

Appendix

Self-Regulating Codes of the Comic Book Industry¹

Code of the Association of Comic(COMICS?) Magazine Publishers (1948)

The Association of Comics Magazine Publishers, realizing its responsibility to the millions of readers of comics magazines and the public generally, urges its members and others to publish comics magazines containing only good, wholesome entertainment or education, and in no event include in any magazine comics that may in any way lower the moral standards of those who read them. In particular:

1. Sexy, wanton comics should not be published. No drawing should show a female indecently or unduly exposed, and in no event more nude than in a bathing suit commonly worn in the United States of America.
2. Crime should not be presented in such a way as to throw sympathy against the law and justice or to inspire others with the desire for imitation. No comics shall show the details and methods of a crime committed by a youth. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions should not be portrayed as stupid, ineffective, or represented in such a way to weaken respect for established authority.
3. No scenes of sadistic torture should be shown.
4. Vulgar and obscene language should never be used. Slang should be kept to a minimum and used only when essential to the story.
5. Divorce should not be treated humorously or represented as glamorous or alluring.
6. Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America (1954)

Preamble

The comic book medium, having come of age on the American cultural scene, must measure up to its responsibilities.

Constantly improving techniques and higher standards go hand in hand with these responsibilities.

To make a positive contribution to contemporary life, the industry must seek new areas for developing sound, wholesome entertainment. The people responsible for writing,

drawing, printing, publishing, and selling comic books have done a commendable job in the past, and have been striving toward this goal.

Their record of progress and continuing improvement compares favorably with other media in the communications industry. An outstanding example is the development of comic books as a unique and effective tool for instruction and education. Comic books have also made their contribution in the field of letters and criticism of contemporary life.

In keeping with the American tradition, the members of this industry will and must continue to work together in the future.

In the same tradition, members of the industry must see to it that gains made in this medium are not lost and that violations of standards of good taste, which might tend toward corruption of the comic book as an instructive and wholesome form of entertainment, will be eliminated.

Therefore, the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. has adopted this code, and placed strong powers of enforcement in the hands of an independent code authority.

Further, members of the association have endorsed the purpose and spirit of this code as a vital instrument to the growth of the industry.

To this end, they have pledged themselves to conscientiously adhere to its principles and to abide by all decisions based on the code made by the administrator.

They are confident that this positive and forthright statement will provide an effective bulwark for the protection and enhancement of the American reading public, and that it will become a landmark in the history of self-regulation for the entire communications industry.

Code for Editorial Matter

GENERAL STANDARDS—PART A

(1) Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.

(2) No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.

(3) Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

(4) If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.

(5) Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.

(6) In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal shall be punished for his misdeeds.

(7) Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gunplay, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.

(8) No unique or unusual methods of concealing weapons shall be shown.

(9) Instances of law-enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged.

(10) The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnapper. The criminal or the kidnapper must be punished in every case.

(11) The letters of the word "crime" on a comics-magazine cover shall never be appreciably greater in dimension than the other words contained in the title. The word "crime" shall never appear alone on a cover.

(12) Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or subtitles shall be exercised.

GENERAL STANDARDS—PART B

(1) No comics magazine shall use the word "horror" or "terror" in its title.

(2) All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, and masochism shall not be permitted.

(3) All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.

(4) Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.

(5) Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.

GENERAL STANDARDS—PART C

All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the code, and are considered violations of good taste or decency, shall be prohibited.

Dialogue

(1) Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.

(2) Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken.

(3) Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and, wherever possible, good grammar shall be employed.

Religion

(1) Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

Costume

(1) Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.

(2) Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.

(3) All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.

(4) Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.

NOTE.—It should be recognized that all prohibitions dealing with costume, dialogue, or artwork apply as specifically to the cover of a comics magazine as they do to the contents.

Marriage and Sex

(1) Divorce shall not be treated humorously nor represented as desirable.

(2) Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.

(3) Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honorable behavior shall be fostered. A sympathetic understanding of the problems of love is not a license for morbid distortion.

(4) The treatment of live-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.

(5) Passion or romantic interest shall never be treated in such a way as to stimulate the lower and baser emotions.

(6) Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested.

(7) Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.

Code for Advertising Matter

These regulations are applicable to all magazines published by members of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. Good taste shall be the guiding principle in the acceptance of advertising.

(1) Liquor and tobacco advertising is not acceptable.

