

# “Guidelines for Administering Censorship and for the Conduct of Censors” (1810)

## Abstract

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Enlightenment liberalism argued for a free marketplace of ideas. Eighteenth-century German governments took long strides in this direction, but religious counter-currents and later the French Revolution inspired tightened censorship. This text illustrates the mixture of motives that animated the Austrian government’s censorship policies: political, religious, and cultural. Noteworthy is the distinction, acceptable both to conservatives and liberals, between writings fit only for the educated and rationally-minded upper classes and those that might prudently be made available to the common people.

## Source

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### **Guidelines for Administering Censorship and for the Behavior of Censors from September 10, 1810**

His Majesty unceasingly strives to promote the well-being of one and all in every way. His Majesty is convinced that among the most excellent means of bringing this about is the proliferation of useful knowledge and the perfection of discernment, combined with the refinement of the senses, and His Majesty knows well that an expediently managed freedom of reading and writing is especially suited to bring this about. Therefore, fully conscious of his foremost duties as ruler and father, which encompass the intellectual and moral education [of his subjects], as well as their physical well-being, and which no more allows that the subjects' spirits or hearts be corrupted than that their bodies be corrupted, His Majesty has most graciously deigned to specify the following standards for the future management of censorship as guidelines for the conduct of the censors. In the future in the monarchy no flash of light, regardless of where it comes from, shall remain unnoticed or unrecognized or be deprived of its most beneficial effect. However, the hearts and minds of minors shall be kept safe with a careful hand from the corrupting monstrosities of horrible fantasies, from the poisonous stench of egotistical debauchers, and from the dangerous pipe dreams of strange minds.

§ 1. In the judgment of books and manuscripts there must be differentiation above all between those works whose content and handling of their subject is intended only for academics and people dedicated to scholarship, and between brochures, popular literature [*Volksschriften*], entertaining books, and humor.

§ 2. A so-called academic work is not qualified by the size of the book, but rather by the importance and quality of the subject handled, and the manner in which the subject is handled.

§ 3. The academic works are divided again into two classes. In the first class belong those works that are distinguished by new discoveries, by a colorful and enlightening portrayal, by the documentation of new views, and so on; in the second class [are] the dry and lifeless compilations and repetitions of what has been said a hundred times, and the same.

§ 4. Works of the first class should be handled with the greatest leniency, and not be forbidden without reasons of the most extreme importance. If a restriction is necessary, then one should not let it be publicly announced.

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§ 5. Works of the second class deserve no leniency, because they bring no advantage, and their content can be taken from better sources. Therefore they are to be handled according to the existing censorship laws.

§ 6. Brochures, youth literature, popular literature, and entertaining books must be handled according to the full strictness of the existing censorship laws. Not only must everything be removed that is either directly or more furtively against religion, decency, respect and adherence to the ruling house, the existing form of government, etc., but also all writings are to be removed that positively affect neither the mind nor the heart, and whose only tendency is to sway sensuousness. Therefore it should be seriously attempted to make an end of the harmful novels. It is thereby taken for granted that those few good novels, which serve to enlighten the mind and ennoble the heart, cannot be meant, but the never-ending mass of novels that only revolve around romance as their eternal axis or that fill the imagination with pipe dreams.

§ 7. The bulk of the products of the writers can be counted as humor, and they cannot be separated from the category of popular literature. If the classical works of this kind are not to be handled according to the principles provided in § 6, then they also cannot be handled with the leniency indicated in § 4; and even less so, because they are not suited to promote the true well-being of the individual or the whole, which is where the actual tendency of the books described in § 4 goes.

§ 8. Works in which the government administration in its entirety or in individual branches is appreciated, in which mistakes or errors are uncovered, in which improvements are suggested, in which means or ways to achieve a benefit are indicated, in which past events are illuminated, etc., should not be banned without sufficient reason, even if the principles and views of the author are not those of the government administration. Writings of this kind must be composed with dignity and modesty, avoiding actual or frivolous persons, and contain nothing against religion, morals, or anything detrimental to the state.

§ 9. No work is exempt from the censor, and the compliance department [*Revisionsamt*] is responsible if a work is given to the book sellers without the assessment of the specific censor.

§ 10. Writings that attack the most high head of state and his dynasty or even foreign government administrations, and whose tendency goes towards spreading discontent and unrest, loosening the bond between subject and prince, undermining the Christian, and primarily the Catholic religion, corrupting the morals, promoting superstition, and books that preach Sozianism, deism, or materialism, and finally parodies of all kinds, are little suited to raise the fortune [*Glück*] of individuals or the well-being of the whole, and they are much more suited to destroy the same completely and they can no more demand leniency than assassins can demand toleration. Therefore they are to be handled according to the stringency of the heretofore existing regulations.

§ 11. The provided principles apply not only for printed writings and works, but also for handwriting.

[...]

§ 15. From now on the censor only has the following formulas for printed works: *Admittitur*, *Transeat*, *Erga Schedam conced.*, *Damnatur*.

*Admittitur* is issued by the censor to those writings that may be openly sold and also announced in the newspapers. *Transeat* to writings that are not entirely suited to general circulation, but are also not suited to strict restriction. They may be sold, but may not be announced in the newspapers. *Erga Schedam conced.* is received by writings in which the offensiveness outweighs the good and the common interest, and that can safely only be issued by the police to businessmen and to people blessed by scholarship in return for collateral [*Reserve*]. *Damnatur*, as the highest grade of prohibition, is reserved

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only for such writings that undermine the state, religion, or morals. Permission to read such writings is also granted by the police, and every three months they will submit a list to His Majesty of the people who are allowed this type of book, and the writings that they were allowed to read. [...]

§ 17. The conventions regarding handwritten manuscripts remain as before. Only one new one appears: *Toleratur*. A manuscript judged in this way can be printed and advertised in the catalogs, but not in the newspapers. It applies to domestic writings that could be read by an educated audience, but are not suitable to come into the hands of uneducated people. This type of judgment is also applicable to political writings, the broad circulation of which the government administration does not want to take any notice of. [...]

§ 22. The earlier regulations, which are not changed or abolished through these provisions, remain in effect.

Source of original German text: Herrmann Th. Schletter, ed., *Handbuch der deutschen Preß-Gesetzgebung. Sammlung der gesetzlichen Bestimmungen über das literarische Eigenthum und die Presse in den deutschen Bundesstaaten*. Leipzig: E. F. Steinacker, 1846, pp. 168–71; reprinted in Walter Demel and Uwe Puschner, eds., *Von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Wiener Kongreß 1789-1815*, *Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung*, ed. Rainer A. Müller, vol. 6. Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1995, pp. 264–70.

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