

The International Game Journalists Association  
and  
Games Press Present

# THE VIDEOGAME STYLE GUIDE AND REFERENCE MANUAL

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## THE VIDEOGAME STYLE GUIDE AND REFERENCE MANUAL

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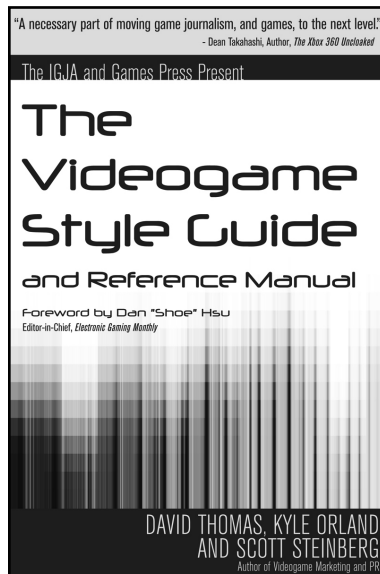
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# DEDICATION

**David**

For Sam and Linc. Thanks to Becky.

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For Michelle, the epitome of my love.

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To Karyn, for her patience and support.

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# **FOREWORD**

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“Early in the millennium, the gamers were the real winners: The Playstation 2, Gamecube, and XBox provided countless hours of gaming goodness.”

Ugh...that was pretty ugly, wasn't it? Besides its generic garbage of a message and two horrendous clichés, that opening sentence has style problems that a blind copyeditor wouldn't tolerate. For the record, it's "PlayStation" (with an internally capitalized "S"), "GameCube" (again, with an internally capitalized letter), and "Xbox" (breaking the pattern with a lowercased "b").

Why does it matter? After all, we're talking about videogames – kids' stuff, right? Little Billy Pokégamer doesn't care whether it's GameCube, Gamecube, or Game Cube. He knows what it is, and isn't that enough?

Except that it's not just Little Billy Pokégamer who's reading about videogames. The average age of my magazine's readers is over 21 years old. Heck, the average age of gamers in the U.S. is over 29 years old. And for videogame writing to be taken seriously by adults, it has to be written for adults. That doesn't just mean correct grammar and spelling (though those are musts, obviously). It also means a level of consistency that shows writers aren't just pulling industry terms out of their asses (or worse, Wikipedia).

That's why I was thrilled when I heard about a style guide designed to help game journalists everywhere. It's not as though I've been clamoring for one myself—my publishing company has its own style guide, which is enforced by a team of copyeditors. But not every magazine, major website, fansite or blogger has access to such resources.

The thing is, for any one publication (including mine) to be treated with respect, all game writing must be held to the same high standards. In other words, who really gives a rat's behind if a few publications or websites are well-written if the general public thinks game journalism as a whole is meant for the 10-and-under crowd?

The kicker being this: Overall, game writing has a great deal of room to mature, and it starts with this style guide.

Now if only we can somehow get everyone to retire the phrase "gaming goodness" once and for all...

Dan "Shoe" Hsu  
Editor-in-Chief  
*EGM: Electronic Gaming Monthly*

# **INTRODUCTION**



# A Question of Style

When it comes to presenting a consistent vocabulary and style, videogame journalism is sloppy at best. At worst, it's a complete mess.

How much of a mess is it?

Consider the term Xbox. When reproducing this seemingly simple product name in print, a writer is faced with many different stylistic decisions, including:

- Whether or not to capitalize the first “X”
- Whether or not to capitalize the “B”
- Whether or not to capitalize the entire term
- Whether or not to place a hyphen between the “X” and the “B”
- Whether or not to insert a space between the the “X” and the “B”

Considering these quandaries alone, a writer is looking at about 15 different ways of writing the name of Microsoft's first console. This doesn't count totally wacky capitalizations, unnecessary “scare quotes” around the name and the question of whether or not to precede it with the word “Microsoft.” (And, if so, whether to do this only on the first reference or each and every time...) Unfortunately, I can assure you all of these different forms have been used by innocent journalists who were either unaware or uninformed.

I've been writing about videogames in one form or another for nearly 10 years now, and reading about them for almost twice as long. However, it took some college journalism courses and exposure to *The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook* to make videogame journalism's inconsistencies come to light for me. *The AP Stylebook*, for those not in the know, is designed to arbitrate the nitpicky arguments about the proper utilization of the written word (such as Presidents Day vs. President's Day vs. Presidents' Day). It was *The AP Stylebook* that made me start to take a more critical look at the words that fill up videogame magazines and websites.

Things that once seemed like minor quibbles (for example, the fact that “console” and “system” were always used interchangeably) started to get under my skin. I began to wince while reading my favorite magazines. I remember finding a review in which “Xbox” was spelled three different ways in the very same paragraph.

These sorts of inconsistencies are all too commonplace in videogame journalism. From the most respected magazines to the most obscure websites, from enthusiast periodicals to consumer publications, these editorial gaffes abound.

So where does a good videogame journalist turn?

*The AP Stylebook* features separate sections for business, sports and Internet journalism, but is of little use for videogame-specific issues of style. *Wired Style* includes a few videogame terms, but it can't tell you when to use “power-up” and when to use “item” instead.

The bottom line: If we as journalists specializing in computer and videogames ever want to see these questions answered, we're going to have to answer them ourselves.

I imagine some of you are thinking, “Lighten up! It's just videogames. Punctuation and grammar are for squares. Who cares how to capitalize Xbox – the reader will know what you mean! Take two Xanax and call me in the morning!”

So why bother with all of this? I'll tell you why:

**A consistent style helps engender trust from readers, and, on a larger scale, lend legitimacy to our industry.** Imagine this: An average, well-educated videogame player, one who has never read a game magazine, wants to browse a few

reviews of recent releases. He/she reads one publication that says the game has great “cut scenes,” then spies another outlet that claims the disc’s “FMVs” are excellent. A third publication praises the title’s “cinematics.”

Sure, the reader can probably use contextual clues to infer that all three articles are essentially saying the exact same thing. However, this inconsistency makes these stories harder to parse for a non-specialist reader. What’s more, the reader might also stop to wonder why it is that three different publications, each supposedly penned by industry experts, can’t agree on a name for the short animated movies interspersed throughout most of today’s games.

Over the years, avid gamers have developed a sort of organic shorthand that is perfectly clear to them but perfectly incomprehensible to a mainstream audience. This jargon is standing in the way of mainstream understanding and acceptance of videogames, and we’ve noted it as such in this guide.

However you slice it, having an inconsistent style is embarrassing and detrimental to the cause of our beloved industry. Addressing these issues will inevitably build trust and respect for both our art and the emerging field of gaming as a whole.

**It’s educational.** What was the world’s first videogame? If you guessed *PONG*, you guessed wrong. Even those familiar with gaming history tend to accidentally overlook more correct answers such as *Computer Space* or Willy Higinbotham’s venerable *Tennis for Two*.

But if those same people were to go on record in a major news publication stating that *PONG* was the industry’s true progenitor, the publication would no doubt receive sacks of angry mail from well-read enthusiasts. (Not to mention disapproving glances from the copy desk and angry phone calls from upper management.) This style guide is also a reference manual of industry facts and trivia for the benefit of the busy writer or editor.

**It’s important to preserving videogame history.** In 50 years, if someone looks back at an article that references “SMB,” they may well wonder if the author is referring to *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Monkey Ball*, the fictitious Sega Marketing Board, or countless other terms with the same acronym. Unless properly annotated, another information seeker might potentially confuse 1989 best-seller *Prince of Persia* with its 2003 remake, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, merely because an author forgot to reference the subtitle. A standardized method for referring to definitive games and terms is essential to keeping a clear and comprehensive historical record of this growing medium.

**It’s a reflection of the industry’s current state.** Has our industry evolved from its component parts of “video” and “game” to become “videogame,” a one-word cultural idiom unto itself? What about “interactive entertainment?” Is the term “man” – as in “eat the mushroom to gain an extra man” – sexist? How are “life” and “death” defined in a videogame? Is “karaoke simulation” its own genre? As the industry evolves, these and other questions about self-perception deserve consideration and meaningful attempts at answers.

**Finally, with the proliferation of the Internet, it’s more important than ever to hold all videogame writers – yes, even FAQ writers – to a higher standard.** With website message boards that drip with egregious violations of the English language and videogame FAQs that practically require a translator, flaunting one’s ignorance is dangerously close to becoming fashionable on the Internet. Writing well, even in informal forums like Internet message boards, should be celebrated and valued.

Bearing all of this in mind, we have one more principle to add: **This guide is by no means written in stone.** As the title implies, this volume is simply a suggested

guide to navigating previously uncharted waters. No rule featured here is without exception, and we don't expect readers to agree with all our decisions. The guide will continue to be updated, both online and in print, with regular updates and revisions that reflect the latest trends in this ever-changing industry. We welcome your comments and suggestions at **[www.igja.org](http://www.igja.org)** and **[authors@gamestyleguide.com](mailto:authors@gamestyleguide.com)**.

In the grand scheme of things, the correct spelling of *Xevious* won't permanently change anyone's life. However, good, sound writing with simple, sturdy sentences, no "133t speak" and proper punctuation is the quickest and easiest way to communicate ideas, find the widest possible audience and become successful in this business.

— Kyle Orland

# Editorial Principles

“Videogame” or “video game” – one word or two? It all depends on whom you ask, which continent you live on, and which media outlet you work for. And it’s not the kind of debate that anyone will resolve soon.

But someone had to make a choice and draw a proverbial line in the sand. So that’s what we did, because that’s what journalists and editors have to do every day – make tough decisions. We hope this guide will save you the trouble of agonizing over minutiae and let you spend more time actually writing.

Whether or not you agree with our choices, you should know that we were guided by one general principle: Journalism is about clear, concise communication. More specifically, we tried to consider the following criteria in making our decisions, listed below in order of importance:

- 1) Ease of comprehension for a general audience.**
- 2) Common usage and accuracy.**
- 3) Convenience, with respect to writer use/remembrance.**
- 4) Official styling, as preferred by game developers and publishers.**

Note that this guide was designed with mainstream readers in mind. Publications that specialize in videogames and/or technical matters will likely want to append it with individual in-house rules that suit their more specialized audiences. Terms that might be familiar to an avid gaming audience but not to a mainstream, non-enthusiast readership are labeled as jargon.

## How To Use The Guide

### Background

This style guide is a suggested approach to videogame journalism. It is, and always will be, a work in progress. Future generations of media experts, journalists, teachers and editors will amend the guide as they see fit. We recognize that many publications will have their own in-house standards. As such, *The Videogame Style Guide and Reference Manual* may function best as an appendix to your publication’s own editorial guidelines.

The definitions and direction provided herein are meant to help the working journalist and editor accurately and consistently report on the videogame industry. All definitions and rules are meant to clarify usage and increase reader understanding. We therefore encourage you to think of the book as an all-purpose map that was written to guide you through the forever-growing tangle of game-related terms and jargon.

### Terms

The preferred usage of a term, including correct capitalization, spelling and punctuation, is found in the bold title for each entry. Interchangeable terms, related terms or abbreviations that might potentially be used in certain situations are also noted in the entry text in bold.

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## Jargon and Technical Terms

Terms marked as “Jargon” will be familiar to an avid gaming audience but unfamiliar to a general mainstream readership. Terms marked as “Technical” won’t be familiar to those without extensive experience in computers and games. Use of jargon and technical terms in mainstream contexts is discouraged. If use of such a term is absolutely required, writers should explain the term after the first use with a supporting parenthetical or definition.

## Definitions

Most terms have a short definition included in their entries. All definitions are intended to clarify the meaning of the term for writers and editors unfamiliar with gaming or game-specific rhetoric. These definitions are by no means comprehensive, but are provided to focus on and illuminate core meanings of terms. They are intended to help writers employ the correct word in the correct context routinely and consistently.

Writers and editors should always keep in mind that certain terms can have very different connotations depending on the context in which the term is employed. For example, the term “background” would likely have a very different meaning for a game developer than it would have for a traditional gamer.

## Examples

Many entries have examples of correct usage listed after any usage rules and definitions. Some entries also have further examples listed in italics within the text of the entry.

## On Incorrect Usage

Where common mistakes are anticipated, examples of incorrect usage have also been provided under the heading “Wrong.” Always refer to the term’s title and text for the correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation and usage.

## On “Also See”

Terms listed under the “Also See” heading provide additional context or guidance for a particular usage question. These secondary references aren’t crucial to comprehending the primary term’s proper usage, but may offer additional insight.

## Errors, Omissions and Suggestions

Just as the videogame business continues to grow exponentially each and every year, so too does the body of terms used to describe, critique and catalog the medium.

We have made every attempt to include in this volume what we consider the most important terms and concepts, especially those we feel are most likely to cause reader confusion or unnecessary ambiguity due to frequent inconsistency or incorrect usage.

That said, it would be foolish to think every issue has been addressed: Please send us your comments and suggestions at [www.igja.org](http://www.igja.org) and [authors@gamestyleguide.com](mailto:authors@gamestyleguide.com).

# THE GUIDE

# 0-9

**1-up** An item that gives a character an extra life. Origin: *Super Mario Bros.*' 1-up mushroom.

In general, only use 1-up if the game specifically refers to an item by that name. Use the specific item name or **extra life** in all other cases.

Do not use 1-up as a generic term for a power-up.

Try to avoid sentence constructions that start with "1-up." If you have to, use "One-up" to begin a sentence.

1UP is also the name of a Ziff Davis Media game portal site: *The user reviews on 1UP range from the sublime to the silly.*

In some multiplayer games, the first character is referred to 1UP above the character's status bar (also 2UP, 3UP, etc.) Use player one, player two, etc. instead unless explicitly referring to the status bar.

**Example:** There is a 1-up mushroom about halfway through the first level of *Super Mario Bros.*

**Wrong:** 1 up, 1up, 1 Up, one up.

**Also see:** life, man, player, power-up.

**1080i, 1080p** See resolution.

**12+, 13+** See ratings.

**1337** See leetspeak.

**16+, 18+** See ratings.

**2-player** See multiplayer.

**2600** See System Names (appendix).

**2D** See dimensions.

**32X** See System Names (appendix).

**3D** See dimensions.

**3D accelerator** See video card.

**3DO** See System Names (appendix).

**480i, 480p** See resolution.

**7+** See ratings.

**720p** See resolution.

# A

**AAA** A high-quality game that is expected to be among the year's best-sellers. Typically, AAA games have larger budgets than so-called "budget software."

Pronounced "triple A."

**Example:** Game developer Insomniac has risen to fame on the shoulders of a long string of successful AAA titles.

**Wrong:** aaa, triple-a, triple a, triple A.

**ability** A numerical or graphical measure of a character's prowess. Typically divided into categories such as strength, accuracy, stamina, charisma, etc.

**Example:** Players should check their character's abilities to see if he's able to use two-handed swords.

**Also see:** avatar, character, skill.

**accessory** See peripheral.

**Achievement** Specific term for special goals that can be completed on Xbox Live-enabled games. **Achievement Points** are awarded for completing Achievements, which count towards a player's **Gamerscore**.

Capitalize names of specific Achievements and put them in quotes. Only capitalize the word Achievement when specifically referring to Xbox Live

Achievements; use lowercase when referring to more general achievements in videogames. *You'll need to defeat the Mother Brain, as well as complete various other achievements, in order to finish most Metroid games.*

**Example:** The "Tour Guide" Achievement in *Dead Rising* only adds 20 Achievement Points to your Gamerscore.

**Also see:** bonus, unlockable.

**action, action-adventure** See Genres (appendix).

**ad hoc** A wireless network involving a direct connection between two or more systems or computers with no router or central base station involved.

This is different from **infrastructure mode**, in which wireless devices connect via a formal networking structure such as the Internet.

**Example:** We ran a series of *Twisted Metal: Head-On* multiplayer matches in the office to test out the PlayStation Portable's ad hoc capabilities.

**Wrong:** adhoc, ad-hoc.

**add-on** See expansion pack.

**adventure** See Genres (appendix).

**AI** See artificial intelligence.

**aliasing** See anti-aliasing.



**alpha** An early, incomplete version of a game. **Alpha code** is typically missing important features or functions planned for the final game. An **alpha version** is often considered an important benchmark in software development as it indicates that the core of the program is working and ready for testing.

An alpha version can be referred to simply as an alpha on all references. Do not refer to a version of a game as alpha unless the game's developer or publisher has done the same.

**Example:** The *Halo 2* alpha assured office skeptics that Bungie would once again come through with a first-rate game. The alpha code did show some signs of graphical slowdown, which is to be expected at this stage of development.

**Wrong:** alpha build, alpha game.

**Also see:** beta.

**alternate fire** In games that designate a key or button on the keyboard or controller as a primary fire trigger, a second button or key may be designated as the alternate fire key or button. Alternate fire triggers a secondary function of a weapon or item, such as launching a grenade instead of shooting bullets.

**Alt. fire** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** Instead of buckshot, the alternate fire mode causes the shotgun to spit out a grenade. Press X to activate alt. fire.

**analog** An internal representation system in a computer that uses a set of continuous values as opposed to discrete on/off values.

The distinction between analog and digital is not always useful in non-technical contexts. A digital system with enough values can mimic a meaningful range of analog values. For example, a high-resolution digital photograph or audio file may appear to have the same quality as an analog (film) photograph

or recording.

In some cases, hardware manufacturers may use the term analog to indicate that a device features a wider range of control than usually expected from digital devices.

**Also see:** analog stick, digital.

**analog stick** Any joystick that translates user input as an analog value rather than a digital value. Analog sticks allow for slight gradations in input force and direction, while digital joysticks can only register preset directions as on or off.

**Analog joystick** acceptable on all references. Do not use analog stick to refer to the controller as a whole. Note that not all joysticks are analog.

**Example:** The Nintendo 64 was the first system to have an analog stick on its controller. Players can tilt the analog stick forward slightly to make Mario tiptoe past the piranha plants.

**Also see:** analog, controller, joystick.

**anti-aliasing** Technical. Programming or hardware techniques used to make computer graphics appear cleaner and smoother at the edges of objects. Anti-aliasing is used to reduce **aliasing**, the jagged edges on the outlines of in-game objects.

**Example:** The PlayStation 3's improved anti-aliasing capabilities translate into an impressive level of visual detail.

**Wrong:** anti aliasing, antialiasing.

**Also see:** jaggies.

**AO** See ratings.

**arcade, arcade cabinet, arcade game, arcade system** See system.

**arcade-like** Jargon. A game that emphasizes quick action and reflexive response over deep strategy.

**Wrong:** arcade like, arcadey, arcady, arcade-y.

**Also see:** Genres (appendix), mode.

**arcade mode** See **mode**.

**arcade system** See **system**.

**arcadey** See **arcade-like**.

**artificial intelligence** A set of computer algorithms designed to make computer-controlled characters exhibit the behaviors of human-controlled characters.

Can be used on its own as a noun, or as an adjective to describe an algorithm or routine in technical contexts. **AI** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** Players will appreciate the game's advanced artificial intelligence once they see opposing enemies duck behind barrels to avoid gunfire. The developers said the AI took more than a year to program.

**Also see:** **bot**.

**artist** A general term for a developer involved in creating the graphical elements of a game. Artists are subdivided into animators, art directors, modelers, texture artists, and other similar categories. Use **developer** to generally describe individuals and teams involved in the creation of a game.

**Example:** The team of artists behind *Psychonauts* helped give the game its signature, twisted visual aesthetic.

**Wrong:** American McGee is the main artist behind *American McGee's Alice*.

**Also see:** **designer, developer**.

**asset** Jargon. Art, sound, and other files used in the creation of a videogame.

**Example:** During our interview, the development team said, "The game's art assets really set it apart from previous projects."

**Atari 2600/VCS** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**attribute** See **ability**.

**avatar** The character a player controls in a game, or the personification of the player in a game's world.

Although any player-controlled character in a game may be referred to as an avatar, the term is usually reserved for characters whose attributes can be customized by the player rather than characters designed by the game's developer.

**Example:** Players in the virtual world of *Second Life* have created avatars that range from personal reproductions of themselves to imaginative fantasy creatures.

**Wrong:** At this point the player should only have three avatars left in the game.

**Also see:** **character, player, player character**.

# B

**background** The graphical backdrop for a game environment.

**Also see:** environment, level, world.

**backward compatible** When a game system can run games or use accessories created for an older system, the new system is considered to be backward compatible with the old system. Note that backward compatibility can apply to a system's software, accessories, or both.

A system may be considered backward compatible even if some older software will not run on the newer system. For example, even though some Xbox titles will not work on the Xbox 360, the 360 is still generally backward compatible with Xbox software.

**Current prominent instances of backward compatibility**

Template: Company: System 1 (System 2) – *System 1 is backward compatible with System 2.*

**Microsoft:** Xbox 360 (Xbox)

**Note:** The Xbox 360 does not accept non-USB Xbox accessories.

**Nintendo:** Nintendo DS (Game Boy Advance), Game Boy Advance (Game Boy Color, Game Boy), Game Boy Color (Game Boy), Wii (GameCube).

**Note:** The Nintendo DS cannot play Game Boy and Game Boy Color software.

**Note:** The Wii can play certain downloadable NES, Super NES, Nintendo 64, Genesis and Turbo-Grafx 16 games

through emulation. This is not considered backward compatibility because the Wii can't play those games on their original media. See **Virtual Console**.

**Sony:** PlayStation 2 (PlayStation); PlayStation 3 (PlayStation, PlayStation 2)

**Note:** The PlayStation 3 does not accept non-USB PlayStation or PlayStation 2 accessories.

**Example:** Sony ensured the success of the PlayStation 2 by making it backward compatible with the original PlayStation. The PlayStation 3 followed this trend, but some users complained that their old controllers would not work with the new system.

**Wrong:** backwards compatible, backward-compatible.

**Also see:** emulator, Virtual Console.

**baddie** See **enemy**.

**beat-'em-up** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**beta** A pre-release, nearly feature-complete version of a videogame that's more advanced, from a development standpoint, than an alpha version.

In many cases, a developer releases **beta code** through a **beta test** to identify bugs before a game's final release. Beta tests can be **public** (open to everyone) or **private** (open to a select group of invited testers). Anyone taking part in a public or private beta test is a **beta tester**.

A **beta version** can be referred to sim-

ply as a beta on all references. Do not refer to a version of a game as beta unless the game's developer or publisher has done the same.