(2) Advertisement of sex or sex instruction books are unacceptable.

(3) The sale of picture postcards, "pinups," "art studies," or any other reproduction of nude or seminude figures is prohibited.

(4) Advertising for the sale of knives or realistic gun facsimiles is prohibited.

(5) Advertising for the sale of fireworks is prohibited.

(6) Advertising dealing with the sale of gambling equipment or printed matter dealing with gambling shall not be accepted.

(7) Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.

(8) To the best of his ability, each publisher shall ascertain that all statements made in advertisements conform to fact and avoid misrepresentation.

(9) Advertisement of medical, health, or toiletry products of questionable nature are to be rejected. Advertisements for medical, health, or toiletry products endorsed by the American Medical Association, or the American Dental Association, shall be deemed acceptable if they conform with all other conditions of the Advertising Code.

Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America (1971)

This seal of approval appears only on comics magazines which have been carefully reviewed, prior to publication, by the Comics Code Authority, and found to have met the high standards of morality and decency required by the code.

Preamble

The comics magazine, or as it is more popularly known, the comic book medium, having come of age on the American culture scene, must measure up to its responsibilities. Constantly improving techniques and higher standards go hand in hand with these responsibilities.

To make a positive contribution to contemporary life, the industry must seek new areas for developing sound, wholesome entertainment. The people responsible for writing, drawing, printing, publishing, and selling comic books have done a commendable job in the past, and have been striving toward this goal.

Their record of progress and continuing improvement compares favorably with other media. An outstanding example is the development of comic books as a unique and effective tool for instruction and education. Comic books have also made their contribution in the field of social commentary and criticism of contemporary life.

Members of the industry must see to it that gains made in this industry are not lost and that violations of standards of good taste, which might tend toward corruption of the comic book as an instructive and wholesome form of entertainment, will not be permitted.

Therefore, the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. has adopted this Code, and placed its enforcement in the hands of an independent Code Authority.

Further, members of the Association have endorsed the purpose and spirit of this Code as a vital instrument to the growth of the industry.

To this end, they have pledged themselves to conscientiously adhere to its principles and to abide by all decisions based on the Code made by the Administrator.

Code for Editorial Matter

GENERAL STANDARDS—PART A

1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.

2. No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime, with the exception of those crimes that are so far-fetched or pseudoscientific that no would-be lawbreaker could reasonably duplicate them.

3. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall not be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority. If any of these is depicted committing an illegal act, it must be declared as an exceptional case and that the culprit pay the legal price.

4. If a crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.

5. Criminals shall not be presented in glamorous circumstances, unless an unhappy end results from their ill-gotten gain, and creates no desire for emulation.

6. In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal shall be punished for his misdeeds.

7. Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gun play, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.

8. No unique or unusual methods of concealing weapons shall be shown, except where such concealment could not possibly be duplicated.

9. Instances of law enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged, except when the guilty, because of their crime, live a sordid existence and are brought to justice because of the particular crime.

10. The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnapper. The criminal or the kidnapper must be punished in every case.

11. The letters of the word "crime" on a comics magazine cover shall never be appreciably greater in dimension than the other words contained in the title. The word "crime" shall never appear alone on the cover.

12. Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or subtitles shall be exercised.

GENERAL STANDARDS—PART B

1. No comics magazine shall use the word "horror" or "terror" in its title. The words may be used judiciously in the body of the magazine.*

2. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, and masochism shall not be permitted.

3. All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.

4. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.

5. Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, or torture, shall not be used. Vampires, ghouls, and werewolves shall be permitted to be used when handled in the classic tradition such as Frankenstein, Dracula, and other high-caliber literary works written by Edgar Allan Poe, Saki, Conan Doyle, and other respected authors whose works are read in schools around the world.

6. Narcotics or drug addiction shall not be presented except as a vicious habit. Narcotics or drug addiction or the illicit traffic in addiction-producing narcotics or drugs shall not be shown or described if the presentation:

(a) tends in any manner to encourage, stimulate, or justify the use of such narcotics or drugs; or

(b) stresses, visually, by text or dialogue, their temporary attractive effects; or

(c) suggests that the narcotics or drug habit can be quickly or easily broken; or

(d) shows or describes details of narcotics or drug procurement, or the implements or devices used in taking narcotics or drugs, or the taking of narcotics or drugs in any manner; or

(e) emphasizes the profits of the narcotics or drug traffic; or

(f) involves children who are shown knowingly to use or traffic in narcotics or drugs; or

(g) shows or implies a casual attitude toward the taking of narcotics or drugs; or

(h) emphasizes the taking of narcotics or drugs throughout, or in a major part, of the story, and leaves the denouement to the final panels.

