

Overview of the Videogame Industry

by Warren Zeng

As part of the imagined “Game Design” curriculum

General Overview

This unit’s goal is to expose students to various elements of the broader video game industry, hopefully introducing them to topics/aspects that they either have not learned about before, or have never analyzed in-depth before. The unit is very much a macro-level focus on the industry and will cover topics, including but not limited to: digital storefronts/launchers, game monetization, game studio sizes (AAA, AA, indie), game marketing/PR, video game reviews/journalism, games as a service, etc. This unit also works well to promote a few digital literacy standards and promotes class discussions/conversations that you would normally not see in programming-focused computer science classes. It works well for the Game Design curriculum that I have thought up of, as it covers important details surrounding a video game that is set to release to the public and gives students an opportunity to think about a game that they are developing beyond just the game programming, art/story, etc. Students will also get to think about career paths and discuss the ethics of certain systems in the industry.

Motivation for Unit

As I described in the general overview, this unit is a great opportunity to give students a breather from designing games on their own and instead allows room for discussion based classes/lessons. It’s also vital for game developers to have context on how the video game industry works, regardless of what kind of game development related job they may want to do in the future. There are many, many aspects of the industry that are important for people to know about, but I tried to choose ones that may be relevant for students to learn about. The biggest motivation is therefore to give students knowledge that will serve them well to know in the future if they ever decide to enter the industry.

Standards Referenced

List The NY State Computer Science standards you will be covering in this unit. Provide the number and name (e.g. 4-6.CT.1 Computational Thinking, Modeling and Simulation)

- 9-12.IC.1 Impacts of Computing, Society
 - 9-12.IC.3 Impacts of Computing, Ethics
 - 9-12.IC.7 Impacts of Computing, Career Paths
 - 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use
 - 9-12.DL.4 Digital Literacy, Digital Use
 - 9-12.DL.6 Digital Literacy, Digital Citizenship
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Tools Used

- Some of the game making engines/software I looked at were RPG Paper maker and Godot, but for this unit in particular, there may not be any programming done.
 - Other written assignments/discussions will be done through Google Classroom
 - Students will use Google docs/Google slides for written work and presentations
 - Computer and internet connection to browse sites online
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Resources

A variety of articles and some videos are used to help deliver the content in the course. They are all listed in the “resources” folder/file.

Lessons

Total length: ~2 Weeks, 45 minute periods. Each bullet represents 1 instructional period

Week 1

- 00_Game development team structure in a professional environment
- 01_Indie, AA and AAA Studios
- 02_Game monetization
- 03_Games as a Service
- 04_Introduce final project - create presentation related to unit

Week 2

- 05_Video game journalism
 - 06_Marketing, PR and Community building
 - 07_Digital storefronts/launchers (Steam, Epic game store, Riot Games client, xbox/playstation stores, App store/Google Play)
 - “08”_Final project - Group work during class time
 - “09”_Final project - Presentation day
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Assesments

formative - - temperature check of room (thumbs up/down, etc.) surrounding introduction to concepts - low stakes participation in class discussions allow for students to show their understanding

Summative - - discussion posts (students discuss/write about their own feelings based on the different things they are learning, which could also be used as formative assessment to check understanding. Some of these will also be ethics debates) - final presentation that involves students going deeper into a subject related to the video game industry

Resources

- <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/game-development-roles>
- <https://www.danielparente.net/en/2023/01/17/whats-the-typical-structure-of-a-game-development-team/>
- <https://www.destructoid.com/geoff-keighley-explains-why-dave-the-diver-has-been-nominated-as-an-indie-game/>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzgP3Y_U-gQ
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonwosborne/2023/05/25/how-loot-boxes-in-childrens-video-games-encourage-gambling/?sh=788ea75b5653>
- <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-15-billion-question-have-loot-boxes-turned-video-gaming-into-gambling>
- <https://clevertap.com/blog/games-as-a-service/>
- <https://www.helpshift.com/games-as-a-service-gaaS-what-it-is-and-how-it-works/>
- <https://www.gridly.com/blog/games-as-a-service/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VScoEZ-qyC4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXA559KNopl>
- <https://www.youtube.com/@extracredits/videos>
- <https://www.ign.com/>
- <https://www.metacritic.com/>
- <https://blog.atisfyreach.com/game-marketing-strategies-to-reach-gamers/>
- <https://vulcanpost.com/651277/league-of-legends-k-pop-video-marketing/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOxkGD8qRB4>
- <https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/16/18334865/epic-games-store-versus-steam-valve-pc-gaming-console-war-reimagined>
- <https://www.pcgamer.com/epic-games-store-self-publishing/>
- <https://www.pcworld.com/article/398473/a-year-in-the-epic-games-stores-fight-against-steam-has-made-all-pc-gaming-better.html>
- <https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/10/07/report-steams-30-cut-is-actually-the-industry-standard>

Lesson 00 – Game Dev Teams

Main objective

Students will gain an overview of the different kinds of careers in a game development studio, as well as how the larger game development process is like in the professional setting.

Standards

- 9-12.IC.1 Impacts of Computing, Society
- 9-12.IC.7 Impacts of Computing, Career Paths
- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: What kind of roles are there in a video game development team?

Do Now:

What has been your favorite part of this course so far? What have you liked creating? List a few specific things you liked about it and share with your classmates.

Instruction:

Segue from the Do Now into a breakdown of the different categories of roles that are present in the game industry (art, design, programming, QA/production). The slides have a general overview of what may be included in each category. Note to students that throughout this year, they have been doing a little bit of all of that in the class.

Next, talk about some examples of official job titles related to game development.

Tease that there are different sizes of game companies (which will be covered in the next lesson), and then move onto group discussions.

Slides included in the folder/at the end of the pdf.

Group discussions:

Class discussion: From your experience in this class thus far and from what you have seen today, what kind of career would you be most excited to have in the video game industry?

Time to work on assignment:

Students get the rest of class (if applicable) to work on their homework assignment.

Resources

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/game-development-roles>

<https://www.danielparente.net/en/2023/01/17/whats-the-typical-structure-of-a-game-development-team/>

Assignments

Post on Google classroom – Restate your opinion on what kind of career you might want to have in the game industry in the future. Look up the kinds of salaries for those kinds of positions. Does this affect your decision on your choice of career?

Reply to 2 others of your classmates' posts.

Lesson 01 – Indie, AA and AAA Studios

Main objective

Students will learn about the different sizes of video game studios, and how they are defined.

Students will also observe the differences between products of said different studios and consider what kind of game studio they may want to work for in a career.

Standards

- 9-12.IC.3 Impacts of Computing, Ethics
- 9-12.IC.7 Impacts of Computing, Career Paths
- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: What are the different sizes of game studios, and what sets them apart from one another?

Do Now:

Students will play Cave Story – depending on limitations, perhaps either every table has a computer with the game installed (very small download and easy to boot up), or the teacher has the game and is projecting it on a screen for students, while students take turns playing the game.

After a few minutes of play, the teacher will reveal that this game was developed by a single person over the course of 5 years, which will then segue to the main lesson starting with indie game studios.

Instruction:

Starting with Indie game studios (by discussing Cave Story), review the 3 most common styles of game studios (in terms of funding/production values) – being Indie, AA and AAA studios.

Indie (Independent) studios for small projects and teams, AA for slightly larger, and AAA for the largest

The slides have plenty of examples of games that those types studios have produced, as well as a breakdown of other differences between the types of studios.

Group discussions:

At the end of the main lesson, there will be a class discussion. Ask students what type of studio they would rather work in – Indie, AA or AAA studios.

Time to work on assignment:

Students get the remainder of the class time to get started on their homework assignment.

Assignments

“Flame war” – Google classroom debate

<https://www.destructoid.com/geoff-keighley-explains-why-dave-the-diver-has-been-nominated-as-an-indie-game/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzgP3Y_U-gQ

Choose either of the above resources (or both!) and read/watch it. Take a stance on what you think is right in each case, and explain your reasoning in detail.

