

What Makes A Good Game?

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There are thousands of games available just for your phone. More for the computer. But is every game a good game? What makes a hit? Thousands of games are created that never get played. It is hard to make a good game. Understanding the trade-offs is critical.



“Humanity's most serious activities belong to the realm of make-believe. Culture comes from play.” -- J Huizinga

There are several traits experts agree are in a “good” game:

- 1) An interesting storyline
- 2) Continuous challenge and replayability
- 3) Immediate feedback and valued rewards
- 4) Combined sense of fun & sense of realism

Games – and play – are how we learn about our culture. Many games are educational. A game can be both fun and educational. But game playing alone is often not a learning event. The debriefing and reflection following the game play is where the learning most often occurs. What worked? What didn't? What did you learn? What would you do differently? Reflection is where players identify and evaluate strategies and rules. Our game performance is enhanced as we learn the rules and better strategies. If the game is too easy, if the challenge isn't there, if it doesn't make us think, it isn't as fun.

But game elements can get in the way of learning. Game events can happen too fast, or be too dramatic, or skip over the tedious steps. This may increase the fun but does so at the expense of learning. Decide what is more important for your game. The more you care about content, the less you tolerate the game elements. When the kitchen is on fire, you don't want to have to play a game to learn how to use the fire extinguisher.

Games can also create spaces that encourage us to use our creativity and imagination. Games can be based on solving a difficult or unique problem: something where there is no single answer and perhaps not even a “right” or perfect solution.

Designing a good game or educational game isn't an either/or choice. Think about what a player might learn from the game you want to design. Maximize their reward by designing a game that is fun but also develops skills. It's a challenge. Are you up to it?

Reference: <http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/games/goodgame.html>