# Ethical Considerations

In this lesson, students will learn the role of governing bodies and developers in creating games that are ethical. The lesson presents different points of view for students to consider and explore.

## Objective

Students will be able to:

* Explain the role of the ESRB and how it differs from a government agency
* Explain the role of developers with regards to ethical issues

## Overview

Ethics, by definition, is the moral principle that governs a person’s behavior. In video game design, ethics plays out in a couple of different ways.

Perhaps the more obvious way is with respect to the content that developers can choose to build. Are there games that should not be built, even if you can legally build them?

The second place that ethics is found in the video game industry is the role of the government. Should the government be able to limit the games that are developed, or should freedom of speech allow a developer to build any game they want?

In this lesson, you are going to take a look at both the role of the developer and the role of the government with respect to video game design.

## The Role of Governing Bodies

## Overview

As video games became more and more violent and realistic through the 1980s and into the early 1990s, pressure began to mount to create some government regulation in the industry. Games such as Mortal Kombat and Doom triggered congressional hearings which ultimately resulted in the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).

The ESRB is not actually a part of the government. It is a self regulating non-profit organization that is responsible for enforcing the advertising guidelines of digital games. As a consumer, you might be familiar with their rating systems, which help individuals to make informed game-purchasing decisions based on their age.

While some jurisdictions have passed laws that limit the sale of mature rated video games to minors, they have been struck down as unconstitutional since video game design is protected as a freedom of speech.

## Objective

For this activity, you will go on a scavenger hunt for information related to the ESRB. Take time to review the ESRB website here:

<https://www.esrb.org/>

Using the information on the website and other information you have seen, answers the following questions:

1. Where can consumers find ratings? Name the four main locations.
2. How many rating categories are there?
3. How are digital games rated? Does the ESRB play the games? Why or why not?
4. What does “Rating Pending” mean? Are publishers allowed to promote and sell their game during this process?
5. According to the content descriptors, would “animated blood” be an appropriate label for a video game that is created for medical students in surgical residency? Why or why not?
6. Navigate back to the homepage and click on the Most Viewed Games link at the bottom of the page. Which ratings are most prevalent in the games listed on the first page? Were you surprised to find this? Why or why not?
7. Search for a game that you are familiar with and find the rating and the reason for the rating. Do you think this rating is fair? Why or why not?
8. Your local congressman wants to overhaul the ESRB system and has tasked you with coming up with a set of changes to the process. What 3 changes would you propose making to the video game rating process and why.

## The Role of Developers

While governing bodies have a role in the ethics of video games, developers can also play a role.

For example, the ESRB may rate things based on violence, but that means a first person shooter game set in World War 2 may get the same rating as a first person shooter set in a high school. While the level of violence/blood and gore may be the same, the ethical consideration for these is much different.

Do you think developers have a right to create any game they want, or should they follow ethical standards?

Some of this will be dictated by the retail market. A company that publishes a first person shooter set in a high school may have backlash from consumers and lose money.

Celia Hodent, an expert in video games user experience and cognitive psychology recently wrote an article on four different ethical considerations in the video game industry.

Take time to read the introduction and one of the four ethical considerations:

1. Video Game “addiction“

2. Loot boxes and gambling

3. Dark patterns

4. Violence

Source: <https://celiahodent.com/ethics-in-the-videogame-industry/>

### The Role of Developers: One Pager

Using the article, choose one of the four issues that Celia Hodent highlights.

Working with either a partner or your own, create a One Pager that you will present to the class. The One Pager should have the issue that you choose in the middle and 4 boxes, each with a title and content. The content can either be a short paragraph, bulleted items, or an image.

The 4 boxes should cover the following information as found in the article.

1. Summary of the concern

2. Summary science behind the concern

3. Summary of what the industry could do about the concern

4. Do you agree or disagree with the concern and bullet points to support your position?