For the article: Is Dave the Diver an indie game? To you personally, what qualities does a developer/game need to be considered indie?

For the video: Is Nexon in the right to sue Ironmace studio, or should Nexon let Ironmace be?

Next, you will respond to at least 2 other of your classmates’ posts, except you MUST disagree with their points. Be respectful, but also give a good argument for the opposite side. You may even agree with their post, but think of ways to play devil’s advocate for the other side.

Resources

Cave Story: <https://www.cavestory.org/download/cave-story.php>

(free indie game developed by a single person, Daisuke “Pixel” Amaya)

<https://kevurugames.com/blog/indie-aa-vs-aaa-game-unraveling-the-differences/>

<https://www.gameopedia.com/indie-aaa-aa-games-comparison/>

<https://www.destructoid.com/geoff-keighley-explains-why-dave-the-diver-has-been-nominated-as-an-indie-game/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzgP3Y_U-gQ

Lesson 02 – Game Monetization

Main objective

Students will receive an overview of the different ways that video games are monetized in the industry. By weighing the different options at developer's disposal, they will begin to formulate their own philosophy on game monetization.

Standards

- 9-12.IC.3 Impacts of Computing, Ethics
- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: How do games make money? What kind of monetization model would I prefer for my game(s)?

Do Now:

How much money do you spend on games on average? (Both mobile and otherwise)

Instruction:

There are many different styles of monetization. Review retail prices (\$60 and \$70 for major releases), DLC/micro transactions, battle passes, season passes, and loot boxes.

Next, go into a little bit of a history lesson on Oblivion's horse armor DLC back in 2006, which paved the way for cosmetic microtransactions in games, leading to all the different styles we have now.

Briefly discuss the ethics of game monetization – it may feel unethical as consumers, but as game developers, we must weigh the different options in order for our games to make money and be successful.

Play this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX3xW6nO4zw>, which covers all of the mentioned styles of monetization in detail.

Group discussions:

In your opinion, what is the "right way" to include microtransactions in games? Would you include microtransactions in your game? – if so, describe your idea to the class.

Time to work on assignment:

Students get the rest of class (if applicable) to work on their homework assignment.

Resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX3xW6nO4zw>

Assignments

Just like in Lesson 01, we will be having another “flame war”.

Read these articles on loot boxes:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonwosborne/2023/05/25/how-loot-boxes-in-childrens-video-games-encourage-gambling/?sh=788ea75b5653>

<https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-15-billion-question-have-loot-boxes-turned-video-gaming-into-gambling>

Answer these questions and explain your opinion: Are loot boxes ethical, or not? Would you include loot boxes in your video game in hopes to get more money from your customers?

After you make your first post, reply to 2 others but make sure that you **disagree** with their point.

Lesson 03 – Games as a Service

Main objective

Students will dive deeper into a type of game monetization called Games as a Service and compare and contrast the pros and cons of the model.

Standards

- 9-12.IC.3 Impacts of Computing, Ethics
- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: What is a Games as a Service model? What are the pros and cons of developing a game like this?

Do Now:

What are some games that you have played for a long time (1 year+)? List the reasons why you continue to play them, and also think about what we learned yesterday – how does the game make money?

Instruction:

Students learned the previous day about different types of game monetization. This is a perfect segue into a slideshow reviewing Games as a Service (GaaS) – a business model that allows developers to continue updating one game in order to retain players. Using frequent updates introducing more forms of monetization, they can continue to be successful for a very long time.

Students will be shown different examples of these types of games in the slideshow, as well as an illustration of how frequently these games are updated.

Students will also be alerted to the criticisms of GaaS and begin to think about the ethics of it, leading into the group discussion.

Group discussions:

Do you play any games that would be considered GaaS? What are they/what do you like about them, and do you recommend them? Do you think they are ethical?

Group discussion for this lesson is lengthier than the previous ones, as the teacher should aim to drive the ethical debate within the class.

Time to work on assignment:

Students get the rest of class (if applicable) to work on their homework assignment.

Assignments

Do some research to learn more about Games as a Service, and then make a post based on what you've found. You will also need to respond to at least 2 of your classmates' posts with something you agree or disagree with, as well as something that you learned from their post or resonated with.

Here are some resources that you can view (but are not limited to):

<https://clevertap.com/blog/games-as-a-service/>

<https://www.helpshift.com/games-as-a-service-gaas-what-it-is-and-how-it-works/>

<https://www.gridly.com/blog/games-as-a-service/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VScoEZ-qyC4>

In your response:

- Summarize what Games as a Service is -- What are the developer's/company's objectives when they make these games? Feel free to reference any specific video games to illustrate your point.
- **State your opinion/choose your side on Games as a Service. Do you like these kinds of games/agree with the practice? Do you think it is ethical?** This should be the majority of your post.
- Some other questions you may choose to answer are: Would you ever work for a company in order to work on a live service game? Do you judge others who play live service games/should they be judged?

Remember to respond to at least 2 of your classmates' posts!

Resources

<https://www.helpshift.com/games-as-a-service-gaas-what-it-is-and-how-it-works/>

<https://www.gridly.com/blog/games-as-a-service/>

<https://clevertap.com/blog/games-as-a-service/>

<https://neilpatel.com/blog/gaas/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VScoEZ-qyC4>

Lesson 04 – Final Project Introduction

Main objective

Students will be introduced to their final project task. They will form groups and decide on the topic that they would like to focus on for their assignment.

Standards

- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use
- 9-12.DL.4 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: Final project introduction, and choosing student groups.

Do Now:

Think about the topics we have been discussing this past week thus far. Pick one that you really liked/enjoyed and list 2-3 reasons why you found it interesting.

Group discussions:

After students have had time to think about the topics that they found interesting, have them turn and talk to their partners/groups at their current table.

The whole class will then come together to share and discuss.

Instruction:

Introduce the final project/final presentation to the class. Explain the different formats of presentation and give examples. Play a video essay example from YouTube in the background while students begin to form their groups.

Students will also need to figure out logistics such as availability to work together outside of class, exchange contact information, etc.

Time to work on assignment:

Students will get the remainder of the time to finalize their groups, as well as decide on the topic and format of the presentation. This is also their homework assignment for the night. Students will be encouraged to outline the work process of the project so that they can get started ahead of time.

Assignments

Final presentation overview:

The final project for this unit will be a group presentation, in groups of about 3-4 students that you will get to choose on your own.

Your group will have the option to either select a topic that we have discussed previously as part of this unit and expand upon what we have already covered in this class or may choose a topic that isn't covered. You may analyze specific games or scenarios related to a topic, or perhaps dive deeper in analysis on a topic related to the video game industry.

As a reminder you can use, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Game development team structure in a professional environment
- Digital storefronts/launchers (Steam, Epic game store, Riot Games client, Xbox/PlayStation stores, App store/Google Play)
- Game monetization
- Marketing, PR, and Community building
- Video game journalism/reviews
- AAA studios vs AA studios vs indie studios
- Games as a Service lesson

NOTE: If your group wants to choose a topic that has not been covered already, please see me about it before starting your work.

Remember this CANNOT simply just be a restatement of facts from our class -- many points will be taken off your grade if that turns out to be the case.

An example of this using the Games as a Service topic that we covered would be to make a presentation on one or two games of this type (ex. Fortnite, Genshin Impact, etc.), analyzing the different types of monetization that they use, the effectiveness of the games as a service model (you will have to research the revenue generated from the game, if applicable), the new changes/adjustments/updates that have been added to the game over time and how successful they have been, etc.

The presentation can be in a variety of forms:

- a slideshow presentation,
- a video essay, or
- a comedy skit/sketch

are all acceptable forms of presentation. If you have another idea, please check in with me first.

Aim to have your presentation be **5-7 minutes long.**

Apart from delivering the presentation to the class, you will also need to hand in all the materials of your presentation to me. Any slides, documents, references, or writing/planning that you have done should be turned in.

