

British Board of Film Classification

GUIDE TO GAMES CLASSIFICATION

What is a video game?

Video games covers a wide range of products from basic games played on mobile phones to games played online by a small community of gamers. They can be played on a variety of platforms (for example computers, consoles, phones) and can vary in content from very basic images to complex simulations of real or fantasy worlds.

They can be contemporary, historical, futuristic or fantastical. They can include puzzles, simulations of sports or other social activities. Games can take place over many levels or in one huge environment where players take on a role and move about freely. Games can be played alone or in groups or online with thousands of others. There are even games in which players can take control of whole worlds or universes.

Like films and DVDs some games are aimed at adult players, others are aimed at younger players or families.

Why does the BBFC classify video games?

Most video games are exempt from BBFC classification and will obtain an age rating under the voluntary system run by PEGI (Pan-European Game Information - www.pegi.info). However, under the terms of the Video Recordings Act 1984, a game will lose that exemption if it contains video footage or if it depicts:

- Human sexual activity
- Acts of gross violence towards humans or animals
- Activity likely to help in the commission of a crime
- Drug use

In the event of a game losing its exemption, it will require a BBFC classification, which is a legal classification, before it can be offered for sale or rental in the United Kingdom. An increasing number of companies are voluntarily submitting their games for BBFC classification even though such games meet the exemption criteria.

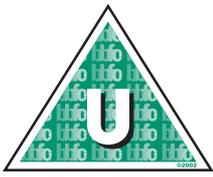
How does the classification of video games differ from the classification of films and DVDs?

The same categories ('U', 'PG', '12', '15', '18') used by the BBFC in classifying DVDs apply to games classified by the Board. A particular category will be awarded to a game according to its treatment of issues such as bad language, sex references, violence or horror using basically the same criteria as set out in the BBFC Guidelines for films and DVDs.

The ability of a game to make a young player complicit in behaviour involving, for example, sex, drugs or realistic violence, may be as important as the level of detail shown, especially where such behaviour forms a major component of the game, and where the level of interactivity is high.



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In a video game, the frequency with which an issue occurs is also often difficult to quantify, as it will depend on how the player chooses to play the game, and how many times a particular level is attempted before completion. Where frequency is a category defining issue (for example, with respect to strong language), the BBFC bases its judgement on an assessment of the frequency with which a player is likely to encounter the issue during normal gameplay.

The BBFC does recognize, however, that the active experience of playing video games is different from that of watching films or DVDs, and this 'interactive' feature is taken into account when classifying games. But, broadly speaking, the factors that will determine a particular age category remain the same across films/DVDs and video games.

What might I find in video games at the various age categories?

In general, the storylines in video games do not deal with themes in the same way as films or DVDs, although the strength of various issues (eg violence or horror) will establish a tone for a work that may contribute towards the classification decision.



At 'U', violence will be mild and usually of a nature familiar from children's cartoons. There may be a distinct fantasy setting with unrealistic weapons being used and there will be no portrayal of realistic injuries. Language will be very mild (eg 'damn' or 'hell') and there will be no focus on sexual behaviour beyond activities such as kissing or hugging. There will be no portrayal of dangerous activities that young children are likely to copy as a result of trying them out within the game. There will be a significant element of problem solving (eg puzzles) that will balance the 'action' in the game. Examples include *Lego Indiana Jones* (2008) for several consoles and *Bratz The Movie* (2008) for the Wii and Gameboy.



At 'PG', violence may have a slightly greater impact but there will be no detail in the manner in which injury is inflicted and the setting should be distanced from the real world by strong fantasy elements. Language will be mild and mild references to sex will be acceptable providing they lack detail. As at 'U', there will be no portrayal of dangerous activities which might be copied after being tried out in the game. There will be no focus on realistic weapons, such as knives. Examples include *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) for several consoles and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007), for the PlayStation 2.



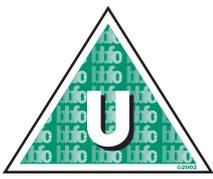
'12' rated games are only suitable for children over the age of 12 and it is against the law to sell or rent them to children under the age of 12. At '12', moderate violence, but without an emphasis on realistic injury detail, is likely and, again, fantasy settings that distance the action from the real world will be a strong mitigating factor. Strong language (eg uses of 'f***') is unlikely to be acceptable because the nature of a video game allows for endless repetition of such language. There may be references to sex that will be familiar to most adolescents and discreet portrayals of sexual activity. Examples include *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* (2007) for the PlayStation 2 console and *Iron Man* (2008) for several consoles.



