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Introduction

Gaming with assistive technology has multiple barriers or learning curves. Often, it is forgotten that knowing about video games themselves can be the biggest barrier for many to get into gaming. If starting gaming is of interest of someone and the landscape is unfamiliar, it can be an intimidating start.

This booklet aims to help combat this barrier by laying out the gaming landscape, gaming genres, and accessibility in games.



Gaming Experiences

Gaming has a wide range of types of experiences a gamer can have. From adrenaline pumping fast paced experiences to puzzle games that share the likeness of knitting. There also are many different game modes like practicing, online multiplayer, or co-op mode. This section will explain the various types of gameplay that are common in gaming.

A good article in how to start gaming: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/2020/03/27/so-you-want-be-gamer-heres-how-you-can-start/>



Gaming Genres

Just like most forms of entertainment, different games can fit into common genres. Knowing the different options can help you get a quick grasp on how the game might be played and the content within it. Popular genres often follow somewhat of the same mold with common features, approaches and usual level of input needed. Although every game is different, A general breakdown of popular genres can be seen below:

<u>Action/Adventure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often defined by story and combat. Following a character through a story. Examples: Spiderman, Assassins Creed, Far Cry, Shadow of the Tomb Raider Input level – High 	<u>Shooter/ Battle Royale</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequently played online with others or follow story. Gamer often plays through first person view with a type of weapon. Examples: Call of Duty, Fortnite, Doom Input level – High 	<u>Puzzle</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Games that require the player to solve puzzles or navigate through more cognitive geared games. Examples: Portal, Candy Crush, Hidden Folks, Donut County Input level – Low
<u>Fighting</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Picking characters to fight with friends or against the game system. Many fighting games are 2D alike platformer games. Examples: Brawlhalla, Street Fighter, Dragon Ball Fighter Z Input level – Low 	<u>Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This genre focuses on large worlds where many players from all over can access the game at any time. These players can work together or fight to play the game. Examples: League of Legends, Dota 2, Smite Input level – High 	<u>Sandbox</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This genre allows the player to enter a world and customize it, shape it, and create their own path to play. There is often little to no story line. Examples: Minecraft, Terraria, Stardew Valley Input level – Medium
<u>Platformer</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Platformer games are only in 2D where the character can move left or right, jump, and use an action to navigate through multiple levels. Examples: Super Mario Bros, Celeste, Cuphead Input level – Low 	<u>Racing</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These games often offer various racing experiences in competitive or free roam modes. Customizing vehicles or characters is often a primary feature. Examples: Need for Speed, Dirt 5, Mario Kart Input level – Low 	<u>Sports</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This genre simulates various sports where the player is a member on the team or a team manager. Examples: Nintendo Switch Sports, FIFA 23, NHL 23. Input level – Medium

Input Level explanation:

High – Often requires 2 joysticks and multiple buttons that may have to be held together or pressed rapidly. Reflexes and high precision is important.

Medium – Often requires 2 joysticks and multiple buttons. Can be taken at the gamers own pace.

Low – Often requires use of 1 joystick and limited buttons or just buttons.

In some cases, gamers may be looking for games with simpler inputs to start their gaming journey. Starting with genres that typically have a lower input level can make the gaming experience less frustrating off the start. There are lots of different types of art styles, story telling, and experiences within each genre, so even if someone is looking for a game with less inputs, they do not have to sacrifice their experience.

Game modes

Game modes describe the types of ways a certain game can be played. There may be cases where games have multiple types of game modes.

- **Single-Player/Campaign/Story:** In many traditional games there is a “main” story that a gamer can choose to play. This is often single player and is the core part of the game. There may be other game modes within the game.
- **Training Mode/Freeplay mode:** Often times, games will feature a mode where the gamer can practice. These are low stakes modes that can be used as an introduction into a game or a time where a player can get familiar with their controls. This can be very helpful when testing if the assistive technology is working.
- **Custom Game:** Some games will allow the player to create their own rules within the game. Custom game modes could let the player invite online friends or the public to the game they create or it can be more of a free flow environment.
- **Multiplayer:** If a game has multiplayer features, this means that an individual can play online or with someone on the same platform. This does not mean that the game is crossplay or cross-platform.

The above are common general categories that are commonly found in games. Although, games may choose to name their modes differently or within the theme of their game.

Compatibility in Games

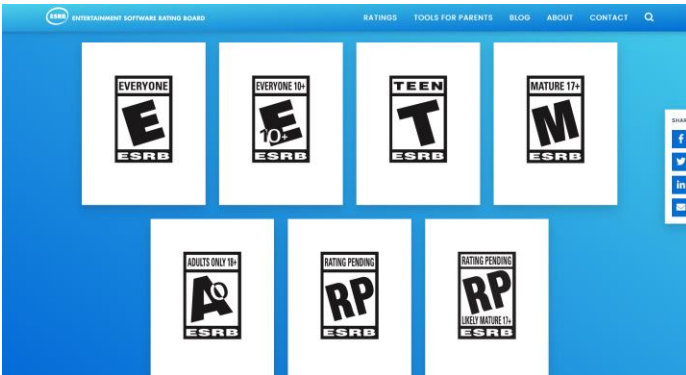
Some games can be played on various systems and allow players to play together in multiplayer modes. Games will advertise their crossplay/compatibility, these can often be the

- **Crossplay:** A game that allows gamers playing on different platforms to game together. For example, an Xbox gamer playing the same game with a PlayStation player. It is important to understand that the different generations of these Consoles can matter as well. Also, crossplay can mean PC or mobile gamers can play with console gamers.
- **Cross-platform:** A game that is available on multiple platforms but does not necessarily mean that gamers can play together. Some games are available on all platforms but do not allow crossplay.



