle the material, on the contrary, it treats them as adults who can and should attend to their own wellbeing with all available information.”

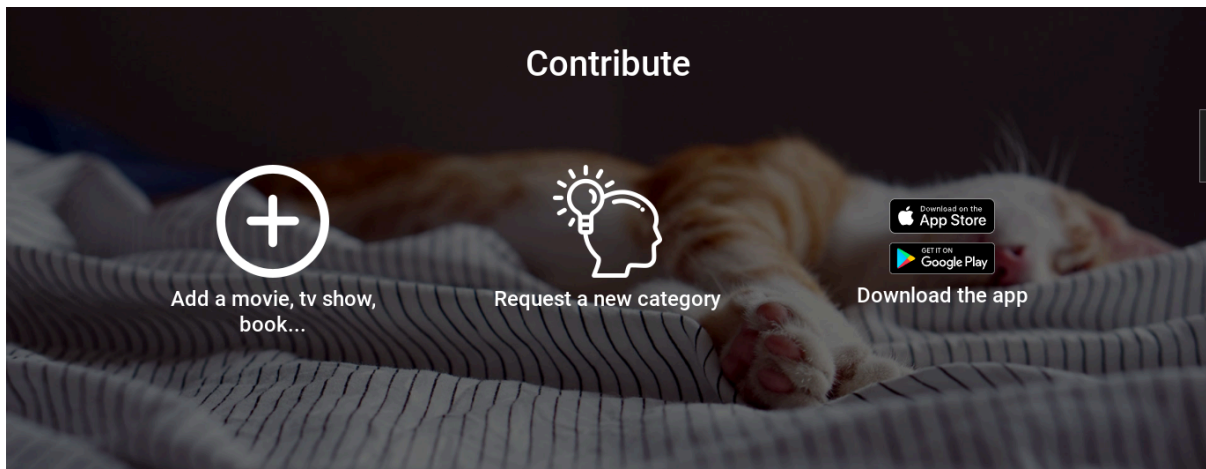
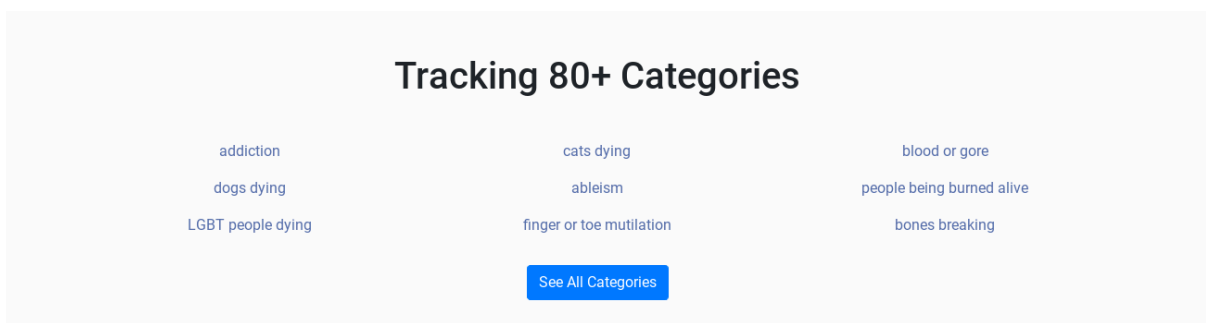
<https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching-sandbox/wp-content/uploads/sites/853/2021/02/An-Introduction-to-Content-Warnings-and-Trigger-Warnings-Draft.pdf>

The use and need of content warnings is widely disputed. If you are considering *not* using warnings, here are some important thinking points:

- Do you want any readers/audience to be able to engage with your work?
- Do you want readers/audience to return to your work (this piece, or the next)?
- How do you make that possible?
- What is the potential harm of using warnings for your content?
- Does this outweigh the potential harm of triggering your readers/audience?
- If you are concerned about spoilers, why? How do these detract from your content? Are there other qualities of your content that can uphold it despite spoilers?
- If your content is reliant on the element of surprise, are there ways you can provide warnings for those who wish to find them, and make them opt-in, so that those who wish to avoid spoilers can skip them? Are there more general warnings you can provide on your platforms/covers to invite in only those readers who are interested in and prepared for your particular content? Or can you work without warnings via proper categorisation and effective copy?
- None of us know or can anticipate **all** possible triggers. But we can listen respectfully, learn and adapt.