**Example:** Three lucky reviewers were given a chance to play the *Halo 2* beta two months before the game's scheduled release.

**Wrong:** beta build, beta game.

**Also see:** alpha, bug, gold master.

**BFG** Jargon. Short for **big f\*\*\*ing gun**. Originally used in *Doom*, now generally used to describe any large, powerful personal weapon in a game.

**BIOS** Technical. Short for Basic Input/Output system. BIOS acceptable on all references.

**Also see:** firmware.

**-bit** Technical. The basic unit of measurement of information and communication in digital computers.

Often used to classify generations of gaming systems by the throughput of their processors. Most commonly: *8-bit* (Nintendo Entertainment System), *16-bit* (Super NES, Genesis). Use numerals rather than writing out the number in this case.

Note that having more bits does not necessarily mean a system has better performance or games.

**Example:** The Super NES is a 16-bit system.

**Also see:** memory.

**bitmap** Technical. An image file structure that assigns a specific color value to each pixel in a grid. Often used for sprite-based graphics.

**Wrong:** bit map, bit-map.

**Also see:** pixel, sprite, vector.

**Blu-ray disc** The high-capacity disc format used by Sony's PlayStation 3. Also used to refer to the discs themselves.

Blu-ray acceptable after first reference. Note that not all PlayStation 3

games are on Blu-ray discs.

**Example:** The PlayStation 3 supports games and movies written on high-capacity Blu-ray discs. The Blu-ray format can hold five times more data than normal DVDs.

**Wrong:** blu-ray, blu-Ray, Blu-Ray, blu-ray disc, Blu-Ray Disc, blue-ray, bluray.

**Also see:** HD DVD.

**bonus** Jargon. A reward that boosts a character's abilities or the player's score in some tangible way.

**Also see:** 1-up, power-up, unlockable.

**bootup** Technical. The initial startup sequence on a computer.

**Boot** acceptable on all references.

Resetting a computer is sometimes called **rebooting**. Although a game system is a computer, avoid use of boot as synonym for starting up or restarting a game console. *If the game freezes, simply restart the system*; as opposed to: *If the game freezes, reboot the system*.

**Also see:** reset.

**boss** A notable enemy, usually one possessing much greater power than other foes in the game. A boss is typically found at the end of a game level.

Capitalize specific boss names.

A major enemy that comes before the end of a level is sometimes referred to as a **mini-boss**. The last boss in a game is the **final boss**.

**Example:** *Metroid's* Mother Brain remains one the most unforgettable final bosses in gaming history.

**Wrong:** boss character, end boss, miniboss, sub-boss.

**Also see:** enemy, level.

**bot** Jargon. Short for **robot** – an ally or enemy controlled by the game's artificial intelligence. Bots are most commonly used as virtual training opponents in first-person shooters.

Bot acceptable on all references.

**Example:** It's easy for players to improve their aim in *Unreal Tournament*

by practicing in arenas filled with well-armed bots.

**Wrong:** droids, scripts.

**Also see:** artificial intelligence, non-player character.

**brawler** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**bug** A programming flaw that causes a piece of software to function incorrectly.

Bugs, or **glitches**, are supposed to be identified and fixed during beta testing, but some bugs inevitably wind up in most commercially-released games.

**Example:** *Jaws: Unleashed* was nearly impossible to play because of a series of frustrating bugs that caused the game to crash in the middle of frantic boss fights.

**Wrong:** problem, error, issue, syntax error.

**build** Jargon. A functional pre-release or released version of a game. Builds are used to test gameplay and gameplay components during development. At later stages of development, a developer may share builds to demonstrate the game. The **final build** of a game is often referred to as the **gold master**.

**Example:** Last year's Tokyo Game Show allowed us to get hands-on time with builds of games that won't be released for at least another 12 months.

**Also see:** alpha, beta, gold master.

**Bullet Time** Jargon. A special effect that lets the player move at normal speed while other characters and objects (e.g. bullets) appear to move in slow motion. Popularized by the *Matrix* movies, the term is a trademark owned by Warner Bros. Entertainment. As such, use a generic term such as "slow motion" instead whenever possible.

**Wrong:** bullet-time, bullet time.

**button** A digital or analog input device on a controller or mouse that is pressed down to register input.

Selectable input on a screen is also called a button. *Use your mouse to click on the start button.*

Do not use to refer to directional pads or keys on a keyboard.

Buttons are usually referred to by a single letter or number clearly labeled on the controller. These buttons may be referred to by their name without additional punctuation. The modifier "button" is optional after the button name. *Press R2 to fire your weapon. Press the X button to jump.*

**Special cases:** The following systems have controllers whose buttons are not single letters or numbers.

**Atari 2600:** The single button is referred to as "the button."

**Turbo-Grafx 16:** I and II, not 1 and 2.

**PlayStation line:** X, triangle, square, circle (or O). The shoulder buttons are L1, L2, R1 and R2. Pressing the analog sticks inward is a form of input commonly referred to as L3 and R3 – this usage is considered jargon.

**PlayStation 3:** PS button.

**Xbox:** black, white.

**Xbox 360:** Rear buttons are LB and RB. Rear triggers are LT and RT. Central button with light up X is the guide button.

**Wii:** +, -, home button.

**Mouse:** left button, right button, scroll wheel. Optionally left mouse button and right mouse button. See **click**.

**Example:** To make Mario jump, press A. Pressing the B button while Mario is in the air makes him do a jump kick.

**Wrong:** Press button X to fire your weapon.

**Also see:** click, d-pad.

**button combo** See **combo**.

**button masher** Jargon. A player that hits buttons seemingly at random, without regard for strategy or skill, or a game that rewards **button-mashing**.

# C

**camera** The player's point of view into the game world.

Cinematic camera vocabulary such as angle, zoom and tilt may be used to refer to the in-game camera. Cameras can either be **fixed** in place (**a fixed camera**), controlled by the player, controlled by the game, or employ any combination of the above in a single game.

For first-person games, use **point of view** rather than camera: *Halo uses a first-person point of view to make you feel like part of the game.*

Technical usage: The camera can also refer to the specific software system used to generate images on the screen.

**Example:** Critics complained about the static camera angles in the *Resident Evil* series until Capcom addressed the issue in the now-classic *Resident Evil 4*.

**Also see:** point of view.

**campaign** A linked series of missions connected by a single objective or narrative plotline.

Many games link individual missions together with a larger story in a **campaign mode**. Do not refer to a mode as campaign mode unless the game explicitly calls it such.

**Example:** Although the combat in *Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends* remains enjoyable, the core fun of this game comes from completing the twisting and turning plotline presented by its engaging campaign mode.

**Also see:** mission, mode.

**camper** See **leetspeak**.

**cart** See **cartridge**.

**cartridge** A game stored on hardware contained inside a plastic casing.

Do not confuse with cassettes and floppy disks which house magnetic tape. Unlike cassettes and disks, videogame cartridges generally have no moving parts.

The abbreviated **cart** is considered jargon.

**Example:** The Xbox 360 version of *Quake 4* had load times that were long enough to make most critics nostalgic for the days of quick-loading cartridges.

**Wrong:** ROM cartridge.

**Also see:** cartridge-based.

**cartridge-based** Adjective used to describe videogame systems that use cartridges. Only use cartridge-based when referring to systems (not to games).

The Fairchild Channel F was the first **cartridge-based system**. The Nintendo 64 was the last major non-portable cartridge-based system.

**Example:** The release of the Sony PlayStation was the beginning of the end for cartridge-based systems.

**Wrong:** cartridge based, cart-based.

**Also see:** cartridge.

**casual game** An easy-to-learn game targeted at and/or played by people without extensive videogame experience. The idea of casual games emerged as a marketing concept used to describe titles targeted at people who do not typically play popular console or PC games.

There is no hard criteria regarding what makes a game casual or not, but in general, casual games tend to be simple action, puzzle, card or strategy games played on a PC or mobile device and are often downloadable for free or for a small fee.

A **casual gamer** is someone who plays these games and/or someone who plays games only occasionally.

**Example:** Casual games such as *Bejeweled* and *Diner Dash* are so easy to understand that even non-gamers can instantly see their appeal.

**CD** See **CD-ROM**.

**CD-i** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**CD-ROM** Abbreviation for Compact Disc-Read Only Memory, a format used for encoding computer programs and videogames onto CD.

CD-ROM acceptable on all references. **CD** acceptable if context makes the specific format clear.

**Example:** Many early PlayStation 2 games were available on CD-ROM instead of the now-standard DVD format. The PlayStation plays games stored on CDs. The PlayStation can play music CDs as well as CD-ROM software.

**Also see:** DVD-ROM, GD-ROM.

**cel shading** Jargon. An in-game art style noted for heavy outlines and bright solid colors wherein featured objects and characters resemble those found in cartoons. Games with this graphic style are **cel-shaded**.

**Example:** *Jet Grind Radio* for the Dreamcast was among the first videogames to use cel shading.

**Wrong:** cel-shading, celshading, cel shaded.

**Cell processor** Technical. A multi-core, parallel processor used in certain Sony products, including the PlayStation 3.

**character** Any computer- or player-controlled entity in a game (excluding inanimate objects). Characters can typically be divided into player-characters, non-player characters (NPCs) and enemies.

In general, use the specific proper name of an in-game character rather than simply referring to him/her as “my character.”

**Example:** Tommy Vercetti remains one of the game industry’s most engaging playable characters.

**Also see:** avatar, enemy, non-player character, player, player character.

**character class** In role-playing games, a descriptive categorization for the specific grouping of skills and abilities available to certain characters. Typical character classes include fighters, wizards, and thieves.

**Also see:** character generation.

**character generation** In games that allow the player to customize their avatar, the series of steps that are taken to fashion a character. Role-playing games pioneered the concept of character generation, but in recent years other genres – including sports games – have incorporated character generation options.

**Also see:** character class, create-a-player.

**character model** See **model**.

**cheat** Any activity in a game that gives the player an advantage outside of the standard gameplay experience.

**Also see:** code.

**cheat code** See **code**.

**cinematic** See **cut scene**.

**circle strafe** See **strafe**.

**click** Verb or noun used to describe depressing a mouse button.

Do not use to describe pushing a button on a controller or a keyboard. A click can be a **left-click** (push of the left button) or a **right-click** (push of the right button). Left-click should only be used when it is necessary to differentiate from a right-click. A **double-click** is the press of a mouse button twice in rapid succession.

**Example:** In *Unreal Tournament*, left-clicking fires your main weapon, and right-clicking fires your secondary weapon.

**Wrong:** Click the A button to jump.

**clipping** Technical. Clipping occurs when in-game objects that should be hidden (**or clipped**) protrude through other visible objects. Some games include a “no clipping” setting which allows players to see through walls and other clipped objects.

**Example:** Even a polished game like *Fight Night Round 3* has its fair share of clipping errors. Notice how the fighter’s foot will sometimes disappear into the canvas when he gets knocked down.

**cocktail cabinet** See **system**.

**code** A specific sequence of button presses, letters or numbers in coded form that can be entered in order to alter the standard gameplay experience.

Codes that give a player an advantage outside of the standard gameplay experience are **cheat codes**. However, not all codes are cheat codes. For example, the **BIGHEAD** code in *NBA Jam* gives the players large heads, but does not affect their abilities, thus it is not considered a cheat code.

Technical meaning: The written com-

puter instructions programmers use to create a computer program or videogame. Use **program code** if necessary to explicitly differentiate between the two meanings.

**Example:** A famous code for *Mike Tyson’s Punch-Out!!* lets players skip over all the challengers and take on Tyson himself.

**Also see:** **button, cheat, Easter egg, trainer, unlockable.**

**coin-op** See **system**.

**ColecoVision** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**collectible card game** Jargon. A game that involves constructed decks of collectible cards, or a videogame that emulates such a game.

CCG acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** *Magic: The Gathering* remains the most popular collectible card game on the market.

**combo** Jargon. A specific sequential combination of button presses and/or moves.

Combo acceptable on all references. Do not expand to button combo.

**Example:** A jumping fierce punch followed by a low sweep is one of Ryu’s strongest combo starters in *Street Fighter II*.

**compact disc** See **CD-ROM**.

**compilation** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**computer game** See **system**.

**console, console system**  
See **system**.

**continue** Noun: An item used by a player to resume a game after the “game over” condition is reached. Verb: To resume a paused or ended game.

**Example:** You’re only provided three continues before it’s game over. If you



choose not to continue, be sure to save before turning off the system.

**Also see:** *game over, life.*

**control pad** See **d-pad**.

**control scheme** See **controls**.

**controller** Any external device used to control a videogame.

In general, the keyboard/mouse on a computer and the controls on arcade, portable and mobile games are not referred to as controllers. See **controls**.

A **standard controller** is any controller that is packaged with a system. Standard controllers can simply be referred to as the system's controller on all references. *The Nintendo 64 controller was the first console controller to feature an analog stick.* A **peripheral controller** is any controller not included with the system. Refer to the official marketing name for peripheral controllers whenever possible, otherwise use a simple description: *the dance pad; the drum controller.*

A controller with no analog joysticks or buttons is a **digital controller**. All other controllers are **analog controllers**.

Do not use joystick or pad as general terms for the entire controller.

**Example:** The Wavebird was the first wireless controller released by Nintendo for the GameCube.

**Wrong:** Controller, joypad, joystick.

**Also see:** *analog, analog stick, button, d-pad, dance pad, digital, joystick.*

**controls** The overall system of input that allows players to manipulate a videogame world, including any physical input devices.

Some games allow a player to edit commands with **customizable controls**. In these games, the **default controls** are the ones set for initial use by the developer.

Used interchangeably with **control scheme**.

**Example:** The default controls for *Metal Slug Anthology* for the Wii are adequate, but none of the game's multitude of

control schemes ever feels quite right.

**conversion** See **port**.

**cooperative** Adjective for a game, mode or quest that allows or requires two or more players to work together towards the same goal.

**Co-op** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** Cooperative play is integral to *The Adventures of Cookie and Cream*. It's so integral, in fact, that the game is really only worthwhile in co-op mode.

**Wrong:** coop, co-operative.

**Also see:** **Genres (appendix).**

**copy protection** A software- or hardware-based method of preventing a game from being illegally copied, or **pirated**. Variations may include, but are not limited to: codewheels, dongles, keydisks, serial numbers, CD checks, dummy files, bad data sectors, file references and documentation/manual (a.k.a. "doc") checks.

Unless going into strict technical detail, it's usually unnecessary to define the specific form of copy protection used.

**Example:** To start the game, you must first bypass the copy protection.

**Wrong:** anti-piracy measure, disc check, serial.

**Also see:** **pirate, software piracy.**

**cosplay** Jargon. Short for costume play – the practice of dressing as a character from a videogame or other pop culture property. Originated in Japan.

Cosplay acceptable on all references. People taking part in cosplay are **cosplayers**.

**Example:** The convention was full of cosplayers of all shapes and sizes.

**courier** A software pirate whose sole task it is to illegally distribute software between bulletin boards, newsgroups, FTP sites and other electronic archives.

**Example:** Couriers served as a ready means of transferring the latest pirated games between BBS systems in the late

'80s and early '90s.

**Wrong:** distributor, spreader.

**Also see:** pirate, software piracy, warez.

**CPU** Technical. Acronym for central processing unit, the main processor on a computer or game system.

CPU acceptable on all references. Do not use as shorthand to represent a computer-controlled opponent unless quoting an explicit game reference (i.e. *Lumines*' Vs. CPU mode). Do not use to represent the system as a whole.

**Example:** The Wii's CPU isn't much more powerful than the GameCube's CPU.

**Wrong:** Playing against the CPU in *Rockstar Games presents Table Tennis* isn't as easy as it looks.

**Also see:** system.

**crack** Jargon. A software program that sits in memory or permanently patches a game so as to unlawfully allow the user to remove or bypass its copy protection. A person who creates a crack is a **cracker**.

Do not confuse with a **hack**, which alters the way a game is played.

**Example:** After running the crack, it's possible to play *Half-Life 2* from your hard drive without owning the original CD-ROM.

**Wrong:** bypass, patch, TSR, workaround.

**Also see:** hack, patch, pirate, software piracy, warez.

**create-a-player** A mode found in many games allowing the creation of customized avatars or other characters.

**Also see:** avatar, character generation, mode.

**cross-platform** See **system**.

**cursor** Any freely movable pointer in a game.

In text-based games, the cursor indicates the position where the next typed letter will appear. For first person shoot-

ers, **reticle** is preferred.

**Example:** In *The Battle for Middle-Earth II: The Rise of the Witch King*, the cursor is used to select units.

**Wrong:** arrow, crosshair, pointer.

**Also see:** reticle.

**cut scene** A brief, non-interactive interlude in a game. Usually used between levels to advance a game's plot.

**Example:** The original *Half-Life* proved to gamers and developers everywhere that, with a little ingenuity, a videogame's story could indeed be told without relying on the use of cut scenes.

**Wrong:** cutscene, cut-scene, cinematic, movie, FMV, in-game cinema.

# D

**d-pad** Jargon. A cross-shaped digital pad used for directional input on a controller. Popularized by the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) controller.

Short for **directional pad** or **digital pad**; d-pad acceptable on all references. Do not capitalize the “d” unless at the beginning of a sentence.

Don’t use any punctuation when referring to specific directions on the d-pad. *The quicker you tap left on the d-pad, the faster your character will go.*

**Example:** The Nintendo GameCube controller has a very small d-pad.

**Wrong:** cross, control pad, digital pad, D-pad, D-PAD, pad.

**dance pad** A controller placed on the floor and controlled by the player’s feet. Popularized by *Dance Dance Revolution*.

**Wrong:** dance mat, dancepad, dance-pad.

**damage** An in-game measure of hurt or loss that brings on death, debilitation or destruction incrementally. The notion of damage may be applied to individual character attributes (such as health), equipment (e.g. swords, guns, or armor), environmental objects (i.e. trees and buildings) or vehicles.

**Example:** The sniper rifle in *Halo* causes massive amounts of damage to enemies, and is therefore one of the most popular weapons in the game.

**Wrong:** wound, wounding.  
**Also see:** health, life.

**DDR-RAM** See **RAM**.

**dead** See **death**.

**death** Death has two specific contexts in videogames. In the case of a narrative game, in which the player character has a life in the story, death is quite literal. When the character dies, the story is over, at least until you reload or restart. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* is an example of this.

In the second context, a death is the end of one of the multiple lives a player is given as a measure of the opportunities to complete a task in a game. See **life**.

In most cases, these contexts are blended together to create statements such as, “Pac-Man can only die one more time,” or “You can die as many times as you want in *Jak and Daxter* without any penalty.”

Because of these ambiguities, use the term death or died to refer to specific story moments. But when referencing gameplay, use more specific terms such as “lost a life.”

In first-person shooters, the score is often referred to as number of **kills**.

**Example:** Aeris’ death in *Final Fantasy VII* remains one of the most memorable moments in any videogame story. Less memorable is Mario losing a

life by falling into a lava pit in *Super Mario Bros*.

**Wrong:** The player attempted a particularly difficult jump with Mario and ended up dying.

**Also see:** life.

**debug** The phase of game development where bugs (program glitches) are found and fixed.

Can also refer to **debug mode**, an oft-hidden gameplay mode that gives the player complete control of the game's environment and variables. A **debug unit** is a version of a game console that developers and journalists use to play unfinished versions of videogames.

**Example:** Whether Rockstar simply missed the controversial Hot Coffee mini-game during the debugging process or intentionally left it in the final game is unclear to this day.

**Wrong:** de-bug.

**Also see:** alpha, beta, bug.

**demo** A sample version of a game, usually used for marketing purposes. Also referred to as a **demo version**.

Jargon usage: Short for demonstrated. *Sierra demoed their latest game for us yesterday.*

**Also see:** shareware.

**designer** A person who designs a game, steering its overall direction and bringing to bear a specific artistic vision.

Modern games often involve a team of designers; the head of such a team is the **lead designer** or **producer**. Designers need not be programmers on a game. Do not use designer to generally refer to all people involved in the making of a game.

**Example:** As the lead designer on *Psychonauts*, industry veteran Tim Schafer worked on the game at every level of development.

**Also see:** artist, developer, producer.

**destroyed** See death.

**developer** A person, creative team or company that creates videogames.

Note that the same company may be the publisher and the developer of a game. In general, be as specific as possible when referring to a game's developer. If a game is developed by a specific studio of a larger company, use the studio name. *Okami was developed by Capcom's Clover Studios subsidiary.*

Any single member of a development team, such as an artist, modeler, programmer or sound engineer, can also be generally referred to as a developer. *Will Wright is one of the most well known developers in the business.*

**Example:** The annual Game Developers Conference is a regular gathering of game developers held each spring.

**Also see:** first-party, second-party, publisher, third-party.

**died** See death.

**difficulty** The level of challenge involved in playing a videogame.

Most games offer a range of selectable **difficulty levels**. Capitalize the names of selectable difficulty levels in all cases.

Games which adjust the difficulty in response to the player's actions have **dynamic difficulty**.

**Examples:** Playing through *God of War* on God difficulty requires godlike reflexes.

**Also see:** mode.

**digital** Technical. Any computer system which uses discrete on/off values to represent input or output. Digital systems are different from analog systems, which use a continuous range of values to represent input or output.

**Also see:** analog, analog stick, controller, d-pad.

**digital distribution** The purchase and/or delivery of a game or other piece of content via a computer network.

Refer to digital distribution services by

their official names, i.e. Xbox Live, Steam, Wii Shop Channel, PlayStation Store.

**Also see:** microtransaction.

### Digital Games Research

**Association** The primary member organization of international academic and professional game researchers. DiGRA acceptable after first reference.

**DiGRA** See **Digital Games Research Association**.

**dimensions** A game with **two-dimensional** gameplay is one in which movement is limited to two different axes (left-right and up-down, for instance). A **three-dimensional** game allows movement along three axes.

Graphically, a two-dimensional game typically uses sprites to represent characters, objects and backgrounds, while three-dimensional games generally use polygons.

Note that games with two-dimensional gameplay may have three-dimensional graphics, and vice versa. For instance, *New Super Mario Bros.* is a two-dimensional game with polygon-based three-dimensional graphics, while *Super Mario RPG* uses two-dimensional sprites to allow for three-dimensional gameplay.

**2D** and **3D** acceptable after first reference. Do not use 2D or 3D at the start of a sentence.

**Example:** The Super Nintendo version of *Star Fox*, which was the first game to use the Super FX chip, represented many gamers' first experience with three-dimensional graphics in a game.

