Visual Novel

"Visual Novel", also known in Japan as "Novel Game"[note] , is a type of interactive medium, typically (if controversially) considered a genre of Video Games and a subgenre of Adventure Games; it is alternatively considered a type of medium itself, for those who do not consider them to be video games.

Wikipe-tan
I heard Watanabe-san was going to make his own visual novel so that we would have some free images to use on Wikipedia! That's the kind of guy who keeps the Internet alive, don't you think?

As a genre, "visual novel" is not defined by a mechanic or an aesthetic, but rather a distinctive presentation: VNs focus on presenting a text-based story using click-through text boxes, accompanied with static character graphics, and usually feature little to no actual gameplay.
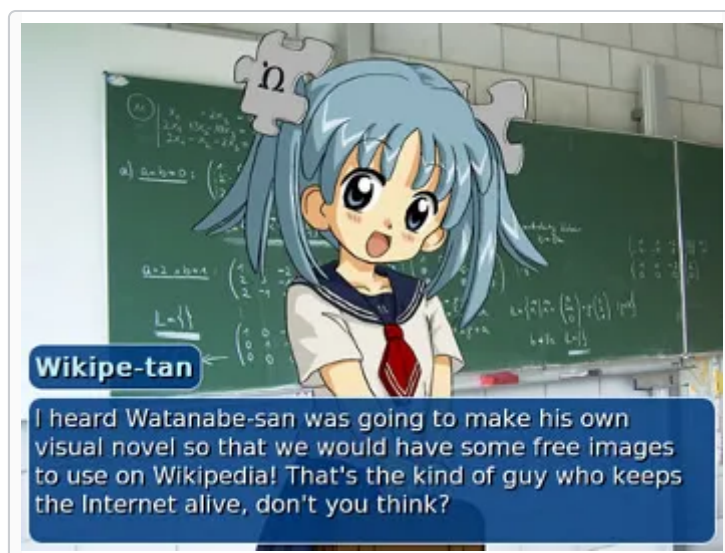
DEFINITION AND FEATURES

The core features of VN presentation include the following:

- **Click-through text boxes**, presenting the written portion of the story, that the player must click to progress through (as if they are flipping pages on a book)
- **Static character and background graphics**, presenting the story's characters and environment
- **Special story graphics** (sometimes called "Game CG"), used situationally to present story events in a more detailed manner

Other multimedia features, such as animation, music, or voice acting are common in VNs, though they're not key components of the VN presentation.

VNs are conventionally understood as being exclusively focused on presenting a narrative with VN presentation, with little to no actual gameplay. However, many works considered "visual novels" do in fact contain gameplay, and the actual line separating "visual novels with a bit of gameplay" and "adventure game with VN presentation" is blurry.

TV Tropes generally applies the Visual Novel Database's ruleset to distinguish VNs; the key elements to VNDB's classification are a dominant focus on VN-presented storytelling, as well as the use of "novel narrative", defined as the work primarily using written descriptions (as opposed to visuals or gameplay) to present the narrative.

Notably, due to the particular way Japanese Adventure Games (ADV) evolved, most Japanese ADVs use VN presentation, and as such are considered "visual novels" in the west. However, Japan still generally considers ADVs to be a separate genre from Novel Games, dividing the two genres by the amount of gameplay present; Novel Games have near-zero gameplay, while Adventure Games have basic gameplay.

As a presentation format-based genre, the stories presented in visual novels can be extremely diverse. Many visual novels feature non-linear Story Branching plots with Multiple Endings and often a Choice-and-Consequence System. In this sense, they can be seen as a digital evolution of Gamebooks (think CYOA). On the opposite end, visual novels with no gameplay and no branching stories are known as Kinetic Novels.

Visual Novels and Galgames

Though "visual novel" is a presentation-style-based genre, they have an overwhelming overlap with *Galgames* (a.k.a. *Bishoujo games*), an aesthetic-based genre. Galgames are a distinctively Japanese genre of video games that focus on attractive girls drawn in anime and manga art styles; the genre is related to the Eroge and Romance Game (and its related Dating Sim) genres.

The vast majority of visual novels are galgames, and almost all galgames are visual novels. This special relationship between the two genres caused the two genres to adopt conventions that significantly feature elements of the other. For example, many visual novels, including non-romance games, divide storylines into specific paths based on specific girl characters, a remnant of galgame conventions. "Visual novel" is commonly used as a synonym for "galgame" in the west, even though the two genres are technically different.

It is not uncommon for anime to be based on galgames, such as *Kanon*, *AIR*, *CLANNAD*, *Fate/stay night*, and *Steins;Gate*.

Visual Novels in the West

Many visual novels are restricted to Japanese markets, but roughly starting with the American release of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* in 2005 the genre has been embraced internationally. Companies such as MangaGamer, JAST, Sekai Project, and Neko Nyan are licensing more and more visual novels. Some visual novels that have been ignored by official localizers get translated by dedicated fans. Many of the ones on this list have an existing Fan Translation, partial or full. That being said, a majority of visual novels being translated and released now tend to have a

professional translation, as more dedicated translation companies appear. In fact, many professional translators started out as fan translators over the past 10 years.

Before The New '10s, most visual novels that did get localized suffered from the same problems that anime in the early '90s did: the localizers seemed to prefer to import the most sexual and/or violent titles. However, with the advent of Steam, its Greenlight program, and crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter (all of which have also aided the revival of Western adventure gaming), the number and availability of visual novels outside Japan have been steadily expanding. Since Steam disallowed explicit sexual content till 2018, the games available there were mostly either "clean" versions of explicit games or games without any explicit content in the first place.

There is also a small but growing number of Western-developed visual novels, generally created by indie developers and not distributed through mainstream channels. Some of these have garnered critical acclaim, such as *Katawa Shoujo* and *Analogue: A Hate Story*. A lot of Western-produced VNs are developed in the popular Ren'Py Game Maker, though many developers are shifting towards the use of Unity's Naninovel⬈.

See Visual Novel Tropes. If you want to take a crack at creating one of your own, we've got you covered.

Visual Novels are not to be confused with Light Novels (see page for more information).

Games in this medium:

📁 open/close all folders

By Genre:
- Fantasy Visual Novels
- Horror Visual Novels
- Science Fiction Visual Novels

By Interactivity:
- Kinetic Novel
- Linear Visual Novel

By Engine:
- Ren'Py
- Unity (Naninovel)

By Decade:
- Early Visual Novels
- Visual Novels of the 2000s
- Visual Novels of the 2010s
- Visual Novels of the 2020s

Major VN Developers:
- AliceSoft
- ELF Corporation
- Key/Visual Arts
- Nasuverse (Type-Moon)
- nitro+