Presentations will be on the last day of this unit (Lesson 09). Our class session the day before (Lesson 9) will be entirely dedicated to letting your group work on/finish putting together your presentation.

Your homework for this weekend is to finalize your presentation plan with your group, deciding on the topic and outlining how your presentation will look like. Have one person in your group make a post in the Google Classroom discussion with the names of all group members, the topic that you have chosen, and the presentation format. I will check in with each group after seeing your outlines.

Resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXA559KNopl>

<https://www.youtube.com/@extracredits/videos>

Lesson 05 – Video game Journalism

Main objective

Students will learn about the positive and negative sides of video game journalism, and then use that to debate the ethics and standards of this type of journalism.

Standards

- 9-12.IC.3 Impacts of Computing, Ethics
- 9-12.IC.7 Impacts of Computing, Career Paths
- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: What is video game journalism? How does its existence affect the game development process?

Do Now:

What are some video game review sites that you know of? When you want to know if a game is good or not, who do you trust?

Group discussions:

Share what you wrote for your Do Now with the class! What is your go-to resource to research a game that interests you?

Instruction:

Students will get a brief overview on the different kinds of game review websites, as well as understanding their purpose in reviewing games for consumers.

Discuss the importance that scores have for games, as well as YouTubers that students might know that are just as important as video game review sites.

Mention some of the controversies that video game journalism/reviews have experienced throughout the years (paid reviews, embargos, score bias, political alignments) , and briefly mention Gamergate, although getting too in-depth into it is a little beyond the scope of the lesson.

Segue into thinking about video game journalism/reviews in the perspective of game developers.

Group discussion:

Do you appeal to game reviewers when developing your game, and try to attract what you think they will give a good score for? Or do you maintain your artistic freedom?

Time to work on assignment:

Students get the rest of class (if applicable) to work on their homework assignment, and/or their presentations.

Resources

<https://www.ign.com/>

<https://www.metacritic.com/>

Assignments

Think of a video game that you really like. Find a review on it online – either an article review on one of the big review sites, or a video review on YouTube. Also, look up the Metacritic score of the game.

Make a post with all your findings. Do you trust what these people have to say about the game? Do you agree with their points – and are there any points that you disagree with? Consider whether or not there may be foul play involved in the review as well, either in the form of a paid review, bias from the author or the website, etc.

Lesson 06 – Marketing, PR and Community Building

Main objective

Students will learn about the different community aspects of game development that are used to market games to wider audiences.

Standards

- 9-12.IC.7 Impacts of Computing, Career Paths
- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use
- 9-12.DL.6 Digital Literacy, Digital Citizenship

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: What are ways to market video games, as well as build communities/fanbases?

Do Now:

What are some video games that you know a lot about, but have never played any of? How did you come to learn about it?

Instruction:

Start by discussing the obvious type of marketing – large scale advertisements. TV commercials, billboards/posters, collaborations between music artists/celebrities. Also discuss awards shows/expos such as E3 and The Game Awards, and how games get publicity through that.

Students should also learn about smaller types of marketing, such as through social media, YouTubers/Twitch streamers, or even just making wikis for games.

Finally, discuss building fan communities through reddit, discord servers, and forums like Steam discussions.

This will be a lesson on the shorter side, in order to start giving students more of a chance to work on their final presentations.

Time to work on assignment:

Students get the rest of class to work on their homework assignment, and/or their presentations.

Resources

<https://blog.atisfyreach.com/game-marketing-strategies-to-reach-gamers/>

<https://vulcanpost.com/651277/league-of-legends-k-pop-video-marketing/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOxkGD8qRB4>

Assignments

Low stakes assignment – Where do you keep up with news about game(s) that you like? (Discord servers, Reddit, other online forums, etc.) Share your positive or negative experiences and recommend things to people on a Google Classroom post!

Lesson 07 – Digital Storefronts

Main objective

Students will learn about the different digital storefronts/platforms that sell video games. With the knowledge of the different competitors and what they each offer, students will consider which storefronts they would want to develop games for/release games on.

Standards

- 9-12.IC.3 Impacts of Computing, Ethics
- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: Why are there so many digital storefronts for games? What makes them different from one another?

Do Now:

Where do you usually purchase your games from? Do you know anything about how much of your money goes to developers and publishers?

Instruction:

Give a brief overview of video game storefronts, starting by talking more generally about the different console ecosystems. (Xbox Game Pass and PlayStation Plus subscriptions should also be discussed)

Then, transition into talking about the different PC storefronts and launchers. This can then segue into game retailer cuts – the 30% cut that the majority of these storefronts take from game creators.

Discuss Steam vs Epic Game store– the homework assignment will expand on this battle.

No group discussion this time around, in order to give students more time to work on their presentations.

Time to work on assignment:

Students get the rest of class (if applicable) to work on their homework assignment, or work on their presentations.

Assignments

Read these articles, which expand upon the Epic game store vs. Steam feud:

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/16/18334865/epic-games-store-versus-steam-valve-pc-gaming-console-war-reimagined>

<https://www.pcgamer.com/epic-games-store-self-publishing/>

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/10/07/report-steams-30-cut-is-actually-the-industry-standard>

Take a stance – which store do you think has the moral high ground? Do you think it is right for Epic Games to have exclusive games and deals? Is Steam’s “monopoly” bad for the industry? If you were releasing a game, what storefronts would you be open to releasing your game in?

Respond to two other classmates’ posts.

Resources

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/16/18334865/epic-games-store-versus-steam-valve-pc-gaming-console-war-reimagined>

<https://www.pcgamer.com/epic-games-store-self-publishing/>

<https://www.pcworld.com/article/398473/a-year-in-the-epic-games-stores-fight-against-steam-has-made-all-pc-gaming-better.html>

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/10/07/report-steams-30-cut-is-actually-the-industry-standard>

Lesson 08* – Final Project group work

**this is simply an extension of lesson 04*

Main objective

Students will be introduced to their final project task. They will form groups and decide on the topic that they would like to focus on for their assignment.

Standards

- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use
- 9-12.DL.4 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: Work on your group project!

Do Now: Check in with students about how presentations are going – thumbs up, thumbs sideways, or thumbs down.

Time to work on assignment:

Students will get the entire time to work in their groups independently to finish their project. The teacher will be available to give guidance and check in with groups.

Assignments

See final presentation assignment in Lesson 04 – students will complete it before class time the next day.

Lesson 09 – Final Project Presentations

*extension of lesson 04

Main objective

Students will share their presentations with the rest of the class as well as reflect upon their peers' presentations.

Standards

- 9-12.DL.2 Digital Literacy, Digital Use
- 9-12.DL.4 Digital Literacy, Digital Use

Lesson Structure/In class exercises

Aim: Group presentations!

Instructions:

Each group will give their presentations (5-7 minutes) and then have about a minute or two for questions/comments from their classmates. During group presentations, the audience is instructed to take notes on the presentation:

1. One thing they found interesting/didn't know before
2. One thing that they agree with, or one thing that they disagree with
3. Any questions they might have

Students will be told that these notes will help them for the homework assignment, which will be a reflection post on Google Classroom.

Assignments

You will write a short reflection paper (half a page/2 paragraphs minimum, double spaced), as well as a short reflection post on Google classroom (can be a paraphrase of what you write in your paper). Use what you have seen in class today and your notes to write about things that interested you.

Guiding questions to use as inspiration:

- What was an interesting topic that was brand new to you?
- Which presentations did you enjoy the most?
- Did you disagree with any stances that other groups took on topics?
- Did any presentations change your mind on a topic or issue?
- Did any presentations spark an idea for your capstone project?

00_Overview of the Videogame Industry

Aim: What kind of roles are there in a video game development team?