Age restrictions/rating

Most games include an age rating on their package or within the digital store. There are a few different organizations that provide these ratings that are specific to a region. The rating scale used in Canada, USA and Mexico is the ESRB rating system. More information about the ranking can be found on the website, but a brief explanation (sourced from ESRB directly) can be found below:



<https://www.esrb.org/ratings-guide/>



ESRB Rating	Description
E	Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.
E ₁₀₊	Titles rated E10+ (Everyone 10+) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.
T	Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.
M	Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language
A	Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity. Microsoft does not support AO titles.
RP	Titles listed as RP (Rating Pending) have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.

The age ratings can help guide the player and GAME Checkpoint lead on what games may be appropriate for them.



Accessibility

The gaming industry has made lots of recent progress when it comes to designing games, creating resources, or even developing devices to help make games more accessible. Although this is a changing landscape and it will continue to develop, there are some features to be aware of and knowledge to know if a game is accessible for a player.

In-Game Settings

Most video games have a feature that allows the gamer to customize their settings. Historically, this has included a limited list only allowing the player to adjust the brightness or audio settings in the game. But as time has progressed, game developers have expanded the settings to allow gamers to customize their gaming experience. Inherently, this has made games more accessible and specific options have been added to more recent games from having players with disabilities as part of the game design process.

In-game settings are not standard between video games. Each game often does not advertise the in-game settings before. Therefore, two resources that are extremely helpful when wanting to know what accessibility features or number of inputs required in a game are *Can I Play That* (<https://caniplaythat.com/>) And *Taming Gaming* (<https://www.taminggaming.com/en-us/features/Supporting+Game+Accessibility>). *Can I Play That* hosts a codex of accessibility game reviews that focus on describing the features in the game. *Taming Gaming* hosts a library of games that can be sorted by the types of inputs or accessibility features a player may need.

Can I Play That?



Taming Gaming



Below is a short list of common and useful in game settings to give an idea of what is available in some games. Note that the most common naming is used in the table below, however the setting may just be under a similar name in games. These can be often changed from the “settings” or “accessibility” tab in the game:

In-Game Setting	Description
Display settings	Many games will feature settings to adjust the brightness, contrast, and saturation.
Magnifier	Controlled zoom on the game while playing.
Color Blind Mode	Shifts colors in the game to allow for people with different color blindness types to distinguish between important colors in the game.
Subtitles	Add subtitles to audio in game.
Difficulty options	Allowing the gamer to choose the difficulty they want to experience the game in. Often easy, medium, and hard.
Narration and Descriptive Audio	Adds a screen reader for text or icons in the game and describes the content on the screen.
“Slow Motion” or Reduced Reaction Time	Puts the game into reduced speed to and adds more time for time specific actions in the game.
Aim Assist	If there is a weapon that requires aiming, it automatically aims the weapon at the target
Reduced Screen Effects (i.e. motion blur, depth of field, screen shake, etc.)	Eliminates or reduces the visual sensory experiences that may be triggering.
Heads Up Display/Waypoints	If a game requires a player to navigate to certain areas, these will be highlighted our guide the player to the location.
Simplified Controls	Reduces the number of inputs required to play.
Setting Controller Vibration	Allows the user to increase or decrease the vibration in their controller during the game.
Toggle/Auto Settings	<p>These settings allow the player to make settings that require players to press buttons rapidly or press buttons to pick up items to be turned into and automatic option or turned to toggle instead of holding onto a button.</p> <p>Ex: Game requires player to hold button to sprint and press button to pickup weapons. Instead, the game could allow the player to toggle on and off sprint and automatically pick up weapons.</p>

Game developers recently have been adding what are called “**presets**” to games for accessibility. Such as a preset for vision loss where it turns on all of the settings related to vision. Then from there the player has a baseline to turn on and off settings from the preset.

However, accessible game design is more than just setting options. Games designed with a more diverse set of play testers and have a wholistic approach to make sure their games are accessible are becoming more frequent. This will likely expand the possibilities for settings in games.

Button Remapping

Button mapping is broken into its own section as it is a very useful in-game setting. It is discussed in Booklet 2 that some game platforms feature their own button mapping software such as Xbox and Steam. Many games themselves also feature button remapping. This is the setting that allows the player to reallocate input in the games to alternative buttons on the controller. This can be useful for players that have fatigue when pressing a certain button on the controller or need certain inputs changed to different buttons. An example of this can be seen in the MMC demo of Brawlhalla where the controls were played standardly and then remapped to the rear buttons and triggers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HA9vWREdY>



Social Experiences

Gaming can be a very social experience if that is what the gamer desires. If someone uses games to socialize, discussing options on how to achieve this is important. With multiplayer options allowing to play the game with friends or strangers. There are a few ways that gamers can communicate with other players like:

- Text chat
- Voice chat
- Emojis/Emoting
 - Some games allow player to make the character wave or move in certain ways.

There are many considerations that the gamer will have to determine to make this experience comfortable for them such as privacy.

A major consideration for adaptive gaming setups when considering social play is **headsets** for communication. Headsets are required for voice communication in games and allow players to hear the game along with other players talking in multiplayer modes. Not all games allow for voice chat features but most platforms have a “party” feature which allows players to great voice group chats with their friends to talk while they play.