

# About ESRB

We are the non-profit, self-regulatory body for the video game industry. Established in 1994, our primary responsibility is to help consumers – especially parents – make informed choices about the games their families play.

## What We Do and Why

Our rating system was established with the help of child development and academic experts, based on an analysis of other rating systems and what kind of information is valuable to parents. We found that consumers respond best to an age-based rating system that includes information about the content of a game. As games evolved, we found that parents place equal importance on understanding the ways in which some games are played, such as interacting with others online and spending money on in-game items.

Our [three-part rating system](#) includes Rating Categories to suggest age-appropriateness, Content Descriptors to indicate what type of content may have triggered the rating, and Interactive Elements, to advise about sharing the user's location with other users, in-game purchases, user interactions, and

unrestricted internet access. The result is a rating system that is widely adopted by game publishers, supported by retailers, [regularly used by parents](#), and consistently [described by regulators](#) and opinion leaders as the most effective entertainment rating system in the U.S., if not the world.

We are also responsible for enforcing industry-adopted [advertising guidelines](#), and helping to ensure responsible web and mobile privacy practices under the [ESRB Privacy Certified Program](#).

# Our History

1994

ESRB founded by the [Interactive Digital Software Association](#) (IDSA was renamed Entertainment Software Association in 2004)

New ESRB rating system announced, with 5 rating categories and 17 content descriptors



1995

Advertising Code of Conduct created and adopted by the IDSA

ESRBI rating system established for websites, with 5 rating categories and 22 content descriptors

1997

Online Rating Notice established to warn consumers of user-generated content in online-enabled games and on websites

1998

K-A (Kids to Adults) rating category changed to E (Everyone)



First ESRB Public Service Announcements launched featuring Tiger Woods, Derek Jeter and Regis Philbin

1999

Non-pixelated versions of rating symbols introduced



Advertising Review Council established as division of ESRB to monitor compliance with industry-adopted marketing and advertising guidelines

2000

ESRB [enforcement system](#) established to impose sanctions, including points, fines and corrective actions, on companies who do not comply with ESRB rules and guidelines

2001

New target marketing guidelines for Mature-rated games introduced

[ESRB Privacy Online](#) certification service launched and sanctioned by the FTC as a “Safe Harbor” under COPPA

2002

Arthur Pober departs as ESRB’s founding president; Patricia Vance joins ESRB as its new president

2003

ESRBI rating system for websites discontinued

2005

E10+ rating category introduced for games that may be suitable for ages 10 and older



2006

ESRB increases fine up to \$1 million for non-disclosure of pertinent content

[ESRB Retail Council \(ERC\)](#) launched by ESRB and leading computer and video game retailers; “ERC Commitment to Parents” is adopted by all ERC retail members

National radio and TV PSA [campaign](#) promoting ratings awareness launched with U.S. Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Joseph Lieberman

ESRB launches its first PSA campaign featuring artwork by Penny Arcade

2008

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) finds eight in ten underage buyers are turned away when attempting to purchase Mature-rated games

PTA and ESRB release “Parents Guide to Video Games, Parental Controls and Online Safety”

Rating summaries are introduced along with ESRB’s mobile website

2009

ESRB Privacy Online launches E.U. Privacy Seal Certification program

The FTC’s [sixth follow-up Report to Congress](#) lauds ESRB for having “the strongest self-regulatory code” and confirms that retailers have maintained their 80% store policy compliance rate

2010

ESRB launches PSA campaigns with the [New Orleans Saints](#) and [Chicago Blackhawks](#), both of which include TV and radio ads running in their respective regions as well as in-stadium/arena

2011

The [ESRB Website Council \(EWC\)](#) is established to help ensure that game enthusiast sites post complete rating information and employ age-gates on trailers and videos for M- and AO-rated games

The FTC's [mystery shopper study](#) finds enforcement of entertainment ratings to be "highest among video game sellers" with 87% overall compliance

ESRB introduces an [automated, streamlined process](#) for assigning ratings to console downloadable games

