

# Children's Educational Television

Recent data indicates that, on average, children in the United States spend almost three hours a day watching television. This invited “guest” into our homes has the potential to significantly shape our children’s development. In view of this, Congress has said that broadcast television stations – both commercial and non-commercial – have an obligation to serve the educational and informational needs of children by offering educational and informational children’s programming, and by limiting the amount of commercials during children’s programs.

## Background

In 1990, Congress enacted the Children’s Television Act (CTA) to increase the amount of educational and informational programming available on television. CTA requires each broadcast television station in the United States to serve the educational and informational needs of children through its overall programming, including programming specifically designed to serve these needs (“core programming”). It also limits the amount of time broadcasters may devote to commercial matter during children’s programs.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) wrote rules to carry out this mandate. Under the FCC’s rules, television stations must:

- provide parents and consumers with advance information about core programs being aired.
- define the type of programs that qualify as core programs.
- air at least three hours per week of core educational programming.

## Core Programming

“Core programming” is programming specifically designed to serve the educational and informational needs of children ages 16 and under. Core programming includes the following additional criteria:

- is at least 30 minutes in length.
- is aired between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.
- is a regularly scheduled weekly program.



## Getting Information About Children's Programming

A central goal of the FCC's rules is to provide parents and other members of the public with more information about educational television programming. This will help parents guide their children's television viewing and also encourage an ongoing dialogue between the public and TV stations about TV station performance under CTA. To help accomplish this, the FCC's rules require commercial stations to identify a core educational program at the beginning of the program (*i.e.*, with a verbal announcement or an icon) and to provide information identifying these programs to publishers of program guides and TV listings.

The rules also require commercial TV stations to complete and file with the Commission quarterly reports regarding their educational programming and to make these reports available to the public. Broadcast licensees must file with the FCC and place in their public inspection files at their stations a quarterly Children's Television Programming Report (FCC Form 398) identifying their core programming and other efforts to comply with their educational programming obligations.

## Commercial Time Limitations

The FCC's rules limit the amount of commercial matter which may be aired in certain children's programming to 10.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays. These requirements apply to broadcasters and cable operators. These limitations are prorated for programs that are shorter than one hour in duration. The programming at issue for the commercial time limits is programming originally produced and aired primarily for an audience of children 12 years old and younger.

Commercial television broadcasters are required to place in their local public inspection files certifications that they have complied with the commercial time limits, and must identify any overages. At the time the station files an application to renew its FCC license, it must certify that no commercial overages occurred during the license term, or it must explain any overages. Cable operators must also maintain records to verify compliance and make these available for public inspection. The commercial time limits do not apply to non-commercial educational stations because these stations are prohibited from airing commercials.

Commercial material includes more than advertisements. For instance, where a commercial announcement is primarily for a product otherwise unrelated to a program, but that announcement also includes references to or offers of products which are related to the program, then the broadcast of that commercial announcement during or adjacent to the program will make that program a program-length commercial. In such a case, the entire duration of the program-length commercial will be counted as commercial material. To avoid being considered a program-length commercial, commercial material related to a children's program must be separated from that program by intervening and unrelated program material.



## What is “Host-Selling?”

“Host-selling” is any character endorsement that has the effect of confusing a child viewer from distinguishing between program and non-program material. The FCC’s rules prohibit host-selling by commercial and non-commercial broadcast stations. (A non-commercial station is impacted by the host-selling policy if it airs a sponsorship announcement featuring the same characters that appear in the immediately adjacent children’s program.)

For more information on Children’s Educational Television, please visit the FCC’s Media Bureau Web site at [www.fcc.gov/mb/policy/cetv.html](http://www.fcc.gov/mb/policy/cetv.html).

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission’s electronic subscriber service, click on [www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/emailservice.html).

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