**Wrong:** 2.5D, 2-d, 2-D, 2-dimensional, 3-d, 3-D, 3-dimensional, three-D, two-D.

**Also see:** Genres (appendix), sprite.

**DirectX** Technical. A set of Microsoft-developed programming tools used heavily in the creation and execution of PC game software. Often referred to with the relevant version number. *DirectX 10 is required to run the game.*

Do not abbreviate.

**disc** Acceptable on all references to optical discs such as CDs and DVDs.

**Also see:** CD, DVD, optical media.

**disk** Acceptable on all references to magnetic floppy disks used in computers. Do not use to refer to optical discs.

**Wrong:** diskette.

**Also see:** hard drive.

**distributor** A company or individual that distributes games to retail stores. Some publishers act as their own distributors; others use separate, dedicated distributors.

**Example:** When a publisher says that they've had problems with their distributor, this usually means that a game will reach stores a few days late.

**double jump** A second jump performed in mid-air.

**Example:** The double jump feature helped set *Super Ghouls and Ghosts* apart from other platform games of the day.

**Wrong:** double-jump, doublejump.

**Also see:** genres.

**Dreamcast** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**DS, DS Lite** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**DVD-ROM** Abbreviation for Digital Versatile Disc-Read Only Memory, a format used for encoding computer programs onto a DVD.

DVD-ROM acceptable on all references. DVD acceptable if context makes the format clear.

**Example:** The PlayStation 2 is capable of playing games on DVD-ROMs, as well as DVD movies. Many early PlayStation 2 games were available on CDs instead of DVDs.

**Also see:** CD-ROM.

**dynamic difficulty** See **difficulty**.

# E

**E** See **ratings**.

**Easter egg** A hidden message, object or feature found in a game that is generally unnecessary, unrelated and otherwise outside of the course of normal gameplay. Common examples of Easter eggs include messages from game programmers to fans and relatives, pictures of development teams and inside jokes. Coined by Atari's Steve Wright.

**Example:** Warren Robinette's hidden initials in *Adventure* for the Atari 2600 constituted the first instance of an Easter egg in a videogame.

**Wrong:** easter egg, Easter Egg.

**Also see:** **code, unlockable.**

**EB Games** See **GameStop**.

**EC** See **ratings**.

**editor** A piece of software that allows developers or players to more easily create their own personalized game content. Typically, an editor provides tools that allow for the creation of new game levels, although the term also can apply to software used to modify other game elements such as gameplay variable values and game art assets.

**Example:** The *Half-Life 2* editor provides powerful, yet easy-to-use tools for

fans to create their own game scenarios.

**Also see:** **mod.**

**educational games** Games that explicitly focus on educational topics or methods, such as *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?* and *Mario Teaches Typing*. Educational games are not a genre in and of themselves, and games of practically any genre can have educational content.

**Wrong:** edutainment.

**Also see:** **Genres (appendix).**

**Electronics Boutique** See **GameStop**.

**electronic game** See **videogame**.

**elite** See **leetspeak**.

**emulation** See **emulator**.

**emulator** A piece of software that allows code written for one computer or system to run on another. An emulator is described based on both the hardware it emulates and the hardware it runs on. *While there are many NES emulators for Windows, finding a good Mac-based NES emulator is tough.*

This process is called **emulation**. The native code run by the emulator is sometimes referred to as a **ROM**; this usage is considered jargon.

Emulators are probably best known for facilitating piracy, but there are also

valid and legal uses for emulators. Many classic game compilations use emulation to run original code on more recent systems without any noticeable changes in the gameplay experience.

**Example:** While computer owners can easily download and play classic NES games on an emulator, Nintendo is now offering a legal alternative to this method of reliving your past via its Virtual Console.

**Wrong:** emulator.

**Also see:** backward compatible, ROM, Virtual Console.

**end boss** See **boss**.

**end-user** See **user**.

**enemy** Any in-game character that presents a threat to the player character.

Capitalize specific enemy names. For one-on-one or player-vs.-player games, **opponent** is preferred.

**Example:** Mario fights Goombas, Koopa Troopas and many other enemies in *Super Mario Bros*.

**Wrong:** baddie, foe.

**Also see:** boss, opponent.

**engine** Jargon. The program code that provides the core of a game's processing system. Engines can also run significant sub-systems in a game's code, such as the **graphics engine** and the **physics engine**.

Different games can sometimes use the same engine. Capitalize the name of commercial game engines used in multiplatform games.

**Example:** The *Unreal* engine has become the standard graphics engine for many game developers.

**Entertainment Software Association** Industry trade group representing the largest videogame makers in North America.

Never capitalize the article "the" when referencing the ESA except when it appears at the beginning of a

sentence. **ESA** acceptable after first reference.

Prior to July 2003, the organization was known as the **Interactive Digital Software Association**; use this name only in historical contexts.

**Example:** The Entertainment Software Association lobbies the government on issues of interest to the videogame industry. Piracy is a hot-button issue for the ESA.

**Entertainment Software Rating Board** Industry ratings group established by the Entertainment Software Association in 1994. Games are submitted by publishers and rated by an anonymous, independent panel of trained reviewers that judge a game based on its content. See **ratings** for a description of ESRB ratings and content descriptors.

While the ESRB rates most games released commercially in North America, it does not rate all games. ESRB game ratings do not carry the force of law.

ESRB ratings are only for games released in North America. Other regions have their own rating bodies, including: Japan's Computer Entertainment Rating Organization (CERO), Australia's Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), and Europe's Pan-European Game Information (PEGI). Abbreviations acceptable after first reference.

**ESRB** acceptable after first reference.

**Wrong:** Entertainment Software Ratings Board (do not pluralize "ratings").

**Also see:** ratings.

**environment** The setting where a game takes place. Used interchangeably with **playfield**.

**Also see:** background, level, world.

**equipment** Any item that permanently or semi-permanently gives a player new powers, abilities or statistical enhancements.

A specific instance of equipment is

called a **piece of equipment**.

**Example:** Glornax equipped himself with a fire-resistant piece of armor to prepare for the raid.

**Also see:** avatar, item, power-up.

**ESA** See **Entertainment Software Association**.

**ESRB** See **Entertainment Software Rating Board**.

**executive producer** See **producer**.

**expansion pack** A piece of software that adds content such as new levels or characters to a previously-released game.

Expansion packs require a copy of the original game to run, as opposed to sequels, which do not require this. Italicize the name of an expansion pack as you would a game name.

**Expansion** acceptable after first reference.

The 4MB RAM expansion should be called the **Expansion Pak** on all references

**Example:** *House Party*, a popular expansion pack for *The Sims*, adds many new characters and objects to the game.

**Wrong:** add-on, add on, expander, expansion, pack, pak.

**Also see:** patch.

**experience level** See **level**.

**experience points** See **points**.

**extra life** See **1-up, life**.

**extreme sports** See **Genres (appendix)**.



# F

**fanboy/fangirl** Jargon. An especially obsessive fan.

**Wrong:** fan boy, fan girl, fan-boy, fan-girl.

**fansite** Jargon. A fan-run website devoted to a particular company, individual, game, series or genre.

**Wrong:** fan site, fan-site.

**fighting** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**final boss** See **boss**.

**final build** See **build**.

**firmware** Software that is stored on a hardware device rather than via external storage or hard disk. Usually used to hold critical system and startup files.

Some systems, such as the PlayStation Portable, have upgradeable firmware and require specific firmware versions needed to run certain games. Refer to these versions by their version number. *The LocoRoco demo requires firmware version 2.7 or higher to play.*

**Example:** The latest version of the PlayStation Portable firmware makes the system more difficult to hack.

**Wrong:** Firmware.

**Also see:** hardware, software.

**first-party** When a game developer is wholly owned by a videogame console

manufacturer, it is referred to as a **first-party developer**. Games developed by first-party developers are **first-party games**. Peripheral hardware developed by a console manufacturer is a **first-party peripheral**.

First-party should only be used as an adjective, and never as a noun.

*Polyphony Digital is a Sony first-party developer.* NOT: *Polyphony Digital is a Sony first party.*

Make sure it's clear which company a first-party developer is working for, either explicitly or by context. *HAL is one of Nintendo's most important first-party developers.* NOT: *HAL is one of Nintendo's most important first parties.*

**Example:** First-party developers continue to grow by attracting creative talent to stable businesses that offer a higher chance of getting a product to market. The quality of Nintendo's first-party products continues to discourage other developers from competing for a slice of a competitive market.

**Wrong:** 1st party, firstparty, first party, First-party.

**Also see:** developer, publisher, peripheral, second-party, third-party.

**first-person, first-person shooter**  
See **Genres (appendix)**.

**flight simulation** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**FMV** See **cut scene**.

**fog of war** In strategy games, fog of war refers to the obscured sections of a map where enemy movement and territory remains invisible until approached.

*Also see:* **Genres (appendix)**.

**force feedback** A feature that causes the controller to physically vibrate, rumble or otherwise react to in-game actions. Often used interchangeably with **vibration** or **rumble**, though this is not entirely accurate for some directional force feedback devices.

*Example:* The lack of a force feedback feature in the PlayStation 3 controller is seen as a major drawback, but Sony claims gamers won't miss these rumble options.

*Wrong:* Force Feedback, force-feedback, forced feedback.

**four-player** See **multiplayer**.

**FPS** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**frag** Jargon. Slang for a kill, usually used in player-vs.-player combat games. Short for fragmented. Players are **fragged** and kills can be referred to as **frags**.

*Example:* Expert players suggest that learning how to strafe is the quickest way to increase the number of frags you'll rack up in *Halo 2*.

*Also see:* **death, player-vs.-player**.

**frame rate** The number of individual image frames a game is capable of producing in a given amount of time. Usually measured in **frames per second**; fps acceptable after first reference when paired with a numerical value. See example.

Frame rate should not be confused with **refresh rate**, which measures how often a monitor or TV updates its

image. Refresh rate is measured in hertz (**Hz** acceptable on all references).

*Example:* *Dance Dance Revolution* games on the PS2 run at a silky smooth 60 frames per second. This makes them much more playable than older versions, which ran at 30 fps.

*Wrong:* framerate, FPS, 30fps, f.p.s.

**frames per second** See **frame rate**.

**franchise** A set of games, often with similar names, that share one or more key characters, settings or styles of play. Used interchangeably with **series**.

Franchises are generally named after a unifying character or the name of the first game in the franchise. Italicize the name of a franchise only if it shares the name of a game in that franchise. *Example:* The *Halo* franchise; The Mario series.

Franchises can inspire various spin-offs that are franchises in their own right; for example, the Mario franchise encompasses the *Mario Kart* and *Mario Party* franchises.

When discussing sports games, be careful to distinguish between the game franchise and the team franchises within the game.

*Example:* The evolution of the character of Solid Snake has anchored the progression of the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise.

**freeware** Software offered in its entirety by the developer or publisher for free, legal distribution.

*Example:* If you're tired of spending big dollars on videogames, try downloading freeware off the Internet.

*Wrong:* free-ware, freebie.

*Also see:* **demo, shareware**.

**FTW** See **leetspeak**.

**fun factor** Jargon. A subjective term used to rank how fun a game is compared to other games. Popularized by *GamePro* magazine. Always try to use more specific terms to describe the gameplay experience.

**Example:** The visceral thrills and adrenaline-soaked gameplay of first-person shooters have made them one of the most popular genres among gamers.

**Wrong:** The overall fun factor of first-person shooters makes them a popular game genre.

# G

**game** See **videogame**.

**Game Boy, Game Boy Advance, Game Boy Advance SP, Game Boy Micro, Game Boy Pocket, Game Boy Color** See **System Names** (appendix).

**Game Gear** See **System Names** (appendix).

**game industry** See **gaming**.

**game mechanics** See **mechanics**.

**game names** Game names should be placed in italics on all references.

Game names should be written out on first reference exactly as they appear in marketing and packaging material.

**Example:** Ubisoft's *Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie* let gamers play as Kong himself.

**Acronyms/abbreviations:** After the first reference, unwieldy game names can be referred to by an acronym. In these cases, note the acronym in a parenthetical after the first reference. Game names may also be abbreviated to shorter forms after first reference if the context makes the reference apparent. Acronyms and abbreviated names should also be italicized.

**Example:** *Grand Theft Auto III* (*GTA3*) was notable for its open-ended design. But many politicians focused on

*GTA3*'s violence and not its novel gameplay. *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* expanded on the multi-million selling original, but *Vice City* was criticized for being too similar to its predecessor.

**Sequels:** Sequel names should be rendered as they appear in packaging and marketing materials, including any franchise names, punctuation, and/or Arabic/Roman numerals. (See the **Notable Games** appendix for some examples of this rule.)

**Example:** *Super Castlevania IV* was the first game in the *Castlevania* series to appear on the Super Nintendo Entertainment System.

**Games released for multiple systems:** To distinguish between games that share the same name but not the same system, refer to that system's **version** of the game.

**Example:** The PlayStation Portable version of *The Sims* bears little resemblance to the console and PC versions.

In reviews for games that appear on multiple systems, note the version evaluated and other versions available.

**Example:** This review is based on the Xbox version of the game. Versions for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, Xbox 360 and PC are also available.

**Also see:** **franchise**.

**Game.com** See **System Names** (appendix).

**GameCube** See **System Names** (appendix).

**game over** An ending condition where the player is forced to restart or continue the game.

**Wrong:** gameover, game-over, Game Over.

**Also see:** continue.

**game system** See **system**.

**game titles** See **game names**.

**gameplay** The experience of interacting with a game.

Gameplay is a quality of the game rather than of the player. *He was caught up in the gameplay.* Not: *He spends too much time in gameplay.*

**Example:** While *Halo 2* left many gamers feeling unsatisfied, the gameplay is actually quite similar to the original.

**Wrong:** game play, game-play.

**Also see:** mechanics, play.

**gamer** Anyone who plays games.

**Example:** Gamers around the world are waiting with bated breath for details of the next *Grand Theft Auto* game.

**Wrong:** videogamer.

**Also see:** gaming, player, videogame.

**Gamerscore** See **Achievement**.

**Gamertag** Online nickname used by members of Microsoft's Xbox Live online multiplayer service.

Do not use to refer to other online nicknames. Maintain given spacing and capitalization when describing specific Gamertags.

**Also see:** Xbox Live.

**GameStop** North America's largest videogame retailer. A merger with competitor **Electronics Boutique** was proposed in April 2005 and approved in October

2005 – only refer to **Electronics Boutique** or **EB Games** in historical contexts.

**gaming** The act of playing a game. Also used as a general term for the videogame hobby.

To avoid confusion with the gambling industry, do not refer to the gaming industry, but rather the **game industry** or **videogame industry**.

**Example:** Many gamers reported an increased concentration and focus when gaming.

**Wrong:** videogaming.

**Also see:** gamer, videogame.

**gamepad** See **controller**.

**garageware** Jargon. See **independent**.

**GD-ROM** A proprietary, 1.2 GB disk format used on the Sega Dreamcast. See **CD-ROM** for usage guidelines.

**Genesis** See **System Names** (appendix).

**genre** See **Genres** (appendix).

**gg** See **leetspeak**.

**ghost mode** See **mode**.

**gibs** See **leetspeak**.

**gigabyte** See **memory**.

**gold master** Jargon. The final, finished version of a game's code sent to the factory for duplication. Games produced in gold master form are said to have **gone gold**.

**Example:** Gold masters of *Metal Gear Solid 4* were mailed out to leading media outlets for evaluation today.

**Wrong:** final CDs, finals, golds, master.

**Also see:** build.

**graphic designer** See **artist**.

**graphics card** See **video card**.

**grief** Jargon. A practice where other players intentionally try to ruin the experience of other players in a multiplayer game. Types of grief include attacking lower-level characters without obvious reward and using in-game chat channels to communicate antagonistic messages. Players who cause grief are called **griefers**.

**Example:** Continued griefer activity in *Ultima Online* discouraged many gamers from returning.

**grind** Jargon. The overly repetitive activities often required to advance in a game. Most often associated with leveling up in role-playing games.

**Example:** Players cannot expect to reach the upper levels of *Star Wars: Galaxies* without going through a significant grind.

**Also see:** **Genres (appendix), level.**

# H

**hack** Jargon. Any unauthorized modification to a game or hardware. Hacks often change the nature or abilities of the game or product in question. Can also be used as a verb for the process of creating a hack. A person who creates a hack is a **hacker**.

Do not confuse hacks with mods, which are authorized or encouraged by the game's creators, or cracks, which allow illegal copies of games to be run.

**Example:** The latest hack of the PlayStation Portable firmware allows emulators and other unauthorized programs to be run.

**Wrong:** Hack, hax, haxxor.

**Also see:** crack, mod, leetspeak.

**hack-and-slash** See **Genres** (appendix).

**handheld system** See **system**.

**hard disk** See **hard drive**.

**hard drive** Acceptable on all references to the physical drive that permanently stores data used by a computer or videogame system.

Used interchangeably with **hard disk**. See **memory** for terms used to discuss hard drive size.

**Example:** *F.E.A.R.* requires 5GB of space to be free on the hard drive for proper installation.

**Wrong:** hard disk drive, HDD.

**Also see:** ROM, RAM, memory.

**hardware** See **system**.

**hardware requirements** See **system requirements**.

**HD** See **resolution**.

**HD DVD** Acronym for high-definition digital versatile disc, a high-capacity DVD format created by Toshiba for data storage and high-definition playback of movies.

An HD DVD movie player is sold as a peripheral for the Xbox 360.

HD DVD acceptable on all references

**Example:** Movies on HD DVD have a much higher resolution than those stored on a normal DVD.

**Wrong:** HDDVD, HD-DVD, hd-dvd

**Also see:** Blu-ray disc.

**HDD** See **hard drive**.

**HDTV** Acronym for high-definition television – any television technology that provides resolution equal to or higher than 720p or better. See **resolution**.

HDTV acceptable on all references.

**Example:** HDTV support has finally arrived on the consoles. The question is: Will consumers pay the additional expense to play games in high definition?

**Also see:** resolution.

**heads-up display** A set of persistent, on-screen indicators for in-game variables such as health, money, speed, location, etc. **HUD** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** The huge odometer on the heads-up display blocks your view of the track, but overall the HUD is understated.

**Wrong:** heads up display, headsup display.

**hi-def** See **resolution**.

**hidden character** See **unlockable**.

**high-definition** See **resolution**.

**high score** The highest score achieved in a game. Be sure to note whether the score applies to the point tally stored on a specific copy of the game, an Internet-linked ranking of worldwide scores, or a record archived by *Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records* or another official ranking body. Note that many older games reset high scores when the system is turned off.

**Example:** The all-time record high score for *Pac-Man* of 3,333,360 points is held by Billy Mitchell. The high score shown on my machine usually strains to break five digits.

**Wrong:** highscore, high-score, High Score.

**Also see:** **leaderboard, score**.

**hit points** See **points**.

**home console, home system**  
See **system**.

**homebrew** Adjective used to describe software created in a non-professional capacity by amateur programmers, or the process of creating such software. Do not use homebrew as a noun; refer to **homebrew software** instead.

**Example:** Homebrew developers have created a wide variety of unauthorized

games for the PSP. In general, homebrew software doesn't have the polish of its professionally developed competition.

**Not:** home brew, home-brew.

**Also see:** **mod, freeware**.

**hotkey** A sequence of commands or button presses mapped to a single button on a keyboard or controller. Used interchangeably with **shortcut** and **macro**.

**Also see:** **button, controller**.

**HP** See **hit points**.

**HUD** See **heads-up display**.



# I

**IGDA** See International Game Developers Association.

**in-game cinema** See cut scene.

**independent** Any game or company not affiliated with a major publisher. These games often have small budgets and/or are funded solely by the developer. Independent games are not a genre in and of themselves, and independent games can encompass many genres.

Abbreviation to **indie** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** *Darwinia* is an independent game that has found success, but many other indie games struggle to find a place in the market.

**infrastructure mode** See *ad hoc*.

**instruction manual** The usually brief instructive document included within a game's box.

**Manual** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** Many of the most powerful moves in *Dead or Alive* aren't listed in the instruction manual.

**Wrong:** instruction book, instruction booklet, instruction guide.

**Also see:** strategy guide.

**Intellivision** See System Names (appendix).

**Interactive Digital Software Association** See Entertainment Software Association.

**interactive entertainment**

Alternate term for **videogames**. Avoid, except in quoted materials or references to organizations like the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association.

**Example:** Steven Spielberg said, "Interactive entertainment is the future of Hollywood."

**Wrong:** Interactive Entertainment, inter-tainment.

**Also see:** videogame.

**interface** The input/output interaction between a player and a game. Includes the in-game controls and controller hardware, but also refers to on-screen indicators and the feedback loop they create with the player.

Avoid use as a verb.

**Example:** The game's smooth, intuitive interface allows players to quickly react to the high-speed action.

**Wrong:** He interfaced with the game.

**Also see:** controls, controller.

**International Game Developers**

**Association** The primary member organization for game developers.

**IGDA** acceptable on second reference.

**Internet play** See **online**.

**inventory** See **item**.

**isometric perspective** A method for rendering a scene where the X, Y and Z axes are all held in proportion. As a result, there is no vanishing point in an isometric perspective.

Typically, isometric projections are shown from an angled, bird's eye perspective. *Disgaea* and *Final Fantasy Tactics* are two popular game franchises that use the isometric perspective.

**Wrong:** 2.5D, three-quarters view.

**Also see:** **dimensions**.

**item** An in-game element that aids the player in some way. Items can be stored in a player's **inventory**, or used immediately upon retrieval.

Capitalize the names of specific items. Refer to game documentation for official names and spellings of item names.

**Example:** Ragnar picked up the item that the slain goblin left behind.

**Also see:** **equipment, power up**.

# J-K

**jaggies** Jargon. The “stair-step” effect that appears on straight lines in computer graphics.

*Also see:* anti-aliasing.

**Jaguar** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**joypad** See **controller**.

**joystick** An input device on a controller that is tilted by the player to indicate direction. Most upright arcade cabinets, as well as the Atari 2600, use **digital joysticks**. Most modern video game systems, however, use **analog joysticks**. See **analog** and **digital** for more on the difference.

Interchangeable with **stick** in familiar contexts. Do not use joystick as a general term for the controller itself.

*Example:* To perform Guile’s flash kick, first hold down on the joystick for two seconds.

*Wrong:* Billy picked up the Nintendo joystick and played the game.