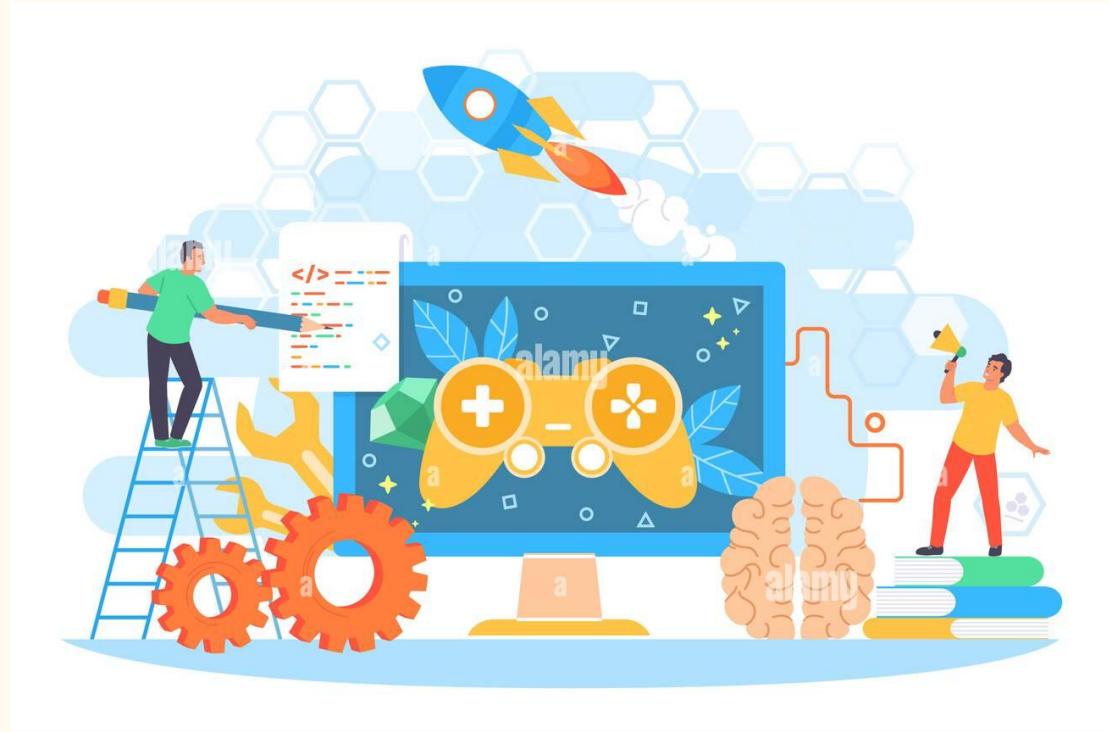
Do Now

What has been your favorite part of this course so far? What have you liked creating? List a few specific things you liked about it and share with your classmates.

Broadly speaking the roles can be divided into categories

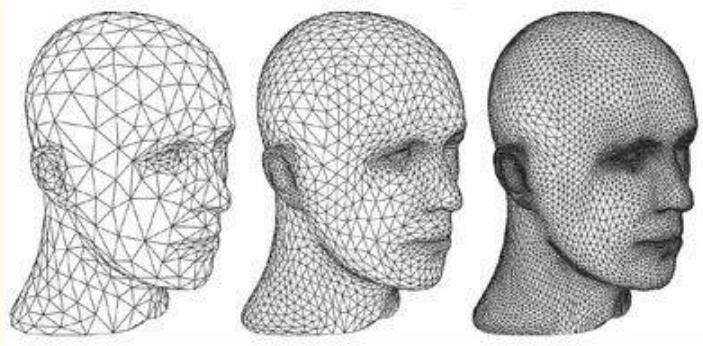
Broadly speaking, the roles can be divided into categories:

- Art
- Design
- Programming
- QA/Production

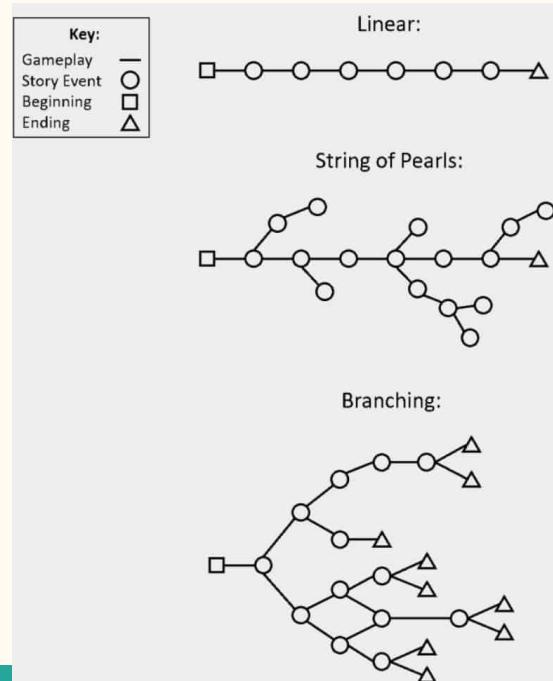


Art

- visuals, graphics, animations
- story, character design, writing, world building
- sound design, music

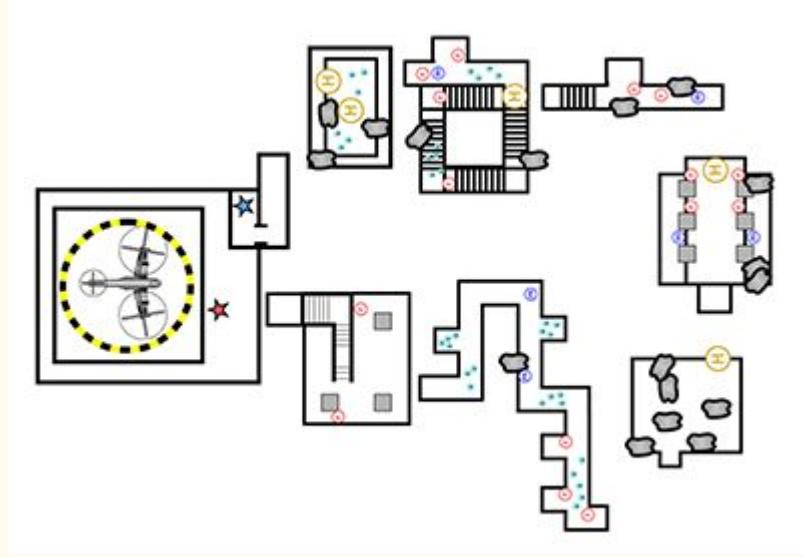
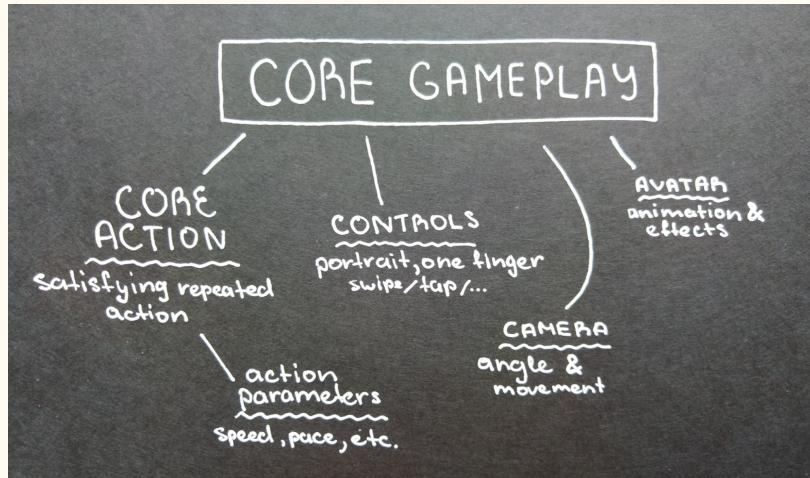


[Zorin and Schröder, 2000]