Some established models

- Does the Dog Die? (movies, TV, books & others) - <https://www.doesthedogdie.com/>



Trending

#1 Rescued by Ruby	#11 Euphoria (TV Show)
#2 Dog (Movie)	#12 Bad Vegan: Fame. Fraud. Fugitives.
#3 Bridgerton	#13 Fresh (Movie)
#4 The Power of the Dog (Movie)	#14 Nightmare Alley (Movie)
#5 The Adam Project	#15 Hereditary
#6 Our Flag Means Death	#16 Midsommar
#7 Deep Water (Movie)	#17 Brand New Cherry Flavor
#8 A Nightmare On Elm Street (Movie)	#18 The Invisible Man
#9 American Psycho	#19 Marley & Me
#10 The Batman	#20 Deep Water (Movie)

   [Sign In](#)

Categories

Pin categories important to you.
Search results will show these categories first.

animals are abused
Some animals don't necessarily die, but are severely abused. Are there graphic details about animals being beaten, bloodied, skinned alive, trapped in cages, starved, or neglected?

a dog dies

there's a dead animal

there are snakes

a dragon dies

a horse dies

there's dog fighting

   [Sign In](#)

Is there shaving/cutting?

Pin to top of search results.

Filter Yes, there's shaving/cutting.
 No shaving/cutting.

Type

← Ads by Google

[Send feedback](#)

[Why this ad? ▸](#)

Midsommar	Yes 276	No 2
Movie • 2019 Report		
▲ ElizFoster		
15 ▼ Palm ritualistic cutting		
4 comments Add comment		
The Umbrella Academy	Yes 192	No 2
TV Show • 2019 Report		
▲ LillianCummings		
29 ▼ A dad shave his son's face in a barber shop scenario, no blood or anything		
5 comments Add comment		

- Content Warning Database (books) - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PHIA7QglPpKRbOVEKc_0BCjRmZ8PWPLr3t_wMnggsAg/edit#gid=1855537145

Content Warning Database

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Extensions Help

100% View only

	A	B	C	D
1	Title	Authors	Content Warnings	Details
2	13 Minutes	Sarah Pinborough	Trivializing mental illness	trivializing suicide and eating disorders
3	A Bagful of Dragon	Sakina Murdock	Lifecchanging injury	MC loses use of arm
4	A Bitter Pill to Swallow	Tiffany Gholar	Mental illnesses	the story is set in a therapeutic boarding school for teens with mental illnesses, a MC has P
5			self-harm	Janina decides to punish herself by going out in a snowstorm in a sundress and flip-flops
6	A Princess in Theory	Alyssa Cole	Sickness, coma	the MCs grandparents are in a coma due to poisoning
7	A Time to Dance	Padma Venkatraman	Ableism	called out by the MC
8	Ace of Shades	Amanda Foody	Addiction	A secondary character is a recovering addict and it's mentioned a few times
9			Drug addiction/chronic pain	A side character has become addicted to drugs (first pain killers, now heroin) after a surfing
10	Alex, Approximately	Jenn Bennett	Panic attack/PTSD	When a character hears firework she has a flashback to gun related trauma and has a panic
11			Surfing/shark related accidents	There's multiple mentions of surfing accidents, one where the love interests dad loses his ar
12	Amal Unbound	Aisha Saeed	Post-partum depression	Amal's mom has PPD after giving birth at the start of the book
13			Germophobia	The MC's germophobic
14	American Panda	Gloria Chao	Medical talk	Talk of STDs, a scene dissecting cadavers, etc...
15			Mention of suicide	A minor character mentions a loved one's suicide
16	Aru Shah and the End of Time	Roshani Chokshi	Ableist language	use of words such as dumb, crazy, insane
17	Ayesha at Last	Uzma Jalaludin	Ableist language	Use of crazy in narration, "Ayesha needs a psychiatrist"
18	Bad for the Boss	Talia Hibbert	Anxiety & PTSD	the MC has both with on page description of an anxiety attack is chapter 11
19			Panic attack	Yearling has one with flashbacks after he sees his cousin
20	Blanca & Roja	Anna-Marie McLemore	Depression	Blanca has depression

LGBTQIAP+-phobia Illnesses & Disabilities Sexual Content Violence Death Other Explore

- Ao3 (fanfic) - <https://archiveofourown.org/works/search>

Rating

Warnings

- Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
- Graphic Depictions Of Violence
- Major Character Death
- No Archive Warnings Apply
- Rape/Non-Con
- Underage