*Also see:* analog, analog stick, controller, digital.

**K-A** See **ratings**.

**kill** See **death**.

# L

**LAN** See **local area network**.

**LAN party** A gathering of gamers focused on playing networked, multiplayer games such as *Quake*, *Counter-Strike* or *Halo*.

**Example:** Despite the growth of online gaming, LAN parties remain a popular way for gamers to get together face-to-face.

**Also see:** LAN, online.

**leaderboard** An Internet-linked ranking that keeps track of high scores or other notable in-game achievements from around the world. **Internet leaderboard** is useful for clarification.

**Example:** While a score of 1 million points might seem impressive, it won't get you a very good ranking on the game's leaderboard.

**Wrong:** internet ranking, netranking.

**Also see:** high score.

**learning curve** How quickly a player can adjust to the rules of the game and become proficient. A game with a **steep learning curve** becomes difficult quickly, while one with a **shallow learning curve** eases the player into the game and its mechanics slowly. The term is highly subjective, and depends largely on the player's personal game-playing experience.

**Example:** While *Advance Wars* for

the DS is completely engrossing, the game's steep learning curve could prevent casual gamers from progressing beyond the tutorial.

**Wrong:** difficulty progression, difficulty curve.

**Also see:** difficulty.

**leetspeak** Jargon. A loose patois of English and Internet shorthand used by online game players for quick communication inside and outside of games.

Because of its heavy use of jargon and variable nature, avoid using leetspeak except in quoted material. For a general audience, parenthetical descriptions are recommended.

Some common leetspeak terms/phrases and their definitions:

**camper:** A player that camps out in an advantageous position on a game map.

**FTW:** For the win.

**gg:** Good game.

**gibs:** A general term for any in-game death. Short for giblets, i.e. what an exploded character generally looks like.

**leet/133t/1337:** Short for elite. Used as a term of admiration for an impressive in-game display.

**lol:** Laughing out loud.

**newbie/noob/n00b:** A relative newcomer to a game; often used derisively to describe an ignorant player. *You don't know where to find heal spells? What a n00b!*

**owned/pwned:** A particularly savage

defeat in a game. *You totally got pwned by that rocket launcher.*

**rofl:** Rolling on the floor laughing.

**level** The term has two separate connotations, one related to the structure of a game, the other to the statistical advancement of a player's character.

In terms of game structure, a level is an individual, self-contained area, action sequence or scenario into which a game has been subdivided for the sake of design or programming. Levels, in this sense, are usually loaded independently from one another. Certain games are separated into missions, stages or worlds rather than levels – go by the description used by the game itself whenever possible.

In terms of a player's character, a level is one of a number of discrete, consecutive and measurable achievement milestones that generally provide additional powers, resources and attribute improvements. Character levels are especially important in role-playing games, where levels also indicate player stature. Raising this level is referred to as **leveling up**.

In cases where there may be confusion between these two connotations, use **game level** and **character level**.

**Example:** By the time players reach the third level of *Devil May Cry 3*, they'll have endured more challenges than are contained in most other games in their entirety.

**Wrong:** area.

**Also see:** campaign, mission, stage, world.

**level design** The art and craft of creating game levels.

**Wrong:** stage design.

**Also see:** level.

**life** A distinct gaming attempt that starts when the player takes control of a character and ends with a death (often referred to as **losing a life**). In games with a limited number of lives, the loss of all lives results in game over or a continue.

While it may not make literal sense to describe inanimate objects (i.e. marbles, tanks), or the undead (such as zombies or ghosts) as alive, this term is generally used to describe the period between the start and end of play for any character. Still, some on-screen avatars do not lend themselves to being described in terms of *lives*. Cars in a racing game, for example, or fighters in a fighting game are usually never described in terms of losing lives.

When writing about lives remaining in a game, remember that some games include the current life in the displayed "lives remaining" count and some do not. For example, in the original *Castlevania*, play continues when "P = 0" is on screen. In contrast, in *Super Mario Bros.*, dying when "Mario x 1" is on the screen results in a game over.

**Example:** Players start *Super Mario Bros.* with three lives. When Mario gets hit by an enemy, he loses a life.

**Wrong:** play, try.

**Also see:** continue, death, game over, playthrough.

**light gun** A gun-shaped controller that uses light to sense the position of a mechanical target or on-screen target.

**Wrong:** laser gun, lightgun, light-gun, zapper.

**Also see:** controller.

**lighting** A general description of how a computer-generated light source illuminates a gameplay scene.

*Lighting* may also refer to the specific technical aspects of how a game engine draws on-screen graphics.

**Example:** The lighting in *Condemned: Criminal Origins* helps to create the proper eerie atmosphere.

**link cable** A proprietary hardware cable used to connect two systems to allow for competitive or cooperative play and/or data transfer.

The two systems are usually the same, but not always (as with the

GameCube/Game Boy Advance link cable.) Do not use interchangeably with the Ethernet or phone cables used to connect systems to a LAN or the Internet.

**Example:** Players can use Tingle to get hints in *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* by connecting a Game Boy Advance to a GameCube via a link cable.

**Wrong:** cable, connection cable, Link Cable, link-cable, system-link cable.

**Linux** See **Operating Systems (appendix)**.

**load time** The amount of time it takes to load a game from disc, ROM or a hard drive into RAM. In games, noticeable load times generally take place at startup or between distinct levels or worlds. Load time is most noticeable in games stored on optical media, though games stored on cartridge and disk can also have load times.

**Wrong:** loadtime, loading time.

**Also see:** cartridge, disk, optical media, RAM, ROM.

**local area network** Two or more systems connected directly via a cable allowing the machines to communicate with one another.

**LAN** acceptable on all references.

**Wrong:** lan, Local Area Network.

**Also see:** LAN party, WLAN.

**Lynx** See **System Names (appendix)**.

# M

**M** See **ratings**.

**machinima** A form of computer animation that uses a real-time virtual environment, such as a game development engine, to create a non-interactive movie.

Typically, machinima is distinguished from in-game animations such as cut scenes, even though the same tools are often used in both.

Pronounced “muh-sheen-eh-mah.”

**Example:** The appearance of the famous *Red vs. Blue* machinima at the film festival introduced a new era of narrative film making

**Wrong:** machinema, mashinima.

**Also see:** **cut scene**.

**Macintosh** See **Operating Systems (appendix)**.

**macro** See **hotkey**.

**magic points** See **points**.

**man** See **life**.

**manual** See **instruction manual**.

**map** An in-game view that summarizes the relative location of objects and/or characters on the playfield.

A **mini-map** is a small map shown on the game screen during active play.

**Example:** While players can access the map easily in *Grand Theft Auto III*, it is just as easy to use the mini-map to find mission objectives.

**Wrong:** minimap, mini map.

**Also see:** **playfield**.

**massively-multiplayer online**

See **Genres (appendix)**.

**Master System** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**mechanical game** A videogame or arcade game that uses moving parts in its gameplay, in part or in total. Pinball machines are a type of mechanical game.

**Example:** Mechanical games are often considered the precursor to today’s videogames.

**Wrong:** mechani-game, Mechanical Games.

**Also see:** **pinball**.

**mechanics** Jargon. The specific rules for interaction between a player and a game. Often referred to as **game mechanics** or **play mechanics**; these terms can be used interchangeably.

Only use as an all-encompassing description of a game’s rules; do not

refer to a specific game element as a mechanic.

**Example:** The game mechanics in *Super Mario Bros.* focus on making pin-point-accurate jumps onto a series of ever-shrinking platforms.

**Wrong:** The jumping mechanic is the hallmark of the Mario series.

**Also see:** **gameplay.**

**megabit, megabyte** See **memory.**

**memory** Used generally to refer to RAM, a ROM or a hard disk that holds computer data. Refer to one of these specific types of memory instead of using the generic term “memory” whenever possible.

Memory is measured in **bytes**, which are made up of eight **bits**, each one represented by a one or a zero. Use the following two letter abbreviations when referring to memory size (all abbreviations acceptable on first reference).

KB – kilobyte = 1024 bytes

MB – megabyte = 1024 KB

GB – gigabyte = 1024 MB

TB – terabyte = 1024 GB

PB – petabyte = 1024 TB

Always use Arabic numerals when describing memory size rather than writing out the number. *5 MB*; NOT: *five MB*.

Never mix different memory size abbreviations. Instead, use decimals to approximate exact sizes. *1.5 MB*; NOT: *1 MB, 500 KB*.

Games for older systems are sometimes measured in **kilobits** and **megabits**, which should always be written out. *The cartridge was 4 kilobits. A 16-kilobit cartridge.*

**Example:** While a CD-ROM can hold more than 600 MB, loading all that data into 4 MB of RAM can slow down games considerably.

**Also see:** **CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, hard drive, RAM, ROM.**

**memory card** A proprietary external storage peripheral utilized by videogame

systems to store game data for later use.

Do not use to refer to hard drives or other standard storage card formats like SmartDigital, CompactFlash or Sony’s Memory Stick. Memory cards made by a console manufacturer are **first-party memory cards**; those made by other companies are **third-party memory cards**.

**Example:** The standard PlayStation 2 memory card can hold roughly 8 MB of data.

**Wrong:** Memory Card, mem. card, mem-card.

**Also see:** **hard drive.**

**men** See **life.**

**microtransaction** A small, online purchase facilitated through a specialized digital distribution system.

**Example:** Many *Oblivion* fans resented the fact that the horse armor item was only available as a microtransaction over Xbox Live.

**Wrong:** micro-transaction, Microtransaction.

**Also see:** **digital distribution.**

**mini-boss** See **boss.**

**mini-game** A small, self-contained game included as a part of a larger game, with its own distinct gameplay.

**Example:** Some critics have complained that *Bully* is really nothing more than a series of mini-games.

**Wrong:** minigame, mini game, microgame.

**mini-map** See **map.**

**minimum requirements** See **system requirements.**

**mission** A specific assignment or objective that the player is tasked with completing.

Certain games are separated into levels, stages or worlds rather than missions – go by the description used by the



game itself whenever possible.

**Example:** Activision's *GUN* features a host of optional missions that do not need to be completed in order to finish the game.

**Wrong:** area, level, stage, target, task.

**Also see:** level, world.

**MMO, MMORPG** See **Genres** (appendix).

**mobile, mobile game** See **system**.

**mod** Short for modification: A player- or professionally-developed enhancement to a game that updates or changes the game's existing content.

Mod acceptable on all references. Italicize names of mods as you would stand-alone games.

Do not confuse with hacks: Mods are generally created using tools provided by the game's developer, hacks are not.

The **mod community** for a game includes all the players and fans working to develop new content for a title.

**Example:** *Counter-Strike* was a originally just an independently developed and distributed mod for *Half-Life*. Eventually, the mod was distributed as a commercial game on its own.

**Also see:** hack.

**mod chip** Short for modification chip, an external computer chip added to a system, often through soldering, that allows a system to play foreign or illegally duplicated software. Not all mod chips provide both these functions. The addition of a mod chip most often voids the warranty for a videogame system.

Mod chip acceptable on all references.

**Also see:** crack, hack.

**mode** A distinct user-selectable play variant within a game.

Capitalize mode names on all references. Do not capitalize the word "mode" itself. Do not refer to a specific style of play as a mode unless the game explicit-

ly refers to it as such. Do not refer to a selectable difficulty level as a mode.

Common modes include:

**Arcade mode:** A simplified version of the game intended to give the player an immediately gratifying experience without requiring tutorials or significant practice.

**Ghost mode:** A mode that pits the player against a computer-simulated replay of a human player's earlier performance.

**Practice mode:** A training area that allows the player to master difficult principles in a game.

**Story mode:** A running narrative unveiled as the player completes individual levels or missions.

**Survival mode:** Pits the player against a constant onslaught of enemies or challenges with limited resources.

**Example:** Playing *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* in Turbo mode is guaranteed to challenge even the most accomplished gamer.

**Also see:** difficulty.

**model** General term for the underlying geometric, graphical and animation structure of an in-game object.

**Example:** *Dead Rising's* convincing character models make the zombies look and behave like organic creatures.

**monitor** A computer display. Do not use to refer to a television screen.

**Also see:** screen.

**motion blur** A visual effect generated by the game's graphic engine, meant to simulate the blurring of moving objects that occurs in traditional film photography.

**Example:** *Need for Speed's* dramatic use of motion blur heightens the feeling of driving 200 MPH down busy streets.

**MP** See **magic points**.

**MUD** See **multi-user dungeon**.

**multi-user dungeon** A text-based

multiplayer adventure or role-playing game. Coined in 1978 by Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle as the title for a text-based multi-user role-playing game, *MUD*.

**MUD** acceptable after first reference.

**multiplayer** Describes any game that supports more than one player, either online or by sharing a single system in one location. Games can allow **simultaneous** (all at once) or **alternating** (one at a time) multiplayer support. Clarification is generally needed only when the support is alternating.

Write out the number when referring to X-player games: **two-player**, **three-player**, **four-player**, etc. Do not refer to a game as X-player unless it specifically requires that many players. Otherwise say the game supports up to X players.

**Example:** *Super Smash Bros.* is a multiplayer game that allows up to four people to play simultaneously. The four-player fights are especially exciting.

**Wrong:** *Super Smash Bros.* is a four-player game.

**Also see:** Genres (appendix), single-player.

**multiple versions** See **Notable Games** (appendix).

# N

**N-Gage** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**Neo-Geo, Neo-Geo Pocket, Neo Geo Pocket Color** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**nerf** Jargon. To significantly alter the characteristics of a character or class of characters to make a game more balanced.

**Example:** The latest update nerfed the paladins to the point that they're barely more powerful than dwarves!

**Also see:** **update**.

**NES** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**newb** See **leetspeak**.

**next-generation** Catchall term used to refer to upcoming console hardware. Hyphenated when used as an adjective (next-gen acceptable after first reference); no hyphen when used as a noun (in this case, do not abbreviate to "next gen").

Do not refer to a system as part of the next generation after its domestic release.

The publication *Next Generation* (later *Next Gen*) should be capitalized and italicized to differentiate.

**Example:** The next-generation systems will all include the option for broadband and Wi-Fi connections.

**Wrong:** Now that the next generation is here, we can finally compare the new systems side by side.

**Nintendo 64** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**Nintendo DS, Nintendo DS Lite** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**Nintendo Entertainment System** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**non-player character** A character that is not controlled by a human. Usually used in role-playing games to refer to computer-controlled characters like merchants, innkeepers, townsfolk and others who aid in your quest. Do not use to refer to enemies.

**NPC** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** Non-player characters populate *Oblivion's* towns, saying captivating things like, "Sigh... times are tough" when you talk to them.

**Wrong:** non player character, nonplayer character.

**Also see:** **artificial intelligence, bot, character, player**.

**noob** See **leetspeak**.

**NPC** See **non-player character**.

**Nunchuk** See **Wii remote**.

# O

**Odyssey, Odyssey 2** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**online** A computer connected to a computer network. A game is **online-enabled** if it can be played online. Online-enabled games can be **played online** and support **online play**.

**Example:** *City of Heroes* players generally spend more time online than players in other massively-multiplayer online games.

**Wrong:** on-line, on line.

**Also see:** **Genres (appendix)**.

**otaku** Jargon. Japanese slang for an especially obsessive fan.

**Also see:** **fanboy**.

**open-world** Jargon. A type of gameplay that allows the player to enjoy a variety of open-ended activities that can be completed in non-linear fashion.

**Example:** More than the violence, *Grand Theft Auto III*'s open-world design is what sets it apart from other games of its day.

**Also see:** **sandbox**.

**operating system** See **Operating Systems (appendix)**.

**opponent** A player or character fought in a one-on-one situation, whether controlled by the computer or

another player. Usually used when describing fighting games. In one-vs.-many situations, use the more generic term enemy.

**Example:** If Guile is your opponent in *Street Fighter II*, don't even think about attacking him from the air.

**Also see:** **character, enemy, player**.

**optical media** Any software storage medium that uses lasers or other lights to retrieve stored information, such as CDs, DVDs, HD DVDs and Blu-ray discs. Use specific format names whenever possible.

**Example:** Unlike magnetic media, optical media can't be ruined by exposure to magnetic fields.

**Wrong:** The PlayStation supports games stored on optical media.

**Also see:** **CD-ROM, disc, DVD-ROM**.

**owned** See **letspeak**.

# P-Q

**pack-in** A game included with a game system or a peripheral included with a game.

**Example:** Nintendo's decision to include *Wii Sports* as a pack-in with the Wii made the purchase a better value.

**Wrong:** pack in, packin.

**pad** See **d-pad**.

**palette swap** Jargon. When two characters or objects are differentiated only by their color schemes. Palette swaps are used to save memory space, as the same basic sprite or model can be used for both palette-swapped characters.

**Example:** In *Super Mario Bros.*, Luigi is nothing more than a palette swap of Mario. This is no longer true by the time *Super Mario Bros. 2* comes along.

**Also see:** **sprite**.

**parallax scrolling** Jargon. Refers to two different foreground or background planes that scroll independently from each other to heighten the sense of depth in the image. Popularized on the Commodore Amiga computer and Super Nintendo Entertainment System.

**Example:** The parallax scrolling in *Super Castlevania IV* was unlike anything seen in the game's prequels.

**particle effects** Technical. Graphic effects such as smoke and sparks which simulate the movement of particles in the air.

**Example:** The particle effects in the Xbox version of *Burnout Revenge* are nearly blinding, especially when your car scrapes along a roadside guardrail.

**party** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**patch** A file or set of files that fixes bugs in a game after its release. After applying a patch, a game is considered **patched**.

**Example:** Now that the Xbox 360, Wii and PlayStation 3 are all able to connect to the Internet, it's easier than ever to download patches for bug-filled games.

**Also see:** **bug**.

**PC** See **Operating Systems (appendix)**.

**peripheral** A joystick, racing wheel, hard drive or other optional hardware add-on intended for use with a videogame or computer system. Note that this definition does not encompass mandatory system components, such as a computer keyboard or the controller packaged with a system.

In certain highly specific cases, a peripheral also functions as a system unto itself. For example, the Sega CD

and 32X function in this way. See the **System Names** appendix.

Capitalize the names of specific peripherals.

**Example:** Peripherals such as the Power Pad and the Power Glove were big sellers during the NES era.

**Wrong:** accessory, Peripheral, peripheral hardware.

**Also see:** controller, hardware.

**peripheral hardware** See **peripheral**.

**peripheral system** See **system**.

**perspective** A specific camera view. Typical perspectives include first-person, third-person and isometric.

The use of both camera and perspective together is considered redundant.

**Example:** Tactical role-playing games often show the action from an isometric perspective. The player's point of view shows them a wide-open vista of the battlefield.

**Wrong:** The game's first-person perspective camera worked fine for boss battles.

**Also see:** camera, isometric, point of view, **Genres** (appendix).

**physics** The simulation of properties such as a gravity, velocity, friction and elasticity by a game engine.

**Also see:** engine.

**pinball** A mechanical game played on a sloping board with the goal of guiding a steel ball against pins or into pockets, ramps or targets. Early pinball games did not include flippers to redirect the ball.

Even though they include some elements of videogames, pinball games are generally considered **mechanical games**. Capitalize and italicize the names of all pinball machines.

**Example:** *The Addams Family Pinball* was a surprisingly big hit.

**Wrong:** pin-ball, Pinball.

**Also see:** mechanical game.

**pirate** One who illegally copies and distributes copyrighted software.

**Example:** Pirates cracked *Battlefield 2142* within its first week of release.

**Also see:** crack, software piracy, warez.

**pixel** Short for picture element. The smallest distinct part of a digital image; a single point in the image grid. Monitor resolution is measured in pixels.

**Example:** The character models are sharp and detailed down to the last pixel.

**Also see:** monitor, resolution, screen.

**platform** See **system**.

**platform game, platformer**  
See **Genres** (appendix).

**play** Any interaction with a game.

**Example:** The first time I played *Devil May Cry*...

**Wrong:** On my first play of *Devil May Cry*...

**Also see:** life, play session, playthrough.

**play mechanics** See **mechanics**.

**play session** A single identifiable period of time spent with one game title. Due to its ambiguity, the term should be avoided.

**player** A person playing a game.

Use specific names or terms like **avatar** or **player character** to refer to the character the player is controlling.

In multiplayer games, characters can be referred to generically as **player one**, **player two**, and so forth (don't use numerals).

In massively-multiplayer games, different players should be referred to by the names of their characters.

**Example:** In the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* arcade game, player four controls Donatello.

**Also see:** avatar, character, multiplayer, player character.

**player-vs.-environment** In multiplayer games, a style of play where characters battle computer-controlled opponents rather than those controlled by other players in the game.

**PvE** acceptable after first reference.

**Wrong:** player-versus-environment, player vs. environment, player-vs-player.

**Also see:** cooperative, player-vs.-player.

**player-vs.-player** In multiplayer games, a style of play where players can inflict damage on other players.

**PvP** acceptable after first reference.

**Wrong:** player-versus-player, player vs. player, player-vs-player.

**Also see:** cooperative, player-vs.-environment.

**player character** The character a player controls.

**Also see:** avatar, player.

**playfield** See **environment**.

**PlayStation, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3** See **System Names** (appendix).

**playtest** See **quality assurance**.

**playthrough** One complete pass through a game's story from start to finish. Not applicable for games that have no precise ending, such as many simulation and puzzle games.

**Example:** After beating *Resistance: Fall of Man*, a second playthrough unlocks new weapons.

**Wrong:** play-through, play through.

**Also see:** play, play session.

**point of view** How a player views a particular scene in a game. In most cases, use perspective rather than point of view.

Point of view may be used in the literary context to describe the relationship of the narrative to the narrator. To avoid confusion, use the term **narrative**

**point of view** when discussing the story.

**Example:** The player's point of view in *Half-Life 2* helps to put you into the story without sacrificing a clear perspective on the game's environments.

**Wrong:** POV.

**Also see:** camera, perspective.

**points** Used to measure scores or other statistics in a game. Some common types of points found in many games:

**experience points:** A measure of a character's level of progress. Earned for completing certain in-game tasks. After gaining a set number of experience points the character will level up; see **level**. Use of XP is discouraged.

**hit points** or **health points:** The amount of energy remaining before death. Do not use the two terms interchangeably – consult the game documentation for which one is appropriate. HP acceptable after first reference. See **life**.

**magic points:** The amount of power remaining for casting spells. MP acceptable after first reference. Magic points may be shown as a numerical value or displayed in a graphic form, such as a star filled with the color green.