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in [Brown v. EMA/ESA](#) that video games qualify for First Amendment protection and the sale of violent games may not be restricted by law, a landmark decision that recognized the effectiveness of the ESRB rating system

ESRB is [commissioned](#) by the CTIA, the trade association representing wireless carriers in the U.S., to develop and administer a rating system for mobile apps

ESRB launches TV, radio and in-arena PSA campaign with the [Washington Capitals](#)

2012

ESRB releases a new [print and online PSA campaign](#) featuring real-life parents and gamers and artwork by Penny Arcade

ESRB launches TV and radio PSA campaign with the [San Francisco Giants](#) with airings in AT&T Park and throughout the Bay Area during the 2012 MLB season

[Interactive Elements](#) added to ESRB ratings for digital games and apps

ESRB introduces a [digital rating service](#) to provide cost-free ratings for digitally delivered games

# 2013

The FTC announces that [video game retailers](#) continue to have the highest level of store policy enforcement as compared to other entertainment retailers with 87% overall compliance

ESRB's Safe Harbor privacy program is re-branded [ESRB Privacy Certified](#) featuring new seals and privacy resources for existing and new members



[International Age Rating Coalition \(IARC\)](#) is incorporated

# 2014

International Age Rating Coalition (IARC) begins assigning ratings to games and apps on Mozilla's Firefox Marketplace

The Australian Classification Board (ACB) becomes an IARC participating rating authority

The Nintendo eShop deploys the IARC rating system for all digitally delivered video games and apps

# 2015

Google Play deploys the IARC rating system, resulting in the display of ESRB ratings for all apps available in North America

# 2016

The Windows Store deploys the IARC rating system for all digitally delivered games and apps

# 2017

The Oculus Store [deploys](#) the IARC rating system for all VR games and apps

Republic of Korea's [Game Rating and Administration Committee \(GRAC\)](#) becomes the newest participant in the IARC rating system

2018

[ESRB begins assigning Interactive Elements](#) to physical (e.g., boxed) games, including In-Game Purchases and Users Interact

PlayStation deploys IARC on the PlayStation Store to display ESRB ratings for all digitally delivered games, including for PlayStation VR

ESRB and Penny Arcade launch their third PSA campaign, featuring both artwork and voiceover from the Penny Arcade team

2019

[Origin](#) deploys the IARC rating system for all digitally delivered games

2020

ESRB [introduces](#) *In-Game Purchases (Includes Random Items)* [Interactive Element](#)

ESRB launches [¡Vamos a Jugar!](#) (or "Let's Play" in English) to help Spanish-speaking parents and guardians learn about the ESRB rating system, parental controls, and more

Google Stadia deploys the IARC rating system for all digitally delivered video games

2021

ESRB introduces the RATING PENDING – LIKELY MATURE 17+ [notice](#) that publishers can include in advertisements and promotional materials for upcoming video games that have not yet been rated but are anticipated to be rated Mature 17+



# WE ARE THE ESA

The Entertainment Software Association serves as the voice and advocate for the video game industry. Our mission is to expand and protect the dynamic worldwide marketplace for video games.

## ABOUT OUR MEMBERSHIP

The ESA works to ensure that the video game community can innovate and achieve its goals. We provide our members with expert insights into the legal, policy, and public affairs matters that affect interactive entertainment.

We serve our members by protecting and expanding the frontiers of our industry; providing world-class guidance on policy, government relations, and communications; convening industry leaders to solve problems together; arranging opportunities to learn and network; and showcasing the positive economic and social contributions of video games.



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GAMES

ACTIVISION | BLIZZARD<sup>®</sup>

  
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**SQUARE ENIX**



*Tencent* 腾讯

**THQ NORDIC**



**WARNER BROS.**  
GAMES



## CATÉGORIES DE CLASSEMENT

## ENFANTS ET ADULTES

Le contenu convient de manière générale à tous les âges. Peut comporter quelques éléments de violence animée, fictive ou légère et/ou l'usage occasionnel d'un langage grossier.