Design

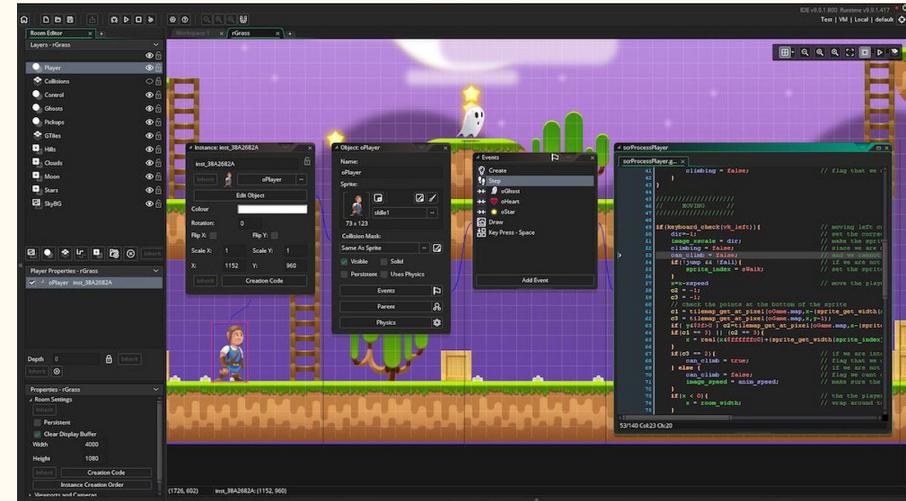
- game play design
- level designs
- turning ideas into reality
- aesthetics
- pacing



Programming



- writing code to give the designs and art life
- developing the way the players will be able to interact with the world
- creating prototypes



QA/Production

- making sure development is on schedule
- play testing to iron out bugs
- taking care of budget, contracts, marketing, etc



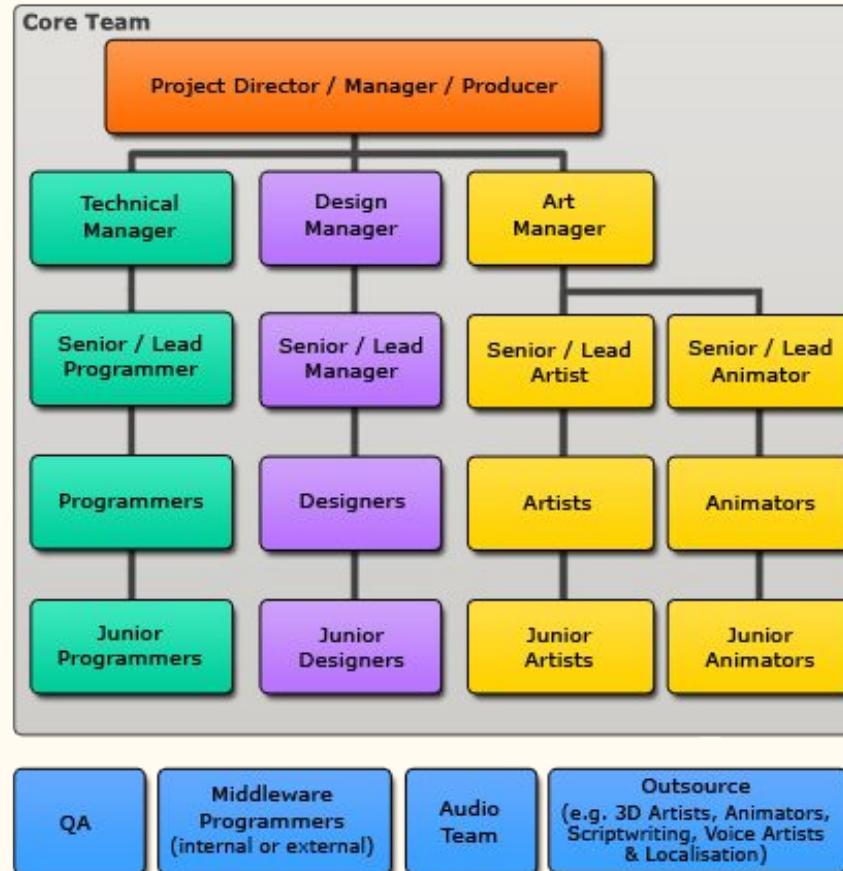
Adobe Stock | #393548877



Specific job titles may include:

- Game designer
- Game artist
- Sound engineer
- Game programmer
- Game level designer
- Game tester
- Game producer

Depending on the size of the company...



We'll talk about game studio sizes tomorrow!

Class discussion

From your experience in this class thus far and from what you have seen today, what kind of career would you be most excited to have in the video game industry?

Homework

Post on Google classroom – Restate your opinion on what kind of career you might want to have in the game industry in the future. Look up the kinds of salaries for those kinds of positions. Does this affect your decision on your choice of career?

Reply to 2 others of your classmates' posts.

01_Indie, AA and AAA studios

Aim: What are the different sizes of game studios, and what sets them apart from one another?

Do Now:



Cave Story - an Indie Game

- Originally released on Windows on December 20, 2004
- Would later be re-released/remastered for the Wii, DS, 3DS, and Nintendo Switch
- The original game was made over the course of 5 years
- **This game has a ONE-person development team –**
Daisuke “Pixel” Amaya was the game designer, programmer, art director, music composer, story writer, all in one!

Please give this game a try! The original game is free!



Indie studios

- “Indie” stands for “independent video game”. These studios (or in many cases, small teams), usually don’t have a publisher. If they do, the publisher is backseat.
- Full creative control
- Small budgets (a few thousands of dollars usually)
- Innovative gameplay
- Very, very large pool of different genres
- Usually restricted to digital releases



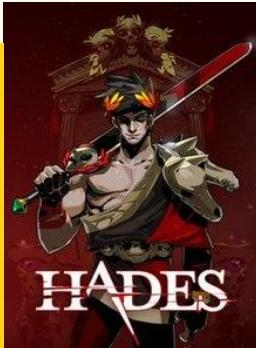
There are discussions around the definition of an indie game however, on what really constitutes as one... you can read about it in your homework!

AA studios

- A step above indie studios:

These companies have a bigger budget (maybe a few million) and bigger teams, and usually a publisher that assists in the development process

- Decent quality production values and production values
- Still maintain most of their creative freedom, meaning that they are able to bring new/unique ideas to the table
- Essentially the middle child

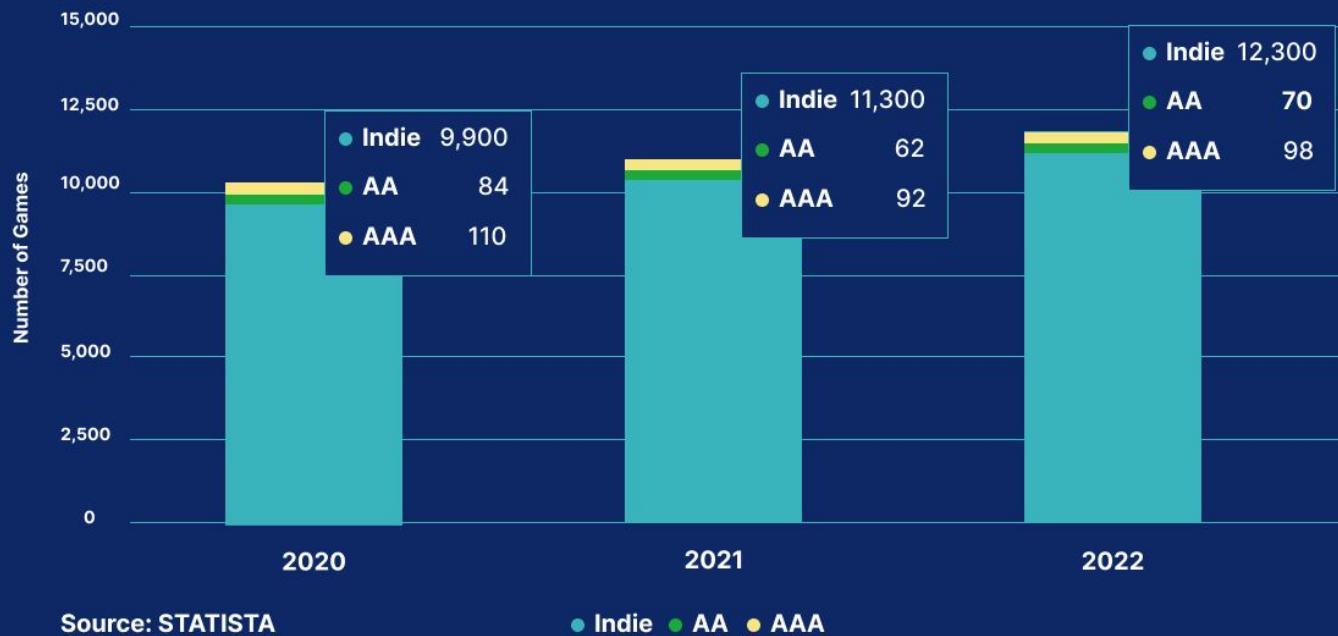


AAA studios

- Produce the biggest of the hits. High budget (dozens to hundreds of millions of dollars, not including marketing costs), and large game development teams (50-400 employees) run by the biggest companies in gaming
- Cutting edge graphics and production value
- Usually franchises their games
- Sell millions of copies and are the talk of the industry (lots of traction on Twitch/YouTube, etc.)



