

## Topic Page: [Video games](#)

Definition: **video game** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Game using electronically generated images displayed on a screen. High-quality graphics increasingly resemble the real world or stylised fantastical environments. Some video games test the skill of a single player, whilst other games allow two or more players to compete. See *also* virtual reality

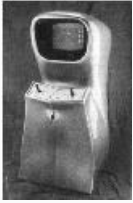


Image from: [Arcade Games in Computer Graphics Companion](#)

### Summary Article: **Video and Computer Games**

From *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

The computer game's evolution has closely paralleled the larger “digital revolution”: originating with computer hobbyists and shareware advocates in the 1960s, reaching the general public in the 1970s and 1980s consumer electronics boom, and going on-line in the 1990s. Computer games now constitute a major sector of the American entertainment industry.

Steve Russell, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology researcher, developed the first computer game, Spacewar, in 1961. Russell's innovation quickly spread across university and corporate computer labs in the 1960s. Often circulating games between labs as free shareware and thus fueling innovation, other researchers and hobbyists developed prototypes for the genres that still dominate the game industry, including adventure, role-playing, shooting, and flight simulation games.

As entrepreneurs marketed these prototypes, electronic games were introduced as public amusements in arcades and bars, taking their place alongside jukeboxes and pinball machines. The growth of shopping malls, which often used game arcades to attract younger customers, furthered the spread of popular early games such as Space Invaders, Asteroids, and Pac-Man.

By the early 1970s Atari, Magnabox, Intellivision, and other consumer electronics companies were marketing these same games for domestic consumption. Pong, one of the most popular early home games, consisted of little more than two vertical bars, or “paddles,” and a moving dot, or “ball”; but the novelty of a more interactive relationship to television proved popular. By 1983, at the peak of this first wave of consumer electronics, more than five hundred new games per year were being produced, although the bottom fell out of the market that same year owing to overproduction and poor quality control.

A second generation of video game companies, dominated by Japanese-owned Nintendo, Sega, and later, Sony, revitalized the industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s, establishing electronic games as a central feature of American childhood. According to industry estimates, ninety percent of American boys and forty percent of American girls have played computer or video games. Children's diminished access to real-world play spaces because of urbanization, the two-career family, and concerns about crime and safety made video games' vivid virtual play spaces an attractive after-school entertainment. The dominant video game genres reflected traditional themes of children's literature (including fantasy, horror, and adventure stories) or backyard play (including space exploration, fisticuffs, and sports). Such interests contributed to the popularity of early console game successes, such as SuperMario Brothers, The Legend of Zelda, Sonic the Hedgehog, and Mega-man. Fighting games, such as Mortal Kombat or Streetfighter II, exploited steady improvements in computer graphics and processing power.

The computer game also fueled the home market for the personal computer. Games such as Doom, Quake, and Myst proved to be “killer apps” (that is, software applications that sold the hardware). By 1997 annual domestic income from the American computer and video game industry had reached 5.3 billion dollars and worldwide sales were at least 10 billion dollars. Game characters such as Tomb Raider's Lara Croft had become transmedia phenomena.

Many critics expressed concern about the amount of time children spend playing video and computer games and especially about blood-thirsty game content. Such criticisms resulted in the formation of a rating system for games, administered by the Interactive Digital Software Association, the industry's primary trade organization. First-person shooting games became the focus of such criticisms, since similar simulation games were used for military training and some critics feared that such gameplay's constant “rehearsal” of violence might have been a factor in a spate of school shootings. Defenders of computer games note, however, that many controversial games were not designed for children but rather reflect the tastes of older players: seventy percent of computer game players and forty-two percent of console-game players are over eighteen. Existing evidence linking video game violence and real world violence remains inconclusive.

Other critics have charged that the male orientation of game design and marketing fosters a gender gap in computer access. Game playing gave boys much earlier access to the computer than girls and resulted in boys having a greater comfort level with the technology. The so-called girls game movement sought alternative game genres that reflected characteristically feminine interests in doll play or diary-keeping or emphasized character relations rather than violent action. Despite innovative contributions by smaller, female-run start-up companies such as Brenda Laurel's Purple Moon, the movement's real market success came through Mattel's Barbie interactive products. By the end of the 1990s, Mattel had acquired many of the girls game companies.

The dramatic growth of the Internet sparked interests in on-line gaming. Fighting games such as Quake led to the formation of “clans” of on-line game-players and even “hired guns,” whom players can pay to best their enemies. Some argue that on-line gaming may allow a broader array of games to reach the market and may foster a new wave of innovations in digital storytelling. On-line gaming has proven especially effective at attracting female players. However, no one has resolved which business model will enable on-line gaming to achieve a stable economic base.



*Pac Man. Screen shot. 2004.*



*World of Warcraft. Screen shot. 2006.*



*The Sims. Screen schot. 2006.*



*World Cyber Games Finals. 2004. Mzacha, photographer.*

## **Bibliography**

- Anderson, Craig A.; Douglas A. Gentile; Katherine E. Buckley, *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents: Theory, Research, and Public Policy* (Oxford 2007).
- Cassell, Justine; Henry Jenkins, eds., *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (MIT Press 1998).
- Doan, Andrew P.; Brooke Strickland; Douglas Gentile, *Hooked on Games: The Lure and Cost of Video Game and Internet Addiction* (FEP International 2012).
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon; Jonas Heide Smith; Susana Pajares Tosca, *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction* (Routledge 2008).
- Gee, James Paul; Elisabeth R. Hayes, *Women and Gaming: The Sims and 21st Century Learning* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009).
- Herz, Jessie C., *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds* (Little, Brown 1997).
- Interactive Digital Software Association, *The State of the Entertainment Software Industry: 1998* (1998).
- Juul, Jesper, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and Their Players* (MIT Press 2010).
- Kent, Steven, *Super Mario Nation*, *American Heritage* (Sept. 1997):65.
- Perron, Bernard; Mark J. P. Wolf, eds., *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* (Routledge 2009).
- Sheff, David, *Game Over: How Nintendo Zapped an American Industry, Captured Your Dollars, and Enslaved Your Children* (Random House 1993).
- Waggoner, Zach, *My Avatar, My Self: Identity in Video Role-Playing Games* (McFarland 2009).
- Wolf, Mark J. P., ed., *The Video Game Explosion: A History from PONG to PlayStation and Beyond* (Greenwood Press 2008).
- Wolf, Mark J. P.; Bernard Perron, eds., *The Video Game Theory Reader* (Routledge 2003).

Henry Jenkins

**APA**

Chicago

Harvard

MLA

Jenkins, H. (2018). Video and computer games. In S. Bronner (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of American studies*. MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic\\_game](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic_game)

---



Copyright 2018 The American Studies Association



Copyright 2018 The American Studies Association

## APA

Jenkins, H. (2018). Video and computer games. In S. Bronner (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of American studies*. MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved from [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic\\_game](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic_game)

## Chicago

Jenkins, Henry. "Video and Computer Games." In *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, edited by Simon Bronner. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.  
[https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic\\_game](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic_game)

## Harvard

Jenkins, H. (2018). Video and computer games. In S. Bronner (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of American studies*. [Online]. Johns Hopkins University Press. Available from:  
[https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic\\_game](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic_game) [Accessed 17 November 2019].

## MLA

Jenkins, Henry. "Video and Computer Games." *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, edited by Simon Bronner, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1st edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, [https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic\\_game](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/electronic_game). Accessed 17 Nov. 2019.