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Le contenu convient de manière générale aux enfants de 10 ans et plus. Peut comporter un plus haut degré de violence animée, fictive ou légère, de langage grossier et/ou quelques scènes suggestives.

Le contenu convient de manière générale aux enfants de 13 ans et plus. Peut comporter des éléments de violence, des thèmes suggestifs, un humour grossier, quelques représentations de sang, des jeux de hasard simulés et/ou un langage parfois ordurier.

## JEUNES ADULTES 17+

Le contenu convient généralement aux personnes de 17 ans et plus. Peut comporter un haut degré de violence, des représentations de sang et de carnage, des scènes sexuelles et/ou un langage ordurier.

## ADULTES SEULEMENT 18+

Le contenu convient uniquement aux adultes de 18 ans et plus. Peut comporter des scènes prolongées de violence intense, des contenus graphiques à caractère sexuel et/ou des jeux d'argent.

## COTE en ATTENTE

Cote finale de l'ESRB pas encore attribuée. N'apparaît que dans les supports publicitaires, de marketing ou promotionnels se rapportant à un jeu vidéo physique (par exemple : en boîte) qui portera ultérieurement une cote ESRB, laquelle remplacera, une fois attribuée, la mention de cote en instance.

## COTE en ATTENTE Probablement Jeunes Adultes 17+

La cote finale de l'ESRB n'a encore été attribuée, mais le classement Jeunes adultes 17+ est anticipé. Cote finale de l'ESRB pas encore attribuée. N'apparaît que dans les supports publicitaires, de marketing ou promotionnels se rapportant à un jeu vidéo physique (par exemple: en boîte) qui portera ultérieurement une cote ESRB, laquelle remplacera, une fois attribuée, la mention de cote instance.

# Description des Contenus

Description des contenus indiquant les éléments de contenu qui ont justifié l'attribution d'une cote particulière et/ou auxquels on doit porter une attention spéciale.

<b><u>Mention d’alcool</u></b>
Mention et/ou images de boissons alcoolisées
<b><u>Sang</u></b>
Représentations de sang
<b><u>Violence en animation</u></b>
Actes violents comportant des situations et des personnages animé(e)s. Peut contenir de la violence sans toutefois porter atteinte aux personnages victimes de tels actes
<b><u>Humour grossier</u></b>
Représentations ou dialogue comportant des espiègleries vulgaires, y compris de «l'humour de toilettes»
<b><u>Violence fictive</u></b>
Actes violents à caractère fictif impliquant des personnages humains ou non-humains dans des situations que l’on peut facilement distinguer de la vie réelle
<b><u>Langage</u></b>
Jurons légers à modérés
<b><u>Humour adulte</u></b>
Représentations ou dialogue comportant de l'humour «adulte», y compris des références au sexe
<b><u>Nudité partielle</u></b>
Brèves et/ou légères scènes de nudité
<b><u>Contenu sexuel</u></b>
Représentations non explicites de comportement sexuel, incluant possiblement de la nudité partielle
<b><u>Violence sexuelle</u></b>
Représentations de viol ou autres actes sexuels violents
<b><u>Langage ordurier</u></b>
Utilisation fréquente et/ou explicite de jurons
<b><u>Fort contenu sexuel</u></b>
Représentations explicites et/ou fréquentes de comportement sexuel, incluant possiblement de la nudité