GENERAL STANDARDS—PART C

All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the Code, and are considered violations of good taste and decency, shall be prohibited.

*The word "horror" or "terror" in a story title in the body of the magazine has been ruled to be an injudicious use, and therefore is not permitted.

Dialogue

1. Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings—judged and interpreted in contemporary standards—are forbidden.

2. Special precautions to avoid disparaging reference to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken.

3. Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and whenever possible good grammar shall be employed.

Religion

1. Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

Costume

1. Nudity in any form is prohibited. Suggestive and salacious illustration is unacceptable.

2. Females shall be drawn realistically without undue emphasis on any physical quality.

Marriage and Sex

1. Divorce shall not be treated humorously or represented as desirable.

2. Illicit sex relations are not to be portrayed and sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.

3. All situations dealing with the family unit should have as their ultimate goal the protection of the children and family life. In no way shall the breaking of the moral code be depicted as rewarding.

4. Rape shall never be shown or suggested. Seduction may not be shown.

5. Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.

Code for Advertising Matter

The regulations are applicable to all magazines published by members of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. Good taste shall be the guiding principle in the acceptance of advertising.

1. Liquor and tobacco advertising are not acceptable.

2. Advertising of sex or sex instruction books are unacceptable.

3. The sale of picture postcards, "pin-ups," "art studies," or any other reproduction of nude or seminude figures is prohibited.

4. Advertising for the sale of knives, concealable weapons, or realistic gun facsimiles is prohibited.

5. Advertising for the sale of fireworks is prohibited.

6. Advertising dealing with the sale of gambling equipment or printed matter dealing with gambling shall not be acceptable.

7. Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.

8. To the best of his ability, each publisher shall ascertain that all statements made in advertisements conform to the fact and avoid misrepresentation.

9. Advertisement of medical, health, or toiletry products of questionable nature are to be rejected. Advertisements for medical, health, or toiletry products endorsed by the American Medical Association, or the American Dental Association, shall be deemed acceptable if they conform with all other conditions of the Advertising Code.

Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America (1989)

Preamble

The Comics Magazine Association of America was formed in 1954 by a group of publishers committed to the principle that the public deserved decent and wholesome comic books as entertainment for children. To that end, those publishers set content guidelines, created a reviewing authority, and established the Comics Code Seal. This seal was to appear on covers of the CMAA member comics as a way of communicating to the public their shared commitment to uphold these standards.

While the comic book industry has changed over the intervening three decades, as has almost every other facet of American life, the publisher members of the CMAA remain committed to providing decent and wholesome comic books for children. This new updated version of the Comics Code is a reaffirmation of that commitment.

The member publishers of the Comics Magazine Association of America hereby reaffirm our joint commitment to our shared principle: that comics carrying the Comics Code Seal be ones that a parent can purchase with confidence that the contents uphold basic American moral and cultural values.

Institutions

In general recognizable national, social, political, cultural, ethnic and racial groups, religious institutions, law enforcement authorities will be portrayed in a positive light. These include the government on the national, state, and municipal levels, including all of its numerous departments, agencies and services; law enforcement agencies such as the FBI, the Secret Service, the CIA; the military, both United States and foreign; known religious organizations; ethnic advancement agencies; foreign leaders and representatives of other governments and national groups; and social groups identifiable by lifestyle, such as homosexuals, the economically disadvantaged, the economically privileged, the homeless, senior citizens, and minors.

Socially responsible attitudes will be favorably depicted and reinforced. Socially inappropriate, irresponsible, or illegal behavior will be shown to be specific actions of a specific individual or group of individuals, and not meant to reflect the routine activity of any general group of real persons.

If, for dramatic purposes, it is necessary to portray such group of individuals in a negative manner, the name of the group and its individual members will be fictitious, and its activities will both be clearly identifiable with the routine activities of any real group. Stereotyped images and activities will be not used to degrade specific national, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups.