Number of Games Released on Steam Worldwide from 2020 to 2022, by developer type



Class discussion

Which of the three kinds of studios would **YOU** want to work in?

Homework

“Flame war” – Google classroom debate

<https://www.destructoid.com/geoff-keighley-explains-why-dave-the-diver-has-been-nominated-as-an-indie-game/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzgP3Y_U-gQ

Choose either of the above resources (or both!) and read/watch it. Take a stance on what you think is right in each case, and explain your reasoning in detail.

For the article: Is Dave the Diver an indie game? To you personally, what qualities does a developer/game need to be considered indie?

For the video: Is Nexon in the right to sue Ironmace studio, or should Nexon let Ironmace be?

Next, you will respond to at least 2 other of your classmates' posts, **except you MUST disagree with their points.** Be respectful, but also give a good argument for the opposite side. You may even agree with their post, but think of ways to play devil's advocate for the other side.

02_Game Monetization

Aim: How do games make money? What kind of monetization model would I prefer for my game(s)?

Do Now:

How much money do you spend on games on average? (Both mobile and otherwise)

Game monetization

There are currently many different ways that video games can make money.

Traditionally, there is the retail price of paid video games (\$60 or \$70 for major releases). As the industry has aged, however, more and more styles of monetization have been introduced.

- DLC/microtransactions
- loot boxes
- battle passes
- season passes

These forms of monetization also make it possible for free to play games to exist.

History lesson...

The Elder Scrolls IV:Oblivion - Horse armor

In 2006, for \$2.50 you could dress your horse up like this!



ORIGINAL GAME



EXPANSION PACK

30\$



EXPANSION PACK

30\$



ORIGINAL GAME



EXPANSION PACK

40\$



Shop

Recommended

Gift Shop

Paimon's Bargains

Crystal Top-Up

First-time buyer bonus available only once



Bonus +3280 Genesis Crystals US\$49.99

Bonus +6480 Genesis Crystals US\$99.99



Customer Service

UID: 02200000000000000000



1999

2005

ORIGINAL GAME



DLC 15\$

DLC 15\$

DLC 15\$



MICROTRANSACTIONS

\$15\$

\$100\$

\$30\$

\$10\$

DLC 15\$

DLC 15\$

DLC 15\$

GameStop
EXCLUSIVE

ORIGINAL GAME
BEST BUY
EXCLUSIVE

LAST-GEN

NEXT-GEN

ASSASSIN'S CREED VALHALLA

SEASON PASS

INCLUDES TWO UPCOMING EXPANSIONS



WRATH OF THE DRUIDS
THE SIEGE OF PARIS

THE LEGEND OF BEOWULF

EXCLUSIVE QUEST
AVAILABLE AT LAUNCH



Is monetization evil?

On the consumer side, it may seem like these types of cosmetic microtransactions are unethical, as it forces consumers to pay more and more money for the product.

How else would video games make money though?

As a game developer, you will want to weigh the many different options at your disposal (as well as what works with the kind of game that you develop), in order to make a profit – and sometimes a living.

Monetization Madness- How Games Make Money

From the YouTube channel, Extra Credits/Extra History:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX3xW6nO4zw>

Class discussion

In your opinion, what is the “right way” to include microtransactions in games?
Would you include microtransactions in your game? – if so, describe your idea to the class.

Homework

Just like in Lesson 01, we will be having another “flame war”.

Read these articles on loot boxes:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonwosborne/2023/05/25/how-loot-boxes-in-childrens-video-games-encourage-gambling/?sh=788ea75b5653>

<https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-15-billion-question-have-loot-boxes-turned-video-gaming-into-gambling>

Answer these questions and explain your opinion: Are loot boxes ethical, or not? Would you include loot boxes in your video game in hopes to get more money from your customers?

After you make your first post, reply to 2 others but make sure that you **disagree** with their point.

03_Games as a service

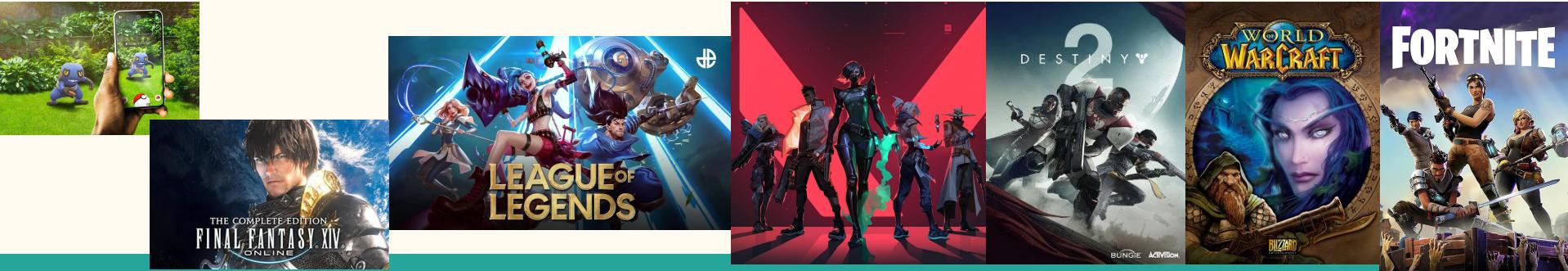
Aim: What is a Games as a Service model? What are the pros and cons of developing a game like this?

Do Now:

What are some games that you have played for a long time (1 year+)? List the reasons why you continue to play them, and also think about what we learned yesterday – how does the game make money?

What exactly is Games as a Service?

- Games as a Service (GaaS) is a business model for game development that allows a game to thrive long after it's initial release
- Developers release updates to these games frequently (weekly or monthly), and often they have lots of opportunities for monetization through these updates in order to maximize the revenue from the game. Some pay for the game through microtransactions, while other games have a subscription based payment
- By continuing to build and develop for one game, developers don't need to reinvent the wheel or make sequels to be successful, they simply need to keep their wheel running



WOW Expansion List

1. World of Warcraft (2004)
2. Burning Crusade (2007)
3. Wrath of the Lich King (2008)
4. Cataclysm (2010)
5. Mists of Pandaria (2012)
6. Warlords of Draenor (2014)
7. Legion (2016)
8. Battle for Azeroth (2018)
9. WoW Classic (2019)
10. Shadowlands (2020)
11. Burning Crusades Classic (2021)
12. Wrath of the Lich King Classic (2022)
13. World of Warcraft: Dragonflight (2022)
14. World of Warcraft: The War Within (TBA)
15. World of Warcraft: Midnight (TBA)
16. World of Warcraft: The Last Titan (TBA)

UPDATE CYCLES FOR SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR GAMES SINCE JANUARY 2018

HEAVILY SOCIAL

FORTNITE



108 PATCHES IN LAST 2 YEARS
~1 PATCH EVERY WEEK

OVERWATCH



60 PATCHES IN LAST 2 YEARS
~1 PATCH EVERY 2 WEEKS

PUBG



66 PATCHES IN LAST 2 YEARS
~1 PATCH EVERY 2 WEEKS

LESS SOCIAL

The SIMS 4



37 PATCHES IN LAST 2 YEARS
~1 PATCH EVERY 4 WEEKS

JAN-18 APR-18 JUL-18 OCT-18 FEB-19 MAY-19 AUG-19 DEC-19 MAR-20 JUN-20

Sources: IGN, Overwatch Fandom, PUBG Gamepedia, and The Sims Fandom (data accessed July-November 2020).

