

RENAISSANCE

Renaissance's Content Appropriateness Guidelines

This document outlines the high-level process and considerations for developing content that is fair, appropriate, and free from bias for all Renaissance products.

Renaissance's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Education

Renaissance's mission is to accelerate learning for all children and adults of all ability levels and ethnic and social backgrounds, worldwide. To that end, Renaissance is committed to producing content that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable for all learners.

At Renaissance, we acknowledge the harmful effect to specific individuals or groups that unconscious, or implicit, biases and social stereotypes create, and we strive to eliminate bias in all forms from both our products and our workplace. Our goal is to develop content that treats individuals and topic areas with appropriate respect and does not offend or otherwise impede a student's ability to respond to content due to personal characteristics, background, or other aspects that are not relevant to the content. All students should be able to demonstrate the intended knowledge and skills using Renaissance products, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, national origin, or any other protected category.

Purpose of this Document

The purpose of these guidelines is to describe the minimum baseline for all Renaissance-developed content. Though Renaissance develops a variety of educational content types (e.g., instruction, practice, assessment), these guidelines serve as a common set of standards for content development, including text and multimedia.

Each product also has its own, detailed guidelines appropriate for the product and its purpose:

- **Accelerated Reader (AR)** and **myON** are products primarily based on existing books. Any created content (e.g., quizzes, projects) designed to measure a student's knowledge or comprehension tends to address the main points in the books. For example, if a book contains controversial or mature content, it is indicated in the customer-facing book summary in AR, which can also be found on the Accelerated Reader Bookfinder website.
- **Star** is a suite of assessment products intended to efficiently measure a student's knowledge and skills. To provide valid measurement, topics that might adversely impact a student's ability to demonstrate his or her knowledge are avoided.

- **Freckle**¹ is intended to be used by education practitioners to support instruction and practice in various content areas. Due to the nature of teacher involvement and breadth of standards coverage, it may be appropriate to include sensitive topics, but they are treated with awareness and respect.

Bias and Fairness

We recognise that bias occurs when an item contains content or language that unfairly impacts the performance of students. Bias within an item can cause the student to get the item correct or incorrect for the wrong reason. Bias is avoided through careful item design, creation, and review by a diverse group of trained content developers.

There are three types of bias reviewed within Renaissance content: content bias, language bias, and item structure or format bias. Understanding different types of bias helps content designers publish bias-free content. Bias-free, or fair, content provides an equal, reasonable, and impartial representation of groups of students and representative situations for groups of students.

The following questions are used throughout the item creation process to avoid or eliminate bias, thereby developing items that contribute to overall fairness.

Content Bias:

- Does the item contain content that is different or unfamiliar to different groups of students?
- Will different groups of students get the item correct or incorrect for the wrong reason?
- Does the content of the item reflect information and/or skills that may not be expected across the educational background of all students?

Language Bias:

- Does the item contain words that have different or unfamiliar meanings for different groups of students that would impact their ability to answer correctly?
- Is the reading level appropriate for the age or year group of the intended students?
- Is the item free of group-specific language, vocabulary, or reference pronouns that would impact a student's ability to answer correctly?

Item Structure and Format Bias:

- Are contextual clues included in the item that would provide an advantage for one group over another?

¹ Freckle is not currently available to UK schools.

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- Are there any inadequacies or ambiguities in the test instructions, test question, correct response, or distractors?
- Does the explanation concerning the nature of the task or the steps required to successfully complete the item confuse members of different groups of students?

Sensitivity

Avoid Stereotypes and Unconscious Bias:

- We aim to use language that respects, honours, and values all individuals and groups regardless of their identity or circumstance, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, national origin, or any other protected category.
- We seek to eliminate negative, value-laden language that patronizes, distorts, villainises, glorifies, romanticises, belittles, marginalises, misrepresents, or otherwise ignores individuals or groups based on their identity or circumstance.

Use Inclusive Language:

- We use people-first language which aims to make personhood the essential characteristic of every person and to view other social identities that people may hold as secondary and non-essential.
- We apply self-identification language which strives to include language that reflects people's choice and style in how they talk about themselves.
- We employ active voice which puts the "actor" of the sentence in the role of performing the action.
- We use proper nouns. Names used for and by individual places, persons, and organizations convey respect, understanding, acceptance, and clarity.

Avoid Sensitive Topics or Address with Awareness and Respect:

As noted earlier, Renaissance creates products to serve a variety of educational purposes. The following provides examples of topics and topic areas that we avoid or treat with sensitivity depending on the product purpose:

- **Adult Habits:** e.g., swearing, gambling, substance and alcohol use, rehabilitation

- **Anti-Social Behavior:** e.g., aggression, defiance, bullying, pranking, tardiness
- **Brand/Products:** e.g., brand names
- **Contemporary Figures:** e.g., politicians, celebrities, athletes, artists
- **Family Issues:** e.g., divorce, separation, homelessness, adoption, care issues
- **Gender/Sexuality:** e.g., practice, pregnancy, reproductive health, gender identity
- **Health/Illness:** e.g., mental health, disease, death
- **Illegal Behavior:** e.g., theft, fraud, discrimination, murder, slander, vandalism
- **Religion:** e.g., beliefs, customs, practices, holidays
- **Violence:** e.g., abuse, self-harm, warfare, weapons, terrorism

Quality Assurance Process

To ensure these guidelines are being followed across all Renaissance product lines, our content staff implement the following quality assurance processes:

- Renaissance hires staff with expertise in education. For example, all Star Assessments item writers have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited university and three years of editorial experience related to content development, or an equivalent combination of education and experience.
- All team members who create content have received training on these content appropriateness guidelines, as well as training on the guidelines for the specific product they support.
- After content is created, at least one other trained team member reviews the content to ensure it meets Renaissance standards, including those for content appropriateness.
- Samples of all Renaissance content are externally reviewed for content appropriateness on a regular basis.