Categories

- F/F
- F/M
- Gen
- M/M
- Multi
- Other

Characters

Relationships

Additional Tags

This screenshot shows a website interface with a navigation bar at the top containing 'Home', 'Reading Challenges', 'Community', 'Sign in', and 'Sign up'. A search bar on the right says 'Search all books...'. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a 'Content Warnings' section with the text 'Approved by the author' and a 'View' button. Below this are three categories: 'Graphic' (Sexism (sexist language)), 'Moderate' (Sexual violence, Sexual harassment, Animal death (and injury), Misogyny, Sexual content), and 'Minor' (Rape, Incest, Death, Abandonment). A 'See all...' link is provided. Below the warnings is a 'Community Reviews' section with a 'summary of 4 ratings (see reviews)' and a 'Moods' list with 'emotional 100%'. The right column contains links for 'Browse similar books...', 'Personalised similar books' (with a 'Plus' button), 'Start a buddy read...', and 'Flag incorrect book information...'. A 'Contact us' button is in the bottom right corner.

This screenshot shows the same website interface as above, but with a more detailed 'Moods' list under the 'Community Reviews' section. The list includes: 'emotional 100%', 'informative 100%', 'inspiring 100%', 'mysterious 100%', 'reflective 100%', 'Pace' with 'medium 100%', 'Plot- or character-driven?' with 'A mix: 100%', and 'Strong character development?'. The rest of the page layout, including the navigation bar, search bar, and other content sections, remains identical to the first screenshot.

What to include in a warning

- Category of content, e.g. loss/violence/abuse
- Level of intensity/tone/impact, e.g. mild/implied/abstract/moderate/graphic/explicit
- Level of frequency, e.g. one-off/occasional/frequent/continuous/gratuitous
- Sometimes a little more detail enables someone to decide whether this specific instance will be manageable or triggering for them, e.g.:

Everything Everywhere All at Once

Yes 47	No 6
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Movie • 2022 [Report](#)

▲ DK6407

▼ 25 A male character is swapped into a salsa dress, but this is played off as absurdist humor rather than misogyny.

Is there gun violence? ☆

Yes 23	No 1
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▲ stinkyghost

▼ 5 There is a gun duel between two characters, one character is clearly aiming to shoot the other person with intent to kill/harm, a shot is fired but in the end no one is harmed (a horse gets startled)

How to use them in... books

Depending on the sensitive material's prevalence within your content, you could flag it:

- By book
- By chapter
- By page

If choosing by chapter/page, you could list the warnings in an index.

Where you could include your warnings:

- On the copyright page
- On a separate warnings page at the front or back of the book, signposted on a contents page
- In a more extensive index
- Online, linked or signposted to from a page of the book
- On the back cover underneath the blurb

How to use them in... in-person events

- Mention the topic *before* sharing the content.
- Tell the audience how you will signal the end of the content, so they can rejoin you afterwards. This might be with verbal and/or visual messages, depending on your space. Perhaps an organiser will be responsible for stewarding this.

- Give them time to step out of the room between issuing your warning and beginning your content. Make it clear that this is expected and supported.
- Make it clear if this content is expected to last the duration of the event.
- Remember to signal the end of the content and give people time to rejoin the event.

How to use them in... online events

- Mention the topic *before* sharing the content.
- Tell the audience how you will signal the end of the content, so they can rejoin you afterwards. This might be with verbal, written and visual messages, for inclusivity.
- Give them time to mute/switch off between issuing your warning and beginning your content.
- Make it clear if this content is expected to last the duration of the event.
- Remember to signal the end of the content and give people time to rejoin the event.

How to use them in... social media

1. Start with the abbreviation:

CW or TW

2. Add the two slashes:

CW // or TW //

3. Add the keywords clearly, without censoring (make these clear enough so people know what to expect, but without being too descriptive that it itself can trigger a reaction):

CW // nudity or TW // sexual violence

4. If you are writing a caption, go to the next line and add a full stop. Keep doing this until the description is hidden, so those who are okay with continuing can click on “read more.”

TW // sexual violence

<https://www.themix.org.uk/mental-health/looking-after-yourself/a-guide-to-content-and-trigger-warnings-37946.html>

How to use them in... conversation

When you are in a conversation and know you will be saying something sensitive:

1. Say that you are giving a content/trigger warning.
2. Clearly mention the themes you will be touching on.
3. Leave enough time for someone to opt out.
4. Accept and respect their decision. Only proceed if they consent.

<https://www.themix.org.uk/mental-health/looking-after-yourself/a-guide-to-content-and-trigger-warnings-37946.html>

Further reading

<https://kitnkabookle.com/content-warnings-books/> - how they can work, how they can fail, how to work without warnings via proper categorisation and effective copy