Criticism of the model

Because of its reliance on maintaining player's attentions (FOMO) and perpetuation of monetization to get consumer's money, Games as a Service has gotten a lot of criticism and is generally unliked by many people.

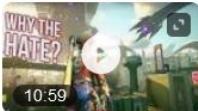
Does it make sense for a game to not technically “end”? Do you feel like the purpose of these games is just to make money?

▶ Videos :



"Games as a service" is fraud.
YouTube · Accursed Farms
Apr 25, 2019

11 key moments in this video ▾



Why Almost Everyone HATES Live Service Games?
YouTube · gameranx
Mar 15, 2023

7 key moments in this video ▾



Great Games Are Killing Games as a Service Games (GAAS)
YouTube · Ginger Prime
Sep 29, 2023

[View all →](#)

Not all GaaS are successful either... there are a LOT of failures that tried to use the model.

Group discussion

Do you play any games that would be considered a GaaS? What are they/what do you like about them, and do you recommend playing them?

Do you think they are ethical?

Homework

Google Classroom discussion:

Do some research to learn more about Games as a Service, and then make a post based on what you've found. You will also need to respond to at least 2 of your classmates' posts with something you agree or disagree with, as well as something that you learned from their post or resonated with.

- Summarize what Games as a Service is -- What are the developer's/company's objectives when they make these games? Feel free to reference any specific video games to illustrate your point.
- State your opinion/choose your side on Games as a Service. Do you like these kinds of games/agree with the practice? Do you think it is ethical?
- Some other questions you may choose to answer are: Would you ever work for a company in order to work on a live service game? Do you judge others who play live service games/should they be judged?

Remember to respond to at least 2 of your classmates' posts!

04_Unit Final Project intro

Aim: Final project introduction, and choosing student groups!

Do Now

Think about the topics we have been discussing this past week thus far.

Pick one that you really liked/enjoyed and list 2-3 reasons why you found it interesting.

Turn and talk

Turn and talk to your partner and within your table about what you wrote down for your Do Now.

Did you have similar thoughts? Did your peers remind you of anything?

We will discuss as a class in a few minutes.

Final project/presentation

- Groups of 3-4, presentation should be 5-7 minutes long
- Select a topic covered in this unit (or an entirely new topic) and make a presentation on it. It can be in the form of a:
 - slideshow presentation
 - video essay
 - comedy skit/sketch/video
- As a reminder, here are the following topics covered in this unit:
 - Game development team structure in a professional environment
 - Digital storefronts/launchers (Steam, Epic game store, Riot Games client, Xbox/PlayStation stores, App store/Google Play)
 - Game monetization
 - Marketing, PR, and Community building
 - Video game journalism/reviews
 - AAA studios vs AA studios vs indie studios
 - Games as a Service lesson

You may analyze specific games or scenarios related to a topic, or perhaps dive deeper in analysis on a topic.

- More detailed instructions are posted on Google Classroom

Make your groups!

Decide on the topics that you would be interested in using for your presentation. Please also figure out logistics with your group members (how to contact each other, who will be working on which parts of the presentation, etc.

You have the rest of class to do this, as well as perhaps starting to work on it!

In the meantime we will watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXA559KNopI>

*The channel Extra Credits we saw before are great examples of video essays to take inspiration from! <https://www.youtube.com/@extracredits/videos>

Homework

Your homework is to finalize your presentation plan with your group this weekend.

Decide on a topic and your group members, and outline what your presentation will look like.

ONE PERSON NEEDS TO MAKE A POST ON GOOGLE CLASSROOM!

Details are on our Classroom stream

05_Video game Journalism

Aim: What is video game journalism? How does its existence affect the game development process?

Do Now:

What are some video game review sites that you know of? When you want to know if a game is good or not, who do you trust?

Group discussion

Share what you wrote for your Do Now with the class! What is your go-to resource to research a game that interests you?

Game reviews/journalism

As video games have gotten more popular these past couple of decades, there has been an increased demand for reviews and journalism around video games.

People want to know if certain video games are good before they buy them, as well as read about the latest news in the industry.

Recognize any of these review sites? →

Some of the most notable are Metacritic and IGN



This isn't a serious chart

Scores

As such, critics scores have become very important considerations for consumers. Review sites use them as a metric for how good a game is, usually on a scale from 1-10 or from 1-100, just like Rotten Tomatoes does for film/movies.

Because of the importance of these scores, there are also cases of review bombing done by user scores and not approved critics.



96



E POKEMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: EXPLORERS OF SKY REVIEW

BAD

NINTENDO DS WII U

4.9



E IMAGINE: PARTY BABYZ WII REVIEW

GOOD

7.5

YouTubers/Streamers

YouTube reviewers are also very noteworthy. I'm sure you have seen videos on the platform reviewing games, some of who also give scores just like review sites do. Even Twitch streamers, that just play the games for viewers, play a big part in how a game is received.

These E-celebrities have a lot of traction and influence on how the public views games. Often times, they even receive money from game developers/publishers in order to play/review their games.



Controversies

Over the years, there have been a number of controversies surrounding video game journalism and reviews.

- Back door paid reviews
- Embargos that make reviewers rush to play a game to put out a review
- Reviewer blacklists
- Discrepancy in scores due to bias
- Political alignments influencing reviews/coverage

We won't be discussing it in this class, but there was an incident called "Gamergate" in 2014-2015 that heavily involved video game journalism.

In the perspective of game developers...

As game developers, you obviously want game reviewers and YouTubers to view your game favorably. It will help spread word of mouth for your game and get more people to buy it, which begs the question...

Group discussion:

Do you appeal to game reviewers when developing your game, and try to attract what you think they will give a good score for? Or do you maintain your artistic freedom?

Homework

Think of a video game that you really like. Find a review on it online – either an article review on one of the big review sites, or a video review on YouTube. Also, look up the Metacritic score of the game.

Make a post with all your findings. Do you trust what these people have to say about the game? Do you agree with their points – and are there any points that you disagree with? Consider whether or not there may be foul play involved in the review as well, either in the form of a paid review, bias from the author or the website, etc.

Use the rest of the time to work on your presentations!

06_Marketing, PR and Community building

Aim: What are ways to market video games, as well as build communities/fanbases?

Do Now:

What are some video games that you know a lot about, but have never played any of? How did you come to learn about it?

Large scale advertisements

- Billboards
- TV commercials
- Anime/TV shows
- Awards shows/Games shows
- Music videos with famous artists
- Collaborations between different IPs



576 million views!



Nintendo Direct

E3



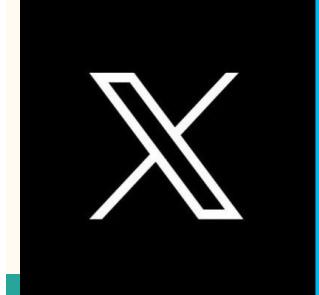
Marketing

Unless you are working on a AAA game, it will be difficult to get widespread advertisements, such as posters/billboards, TV commercials, and collaborations with big name music artists.

Some other ways that games are marketed are through social media, as well as YouTube/Twitch videos. The more buzz a game makes online, the wider the audience it will reach!



We talked about E-celebs yesterday!



Building fan communities

You can also build your own fan communities as developers by reaching out to fans of your games in forums, or creating a Discord server/Twitter account as a sort of newsletter.

Everyone has to start somewhere!