**polygon** The basic building block of most three-dimensional videogame models. Most polygons used in games are individual triangles connected together to form the 3D mesh outlining the surface of an in-game object.

The **polygon count** is the number of individual polygons used in a scene or model. More polygons usually mean higher graphical fidelity, though other factors can also affect the look of a model.

**Wrong:** poly.

**Also see:** model.

**pop-up** Jargon. In three-dimensional games, the effect of background elements suddenly popping into view as they get closer, rather than slowly fading in on the horizon as in real life. Pop-

up often indicates an overtaxed console or poor programming.

**Example:** The excessive pop-up in *Ridge Racer* makes it hard to predict your next turn.

**Wrong:** popup, pop-in

**port** A version of a game for a system other than the one it originally debuted on.

Do not refer to games that are released concurrently for multiple systems as ports. Do not refer to emulated games as ports.

**Example:** After first appearing on the Nintendo 64 in 1996, a port of *Super Mario 64* appeared on the Nintendo DS eight years later.

**Wrong:** copy, carbon copy, transfer, update

**Also see:** game names.

**portable console, portable system** See **system**.

**POV** See **point of view**.

**power-up** Any item that temporarily gives a character new abilities, new powers, or a statistical bonus.

Capitalize the names of specific power-ups. Refer to game documentation for official names and spellings of power-ups. Do not use as a generic term for any in-game item.

**Example:** Mario's power-ups include Fire Flowers, Super Mushrooms and Starman.

**Wrong:** powerup, power up, Power-up.

**Also see:** equipment, item.

**Practice mode** See **mode**.

**producer** The person in charge of managing a game's development team and ensuring that the game is released on schedule. Producers are usually employed by the game's publisher. The responsibilities of the producer can vary greatly depending on the company and

the product being produced.

An **executive producer** may oversee a number of games and production teams for one company.

**Also see:** artist, developer, publisher.

**profile** A collection of settings and/or player information that can be shared between play sessions or among other gamers. Profiles can be exclusive to a specific game or piece of hardware or shared online.

**Example:** Your Xbox Live profile keeps track of your Achievements, as well as what games you've downloaded and recently played.

**programmer** Anyone involved in writing the actual program code of a game. Programmers can sometimes hold other titles, such as **software engineer**.

Programmers are often focused on specific areas of a game, such as gameplay, sound or graphics, and are often noted as such in a game's credits. Use the most specific title available when referring to a programmer's position.

Do not use programmer as a generic term for anyone working on a game. See **developer**.

**Example:** As the lead physics programmer for the game, John Q. Programmer was responsible for the game's inventive gravity effects.

**Also see:** developer.

**PSOne, PSX** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**publisher** The company responsible for the financing, manufacturing and marketing of a videogame. Also often responsible for a game's distribution. See **distributor**.

Note that older publishers may now be defunct or subsumed as part of a currently-functioning publisher. In general, use the original publisher's name, and note the company's current lineage if context requires. See the **Notable Companies** appendix for a list of some



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defunct/acquired companies.

**Also see:** *developer, Notable Companies (appendix).*

**puzzle** See *Genres (appendix).*

**PvE** See *player-vs.-environment.*

**PvP** See *player-vs.-player.*

**pwned** See *leetspeak.*

**quality assurance** A phase of game development when the game is evaluated and checked for any remaining bugs before shipping to the manufacturer.

Quality assurance is often called **playtesting**, which is performed by a **playtester**.

**QA** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** There are rumors that the next *Grand Theft Auto* game will be delayed due to a longer-than-expected quality assurance process.

**Wrong:** play-test, Quality Assurance.

**Also see:** *bug.*

# R

**racing** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**rails** Jargon. A game, or a portion of a game, that limits player control and forces the player through a highly linear sequence. For example, a third-person action game might include brief **on-rails** portions that put gamers into a constantly moving vehicle.

*Also see:* **Genres (appendix)**.

**RAM** Short for random access memory – the quickly accessed internal memory inside a computer or videogame system. Game code is loaded from a hard drive, disc or ROM into RAM before being executed by the system. RAM can also refer to the physical **RAM chips** used for computer RAM, which are usually stored on **RAM sticks**.

RAM acceptable on all references. Use terms for specific types of RAM (such as DDR-RAM, etc.) only if technical context requires it.

**Example:** You'll need to add plenty of RAM to your PC in order to run Crytek's latest game, *Crysis*.

**Wrong:** Ram, ram.

*Also see:* **memory, ROM**.

**ratings** An evaluation of the age-appropriateness of a game's content by an independent body. *The game is rated E. An E-rated game.* See special note about Rating Pending below.

For audiences that are not familiar with the Entertainment Software Rating Board's rating system, include a short description of the rating. *Rated E for Everyone by the Entertainment Software Rating Board.* See below.

**Descriptions:** In America, games are given the following ratings by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, an offshoot of the Entertainment Software Association.

**EC (Early Childhood):** May be suitable for ages three and older.

**K-A (Kids to Adults):** May be suitable for ages six and older. Retired by the ESRB on Jan. 1, 1998. Use only in historical contexts.

**E (Everyone):** May be suitable for ages six and older.

**E10+ (Everyone 10 and Older):** May be suitable for ages ten and older. Added by the ESRB on March 2, 2005.

**T (Teen):** May be suitable for ages 13 and older.

**M (Mature):** May be suitable for ages 17 and older.

**AO (Adults Only):** Should only be played by persons 18 years and older.

**RP (Rating Pending):** Submitted to the ESRB and awaiting final rating. Write out as **Rating Pending** or **not yet rated** on all references.

From 1993-1994, Sega's Video Game Rating Council rated games **GA** (General Audiences), **MA-13** (Mature Audiences:

Parental Discretion Advised), and **MA-17** (Mature Audiences: Not Appropriate for Minors).

European games are currently rated under the **Pan-European Game Information** system (PEGI acceptable after first reference), with ratings of **3+**, **7+**, **12+**, **16+** and **18+** (slightly different in Finland and Portugal).

**Content Descriptors:** ESRB and PEGI ratings both come accompanied by specific content descriptors that detail specific potentially objectionable content in the game. These descriptors are not required when mentioning a game's ESRB rating, but it's recommended that they be included in all game reviews.

**Example:** *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* is rated M (Mature) by the ESRB for blood and gore and intense violence.

**real-time strategy** See **Genres** (appendix).

**recommended requirements**  
See **system requirements**.

**refresh rate** See **frame rate**.

**replay** Any further play of a game after the first playthrough.

A game's lasting value is often referred to as its **replayability** or **replay value**.

**Example:** *Resident Evil 4* is fun while it lasts, but its replayability suffers after the first playthrough.

**Wrong:** replay factor.

**Also see:** **play, play session, playthrough**.

**reset** The act of restarting a game, system or computer.

**Restart** acceptable on all references. Many game systems have a **reset button**.

**Also see:** **bootup**.

**resolution** The number of pixels contained in an image or screen. Note that the resolution of which a system or computer is capable, the resolution of which a screen is capable and the resolution for which a game is programmed may all be

different.

When describing computer games and monitors, list resolution as horizontal pixels and vertical pixels separated by an "x." *The game requires a monitor capable of 1024x760 resolution.* (Pronounced "twenty-four by seven-sixty.")

When describing TV-based systems and games, express resolution as the number of vertical scan lines (usually 480, 720 or 1080), followed by the letter p (for **progressive scan**, which refreshes all scan lines every cycle) or i (for **interlaced**, which refreshes only half the scan lines each cycle).

A resolution of 480i or below is referred to as **standard definition**. 720 and higher TV resolution is referred to as **high-definition**.

**Example:** The number of American homes that have TVs capable of a 1080p picture is growing every day.

**Also see:** **framerate, HDTV**.

**respawn** See **spawn**.

**restart** See **reset**.

**reticle** A small graphic overlay most commonly used for targeting in shooting games or action sequences.

**Example:** In *Lost Planet*, the reticle turns from green to red when placed over an enemy unit.

**Wrong:** reticule.

**Also see:** **heads-up display**.

**reticule** See **reticle**.

**retro** Catch-all term used to describe older games and systems. Generally, anything two console generations old (or roughly 10 years old) is considered retro.

**Example:** The Atari Flashback 2, a modern reworking of Atari's classic 2600 system, should make fans of retro videogames very happy.

**review build** Technical. A final, or near-final, version of a game's code that

is mailed out to journalists for evaluation. Reviews should note whether a game is being reviewed based on a review build or a retail copy.

**Example:** The review build of *MotorStorm* arrived in the office yesterday via FedEx.

**Wrong:** final CDs, finals, golds.

**Also see:** build, gold master.

**rhythm** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**right-click** See **click**.

**role-playing** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**ROM** Technical. An acronym for read only memory – the type of memory used to store most game data. A digital copy of a game's code run by an emulator can also be referred to as a ROM.

**ROM** acceptable on all references.

Games for cartridge-based systems are encoded on **ROM chips**; games for optical media systems and modern PCs are stored on CD-ROM, DVD-ROM or another disc format. Games are loaded from the ROM into RAM, where the program code is actually run by the system.

In general, use the specific ROM format (cartridge, CD-ROM, etc.) instead of the more general ROM when referring to the media used to store specific game code.

**Example:** Amazingly enough, the original *Super Mario Bros.* now fits onto a 3-megabit ROM chip.

**Wrong:** Rom, rom.

**Also see:** cartridge, CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, emulator, memory, RAM.

**RP** See **ratings**.

**RTS** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**rumble** See **force feedback**.

# S

**sandbox** A type of gameplay that provides players with a broad variety of tools and allows them to determine their own objectives. *SimCity* is an example of a sandbox game.

Sandbox may also refer to open-world games such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series and *Scarface: The World is Yours*.

**Also see:** open-world.

**Saturn** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**score** A method of measuring progress and ability in many games.

Score is usually measured in points, but can be measured in any unit, depending on the game.

Do not refer to in-game elements such as number of kills, money or time remaining as the “score,” unless the game itself specifically calls them such.

**Example:** *Serious Sam* is one of the only first-person shooters to measure a player’s score.

**Also see:** high score, points.

**screen** An individual static frame or TV/monitor-sized background displayed on a TV or computer monitor. Can also describe a specific in-game interface. *Players can quickly access the weapon selection screen by pressing the triangle button.*

In older games, a screen was often the

equivalent to an entire level, or a discrete sub-section of a level. In three-dimensional games, the notion of a screen is arbitrary, and the usage is discouraged.

Can also be used to describe a monitor or TV on which a game is played or as an abbreviation for a screenshot.

**Example:** In the original *Zelda*, players would walk to the edge of the screen before the game would scroll over to the next room.

**Also see:** monitor, screenshot.

**screenshot** A static snapshot of a gameplay screen. Coined by Bill Kunkel.

Abbreviation to **screen** acceptable on all references.

**Example:** The newly revealed screens for *God of War 2* gave a glimpse of the kinds of beasts hero Kratos would face in his new adventure.

**Wrong:** picture.

**Also see:** screen.

**scrolling** The direction in which a two-dimensional game progresses. The most common types of scrolling are **side-scrolling** (left-to right or right-to-left) and **vertically-scrolling** (top-to-bottom or bottom-to-top). **Auto-scrolling** games or portions of games scroll the playfield without direct player input.

**Example:** While most of *Super Mario Bros. 3*’s levels are of the standard side-scrolling variety and allow you to

play at your own pace, a few of the later levels are auto-scrolling.

**Wrong:** sidescrolling, side scrolling.

**Also see:** Genres (appendix), rails.

**second-party** When a game developer is not wholly owned by a videogame console manufacturer, but has an exclusive relationship with that manufacturer, it is referred to as a **second-party developer** for that manufacturer. Games developed by second-party developers are **second-party games**.

Second-party should only be used as an adjective, and never as a noun. *Rare ended its second-party relationship with Nintendo when it was purchased by Microsoft.* NOT: *Rare stopped being a Nintendo second party when it was purchased by Microsoft.*

Make sure it's clear which company a second-party developer is working for, either explicitly or by context. *Insomniac is one of Sony's many second-party developers.*

**Example:** A series of relationships with second-party developers helped Sony get a bevy of exclusives for the PlayStation.

**Wrong:** secondparty, second party, 2nd party, Second-Party.

**Also see:** developer, first-party, publisher, third-party

**Sega CD** See System Names (appendix).

**Sega Master System** See System Names (appendix).

**series** See franchise.

**serious games** Games that utilize interactive tools towards a specific purpose besides entertainment, such as training, politics, rhetoric or education. Serious games may be fun, but fun is not necessarily their central purpose.

**Also see:** educational games.

**shader** See shading.

**shading** Technical. The graphical display of variable light intensity on various parts of an in-game model. The specific technical systems responsible for shading are **shaders**.

**Also see:** lighting.

**shareware** Software that is free to distribute and use in limited form or for a predetermined trial period. Usually used to allow audiences to sample a product before making a full purchase.

**Example:** A large part of *Doom's* success is attributed to the fact that the first few levels of the game were available as shareware.

**Wrong:** sample, trial.

**Also see:** demo, freeware.

**shmup, shoot-'em-up** See Genres (appendix).

**shortcut** See hotkey.

**side-scrolling** See scrolling.

**simulation** See Genres (appendix).

**single-player** A game designed to be played by a single person.

Only refer to a game as a **single-player game** if it offers no multiplayer modes whatsoever. Otherwise, refer to a game's **single-player mode** or the single-player portion of a game.

**Example:** If you really want to see Ubisoft's *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* shine, you'll need to ditch the static single-player experience and try the game online.

**Wrong:** one-player, single player.

**Also see:** mode, multiplayer.

**sit-down cabinet** See system.

**Sixaxis** Brand name for the standard controller on the PlayStation 3. May simply be referred to as the PlayStation 3 controller on all references.

**Also see:** controller.

**skeletal model** See **model**.

**skill** Areas of expertise in which in-game characters may specialize, such as swordplay, armed combat or computer hacking. Most commonly encountered in role-playing games.

**Example:** In *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, you can't repair droids if your hero doesn't possess the proper repair skill.

**Wrong:** ability rankings, rank.

**Also see:** ability, statistics.

**software** Any computer program, regardless of the storage medium or system. Videogames are a type of software.

**Wrong:** Software, soft ware, soft-ware.

**Also see:** firmware, hardware.

**software piracy** The act of illegally copying and distributing copyrighted software.

**Piracy** acceptable on all references.

**Example:** Software piracy has become a global epidemic, resulting in billions in lost sales.

**Also see:** courier, cracker, pirate, warez.

**spawn** Jargon. The appearance of a player character, enemy, or object in the game world for the first time. Subsequent appearances after death or destruction are called **respawns**.

**Example:** The key to a high score in *Pac-Man* is eating the fruit that spawns underneath the ghosts' house in the center of the maze.

**Also see:** spawn point.

**spawn point** Jargon. The location at which a dead player character, enemy or item appears on the playfield. Generally used in multiplayer contexts.

**Example:** Plant a C-4 charge on the spawn point, then trigger it once your enemy respawns to watch his internal organs fly.

**Also see:** enemy, player character, spawn.

**specifications/specs** See **system requirements**.

**sports** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**sprite** Technical. A fixed-size set of pixels.

Jargon. A distinct two-dimensional graphic representing an in-game character or object.

Sprites may be used in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional games.

**Example:** Despite *Doom*'s 3D appearance, each and every monster in the game is a 2D sprite.

**Also see:** dimension, pixel, texture.

**stage** See **level**.

**standard controller** See **controller**.

**statistics** A numerical or graphical measure of your in-game character's skills/talents/physical prowess. Typically divided into categories such as strength, accuracy, stamina, charisma, luck, etc. In most cases, the higher the score or greater the value, the more able-bodied and skilled in a particular discipline your avatar is.

Can be abbreviated to **stats** on all references.

**Example:** Building up your stats in multiple areas is an easy way to create a well-rounded character in *Neverwinter Nights 2*.

**Wrong:** ability rankings, rank, readout

**Also see:** ability, skill.

**stats** See **statistics**.

**stealth** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**stick** See **joystick**.

**strafe** In three-dimensional games, a side-to-side movement made without changing the direction a character is facing. **Strafing** is sometimes accomplished by

holding down a **strafe key**. Using strafing to circle around an enemy while constantly facing it is referred to as a **circle strafe**.

**Example:** Players will need to learn how to strafe, or they won't make it far in *Quake 4's* single-player campaign.

**Also see:** **WASD controls**.

**strategy** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**strategy guide** A published guide focusing on hints, tips and strategies for a particular game.

**Guide** acceptable on all references.

When referencing specific guides, be sure to note the publisher as well as whether or not the guide is branded as an official guide. Capitalize and italicize all strategy guide titles.

Do not use interchangeably with walkthroughs, which simply provide step-by-step instructions for progressing through a game and are usually available online.

**Example:** BradyGames' *Official Guide to Kingdom Hearts*, in all of its hardcover glory, is guaranteed to be a collector's item.

**Wrong:** Strategy Guide, strats.

**Also see:** **instruction manual, walkthrough**.

**studio** A distinct subset of a videogame developer that works largely independently from the rest of the company.

Capitalize the names of specific studios in all references. When referencing developers, use the more specific studio name rather than the larger company name whenever possible.

**Example:** Sega's AM2 studio was responsible for some of the company's greatest arcade hits.

**Also see:** **developer**.

**Super Nintendo Entertainment System** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**survival horror** See **Genres (appendix)**.

**system** The following terms are often

used to describe videogame hardware and software.

**arcade cabinet** A single arcade game unit. Sometimes used to refer solely to the outer casing that holds the game.

Use **arcade game** to refer to a game as a concept.

**Types of arcade cabinets include:**

**cocktail cabinet:** Table-shaped arcade cabinet with a monitor facing upward; often used for competitive two-player games.

**sit-down cabinet:** An arcade cabinet that requires the player to sit down to play; most commonly used in racing and flight simulator games.

**upright cabinet:** A free-standing vertical arcade cabinet.

---

**arcade game:** General usage for any coin-operated videogame. See **arcade cabinet**, above.

---

**arcade system:** Use only to refer to the specific hardware used to run an arcade game or set of arcade games.

**Example:** Namco's adoption of the System 12 arcade system made converting games to the PlayStation simple.

---

**coin-op:** Jargon. Short for coin-operated. Any machine designed to operate only when money is deposited. More specific terms like **arcade game** or **arcade cabinet** are preferred for coin-operated videogames. See above.

---

**computer:** While all videogame systems are technically computers, in videogame contexts, only use the term to refer to general purpose computers that are designed primarily for uses other than games. A **computer game** is a game specifically designed for a computer. Do not use computer game to refer to games for console, portable, or mobile platforms.

---

**console:** Any device designed primarily for playing videogames on a television. Used interchangeably with **home system**. See **portable system**, below.



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**console system:** Redundant; do not use. See **home system** below.

---

**game system:** Use on first reference to a system if context is unclear. **Home game system** and **portable game system** also acceptable. See **system** below.

---

**handheld system:** Use **portable system** instead.

---

**hardware:** The physical components of a console, computer, portable or mobile device. Often used to refer to a system as a whole. Usually used in contrast to software.

**Example:** Holiday demand for game hardware has skyrocketed during the holiday season.

---

**home console:** Use **home system** or **console** instead.

---

**home system:** Any device designed primarily for playing videogames on a television. Used interchangeably with **console**. See **portable system**, below.

---

**mobile:** In videogame contexts, refers to mobile phones, PDAs, portable media players and other portable devices that play games but are not designed primarily for game playing. These devices should be referred to as **mobile platforms** or **mobile devices**, not mobile systems. Games designed for these devices are **mobile games**. Do not use interchangeably with portable system.

**Example:** The failure of the Nokia N-Gage was partially due to the fact that no one could tell whether or not it was a portable system or a mobile device.

---

**peripheral system:** Use when referring to hardware that attaches to another system in order to work. See the **System Names** appendix for examples.

---

**platform:** Jargon. Used in the context of game development to denote a specific system. A game under development for

multiple platforms is a **multiplatform** or **cross-platform** game.

**Example:** Electronics Arts will release *Madden NFL 08* on all major platforms.

---

**portable console:** Use **portable system** instead.

---

**portable system:** A travel-ready, battery-powered system with its own screen.

---

**system:** Any computer, console, portable system or mobile platform capable of playing games.

**Example:** Nintendo released its first system, the NES, in the United States in 1985.

---

**unit:** Jargon. Use only in business contexts to discuss hardware or software sales.

**Example:** Nintendo sold over one million units of the Wii last month.

---

**system requirements** The hardware, operating system and supporting software recommended by the publisher to run a computer game effectively. Most games have **minimum system requirements** (those required to play the game without significantly affecting the gameplay) and **recommended system requirements** (those required to run the game at optimal speed and graphical fidelity). Most games will run on machines that do not meet the minimum system requirements, but players may encounter performance issues.

In reviewing computer games, both minimum and recommended system requirements should be included as a guide for the reader, as listed on the games' packaging. Also, be sure to include the **system specification** (system specs after first reference) of the machine the game was reviewed on.

**Example:** The minimum system requirements for *Half-Life 2* were so high that most fans had no choice but to upgrade their system in order to play it.

**Wrong:** hardware requirements, specifications, specs, sys reqs, sysreqs.

# T

**T** See ratings.

**technology tree** In some videogames, a technology tree defines a hierarchy of gameplay skills, units or abilities players must attain in set or branching succession.

Generally, in order to access more powerful units or powers in the hierarchy, the player must first research or build the lower-ranking units or powers. For example, in a real-time strategy game, it may be necessary to erect a basic barracks before a building that produces super-soldiers can be constructed.

In some cases, the game design may reward players with units/abilities further along the tree without meeting lower-tier tree requirements.

**Tech tree** acceptable on all references.

**Example:** The tech tree posters included with *Civilization* help players strategize the development of their army.

**Wrong:** techtree, tech-tree.

**Also see:** Genres (appendix).

**tester** A paid member of the game development team who examines and helps eliminate bugs and other programming errors in the game. Not to be confused with a **beta tester**, who is usually a member of the public and usually unpaid.

**Playtester** acceptable on all references.

**Also see:** beta, developer, quality assurance.

**texture** Technical. A two-dimensional sprite that is placed onto a three-dimensional polygonal model to give it a deeper, textured appearance.

