

Content Warnings: Vital Access Tools

Definition: Content information or content warnings, also known as trigger warnings or content notes, can be defined as a list of information about potentially upsetting topics that may be explored in a production. Providing this information allows productions to safeguard their audiences and allows audience members to make an educated choice about if a show is right for them. An individual who has been impacted by a traumatic experience deserves the right to decide if they are ready to see a similar experience played out in performance.

The goal is not to give away the storyline or secrets of a particular production, but to allow individuals to make informed decisions about what they are choosing to see and ensure that performers and audience members can experience a performance safely.

These warnings should be made readily available for individuals who want to access them. This can be done via a company or production website, signposted in the theatre, included in the programme, and/or via QR code. Resources should also be made available for individuals who are negatively impacted by a production, this is as simple as

signposting charities that provide emergency mental health support to those who may need it within the content information.

It is inherently discriminatory to not provide audiences with access tools such as captioning, BSL, relaxed performances, and accessible facilities within venues. Content warnings simply act as another vital access tool for audience members. The provision of thematic information means individuals can make an informed choice about if and how they might engage with a performance. This is no different than providing warnings about strobe lights to individuals who may have light sensitivity.

If you don't like content warnings, you can simply not read them. It is an individual choice, and one that you should feel free to make.

Ultimately, this is an access requirement and is much more complex than a sensitivity issue. The theatre sector has never needed its audiences more, we should be welcoming more people, not ostracising those who may have additional access needs. We all should provide audiences with the support they might need.

More information:

Part of content information is providing an age recommendation. This allows parents, guardians, and educators decide if a production is suitable for the young people in their life.

While this is not an exhaustive list, some of the types of content you might give warnings for include:

Sexual violence

Physical violence

Suicide

Language

Death

Bereavement

Pregnancy or baby loss

Different forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, abuse of power.

Ableism

Racism

Transphobia

Homophobia

Substance abuse

Animal abuse or references to cruelty

Graphic depictions (violence, substance abuse, etc.)