<b><u>Sang en animation</u></b>
Représentations de sang décoloré et/ou non réaliste
<b><u>Sang et carnage</u></b>
Sang et carnage – Représentations de sang ou de mutilation de parties du corps
<b><u>Espiègleries</u></b>
Représentations ou dialogue comportant de l'humour burlesque ou suggestif
<b><u>Mention de drogues</u></b>
Mention et/ou images de drogues illicites
<b><u>Violence intense</u></b>
Représentations graphiques et réalistes de conflit physique. Peut contenir des scènes réalistes et/ou extrêmes de sang, de carnage et d’armes, ainsi que des représentations de blessures corporelles et de mort
<b><u>Paroles de chansons</u></b>
Les paroles contiennent des jurons, de légères références au sexe, à la violence, à la consommation d’alcool ou de drogues
<b><u>Nudité</u></b>
Nudité – Représentations graphiques ou prolongées de nudité
<b><u>Vrais jeux de hasard</u></b>
Le joueur peut participer à un jeu de hasard, y compris parier ou gager des espèces ou de l’argent réel
<b><u>Thèmes sexuels</u></b>
Références au sexe ou à la sexualité
<b><u>Simulation de jeux de hasard</u></b>
Le joueur peut participer à un jeu de hasard sans parier ou gager des espèces ou de l’argent réel
<b><u>Chansons ordurières</u></b>
Les paroles contiennent des jurons et des références explicites et/ou fréquentes au sexe, à la violence et à la consommation d’alcool ou de drogues
<b><u>Thèmes suggestifs</u></b>
Références ou matériels légèrement provocants



**Mention de tabac**

Mention et/ou images de produits de tabac

**Usage de drogues**

Consommation ou usage de drogues illicites

**Violence**

Scènes impliquant un conflit agressif. Peut contenir des mutilations sans effusion de sang

**Usage d'alcool**

Consommation de boissons alcoolisées

**Usage de tabac**

Consommation de produits de tabac

**Références violentes**

Références à des actes violents

**REMARQUE:** Les descripteurs de contenu sont appliqués en rapport avec les pictogrammes de cotation assignés et ne sont pas conçus comme des listes exhaustives de contenus. Lorsqu’une note descriptive est précédée du terme « Faible », il représente une faible fréquence, intensité ou sévérité du contenu qu’elle modifie.

# Éléments Interactifs

Les éléments interactifs mettent en évidence des fonctionnalités interactives ou en ligne qui peuvent être d'intérêt ou d'inquiétudes, mais n'influencent pas l'attribution de notation d'un produit. Cela comprend la capacité des utilisateurs à interagir les uns avec les autres, le partage de l'emplacement des utilisateurs avec d'autres utilisateurs, si des achats de biens ou de services numériques sont proposés, et/ou si un accès Internet illimité est fourni.

## Achats intra-jeu

Contient des offres d’achat de produits numériques ou de primes dans le jeu en échange de monnaie réelle, y compris, sans s’y limiter, des niveaux bonus, des habillages, de la musique, des pièces de monnaie virtuelles et d’autres formes de monnaie dans le jeu, des abonnements, des passes de saison et des mises à niveau (p. ex. pour désactiver les annonces)

## Interactivité des Utilisateurs

Indique une possible exposition à des contenus non filtrés / non censurés créés par un utilisateur, ce qui inclut des communications d’utilisateur à utilisateur et le partage de média via les réseaux et média sociaux.

## Achats intra-jeu (y compris divers articles)

Contient des offres d’achat de produits numériques ou de primes dans le jeu en échange de monnaie réelle (ou de pièces de monnaie virtuelles ou d’autres formes de monnaie dans le jeu pouvant être achetées avec de la monnaie réelle) pour lesquelles le joueur ne connaît pas avant l’achat le produit numérique ou la prime qu’il recevra (p. ex. des coffres à butin, des ensembles d’objets, des prix mystère)

## Partage l’Emplacement

Peut indiquer la localisation de l’utilisateur à d’autres utilisateurs de l’application.

## Internet Illimité

Fournit un accès illimité à Internet (par exemple, navigateur, moteur de recherche)

**« Téléchargements de musique non classés par l’ESRB »** – Prévient que les chansons téléchargées comme suppléments pour des jeux à base musicale n’ont pas été pris en compte dans le classement ESRB.

# Ratings Process

ESRB uses two different rating processes depending on whether a game is available physically (e.g., boxed) or only digitally.