**Texture map** acceptable on all references.

**Example:** The superb texture mapping in *Gears of War* results in a virtual world that's convincing and cohesive.

**Also see:** model, polygon, sprite.

**third-party** When a game developer is not owned in whole or in part by any videogame console manufacturer, it is referred to as a **third-party developer**.

Games developed by third-party developers are **third-party games**.

Third-party should only be used as an adjective, and never as a noun. *Electronic Arts is a third-party developer.* NOT: *Electronic Arts is a third party.*

**Example:** Third-party support was the key to the PlayStation's success.

**Wrong:** 3rd party, thirdparty, third party, Third-Party.

**Also see:** developer, first-party, publisher, second-party.

**third-person** See Genres (appendix).

---

**three-dimensional** See **Genres** (appendix).

**three-player** See **multiplayer**.

**tie ratio** In business contexts, the number of games sold for a system divided by the number of systems sold. For example, a tie ratio of 3.2 indicates that consumers have bought, on average, slightly more than three games for each system purchased.

Be clear about the interval being discussed for a specific tie ratio, such as a lifetime tie ratio or annual tie ratio. Use numerals when referring to a specific tie ratio. Round specific tie ratios to the nearest tenth (one decimal place) unless additional precision is needed to differentiate two different ratios.

**Example:** The PlayStation 2's tie ratio remains among the best for any console over its lifetime.

**trainer** A computer program that allows players to cheat at a specific game automatically or by hitting specific keys.

**Example:** First, load the trainer, then press F12 to instantly get 50 grenades.

**Also see:** cheat, code, hack.

**troll** Jargon. A message board poster who posts provocative claims and statements designed to generate a hostile or angry response. This behavior is referred to as **trolling**.

**Also see:** grief.

**TurboDuo, TurboExpress, TurboGrafx-16, TurboGrafx-CD**  
See **System Names** (appendix).

**turn-based** See **Genres** (appendix).

**two-dimensional** See **Genres** (appendix).

**two-player** See **multiplayer**.

# U-V

**UMD** See **Universal Media Disc**.

**unit** See **system**.

**Universal Media Disc** The proprietary storage format designed for the PlayStation Portable system. It consists of an optical disc housed inside a clear plastic shell.

**UMD** acceptable after first reference.

UMDs can be used to store both games and movies; be sure to distinguish between the two if context requires.

**Example:** Sony is sticking with the Universal Media Disc format even though sales of UMD movies are down.

**Wrong:** Universal Memory Disc, Universal Magnetic Disc, umd, universal media disc, UMD-ROM.

**Also see:** **CD, CD-ROM, disc, optical media**.

**Universal Serial Bus** A standard for connecting peripherals to hardware.

**USB** acceptable on all references.

Devices that use a USB connection are said to be **USB-compatible**. Use USB 1.1, USB 2.0, etc., to differentiate various USB standards in technical contexts.

**Example:** To recharge the Xbox 360's wireless controller, simply plug it into one of the two USB slots found at the

base of the console.

**Wrong:** usb, Usb, U.S.B.

**Also see:** **peripheral**.

**unlockable** Hidden content or items that are unlocked through specific in-game actions. Unlockables are usually not essential to play and/or complete the game, but are added as a bonus for players who complete difficult tasks.

**Example:** *GoldenEye 007's*

Invisibility mode is one of the most difficult-to-obtain unlockables in videogame history.

**Also see:** **Achievement, bonus, cheat code, Easter egg**.

**update** A piece of software that adds or fixes content in an already existing game. An update is not a sequel or an expansion pack, but usually expands the world of the game in a small, but significant fashion.

An update can include a patch, but the terms are not interchangeable.

**Example:** The latest update to *Auto Assault* introduces two new free areas to play in.

**Wrong:** upgrade.

**Also see:** **expansion pack, patch**.

**upright cabinet** See **system**.

**USB** See **Universal Serial Bus**.

**user** Technical. General term for any-

one using a computer or video game system. Sometimes called **end-user** in business contexts. Use **gamer** or **player** in non-technical contexts.

**Also see:** **gamer, player.**

**vaporware** Jargon. A piece of hardware or software or a peripheral that has languished in development limbo despite heavy promotion.

**Example:** *Duke Nukem Forever* remains vaporware over 10 years after it was originally announced.

**vector** Technical. A graphics format that represents 2D images as a collection of lines and other geometric shapes. Vector graphics can be scaled to any size without a loss in quality.

Vector graphics can be seen in action on old arcade games such as *Asteroids* as well as the Vectrex game system.

**Also see:** **bitmap, System names (appendix).**

**vehicular combat** See **Genres (appendix).**

**version** See **game names.**

**vibration** See **force feedback.**

**video card** Technical. The piece of hardware that stores a graphics processor used by a computer to render and output a high-quality video signal on a monitor or television.

**Example:** A large number of PCs in the office didn't have updated video cards, and therefore couldn't run the latest *F.E.A.R.* expansion pack.

**Wrong:** 3D accelerator, 3D-accelerated, graphic accelerator, graphics card, videocard, video-card.

**videogame** Catch-all term for any type of interactive entertainment software. Always write as one word.

Videogames can be divided into sub-categories including: **console games, portable games, computer games, arcade**

**games and mobile games.** All can be generally referred to as **videogames**. See the **system** entry for more on the differences between these subgroups.

**Game** acceptable on all references, except those in which the context makes it hard to distinguish videogames from non-electronic games, such as sports, tabletop or board games.

**Example:** Videogame fans always looked forward to seeing the best upcoming games at the Electronic Entertainment Expo.

**Wrong:** electronic game, VideoGame, Video Game, video-game, video game

**Also see:** **gamer, gaming, interactive entertainment, mechanical game, software, system.**

**Virtual Boy** See **System Names (appendix).**

**Virtual Console** A service offered on the Nintendo Wii that provides downloadable, emulated games. Be sure to note the system Virtual Console games were originally released for when discussing them.

**Also see:** **emulator, system.**

**virtual reality** Jargon. Catch-all term for technological attempts to create a more immersive gaming experience by using hardware such as stereoscopic goggles, glove sensors or motion-sensing equipment.

**VR** acceptable after first reference.

**Example:** Whether or not games ever achieve the kind of virtual reality made famous by *Star Trek's* Holodeck, players will continue to enjoy games for current systems.

# W-Z

**walkthrough** A detailed, step-by-step description of how to complete a videogame, in part or in its entirety. Strategy guides may include walkthroughs, but the terms are not interchangeable.

**Example:** It's nearly impossible to play through *Myst* without having to consult a walkthrough once or twice.

**Wrong:** walk-through, walk through.

**Also see:** strategy guide.

**warez** Jargon. Slang for pirated or illegally copied software.

**Example:** Downloading warez might be beneficial to your bank account, but people have been sent to prison for doing so.

**Also see:** pirate, software piracy.

**WASD controls** Jargon. A videogame control scheme that used the W, A, S and D keys on a keyboard to control forward, leftward, backward and rightward character movement, respectively. Often used in first-person computer games and paired with mouse control of the player's direction and perspective.

**Example:** The popularity of the original *Doom* ensured that WASD controls would become the standard for the first-person shooter genre.

**Also see:** controls, strafe.

**Wi-Fi** A form of wireless local area

network (WLAN) based on the IEEE 802.11 standard.

Note that not all wireless networks use the Wi-Fi standard. Wi-Fi should not be used as a generic term to describe any wireless LAN.

**Example:** Though the Xbox 360 doesn't have Wi-Fi support built in, Microsoft offers a small USB attachment to connect the system to your Wi-Fi network.

**Wrong:** Wifi, WiFi, wifi, wireless fidelity

**Also see:** WLAN.

**Wii** See **System Names (appendix)**.

**Wii remote** Acceptable on all references to the standard Wii controller. The optional attachment that includes an analog stick is called the **Nunchuk**.

**Example:** The Wii remote is all that's necessary for most *Wii Sports* mini-games, but the boxing mini-game requires the Nunchuk as well.

**Wrong:** Wiimote, wii remote

**Also see:** controller, **System Names (appendix)**.

**Windows** See **Operating Systems (appendix)**.

**WLAN** Technical. Short for wireless local area network – a local network that connects network nodes together wirelessly. Wi-Fi is a popular form of WLAN.

WLAN acceptable on all references.

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**Example:** Having a WLAN set up dramatically simplifies the coordination of a LAN party.

**Also see:** LAN, LAN party, Wi-Fi.

**WonderSwan** See **System Names** (appendix).

**world** A game's overall environment or setting, or a specific in-game area which shares a common conceptual and graphical theme.

Certain games are separated into levels, missions, or stages rather than worlds – go by the description used by the game itself whenever possible.

**Example:** The world of *Lost Planet* is dangerous for two reasons: Sub-zero temperatures and the fact it's filled with giant bugs.

**Also see:** level, mission, stage.

**Xbox, Xbox 360** See **System Names** (appendix).

**Xbox Live** Microsoft's network for online multiplayer gaming, communication and content downloads on the Xbox and Xbox 360.

**Wrong:** Xbox Live!, Xbox 360 Live, Live.

**Also see:** leaderboard, multiplayer, online.

# **APPENDICES**



# System Names

## General Rules

Precede system names with an article. *The Xbox sold well this month* not *Xbox sold well this month*.

In general, avoid pluralizing system names; use terms like units, consoles or systems instead. *Microsoft sold 100,000 units of the Xbox 360 this month*. NOT: *Microsoft sold 100,000 Xbox 360s this month*. See the **system** entry.

List the company name with the system name on first reference unless the company name is included the system name (as in Super Nintendo Entertainment System or ColecoVision). Company name is optional after first reference.

System abbreviations listed below should never be used on first reference. In mainstream contexts, list the abbreviation in parentheses after the first reference.

## Foreign System Names

In general, identify a system by its domestic name unless you are specifically referring to the foreign version of the system. Identify the domestic counterpart to the foreign system on the first reference in mainstream contexts. *The Nintendo Famicom (the Japanese version of the Nintendo Entertainment System) was a phenomenal success in its native land*.

## System Listing

Entries are in the form: First Reference – Further References (Abbreviation). If no further reference form is listed, use the full name on all references. Abbreviations should never be used on first reference; do not abbreviate system names with no abbreviation listed. Refer to original packaging and the general rules above for unlisted systems.

**3DO** Panasonic was one of a number of licensees that secured rights to produce 3DO systems. The systems were designed by The 3DO Company, which does not have to be listed with the name.

It's an O (“oh”) not a 0 (“zero”).

**Atari 2600 (2600)** Also referred to as the Atari Video Computer System – Atari VCS acceptable on all references; VCS acceptable after first reference.

**Atari Jaguar – Jaguar**

**Atari Lynx – Lynx**

**Bandai WonderSwan – WonderSwan**

**ColecoVision**

**Magnavox Odyssey – Odyssey** The first videogame console sold commercially.

**Magnavox Odyssey2 – Odyssey2**

**Mattel Intellivision – Intellivision**

**Microsoft Xbox – Xbox**

**Microsoft Xbox 360 – Xbox 360**

**NEC TurboGrafx-16 – TurboGrafx-16 (TG-16)**  
*In Japan: NEC PC Engine*

**NEC TurboExpress – TurboExpress**  
*In Japan: PC Engine GT*

**NEC TurboGrafx-CD – TurboGrafx-CD (Turbo-CD)** Peripheral system for the TurboGrafx-16

**NEC TurboDuo – TurboDuo** Combo system with the TurboGrafx-16 and TurboGrafx-CD in one unit.

**Nintendo 64 (N64)**

**Nintendo 64 Disk Drive (N64DD)**  
Peripheral system for the Nintendo 64. Released only in Japan.

**Nintendo DS (DS)** Do not expand to Dual Screen.

**Wrong:** Game Boy DS

**Nintendo DS Lite (DS Lite)** Use only when referring to a specific Nintendo DS Lite unit or units. Use the more general Nintendo DS in other cases.

**Nintendo Entertainment System (NES)**  
*In Japan:* Nintendo Famicom

**Nintendo Game Boy – Game Boy (GB)**  
May be referred to as the original Game Boy for clarity.

**Nintendo Game Boy Advance – Game Boy Advance (GBA)**

**Nintendo Game Boy Advance SP – Game Boy Advance SP (GBASP)** Use only when referring to a specific Game Boy Advance SP unit or units. Use the more general Game Boy Advance in other cases.

**Nintendo Game Boy Color – Game Boy Color (GBC)**

**Nintendo Game Boy Micro** Use only when referring to a specific Game Boy Micro unit or units. Use the more generic Game Boy Advance in other cases.

**Nintendo Game Boy Pocket** Use only when referring to a specific Game Boy Pocket unit or units. Use the more generic Game Boy in other cases.

**Nintendo GameCube – GameCube (GCN)**  
NGC is the name of a Japanese phone company. Do not use it as an abbreviation

**Nintendo Virtual Boy – Virtual Boy (VB)**

**Nintendo Wii – Wii** From Nintendo's *E3 2006 Style Guide* supplement: "The name works best at the beginning of declarative statements. For clarity, it is best to avoid passive verbs and prepositions."

**Nokia N-Gage – N-Gage**

**Phillips CD-i – CD-i**

**Sega 32X – 32X** A peripheral system for the Sega Genesis

**Sega CD** A peripheral system for the Sega Genesis

**Sega CDX** Only use to refer to the small Sega Genesis/Sega CD combination unit released in March 1994

**Sega Dreamcast – Dreamcast (DC)**

**Sega Game Gear – Game Gear (GG)**

**Sega Genesis – Genesis**  
*In Japan:* Sega Mega Drive (MD)

**Sega Master System (SMS)** Do not shorten to Master System.

**Sega Saturn – Saturn**

**SNK Neo-Geo – Neo-Geo (NG)**

**SNK Neo-Geo Pocket – Neo-Geo Pocket (NGP)**

**SNK Neo-Geo Pocket Color – Neo-Geo Pocket Color (NGPC)**

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**Sony PlayStation – PlayStation (PS)** Do not abbreviate PSX or PS1, as these can be confused with distinct products in the PlayStation line.

Do not refer to as PlayStation 1 or Playstation One.

May be referred to as the original PlayStation for clarity.

**Sony PlayStation 2 – PlayStation 2 (PS2)**

**Sony PlayStation 3 – PlayStation 3 (PS3)**

**Sony PlayStation Portable – PlayStation Portable (PSP)**

**Sony PSOne – PSOne** Only use to refer to the smaller white PlayStation unit released in January 2002

**Sony PSX – PSX** Only use to refer to the PlayStation 2/DVD-recorder combo drive released in Japan in 2003

**Super Nintendo Entertainment System – Super Nintendo (SNES)**

*In Japan: Super Famicom*

**Tiger Game.com – Game.com**

**Vectrex**

# Operating Systems

An operating system is a special piece of software that controls the basic functions of a computer. **OS** acceptable after first reference.

Always capitalize the names of operating systems. Preceding the name of an operating system with the company that makes it is optional.

When referring to computer games, identify what operating system they are developed for. *EA is releasing Madden NFL 08 for Windows PCs.* NOT: *EA is releasing Madden NFL 08 for the computer.* Specify individual versions of the operating system only if context requires (i.e. in discussions of system requirements).

**Use the following examples when referencing operating systems.**

**Microsoft DOS** – DOS acceptable on all references.

## **DOS 6.0**

**Microsoft Windows** – Windows acceptable on all references. Windows computers can be referred to as PCs on all references.

## **Windows 3.1**

## **Windows 95**

## **Windows 98**

## **Windows 2000**

## **Windows ME**

## **Windows XP**

## **Windows Vista**

**Apple Macintosh** – Macintosh or Mac OS acceptable on all references.

## **Mac OS 9.1**

## **Mac OS X**

**Linux** – Do not refer to specific distributions of Linux.

# Genres

## General Rules

**Be wary when placing a game into an explicit genre.** Different readers have different ideas about what qualifies as a genre and what makes a game part of a particular genre. Many readers – and writers – consider putting games into predefined genres as a false distinction. Whenever possible, describe the gameplay more fully instead of simply shoehorning gameplay into a strict genre definition.

**Examples are given only for guidance.** In general, avoid describing a game genre in terms of a prototypical game. Avoid describing a game as a clone of another game unless absolutely necessary. *Sonic is a platform game*. NOT: *Sonic is your basic Mario clone*.

**Genre names should always be written in lower case.**

**Noun versions of genre names (i.e. racer, fighter, first-person shooter) are considered jargon.** When possible, use the full form: *racing game*; *fighting game*.

**Genres are constantly being created and becoming defunct, evolving and intersecting into totally new categories.** In fact, some entries on this list will likely be obsolete by the time this guide goes to press.

## Combining Genres/New Genres

If a game blends two distinct genres that are not listed as a combination on this page, combine them using hyphens: *racing-platform*; *rhythm-puzzle*. Be certain that the game contains sufficient elements of both genres to justify a new term. If one genre is dominant, the game might be better described as having elements of the second genre.

**Example:** *Tony Hawk's Underground* is an extreme sports game at its core, but the option to traverse levels on foot adds adventure elements to the mix.

## Common Modifiers

The following terms are often used to distinguish major subsets of larger genres.

**first-person:** Any game where the player views the action through the eyes of the player character for most or all of the gameplay.

**Common usages:** first-person shooter (*Doom*, *Serious Sam*); first-person action (*Metroid Prime*).

**massively-multiplayer online:** Any game featuring a large number of players interacting in a persistent world through online communication with other players. Abbreviation to **MMO** is acceptable after first reference.

**Common usage:** massively-multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG acceptable after first reference).

**real-time:** A game in which action does not stop for the entry of commands.

**Common usage:** real-time strategy.

**simulation:** When used alone, describes a game whose sole or main purpose is to simulate real-world processes, often without a final goal or explicit purpose (*SimCity*, *Humans*). When used with another genre name, describes an example of that genre that favors realism over abstraction. **Sim** acceptable after first reference.

**Common usages:** racing simulation (*Gran Turismo*), fighting simulation (*Virtua Fighter*).

**text-based:** A game in which input and output are largely limited to text. Text-based games can have graphics, but they are usually secondary to the text itself.

**Common usages:** text-based adventure, text-based role-playing.

**third-person:** Used to describe games or situations played from a perspective removed from the character. The action is generally viewed from above or behind a character via either a user-controlled or fixed camera.

**Common usages:** third-person action, third-person shooter.

**turn-based:** A game that pauses the action periodically to allow the input of commands.

**Common genres:** turn-based strategy, turn-based role-playing.

## List of Common Genres

This list of genres is by no means exhaustive, but it represents some of the genres most commonly encountered in videogame discourse. Descriptions, distinguishing characteristics and examples are provided as a general guide – different readers will have different ideas of what makes a game part of a particular genre.

**action:** Games that emphasize combat and fighting. Usually involves working through distinct levels to reach boss battles. Historically, action has been used as an incredibly broad catch-all genre for any game that involves combat.

**Examples:** *Ikari Warriors*, *Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia*.

Differs from **adventure:** Action games focus more on combat and hand-eye coordination

Differs from **platform:** Action games focus less on jumping puzzles and navigating complex passages.

Differs from **fighting:** Action games focus on a succession of massive battles with some exploration rather than distinct one-on-one fights.

**action-adventure:** Games combining elements of both the action and adventure genres.

**Examples:** *Tomb Raider*, *Scarface: The World is Yours*.

The line between action and action-adventure (or action-role-playing) is often very thin, usually depending on the relative importance of combat (action), puzzle-solving (adventure) and statistical character development (role-playing). Use your discretion.

**adventure:** Games which focus on problem-solving and puzzles with little to no action. Examples: *Maniac Mansion*, *King's Quest*.

Differs from **role-playing:** Adventure games have little to no statistical character development or leveling up involved.

Common modifier: **point-and-click** – An adventure game in which your character is displayed on screen and control is primarily mouse-driven.

**beat-'em-up:** Jargon. Action games that feature hand-to-hand combat against swarms of opponents. Interchangeable with brawler, also jargon.

**Examples:** *Final Fight*, *Streets of Rage*.

**compilation:** A single disc or cartridge that collects many previously-released games into one package.

**Examples:** *Activision Anthology*, *Namco Museum*.

**extreme sports:** Games featuring representations of unconventional action sports; games that require, or encourage, the execution of tricks.

**Examples:** *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, *SSX Blur*.

**fighting:** Games that focus exclusively on one-on-one combat.

**Examples:** *Street Fighter II*, *Virtua Fighter*.

**flight simulation:** Games that represent a realistic simulation of airplane physics, sometimes with an emphasis on combat.

**Examples:** *Falcon, Microsoft Flight Simulator.*

**god game:** Jargon. Use simulation instead.

**hack-and-slash:** Jargon. Games that focus on melee-heavy fantasy combat.

**Examples:** *Dynasty Warriors, Golden Axe.*

**party:** Games that focus on short, simple mini-games which are designed to be played by multiple players.

**Examples:** *Mario Party, Fuzion Frenzy 2.*

**platform:** Games focusing on jumping or navigational challenges. Often include elements of action games.

**Examples:** *Pitfall, Super Mario Bros.*

Differs from **action:** Platform games focus more on jumping and navigating complex passages than on combat.

**puzzle:** Games that involve abstract puzzle-solving exclusively.

**Examples:** *Tetris, Bust-a-Move.*

**racing:** Games featuring time-based competition between characters or vehicles.

**Examples:** *Super Mario Kart, Gran Turismo.*

**role-playing:** Games in which you assume the role of a character or group that must solve problems, interact with non-player characters and engage in combat, with statistical character development paramount. **RPG** acceptable after first reference. Combat may be **turn-based** or **real-time**.

**Examples:** *Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest.*

Common modifiers:

**action role-playing:** Role-playing games with an emphasis on real-time explo-

ration and melee combat. **Action RPG** acceptable after first reference.

**Examples:** *The Legend of Zelda, Diablo.*

**tactical role-playing:** Turn-based role-playing games that emphasize character positioning, movement and attack range on a clearly delineated battlefield. **Tactical RPG** acceptable after first reference.

**Examples:** *Final Fantasy Tactics, Disgaea.*

**rhythm:** Games which focus on keeping time with music, whether through button presses on a standard controller or manipulation of a special controller such as a dance pad or microphone.

**Examples:** *Dance Dance Revolution, Space Channel 5.*

**shoot-'em-up:** Jargon. Games defined by their frenetic pace, emphasis on ostentatious weapon-based combat and massive body counts. Games that usually involve flying or driving a vehicle and shooting everything on screen other than yourself. Often abbreviated as **shmup**, also jargon.