Welcome to the Steam Discussions

Everyone is invited! The Steam discussions are for everyone, new and advanced user alike!

Searching is key! Before you post a question, use the forum search feature to determine whether your topic has already been covered.

Do not start flame wars! If someone has engaged in behavior that is detrimental to the discussion – spamming, harassment, etc – report the post and we'll take a look.

Search discussions

Steam Forums Game Forums Tools & Servers

Steam Forums

FORUM	LAST POST	DISCUSSIONS
New to Steam	Just now	155,256
Help and Tips	2 minutes ago	589,236
Suggestions / Ideas	Just now	83,922
Steam Discussions	3 minutes ago	60,422
Steam for Mac	Just now	16,031
Steam Mobile	58 minutes ago	18,424
Steam Community	9 minutes ago	66,366
VAC Discussion	14 minutes ago	259,808

LINKS & RESOURCES

[View Discussion Guidelines](#)
[View Online Conduct Rules](#)

STEAM FEATURE DISCUSSIONS

Steam Trading Cards Group	394,974 discussion threads
Steam Client Beta	64,492 discussion threads
SteamVR	32,241 discussion threads
Steam Deck	20,395 discussion threads
Steam Universe	14,936 discussion threads
Steam Community Market	13,782 discussion threads
Steam for Linux	12,781 discussion threads
Steam Remote Play	9,842 discussion threads
Steam Labs	7,192 discussion threads
Big Picture	4,365 discussion threads
Steam Broadcasting	4,263 discussion threads
Steam Music	2,922 discussion threads

Homework

Low stakes assignment – Where do you keep up with news about game(s) that you like? (Discord servers, Reddit, other online forums, etc.) Share your positive or negative experiences and recommend things to people on a Google Classroom post!

Use the rest of the time to work on your presentations!

07_Digital Storefronts

Aim: Why are there so many digital storefronts for games?
What makes them different from one another?

Do Now:

Where do you usually purchase your games from? Do you know anything about how much of your money goes to developers and publishers?

Video game storefronts

Back in the day, games only came on discs or cartridges, but in our modern era, you can buy games digitally through storefronts.

For consoles, you generally only have one option, although Xbox and Playstation do offer subscriptions that allow you to “rent” games for the duration of the subscription.

Otherwise, consumers purchase games digitally through these storefronts.

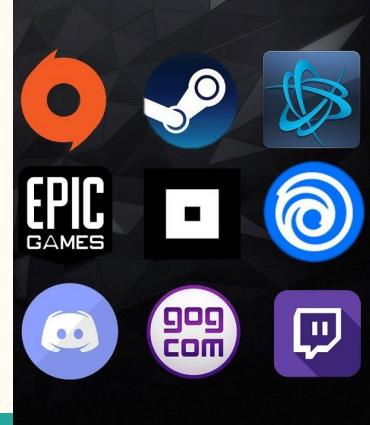
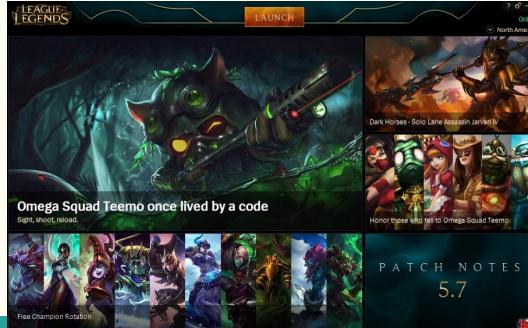
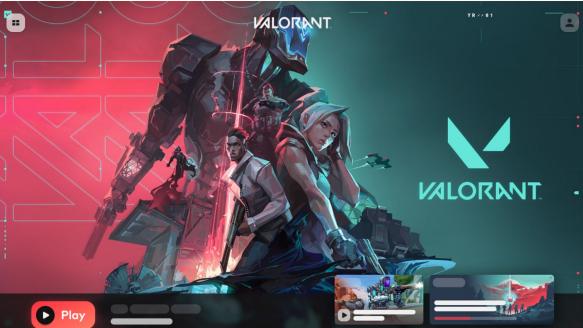


PC launchers/storefronts

On PC, however, things get much more muddied because it's less centralized.

The largest store is Steam (which some view as a monopoly), but many game publishers use their own launcher or attempt to use their own store.

If you play games like Valorant/League of legends or Overwatch, you'll probably have noticed these different launchers.



Typically, these major storefronts take a 30% cut on sales of each game.

This money is revenue for the storefronts, but also used to pay for upkeep of the store as well as pay any licensing fees for listing your game there.

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/10/07/report-steams-30-cut-is-actually-the-industry-standard>



GAME RETAILER CUTS COMPARED

A BREAKDOWN OF WHAT PERCENTAGE MOST MAJOR STOREFRONTS TAKE FROM THE SALE OF A GAME.

PC STORES

STEAM

30%

25% AFTER \$10M EARNED
20% AFTER \$50M EARNED

EPIC GAMES STORE

12%

HUMBLE STORE*

25%

15% TO HUMBLE
10% TO CHARITY OR
BACK AS STORE CREDIT

ITCH.IO

DEVELOPER'S
CHOICE

GOG

30%

MICROSOFT STORE

30%

CONSOLE STORES

PLAYSTATION STORE

30%

(INCLUDES LICENSING FEE)

XBOX GAMES STORE

30%

(INCLUDES LICENSING FEE)

NINTENDO eSHOP

30%

(INCLUDES LICENSING FEE)

MOBILE STORES

APPLE APP STORE

GOOGLE PLAY STORE

30%

(INCLUDING IN-APP PURCHASES)

PHYSICAL STORES

GAMESTOP

AMAZON

BEST BUY

WALMART

30%

ALL RATES WERE RESEARCHED AND VERIFIED BY IGN FROM SOURCES WITHIN THE GAMES INDUSTRY OR THE RETAILERS THEMSELVES (AS OF 8/31/2019).

* DISCLOSURE: HUMBLE BUNDLE IS OWNED BY ZIFF DAVIS, THE PARENT COMPANY OF IGN. HUMBLE BUNDLE AND IGN OPERATE COMPLETELY INDEPENDENTLY, AND NO SPECIAL CONSIDERATION IS GIVEN TO HUMBLE BUNDLE FOR COVERAGE.

Steam vs Epic Games: the “console war” of PC

As you may have noticed, Epic Games Store (provider of Fortnite), had the lowest percentage cut at 12% of all stores.

Tim Sweeney, CEO of Epic Games, wants to give more money to developers for the games that they create.

He takes issues with how much market share Steam has, and has been trying to fight it by paying developers to list their games exclusively on the Epic Games Store, which he can do with all the money that Fortnite makes.

This sometimes makes it more difficult for consumers, as their games are split between different storefronts. Epic Games Store also does not have as many features as Steam does, notably lacking things like a shopping cart, user reviews, etc.



Tim Sweeney, CEO

EPIC GAMES STORE REVENUE SPLIT



* DOES NOT INCLUDE UNITY UP-FRONT LICENSING FEES

● STORE %

● UE4 %

● DEVELOPER %

*Image from 2019

Homework

Read these articles, which expand upon the Epic game store vs. Steam feud:

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/16/18334865/epic-games-store-versus-steam-valve-pc-gaming-console-war-reimagined>

<https://www.pcgamer.com/epic-games-store-self-publishing/>

Take a stance – which store do you think has the moral high ground? Do you think it is right for Epic Games to have exclusive games and deals? Is Steam’s “monopoly” bad for the industry? If you were releasing a game, what storefronts would you be open to releasing your game in?

Respond to two other classmates’ posts.

Use the rest of the time to work on your presentations!

08_Final Project group work

How are your presentations coming along?



Work on your projects!

09_Final Project Presentation

Notes to take for presentations

1. One thing you found interesting or didn't know before
2. One thing that you agree with, or one thing that you disagree with
3. Any and all questions that you might have!

Homework

- Short reflection post on Google Classroom
- Short reflection paper (half a page/2 paragraphs minimum, double spaced)

Details are posted on Google classroom.