## Physical Games

Physical games sold at retail are reviewed prior to release, with two key forms of content disclosure provided by the publisher:

1. A completed questionnaire detailing any relevant content (violence, sex, language, gambling, etc.), and other factors such as context, reward systems and player control.
  2. A video showing typical gameplay, missions, and cutscenes, including the most “extreme” content.
- Unplayable content (i.e., “locked out”), if it is pertinent to a rating, must also be disclosed.

The video is reviewed by at least three trained raters, who recommend a Rating Category, Content Descriptors, and Interactive Elements. The raters’ recommendation is then evaluated and confirmed, sometimes following a parity review to maintain consistency across rating assignments with similar content. A Rating Summary is then finalized, detailing the factors that led to a game’s rating. Finally, the rating is issued to the publisher, which either accepts it as the final rating or chooses to revise the game’s content and resubmit it, at which point the rating process starts again.

After release, testers may also play-test the game to verify that the content disclosure was complete.

## Digital Games

Digital games are rated using a process developed by the [International Age Rating Coalition \(IARC\)](#).

Prior to release developers fill out a questionnaire that quickly assigns the game or app’s Rating Category, Content Descriptors, and Interactive Elements. Games and apps rated via the IARC process do not have Rating Summaries.

The IARC system enables us to monitor rating assignments, test product upon release to ensure those ratings were properly assigned, and promptly adjust the ratings when necessary.

## Downloadable Content (DLC)

In most cases, the rating assigned to a game also applies to its DLC. However, if the DLC content exceeds the rating assigned to the “core” product, it must be submitted, and a different rating may be assigned to the DLC.

## Enforcement

We have several mechanisms in place to ensure that publishers fully disclose all the content in their games, so consumers get complete and reliable rating information.

For digitally delivered games and apps rated through [IARC](#), we can promptly correct the display of an inaccurate rating assignment, which serves as an effective enforcement mechanism.

The display of rating information on physical games is far more difficult to modify after a game ships. As a result, our enforcement system includes sanctions and fines (up to \$1 million) that may be imposed on publishers who don’t fully disclose content to us during the rating process.

Our Advertising Review Council (ARC) also works with publishers to ensure that correct and complete rating information is displayed on game packaging and marketing materials. Publishers of physical games rated by the ESRB are contractually obligated to follow industry-adopted [Principles and Guidelines for Responsible Advertising Practices](#). The [ESRB Website Council](#) (EWC) members also voluntarily comply with many of those guidelines.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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## How was the rating system created?

The ESRB rating system was founded by the video game industry in 1994 after consulting a wide range of child development and academic experts, analyzing other rating systems, and conducting nationwide research with parents. ESRB found that parents wanted a rating system that has both age-based categories and concise and impartial information regarding content. With this philosophy in mind, today the ESRB administers a [three-part system](#) that includes Rating Categories, Content Descriptors, and Interactive Elements.

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## Does ESRB rate only physical games, or does it rate mobile and online games too?

Since 1994, the ESRB rating system has established itself as a familiar, reliable means for parents to gauge the suitability of video games for their children. Although consumers may be more familiar with ESRB ratings on physical (boxed) games, increasingly ESRB ratings can be found for apps, VR, and online games.

The ESRB is one of the founding rating authorities of the [International Age Rating Coalition \(IARC\)](#), which administers a streamlined process for assigning age and content ratings to digitally delivered games and mobile apps. The Microsoft Store for Windows and Xbox, the Nintendo eShop, the PlayStation Store, Origin, the Google Play Store, and the Oculus Store are among the digital storefronts that have deployed the IARC rating system, which facilitates the display of ESRB ratings on devices in North America.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT WHERE TO FIND RATINGS](#) →

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## Are all games required to have a rating?

The rating system is voluntary, however all console manufacturers as well as certain U.S. retailers and mobile or online storefronts require ESRB ratings for the games or apps they offer.

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## Does the ESRB have any restrictions on how a game can be marketed?