Language

The language in a comic book will be appropriate for a mass audience that includes children. Good grammar and spelling will be encouraged. Publishers will exercise good taste and a responsible attitude as to the use of language in their comics. Obscene and profane words, symbols, and gestures are prohibited.

References to physical handicaps, illnesses, ethnic backgrounds, sexual preferences, religious beliefs, and race, when presented in a derogatory manner for dramatic purposes, will be shown to be unacceptable.

Violence

Violent actions or scenes are acceptable within the context of a comic book story when dramatically appropriate. Violent behavior will not be shown as acceptable. If it is presented in a realistic manner, care should be taken to present the natural repercussions of such actions. Publishers should avoid excessive levels of violence, excessively graphic depictions of violence, and excessive bloodshed or gore. Publishers will not present detailed information instructing readers how to engage in imitable violent actions.

Characterizations

Character portrayals will be carefully crafted and show sensitivity to national, ethnic, religious, sexual, political, and socioeconomic orientations.

If it is dramatically appropriate for one character to demean another because of his or her sex, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, political orientation, socioeconomic disadvantages should never assign ultimate responsibility for these conditions to the character themselves. Heroes should be role models and should reflect the prevailing social attitudes.

Substance Abuse

Healthy, wholesome lifestyles will be presented as desirable. However, the use and abuse of controlled substances, legal and illicit, are facts of modern existence, and may be portrayed when dramatically appropriate.

The consumption of alcohol, narcotics, pharmaceuticals, and tobacco will not be depicted in a glamorous way. When the line between the normal, responsible consumption of legal substances and the abuse of these substances is crossed, the distinction will be made clear and the adverse consequences of such abuse will be noted.

Substance abuse is defined as the use of illicit drugs and the self-destructive use of such products as tobacco (including chewing tobacco), alcohol, prescription drugs, or over-the-counter drugs.

Use of dangerous substances both legal and illegal should be shown with restraint as necessary to the context of the story. However, story lines should not be detailed to the point of serving as instruction manuals for substance abuse. In each story, the abuser will be shown to pay the physical, mental, and/or social penalty for his or her abuse.

Crime

While crimes and criminals may be portrayed for dramatic purposes, crimes will never be presented in such a way as to inspire readers with a desire to imitate them nor will criminals

be portrayed in such a manner as to inspire readers to emulate them. Stories will not present unique imitable techniques or methods of committing crimes.

Attire and Sexuality

Costumes in a comic book will be considered to be acceptable if they fall within the scope of contemporary styles and fashions.

Scenes and dialogue involving adult relationships will be presented with good taste, sensitivity, and in a manner which will be considered acceptable by a mass audience. Primary human sexual characteristics will never be shown. Graphic sexual activity will never be depicted.

Administrative Procedure

I

All comics which member publishers wish to bear the Comics Code Seal will be submitted to the code administrator for review prior to publication. The administrator will review them according to the guidance he has received from the permanent committee and will either approve them to bear the seal, or return them to the publisher with comments.

The responsible editor from the publisher will either revise the comic in accordance with those comments, or discuss with the administrator the concerns raised with him and reach agreement on how the comic can properly bear the Code Seal either without being revised or within a mutually agreeable set of alternative revisions. In the event no agreement can be reached between the editor and the administrator, the matter can be referred to the permanent committee, which will act promptly to determine if, or under what conditions, the comic in question can bear the Code Seal. Decisions of the permanent committee will be binding on the publishers, who agree not to place the Code Seal on any comic on which it is not authorized.

II

The members of the Comics Magazine Association of America include publishers who elect to publish comics that are not intended to bear the Code Seal, and that therefore need not go through the approval process described above. Among the comics in this category may be titles intended for adult readers. Member publishers hereby affirm that we will distribute these publications only through distribution channels in which it is possible to notify retailers and distributors of their content, and thus help the publications reach their intended audiences. The member publishers agree to refrain from distributing these publications through those distribution channels that, like the traditional newsstand, are serviced by individuals who are unaware of the content of specific publications before placing them on display.

III

Recognizing that no document can address all of the complex issues and concerns that face our changing society, the member publishers have established a permanent committee composed of the senior editor of each member's staff. The committee will meet regularly to review those issues and concerns as they affect our publications, and to meet with the guide and administrator of the Comics Code, and will replace the previous written guidelines of the Comics Code.