**Examples:** *R-Type, Gradius.*

Differs from **first-person shooter:** Shoot-'em-ups don't use a first-person perspective.

**sports:** Games featuring representations of real-world sports.

**Examples:** *Madden NFL 07, Sensible Soccer.*

**stealth:** Action games that emphasize conflict avoidance and encourage the use of stealth tactics, including hiding and observing enemies from afar.

**Examples:** *Metal Gear Solid, Splinter Cell.*

**strategy:** Games emphasizing tactical management of resources and territory against a human or computer controlled opponent or opponents.

Common modifiers:

**real-time strategy: RTS** acceptable after first reference.

**Examples:** *Starcraft, Total Annihilation*

**turn-based strategy: Examples:**  
*Advance Wars, Civilization*

**survival horror:** Adventure or action-adventure games focused on generating fear and suspense, often with limited resources provided to the player character.

**Examples:** *Resident Evil, Silent Hill*

**vehicular combat:** Action games featuring the explicit use of vehicles.

**Examples:** *Twisted Metal: Black, Destruction Derby*

Differs from **racing:** Vehicular combat focuses more on destruction rather than quick navigation of a course.



# Review Guidelines

The style of game reviews ultimately depends on the editorial direction and philosophy of the publication running them. There are, however, some general guidelines to keep in mind when crafting game evaluations.

Avoid first- and second-person references in your reviews. Keep your writing squarely focused on the subject matter. Remove yourself and the reader from the review.

**Example:** The boomerang is used to defeat the boss found in the third dungeon.

**Wrong:** I defeated the boss in the third dungeon with the boomerang.

**Wrong:** You defeat the boss in the third dungeon by using the boomerang.

Remember that each player's experience with a game is unique. Avoid generalizing about experiences or features that might be unique only to your playthrough. For instance, avoid using the phrase "hours of gameplay" to describe the longevity of a game, since different players will spend different amounts of time with the title.

Craft the review to the audience. Avoid use of jargon like "boss" or "1-up" if the readers might not have a deep familiarity with gaming.

Use specifics as often as possible. Avoid abstractions. The more specific details included, the more likely you will engage a reader with your writing.

**Example:** The lock-on targeting feature allows players to spend less time aiming and more time trying to figure out how to defeat the enemy troops.

**Wrong:** The game's targeting system is well-designed and fun to use.

Ask yourself: How did the game make you feel while playing it? Frustrated?

Angry? Powerful? Overwhelmed? Useless? Make those feelings come through for the reader.

Avoid cleverness and word games. Don't waste time trying to come up with an overly complicated, clever opening and/or closing. Get to the heart of the matter. Be quick about it.

Keep your reviews concise. Time spent reading about videogames is time that your reader could be spending playing videogames!

The easiest games to write about are the ones that are very good or very bad. The hardest games to write about are the mediocre and/or nondescript games.

Unless specified by your assigning editor or formal publication policy, don't separate your review into distinct sections. (Paragraph one covers graphics, paragraph two deals with gameplay, etc.) Instead, weave all these elements into a single, compelling critical narrative.

When editorial policy calls for giving a game a review score, be fair. Not every game produced is an A, and most probably are not even a B. In a world where C is average, dole out the praise sparingly. Puffing up the score for an average game is not fair to the game or the reader.

Be bold. Be brave. Say something interesting. Ask yourself: What makes your review stand out from the hundreds of other reviews being written at this very moment?

# Top-Selling Systems

Figures represent the best data available at press time (April 2007) unless otherwise noted and should be considered estimates. Data was obtained from a variety of sources, including public company records and news reports. For up to date sales data estimates for current systems, see <http://www.vgcharts.org>.

Unlisted systems sold less than five million units worldwide. All numbers are in millions and represent worldwide units shipped unless otherwise noted.

**Atari 2600:** 25

**Nintendo Entertainment System:** 61.91

Japan: 19.35

North America: 34

Other: 8.56

**Game Boy:** 118.69 (Including Pocket and Color)

Japan: 32.47

North America: 44.06

Other: 42.16

**Sega Genesis:** 30.75

Japan: 3.58

North America: 8.8

Other: 18.37

**Super Nintendo Entertainment System:** 49.1

Japan: 17.17

North America: 23.35

Other: 8.58

**Sega Saturn:** 9.26

Japan: 5.74

Other: 3.52

**Sony PlayStation:** 102.49

Japan: 21.59

North America: 40.78

Europe: 40.12

**Nintendo 64:** 32.92

Japan: 5.54

North America: 20.63

Europe: 6.75

**Sega Dreamcast:** 10.6

Japan: 2.3

North America: 4.6

Other: 3.7

**Sony PlayStation 2:** 115.36

Japan: 24.76

North America: 46.53

Europe: 44.07

**Microsoft Xbox:** 24

**Nintendo GameCube:** 21.52

Japan: 4.02

The Americas: 12.74

Other: 4.76

**Nintendo Game Boy Advance** (including SP and Micro): 78.86 (through 2006)

Japan: 16.64

The Americas: 40.7

Other: 21.52

**Nintendo DS** (including DS Lite): 38.26 (As of March 2007)

Japan: 15.68

The Americas: 10.97

Other: 11.61

**Sony Playstation Portable:** 20.98 (As of March 2007)

Japan: 5.43

USA: 7.99

Europe: 7.56

**Microsoft Xbox 360:** 9.68

Japan: 0.38

The Americas: 6.04

Others: 3.26

**Nintendo Wii:** 6.58

Japan: 2.12

The Americas: 2.64

Other: 1.82

**Sony PlayStation 3:** 3.15

Japan: 0.87

The Americas: 1.37

Other: 0.91

# A Brief History of Videogames

## Antecedents

### Prehistory

- People play...with rocks and sticks.
- Sports and physical competition are born.
- Board and card games originate.

**1800s** A political cartoon shows Abe Lincoln playing *Bagatelle*, a pinball precursor.

**1889** The Marufuku Company is founded in Japan to make playing cards. The company will later change its name to Nintendo.

**1931** Gottlieb releases *Baffle Ball* and launches the pinball industry. Use of pinball by gambling and organized crime interests leads to government regulation in many locales.

**1933** Williams builds *Contact*, the first electro-mechanical pinball machine.

**1937** The first electronic computer, the Atanasoff-Berry Computer, is built.

**1947** Tokyo Telecommunications Engineering Company is founded by Akio Morita and Masaru Ibuka. The company starts building pocket transistor radios and grows into the global consumer electronics company known today as Sony.

**1954** David Rosen begins importing photo booths to Japan; his company will eventually become Sega.

**1957** The Soviet Union launches Sputnik. Machines grow as entertainment devices alongside growing fears about technology.

## The Dawn of Videogames

**1958** Willy Higinbotham builds an oscilloscope demonstration that allows players to enjoy a form of tennis at Brookhaven National Labs. *Tennis for Two* is widely considered the first videogame.

**1961** MIT student Steve Russell creates *Spacewar* on a \$120,000 PDP-1 mainframe computer. Other early mainframe games include *Hammurabi* – a simulation game; *Advent* – an adventure game; and *Lunar Lander* – a text-based spaceship landing simulation.

**1966** Sega's coin-operated mechanical game *Periscope* becomes a hit in Japan and is exported to the rest of the world. Players pay 25 cents per game. Although this was considered an excessive cost at the time, the quarter becomes the standard fee for arcade game play.

**1968** Ralph Baer patents the idea of an “interactive television game.”

**1971** Nolan Bushnell ships *Computer Space* for Nutting Associates; the game is generally considered the first non-mechanical coin-operated arcade game. The game fails to attract an audience – many consider it to be too complicated.

**1972** Magnavox releases the *Odyssey*, the first home videogame system, using Baer's technology.

**1972** Bushnell starts Atari. Al Alcorn creates *PONG*, inspired by Baer's designs. The game quickly overflows the coin box at its first test location and goes on to become a massive arcade hit.

**1972 - 1977** Many companies enter the videogame market with *PONG* clones for the arcade and home. By 1977 the fad has died and the videogame market experiences its first “hardware crash.”

## The Atari Era and the Golden Age of Arcades

**1976** Mattel releases *Auto Race*, the first handheld videogame.

**1977** Atari releases the 2600. It comes bundled with *Combat*, a game based on the arcade hit *Tank*.

**1978** Taito's *Space Invaders* arrives in arcades. The game causes a nationwide shortage of 100-yen coins in Japan.

**1978** Bushnell forced out at Atari; founds Chuck E. Cheese restaurant/arcade franchise.

**1979** Ex-Atari engineers start Activision, the first third-party developer.

**1979** *Asteroids* is released.

**1979** *Adventure*, the first game to feature an Easter egg, is released for the Atari 2600.

**1980** *Battlezone*, considered the original first-person shooter, is released.

**1980** *Defender*, the first game to feature a mini-map, is released.

**1980** *Pac-Man* is released.

**1980** *Tempest* is released and helps start the games-as-art debate.

## Personal Computers Arrive

**1979** *Flight Simulator* released for the Apple II and TRS-80.

**1979** Roberta and Ken Williams found On-Line Systems, which will eventually become Sierra Entertainment.

**1980** *Zork* is released for the Apple II.

**1980** Richard Garriott codes *Akalabeth* on Apple IIe; the *Ultima* series is born.

**1982** Trip Hawkins founds Electronic Arts.

**1983** EA's *One-on-One* featuring Julius Erving and Larry Bird becomes the first licensed sports videogame.

## The End of the Atari Era

**1982** Shigeru Miyamoto repurposes old *Radar Scope* arcade cabinets into *Donkey Kong*. The game is the first appearance of Mario and becomes an improbable hit for Nintendo.

**1982** Retailers return millions of unsellable *E.T.* and *Pac-man* cartridges for the Atari 2600. The cost of absorbing the returns is identified as one of the causes of the second videogame crash.

**1983-85** Second videogame crash. Too many low-quality games result in a rapid drop in software prices. In 1982, industry revenues sat at \$3 billion; by 1985 they decline to \$100 million. Atari alone loses \$539 million in 1983.

## The 8-Bit Era: The Return of the Consoles

**1983** The Family Computer (Famicom) is released in Japan.

**1984** Alexei Pajitnov creates a computer version of *Tetris* while working at Dorodnicyn Computing Centre of the Academy of Science of the USSR.

**1985** The American version of the Famicom, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), is test-marketed in New York City. *Super Mario Bros.* debuts.

**1986 - 1991** The NES is a huge hit worldwide, selling over 60 million units and dominating the home videogame market.

## The 16-bit Era

**1989** Sega launches the Genesis, the first 16-bit game console. Interest in the NES starts to decline.

**1989** Nintendo launches the Game Boy with *Tetris* packed in. The system will go on to sell over 100 million units worldwide and dominate the handheld gaming market until the release of the Game Boy Advance in 2001.

**1990** *Super Mario Bros. 3* is released. It becomes a huge hit for the NES, grossing \$500 million.

**1991** The Super Nintendo Entertainment System (Super NES) is released.

**1991** id Software's first-person shooter *Wolfenstein 3D* ships and puts computer gaming back on the map.

**1991** *Civilization* is released for the PC.

**1992** Westwood releases *Dune II*, establishing the real-time strategy genre.

## The PC Strikes Back

**1989** Will Wright creates *SimCity*.

**1993** *Myst* is released for the Macintosh and becomes the first major videogame to push CD-ROM technology and high-end multimedia.

**1993** *Doom* is released for the PC.

## The Next Generation and Beyond

**1994** The Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn are launched in Japan. The PlayStation goes on to become Sony's best selling product while the Saturn quickly flops.

**1995** The Saturn and PlayStation are released in North America.

**1996** The Nintendo 64 launches, and is the last major cartridge-based home system.

**1999** Sega launches the Dreamcast in an attempt to overcome the mistakes made with the Saturn. The system flounders in the marketplace despite critical praise for games such as *Seaman* and *Soul Calibur*. First system with a built-in modem.

**2000** Sony launches the PlayStation 2. The system goes on to dominate the market with over 100 million systems sold worldwide over the next seven years.

**2000** *The Sims* launches and goes on to become the biggest selling PC game of its era.

**2001** Dreamcast pulled from the market, Sega leaves the hardware business to become a third-party software publisher.

**2001** Nintendo's Game Boy Advance and GameCube are both released.

**2001** Microsoft launches the Xbox and loses a reported \$1.5 billion in the first 18 months. Still, the system establishes Microsoft as a viable player in the games business.

**2004** *Halo 2* attracts approximately 1.5 million pre-orders, gaining worldwide media attention.

## The Rise of the MMO

**1996** *Meridian 59* is released as the first graphical massively-multiplayer online game.

**1997** *Ultima Online* successfully expands the audience for MMOs.

**1999** *EverQuest* and *Asheron's Call* released. MMO role-playing games reach new level of popularity and relevance. The slang term "Evercrack" enters the cultural vocabulary to represent the genre's addictive qualities.

**2002** Microsoft launches Xbox Live; millions of gamers pay a fee for the premium online service.

**2002** *The Sims Online* ships.

**2003** *Star Wars Galaxies*, an MMO set in the Star Wars universe, ships.

**2004** *World of Warcraft* ships, goes on to dominate the MMO market with over 8 million subscribers.

## **The High-Definition Generation (The *Next Next* Generation)**

**2004** The Nintendo DS, the first dual-screened portable, launches. The touch-screen-enabled device grows from curious gaming oddity to top-selling portable system.

**2004** Sony launches its long-theorized handheld system, the PlayStation Portable. The all-purpose device plays movies, games, and music, and can connect to the Internet wirelessly.

**2005** The Xbox 360 ushers in the era of high-definition console gaming with support for 720p resolution in every game.

**2006** *Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day* on the Nintendo DS generates a new level of mainstream interest in gaming.

**2006** The PlayStation 3 ships in North America.

**2006** Nintendo's Wii becomes the next-gen console of choice over the 2006 holiday season, thanks in part to its novel motion-sensitive controller and the release of the first *Zelda* game – *Twilight Princess* – in three years. Still, the PlayStation 2 outsells all other consoles during the same period.

# Notable Characters

Capitalize character names as proper names on all references. For characters not listed below, refer to in-game text or accompanying instruction manual for spelling. If no name is given, use a short description of the character.

**Example:** Your ship in *Defender* can warp to another level.

**Wrong:** Use the warp to transport Ship to another level.

If a character shares his/her/its name with the game, italicize the name only when referring to the game, not the character.

## CHARACTERS:

**Aeris Gainsborough:** Aeris acceptable on all references. Not: Aerith.

**Bowser:** Final boss of many Mario games. Not: Koopa.

**Crash Bandicoot:** Star of popular series developed by Naughty Dog. Crash Bandicoot is not the official mascot of Sony or the PlayStation. Crash acceptable on all references.

**Dr. Robotnik:** The main boss/antagonist of nearly every *Sonic the Hedgehog* game.

**Duke Nukem:** Never use Nuke'm, Nuk'em, etc.

**Dig Dug:** Italicize the game name, but not the character name.

**Donkey Kong:** Star of *Donkey Kong* series of games. Appeared in *Donkey Kong Country*, but not its sequels.

**Frogger:** Proper name for the main character in the *Frogger* series.

**Jack and Daxter:** Stars of the eponymous action-adventure series.

**Ken Masters:** The popular, blond American from the *Street Fighter* series. Ken acceptable on all references.

**Lara Croft:** The buxom main character from the *Tomb Raider* franchise. Immortalized in a series of films starring actress Angelina Jolie.

**Leisure Suit Larry:** The libido-driven lead of the eponymous series of saucy, tongue-in-cheek adventure games.

**Link:** Protagonist in *The Legend of Zelda* series.

**Luigi:** Mario's brother, eternal understudy of the *Super Mario Bros.* series.

**Mario:** Plumber (originally carpenter) mascot of Nintendo, star of over 100 games. Never refer to him as Super Mario.

**Master Chief:** Protagonist in the *Halo* game series.

**Mega Man:** Robotic star of dozens of action games. Always two words.

**Ms. Pac-Man**

**Pac-Man**

**Princess Toadstool:** Used interchangeably with Princess Peach to describe the damsel-in-distress/heroine of the Mario series.

**Ryu:** Popular Japanese brawler from the *Street Fighter* series.

**Ryu Hyabusa:** Headliner of the *Ninja Gaiden* series.

**Samus Aran:** Armored heroine of the *Metroid* series. Samus acceptable after first reference.

**Sims:** Use specific avatar names for individual Sims.

**Solid Snake:** Protagonist for most of the *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear Solid* series. Snake acceptable after first reference, but be careful of context to avoid confusion with other characters named Snake.

**Sonic the Hedgehog:** Sega's mascot, known for his speed and trademark sneakers. Sonic acceptable on all references.

**Tommy Vercetti:** Star of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, but not its sequels or prequels.

**Yoshi:** Mario's mountable dinosaur pal. First appeared in *Super Mario World*.

**Zelda:** Princess rescued in the *Legend of Zelda* series. The hero/protagonist of the series is Link.



# Notable Companies

Specific units, divisions and branches of each company may use specific style or nomenclature not listed below. Do not follow company names with Co., Ltd., Corp., etc. except in business contexts. Be as specific as possible when referencing subsidiary companies; see **developer**, **publisher** entries.

**2K Games**

**2K Sports**

**The 3DO Company** (now defunct)

**Acclaim Entertainment** (now defunct)

**Activision**

**Aspyr Media**

**Atari**

**ATI**

**Atlus**

**Bethesda Softworks**

**BioWare**

**Blizzard Entertainment**

**Disney Interactive Studios** (formerly Buena Vista Interactive)

**Capcom**

**Codemasters**

**Crave Entertainment**

**Crystal Dynamics**

**Data East**

**EA Mobile Games**

**eGames**

**Eidos Interactive**

**Electronic Arts**

**Enix:** Merged with Square Soft to form

Square Enix in April, 2003. Refer to Enix only in historical contexts.

**Epic Games**

**Funcom**

**Gameloft**

**Groove Games**

**GT Interactive** (acquired by Infogrames)

**Hands-On Mobile**

**Harmonix** (acquired by MTV)

**I-play**

**id Software**

**Ignition Entertainment**

**Iguana Entertainment**

**Interplay Entertainment**

**KOEI**

**Konami**

**LucasArts**

**Mad Catz**

**Majesco Entertainment**

**Mattel**

**Maxis** (acquired by Electronic Arts)

**Microprose** (acquired by Hasbro Interactive)

**Microsoft**

**Microsoft Game Studios**

**Midway**

**Namco Bandai Games**

**NCsoft**

**Neversoft**

**Nintendo**

**NIS America**

**NVIDIA**

**Nyko**

**03 Entertainment**

**Origin Systems** (acquired by Electronic Arts)

**Psygnosis** (now defunct)

**Raven Software**

**Razer**

**RedOctane** (acquired by Activision)

**Rockstar Games**

**SCI Games**

**Sega Sammy Holdings**

**Sierra Entertainment** (acquired by Vivendi Universal Games)

**Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.**

**Sony Online Entertainment**

**Sony Pictures Digital**  
(mobile phone games)

**Spectrum Holobyte**  
(acquired by Hasbro Interactive)

**Square Soft:** Merged with Enix to create Square Enix in April 2003. Refer to Square Soft only in historical contexts.

**Square Electronic Arts LLC** (owned by Square and Electronic Arts. Folded back into Squaresoft, Inc. and changed to Square Enix, Inc.)

**Square Enix**

**Stardock**

**Strategic Simulations, Inc.** (“SSI”)

**Taito**

**Take 2 Interactive**

**Technos Japan Corporation** (now defunct.  
Assets acquired by Atlus)

**THQ**

**THQ Wireless**

**Ubisoft**

**US Gold** (acquired by Eidos Interactive)

**Virgin Interactive Entertainment**

**Vivendi Universal Games**

**Webzen**

**XS Games**

**XSEED**

# Notable Names

**Al Alcorn:** Designer of *PONG*.

**Robert “Robbie” Bach:** President of the Entertainment & Devices division at Microsoft, where he is in charge of the Xbox/Xbox 360 product line.

**Ralph Baer:** Creator of the first home gaming console, the Magnavox Odyssey.

**Clifford “CliffyB” Bleszinski:** Energetic designer for Epic Games, known for his work on the *Unreal* series and *Gears of War*.

**Bruno Bonnell:** Founder of Infogrames, and former chairman and chief creative officer of Atari.

**Ed Boon:** Creative director at Midway; responsible for the *Mortal Kombat* series.

**Nolan Bushnell:** Creator of *Computer Space*, the first coin-operated arcade game, and founder of Atari.

**John Carmack:** Lead programmer and technical visionary on *Doom* and *Quake*. Responsible for creation of id Software, along with John Romero and others.

**Louis Castle:** Responsible for the *Dune* and *Command and Conquer* series.

**Reginald “Reggie” Fils-Aime:** Popular and outspoken president of Nintendo of America.

**Richard “Lord British” Garriott:** Creator of the *Ultima* series.

**Ron Gilbert:** Computer game designer and programmer; creator of the Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion* (SCUMM) toolset, which was used to create iconic adventure games *Maniac Mansion* and *The Secret of Monkey Island*. Also known for his groundbreaking work on the *Putt-Putt* series.

**Trip Hawkins:** Founder of Electronic Arts, 3DO and Digital Chocolate.

**Kaz Hirai:** President and group chief operating officer, Sony Computer Entertainment Interactive.

**Yuji Hori:** Developer at Square Enix responsible for the *Dragon Quest* series.

**Sam Houser:** President of Rockstar Games; the creative force behind *Grand Theft Auto* series.

**Koji Igarashi:** Producer for the *Castlevania* series.

**Keiji Inafune:** Producer at Capcom who created *Mega Man*.

**Tomonobu Itagaki:** Producer at Tecmo’s Team NINJA; Creator of the *Dead or Alive* series.

**Satoru Iwata:** President and CEO, Nintendo Co., Ltd.

**Toru Iwatani:** Creator of *Pac-Man*.

**David Jaffe:** Game designer and producer known for his work on *God of War* and outspoken game industry critic.

**Eugene Jarvis:** Creator of *Defender* and *Robotron 2084*.

**Hideo Kojima:** Creator of the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise.

**Koji Kondo:** Nintendo composer, best known for his work on the *Mario* and *Zelda* series.

**Ken Kutaragi:** Chairman and group chief executive officer, Sony Computer Entertainment Interactive. Father of the PlayStation.

