

# Frequently Asked Questions

---

## 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.

---

## 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 →](#)

---

## 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.

---

## 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.

---

## 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.

---

## 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](#).

---

## 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](#).

---

## 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.

---

## 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.

---