Publishers of physical (boxed) games carrying an ESRB rating are contractually bound to follow the industry-adopted [Principles and Guidelines for Responsible Advertising Practices](#), including requirements addressing how rating information must be displayed on game packaging and in advertising. There are also certain restrictions on where ads for Mature-rated games may appear. The ESRB's Advertising Review Council (ARC) diligently monitors industry compliance, and if a game publisher is found to have inappropriately labeled or advertised a product, the ESRB is empowered to compel corrective actions and impose a wide range of sanctions, including monetary fines.

Publishers of digitally delivered games and apps are strongly encouraged to provide consumers with clear and prominent disclosure of ESRB rating information as well as comply with the ESRB advertising and marketing guidelines.

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## Who decides which rating should be assigned?

ESRB ratings for physical (boxed) video games are based on the consensus of at least three specially trained raters who collectively assess a game's content and deliberate about what rating should be assigned to a game. Some raters are also required to play-test games post-release to ensure that complete and accurate content disclosure was provided to ESRB when it was originally submitted for rating. To eliminate the risk of outside influence, including from industry members and the media, the identities of ESRB raters are kept confidential, and they are not permitted to have any ties to or connections with any individuals or entities in the video game industry.

Games and apps that are only available online are rated via [IARC](#), a streamlined rating process designed specifically for digitally delivered games and apps.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RATINGS PROCESS](#) →

## How does the ESRB rate downloadable content (DLC) or other content updates that supplement a game or app?

Downloadable content (DLC) often refers to additional content that supplements or extends a previously-rated product. In most cases, the [rating assigned](#) to a game also applies to its DLC. However, if the DLC content exceeds the rating assigned to the “core” product, it must be submitted, and a different rating may be assigned to the DLC.

Should the ESRB find DLC or other update that is incompatible with the original rating, the developer and appropriate digital storefronts will be notified of a change to the rating for the DLC or, in the case where the update is required, a rating change for the core product.

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## Do ESRB raters play the games they rate?

ESRB raters do not play through games during the rating process for a variety of reasons. First, many games can have upwards of 50 hours of gameplay, so requiring a minimum of three raters to play through hundreds of physical (boxed) games rated annually would be impractical. Additionally, games are player-controlled and enable many different permutations of gameplay depending upon how the player decides to approach a situation. We do, however, play-test many games after release to help ensure all pertinent content was disclosed during the [rating process](#).

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## How does the ESRB know companies have fully disclosed all of the content in their game or app, and what happens if they don't?

Through a combination of post-release testing and monitoring of public comments ESRB verifies that all content pertinent to a rating has been reviewed. Should we find that a game or app has been assigned a rating based on incomplete or inaccurate content disclosure, we work to ensure that the rating is promptly corrected wherever it is displayed to consumers, be it a game box, an advertisement, or an online or mobile storefront. For physical (boxed) games, failure to disclose pertinent content during the [rating process](#) may also be addressed with formal [sanctions and penalties](#).

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## Do video game retailers support and enforce the ESRB rating system?

Most major retailers have established their own store policies requiring ESRB ratings to be displayed on the video games they carry. Additionally, they have also implemented age verification for the sale or rental of M (Mature) and AO (Adults Only) rated games. [ESRB Retail Council \(ERC\)](#) members conduct regular mystery shop audits to help ensure high levels of compliance. According to the [Federal Trade Commission](#), unaccompanied children who attempt to purchase a Mature-rated video game are stopped 87% of the time.

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## How can parents manage which games their children play?

Virtually all devices that children use to play games include parental control settings which parents can activate to manage what and how their children play. Depending on the device, parents can manage certain features like how much money their child can spend, who they can play with online, which games can be played based on the age rating, time spent playing them, and more. Consult the [ESRB Parental Controls Guides](#) for step-by-step instructions on setting up parental controls for your console, handheld, phone, tablet, or personal computer. We also encourage parents to establish household rules which this [Family Discussion Guide](#) can help initiate.

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