**Lorne Lanning:** Creator, with Sherry McKenna, of the *Oddworld* series.

**Sid Meier:** Lead designer of *Civilization*, *Pirates!* series.

**Steve Meretzky:** Designer noted for his work on classic text-based games such as *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Planetfall*.

**Shinji Mikami:** Creator of the *Resident Evil* series.

**Rand and Robin Miller:** Brothers responsible for the *Myst* series.

**Shigeru Miyamoto:** Designer responsible for the creation of *Donkey Kong*, *Mario*, *Star Fox*, *The Legend of Zelda* and other popular Nintendo franchises.

**Tetsuya Mizuguchi:** Game designer for Q Entertainment, formerly of Sega; responsible for such critically acclaimed titles as *Rez*, *Lumines* and *Space Channel 5*.

**Peter Molyneux:** Founder of Lionhead Studios; known for his work on *Populous*, *Black & White* and *The Movies*.

**Peter Moore:** Corporate vice president of Microsoft's Interactive Entertainment Business, Entertainment and Devices Division.

**Dr. Ray Muzyka and Dr. Greg Zeschuk:** Founders and joint CEOs of BioWare; famed for their work on *Baldur's Gate*, *Neverwinter Nights* and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.

**Yuji Naka:** Designer at Sega; responsible for *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

**Gabe Newell:** Co-founder of Valve software; creator of *Half-Life*.

**Alexey Pajitnov:** Creator of *Tetris*.

**Dave Perry:** Founder of Shiny Entertainment and creator of *Earthworm Jim*.

**Ted Price:** President and CEO of Insomniac Games, creators of the *Ratchet & Clank* and *Spyro* series.

**John Riccitiello:** Chief executive officer for Electronic Arts.

**John Romero:** Co-founder of id Software; co-creator of *Doom*.

**Hironobu Sakaguchi:** Creator of the *Final Fantasy* series.

**Tim Schafer:** Inventive game designer who has worked on titles such as *Full Throttle*, *Psychonauts* and *Grim Fandango*.

**Warren Spector:** Iconic game designer; oversaw franchises such as *Deus Ex*, *System Shock* and *Thief*.

**Yu Suzuki:** Noted game designer credited with the arcade classics *Out Run*, *Virtua Fighter* and *Shenmue*.

**Roberta and Ken Williams:** Husband and wife founders of On-Line Entertainment, which later became Sierra Online; creators of the *King's Quest* series as well as many other popular adventure games.

**Will Wright:** Designer of *SimCity*, *The Sims* and the upcoming *Spore*.

**Hiroshi Yamauchi:** President of Nintendo from 1949 - 2002; oversaw transformation of Nintendo from a playing card manufacturer to a videogame giant.

**Kazunori Yamauchi:** Producer of *Gran Turismo* franchise.

**Gunpei Yokoi:** Inventor of the Game and Watch and Game Boy product lines; designer of the Nintendo Entertainment System; creator of *Metroid*. Killed in a car accident in 1997.

# Notable Games

**Civilization:** *Civ* acceptable after first reference. Series sequels use Roman numerals: *Civilization II*, *Civilization III* and *Civilization IV*.

**Computer Space:** The first coin-operated arcade game. Based on *Spacewar* for the PDP mainframe computer.

**Counter-Strike:** Originally a mod for *Half-Life*; later became a standalone game and went on to achieve independent success. Not: *Half-Life: Counter Strike*.

**Dance Dance Revolution:** *DDR* acceptable after first reference.

**Final Fantasy:** Use Roman numerals for all sequels. Note that games before *Final Fantasy VII* had different numbering schemes inside and outside Japan. Also note that some unreleased Japanese games have been subsequently released outside Japan under the original numbering (so, in North America, there are two completely different games named *Final Fantasy III*; one for the Super NES and the Nintendo DS). Make sure the correct numbering scheme and release is clear from context, or else note it in the text.

**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories:** Note the lack of a 3 or III in all of these titles.

**Half-Life:** Note hyphenization and capitalization.

**Madden:** The original game, published in 1989, was titled *John Madden Football*. In 1994, the series was retitled *Madden NFL '94*. Subsequent releases use the year as a part of the title. Refer to the series as a whole as the *Madden* or *Madden NFL* series.

**Ms. Pac-Man:** Note hyphenization and capitalization.

**Pac-Man:** Hugely popular 1979 arcade game; also shares its name with first international videogame star. Note hyphenization and capitalization.

**Pokémon:** Note the accent and direction on the e.

**PONG:** Not the first videogame, but the first large-scale commercially successful videogame.

**Quake:** First-person shooter franchise which rose to popularity by being amongst the first to champion head-to-head multiplayer combat over the Internet.

**SimCity:** The game which established the simulation genre. Note the lack of a space between the two words.

**Spacewar:** The first computer game.

**StarCraft:** Widely acclaimed sci-fi real-time strategy game spin-off of the successful *Warcraft* franchise. Especially popular in South Korea. Note the capital C.

**Super Mario Bros.:** Popular series of platform games first appearing on the NES. Pronounced as “Super Mario Brothers,” but it’s always written as “Bros.” Original arcade game is *Mario Bros.* (note: no super). Sequels are *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Subsequent sequels do not include the “Bros.”

**Super Mario Bros. 2:** Significantly different games going by this name were released in Japan and other territories. If the version is not clear from context, be sure to note it in the text.

**Super Mario World:** Not: Super Mario Bros. 4: Super Mario World.

**Super Mario World 2: Yoshi’s Island:** *Yoshi’s Island* is acceptable after first reference.

**The Legend of Zelda:** Series name may be omitted for sequels. Do not use numbers except to reference *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*.

**Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, Tony Hawk's Underground, Tony Hawk's Project 8:** Note the apostrophe and "s" in all these titles.

**Tetris:** Original version was developed/published by Nintendo for consoles and handhelds, Atari for arcades and Spectrum Holobyte for home PCs. Current rights belong to The Tetris Company.

**Unreal, Unreal Tournament:** First-person shooter franchise notable for its stunning visuals. A major rival to id's *Quake* series.

**Warcraft:** Fantasy real-time strategy series. One of gaming's most revered. Unlike *StarCraft*, the "c" is not capitalized.

**World of Warcraft:** Benchmark massively-multiplayer online role-playing game currently with over 8 million subscribers worldwide.

**XenoSaga:** A popular series of role-playing games from Tetsuya Takahashi.

# **OTHER RESOURCES**

# Websites

## **A+E Interactive**

<http://blogs.mercurynews.com/aei/category/gaming>

Breaking news and commentary from the *San Jose Mercury News*.

## **Buzzcut**

<http://www.buzzcut.com>

Critical videogame theory by *Videogame Style Guide* author Dave Thomas.

## **Digital Games Research Association**

<http://www.digra.org>

Academic resources and articles.

## **Embassy Multimedia Consultants**

<http://www.embassymulti.com>

Copywriting and industry consulting from *Videogame Style Guide* and *Videogame Marketing and PR* author Scott Steinberg.

## **GameDaily Media Coverage**

<http://biz.gamedaily.com/industry/media>

Criticism and commentary on game journalism by *Videogame Style Guide* author Kyle Orland.

## **GameDev**

<http://www.gamedev.net>

Technical information and articles.

## **GamePolitics**

<http://www.gamepolitics.com>

Political and social news related to games.

## **GameSetWatch**

<http://www.gamesetwatch.com>

Breaking news and commentary.

## **GameStats**

<http://www.gamestats.com>

Real-time tracking of game popularity.

## **Games \* Design \* Art \* Culture**

<http://www.costik.com/weblog>

Insight from industry insider and Manifesto Games head Greg Costikyan.

## **Games Press**

<http://www.gamespress.com>

Press releases and game images for working members of the media.



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**Grumpy Gamer**

<http://www.grumpygamer.com>

Wit and commentary from Ron Gilbert, creator of *The Secret of Monkey Island* and other landmark games.

**International Game Developers Association**

<http://www.igda.org>

The primary membership organization for game developers.

**Joystiq**

<http://www.joystiq.com>

News, commentary and witty attitude.

**Kotaku**

<http://www.kotaku.com>

News, commentary and witty attitude.

**Reality Panic**

<http://www.realitypanic.com>

Industry commentary from the director of the International Game Developers Association.

**Slashdot Games**

<http://games.slashdot.org>

News for nerds. Stuff that matters.

**Terra Nova**

[http://terranova.blogs.com/terra\\_nova](http://terranova.blogs.com/terra_nova)

Academic game blog focused on virtual worlds. Indispensable news and insight.

**Videogame Media Watch**

<http://www.vgmwatch.com>

Game media criticism and commentary.

**VG Charts**

<http://www.vgcharts.org>

Global hardware and software sales estimates.

**Water Cooler Games**

<http://www.watercoolergames.org>

Serious discussion of serious games.

# Articles

## **Straight to the Source**

<http://biz.gamedaily.com/industry/media/?id=15267>

*Videogame Style Guide* author Kyle Orland explains how to properly source your articles.

## **The New Game Journalism**

<http://gillen.blogspot.com/2004/03/new-games-journalism-this-may-turn.html>

Follow up: <http://gillen.blogspot.com/2005/03/new-games-journalism-year-one.html>

Journalist and raconteur Kieron Gillen attempts to define a progressive form of game journalism and criticism inspired by the school of “New Journalists” such as Tom Wolfe.

## **10 Unmissable Examples of New Games Journalism**

[http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/games/archives/game\\_culture/2005/03/ten\\_unmissable\\_examples\\_of\\_new\\_games\\_journalism.html](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/games/archives/game_culture/2005/03/ten_unmissable_examples_of_new_games_journalism.html)

The UK’s *Guardian* newspaper gives a supportive nod to Gillen’s notion and some of the best examples of the form.

## **New Game Journalism, An Update**

[http://mbf.blogs.com/mbf/2005/02/new\\_games\\_journ.html](http://mbf.blogs.com/mbf/2005/02/new_games_journ.html)

Matteo Bittanti offers some direction for post-NGJ game journalism.

## **Why Videogame Journalism Sucks**

<http://biz.gamedaily.com/industry/feature/?id=13240>

Follow up: <http://biz.gamedaily.com/industry/feature/?id=13290&page=1>

Chris Buffa takes a crack at the eternal question.

## **The Lester Bangs of Videogames**

[http://www.esquire.com/features/articles/2006/060610\\_mfe\\_July\\_06\\_Klosterman.html](http://www.esquire.com/features/articles/2006/060610_mfe_July_06_Klosterman.html)

Media critic Chuck Klosterman wants to know why game journalism doesn’t have a Lester Bangs. So do we.

## **Editorial Integrity**

<http://www.lup.com/do/blogEntry?bld=6228583&publicUserId=5379799>

*Electronic Gaming Monthly* Editor-in-Chief Dan “Shoe” Hsu’s editorial on game journalism ethics remains relevant.

## **Power PR**

<http://biz.gamedaily.com/industry/feature/?id=15160>

*Videogame Style Guide* author Scott Steinberg reveals how public relations representatives and journalists can better relate.

## **The Good, the Blogged and the Ugly**

<http://vgmwatch.com/?p=1026>

*Videogame Style Guide* author Kyle Orland explores the brave new world of videogame blogging.

## **So You Want to Make a Fansite?**

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/issue/71/25>

*Videogame Style Guide* author Kyle Orland tells you everything you need to know to get started.

# Books

Bloom, Steve. *Video Invaders*. New York: Arco Pub., 1982.

Burnham, Van, and Ralph H. Baer. *Supercade: A Visual History of the Videogame Age 1971-1984*. MIT Press, 2001.

Cohen, Scott. *Zap: The Rise and Fall of Atari*. McGraw-Hill, 1987.

DeMaria, Rusel, and Johnny Lee Wilson. *High Score! The Illustrated History of Electronic Games*. McGraw-Hill Osborn Media, 2002.

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Kent, Steve L. *The Ultimate History of Video Games : From PONG to Pokémon and Beyond – The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World*. Roseville, Calif.: Prima, 2001.

King, Brad, and John Borland. *Dungeons and Dreamers : The Rise of Computer Game Culture : From Geek to Chic*. Emeryville, Calif.: McGraw-Hill/Osborne, 2003.

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Kunkel, Bill. *Confessions of the Game Doctor*. 1st ed. Springfield, NJ: Rolenta Press, 2005.

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Poole, Steven. *Trigger Happy : Videogames and the Entertainment Revolution*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Arcade Pub., 2000.

Railton, Jack. *The A-Z of Cool Computer Games*. London: Allison & Busby, 2005.

Sellers, John. *Arcade Fever : The Fan's Guide to the Golden Age of Video Games*. Philadelphia: Running Press, 2001.

Sheff, David, and Andy Eddy. *Game Over: Press Start to Continue*. New York: Cyberactive Publishing, 1999.

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Takahashi, Dean. *Opening the Xbox : Inside Microsoft's Plan to Unleash an Entertainment Revolution*. 1st ed. Roseville, Calif.: Prima, 2002.

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# **AFTERWORD**

# Game Criticism Redefined: “Is This Game Any Good?”

Because the videogame business is, at heart, a product-driven business, journalists covering the industry constantly face this question time and time again. In fact, videogame reviews and criticism often overshadow other forms of game journalism, from news to investigative reporting and commentary. Oddly, while reviewing turns a quick critical eye toward games, the art of reviewing games receives little critical attention of its own. So turning the tables of game criticism for a moment, we can ask the question: “Is this review any good?”

A final answer to this question will always depend on the basic skills of the writer, the needs of the reader and the style, tone and editorial direction of the publication running the review. Still, a basic framework for game reviews and criticism can help a writer judge the quality of their criticism as well as improve upon it.

First off, it helps to separate the ideas of “reviews” from “criticism.” In a very simple sense, reviews work at the level of explaining what something is while criticism seeks to explain what something means. A review might encourage players to check out *World of Warcraft* by describing what it is, championing this feature or that and giving it a place in the world of massively multiplayer online games. A critical piece might explore what it means when so many adults spend so much of their leisure time pretending to be winsome elves.

In this way, reviews and criticism form two ends of a spectrum of game evaluation. Reviews provide the basic descriptive material of the subject at hand while criticism looks to answer bigger questions around meaning.

In between these two poles sits a form of critical reviewing that borrows from each end and asks the question: What does this mean to me?

The urge to evaluate or produce criticism begins with some form of the statement “I liked” or “I didn’t like.” It’s a natural starting point. From an early age teachers instill this idea. “Why did you like the book?” “What did you see in that film?” “What makes this story more compelling to you than other stories?” Introspection starts the process of discovery and articulation brings out those ideas for others to see and consider.

But really, this sort of criticism is just the theater of taste. If you tell me what you like and don’t like, then I am left to unravel whether your taste means anything to me. How do I turn what you like into the raw material for the judgments I want to make about what I like? In a sea of uncertainty dotted with isolated islands of ego, everyone gets to be their own critic and no bigger picture emerges.

For this reason, the notion of “criticism” has become associated with reviewers and wags who simply stand on the sidelines and nitpick. Even when the people are smart and articulate, if they simply spit out taste, then the quality of delivery remains a fancy wrapper on a fairly empty package. When you hear a run-of-the-mill movie critic cry, “I loved it!” you only care to the degree that you might agree with them taste-wise. You don’t have any information to form more sophisticated judgments.

And for many critics, this is as far as criticism goes. Some critics make a career out of broadcasting their personality and opinion in this manner. Readers become familiar with what a critic likes and doesn’t like, so they become a sort of standard measure through consistency, rather than depth of critical insight. Whether you agree with the critic or not, you at least know where they stand. You might actually buy a game or watch a movie simply because a critic you regularly disagree with trashes something.

You figure if they hated it that much, then there must be something there.

Outside of games, we generally split our reviewers from our critics... and in some cases very vigorously. Pauline Kael wrote criticism; Harry Knowles spouts opinions. Roland Barthes wrote literary criticism; the book editor in your local paper writes reviews. Lester Bangs wrote rock criticism; Dick Clark only asked “Does it have a beat? Can you dance to it?” And so on.

From this background, we can put together a model with reviewing as the “tip of the iceberg,” basic criticism reflecting a bit on the subject and popular criticism providing a more fundamental kind of analysis that digs deeper than the review. And, at the base, a form of developed criticism that searches for more fundamental answers to the bigger question of “is this game any good?”

#### GAME CRITICISM MODEL

- Review – What is it? •
- Basic criticism – Do I like it? ••
- Popular criticism – Would other people like it? •••
- Developed criticism – What does it mean? •••••

Of course, a useful critical perspective can blossom from a review culture. Over the years, many videogame critics have realized that timeless criticism is about more than the opinions of the reviewer. These critics try to place a title in the context of other games. They compare features and player reception between games and try to make more universal judgments about the title. In reviewing *Grand Theft Auto*, for example, they will talk about the arch of the game series, and compare *GTA* to other mission-based driving games. They will emphasize what the game does that is new and what it does better than games in the past. They try to answer the question of “Where does this game fit with regards to other videogames?” And, at times, they tackle the question of what the game means to other gamers. “Do you like driving and shooting games?” they ask, “Then *GTA III* is for you!” No longer is the review simply about the reviewer. It is about anyone who might play the game.

Much of professional game criticism today is of this type. Dedicated journalists try to steer their fellow gamers toward quality product. And along the way, they attempt to define what quality is. Unfortunately, many critics stop at this point. They never move fully into the next phase of criticism. They never ask the big question, “What does this mean?”

Many writers shy away from these big questions because they feel that bringing up these kinds of issues is pretentious or making a big deal out of a little thing — a videogame. Really, this is more an issue of style than of substance. Blowhard academics can make simple things sound complex and great writers can make the sublime sensible. Rock and roll and film are mediums filled with critics that manage to entertain, incite and explore their subjects without dipping into self-serving postulation and pondering. Critics such as Lester Bangs and Robert Christgau made sense out of rock and roll without sterilizing it. Pauline Kael turned film criticism into a popular art form without dumbing it down. Roger Ebert carries on that tradition today by striving for meaning in his reviews without resorting to specialized academic vocabularies. Chuck Klosterman may not get videogames, but he manages to render cheap pop culture into a meaningful reflection on modern society.

Rather than threatening to turn game reviewing into an esoteric art, the desire to plumb the critical depths really comes from the basis of reviewing and popular criti-

cism. Each level of criticism relies on the previous. A critic starts asking about the meanings the game has to themselves, whether or not they like it. Next, they may generalize their tastes into whether others might like the game. Finally, they try to figure out what truths might be contained within that mean something in a more universal context.

If you reviewed *GTA III*, for example, and really liked it, you could look at it mechanically and wonder why it was enjoyable. You could abstract those reasons to come up with reasons why other gamers might like the game. And, as you reached the next level of criticism, you might start to ask questions like:

- Why is it fun to be bad?
- Does playing a criminal make me want to do bad things in real life?
- If the character I play is a thieving, murdering ex-con, why do I feel such sympathy for him?
- Do we live in an age where media violence has become so normal that we can only laugh about it?
- What is happening in society where behaving badly in a virtual world is so satisfying?
- What is it like to live in a world where a game like this is a best-seller?

Of course, these are only examples. Still, these questions lead far from the sort of review that is concerned with graphics, voice acting, particle effects, control set-ups or cut scenes alone. Certainly, these elements matter, but they are most compelling when looked at in the context of bigger questions that matter not only to the game and the player, but also outside that closed and isolated loop.

Over time, expect to see the evolution of criticism in videogames continue as academics bring their philosophical and structural tools to bear in creating conceptual criticism that will surely disturb gamers accustomed to simpler forms. Look for game reviewers tired of simple recitations of product features to mature into critics. These writers will most likely form the lead column in an advancement of game criticism. Why? Because, simply, as common reviewing convention grows toward more sophisticated criticism, the critics can help make sense of the medium in both a personal and larger cultural context for gamers.

And this is good news for games.

For videogames to actually grow as an expressive art form and reach beyond the status of toy products built as simple diversions and recognize their full potential as a renowned creative and aesthetic pursuit, people need to talk about them differently. Game journalists can help lead that conversation by finding more interesting answers.”

— David Thomas

## About the IGJA

The International Game Journalists Association was formed in 2004 in an effort to promote the quality and professionalism of videogame journalism. Recognizing both the rapid growth and relative newness of the medium, the IGJA seeks to support individual and group efforts to advance the art of game criticism, news gathering, writing, and reporting. Please join us at [www.igja.org](http://www.igja.org).

## About the Authors

**Kyle Orland** began writing about games when he founded fansite Super Mario Bros. HQ ([www.smbhq.com](http://www.smbhq.com)) in 1997. Since then, he's worked as a freelance journalist for many publications including National Public Radio, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *Gamespot*, *The Escapist*, *Next Generation*, *Joystiq*, *GameDaily*, and *Paste Magazine*. A complete list of his published works can be found on his workblog (<http://kyleorland.blogsome.com>). Kyle graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park in May 2004 with degrees in computer science and journalism. His favorite game of all time is *Super Mario 64*.

**Scott Steinberg** is the author of *Videogame Marketing and PR* ([www.sellmorevideogames.com](http://www.sellmorevideogames.com)) and works as the managing director of Embassy Multimedia Consultants ([www.embassymulti.com](http://www.embassymulti.com)), which counsels game industry leaders on hardware/software development, marketing and promotion. He's also a former vice president of product acquisitions for Microids and director of acquisitions for DreamCatcher Interactive/The Adventure Co. He remains gaming's most prolific journalist, having covered the topic for 300+ outlets ranging from CNN to the *New York Times*, *L.A. Times*, *Playboy*, *Rolling Stone* and *TV Guide*. Other ventures include independent game publisher Overload Entertainment, copywriting company Clandestine Media and GamesPress.com, the ultimate resource for game journalists.

**David Thomas** ([www.buzzcut.com](http://www.buzzcut.com)) has spent 20 years as a newspaper veteran and teacher specializing in arts and technology criticism. A founder of the IGJA ([www.igja.org](http://www.igja.org)), David remains an advocate for a professional approach to game journalism that doesn't dilute the fun inherent in the medium. For the past 10 years, he has covered games for *The Denver Post* and his column is syndicated through King Features. He regularly freelances for *The Escapist* online magazine. He also teaches the history of digital media, critical videogame theory, and other game and media-related classes for the University of Colorado.



*"Don't even think about getting involved with the industry without reading this first."* - Chris Kramer, Sr. Director of Communications, Capcom USA

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

# VIDEOGAME MARKETING AND PR

Foreword by Trip Hawkins  
*Founder of Electronic Arts, 3DO and Digital Chocolate*



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