At '15' video games may contain a focus on stronger issues, just as '15' rated films do. These could include a focus on strong violence with bloody detail, horror scenes, strong language or strong sex or drugs references. Examples include *Resident Evil 4* ('15', 2007) for the Wii console and *Halo* ('15', 2007) for the Xbox 360.



At '18' issues may be even stronger and could include a focus on strong violence with realistic injury detail, strong horror, very strong language, very strong sex references or even depictions of sexual activity or drug use. Examples include the *Grand Theft Auto* series ('18', 1997 - 2008) for various consoles and *Unreal Tournament 3* ('18', 2007) for the Xbox 360.



Tell me more about video games at the higher categories.

It is illegal to supply a BBFC age rated game ('12', '15', '18') to anyone below the age displayed on the packaging. Sales staff can be heavily fined and even sent to prison if they are caught supplying BBFC age rated games to anyone younger than that age. Confusion can result from the fact that PEGI (www.pegi.info) age ratings are not legally binding. Parents and teachers should be aware of this. So a child of any age can buy, say, a PEGI 16+ game and no law has been broken. But it is against the law to sell or rent a game with a BBFC age rating on it to anyone younger.

The BBFC is most concerned about the appeal of video games to children leading to them accessing material that is inappropriate for their age. This is usually because some higher rated games gain 'notoriety' and become 'the thing to play'. The BBFC gives these games high age-restrictive categories for the same reasons that films and DVDs that contain similarly strong elements are classified '15' and '18' – they are inappropriate for children and young teenagers.

The categories given to video games, from 'U' through to '18', are an indication of the suitability of the material they contain and not a measure of the game-playing difficulty of a work, and this is something that the BBFC encourages parents to bear in mind when obtaining video games for their children.

I can't find a game on your website www.pbbfc.co.uk - where do I get more info?

Some video games are classified by PEGI - more information can be found on the PEGI website. Others were classified before we built the Parents BBFC website. If you would like us to provide information on a title please feel free to contact us and request it.

I'm not a gamer - how can I find out more about the games my child plays?

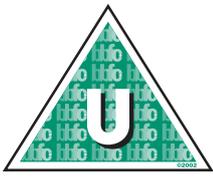
There is extended information on all video games passed by the BBFC on our website www.pbbfc.co.uk along with lots of information about how and why we classify films, DVD and video games. We also have a glossary of gaming terms for those who aren't familiar with gaming terms.

I can't play games so how can I tell what a game will be like before I let my child play it?

You can read the extended information on our website Parents BBFC - this information gives you detailed examples of the issues in any particular game. On the glossary of gaming terms there is information about the different types or genres of video game.

My child is studying games at school – how can I help?

There are two BBFC websites aimed at younger people. Children's BBFC (www.cbbfc.co.uk) is our website for under 12s and includes games, activities, puzzles and a chance to review games and films. Student's BBFC (www.sbbfc.co.uk) is our website for older students and teachers with academic resources including Case Studies, articles, timelines and other features.



Games Glossary

Here are some of the terms you might find on this website or other gaming sites.

Avatar

The third-person character that you are playing when you play a videogame – the gamer controls the avatar like a puppet with the controls.

Boss

An enemy character in a game, that is usually much harder to beat than the other enemies – sometimes you need to develop new skills or moves or use them in combination. Often defeating a boss is the key to getting up a level, and a game may have several different ‘bosses’ that appear as you progress further through the game.

Cheats

These are bits of code which players can commonly put into the game using a series of predefined movements of the game controller. They reward the player with things like additional life and weapons and help to make the game easier.

Consoles

A console is the machine used to play a game. There are many different brands and sorts of consoles. They include: Xbox, Xbox 360 , Nintendo Wii, Nintendo GameCube, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PC, PlayStation Portable, Nintendo Game Boy, Nintendo DS. Extended consumer advice on www.pbbfc.co.uk should tell you which console the game is available for.

Cut scene

Set scenes of action which the player cannot control. Usually cut scenes are used to develop the plot or story of a game, or to give the player information such as introducing them to a character or telling them where to find something.

First person shooter

a game in which the player assumes a character and all action in the game is seen in first person perspective from that character’s point of view.

Gamer

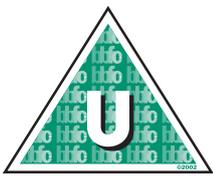
Someone who plays video games or is a video games enthusiast.

God mode

A way of playing a game in which the lead character cannot be injured or killed. A common cheat in some games which makes the player character invincible.

Joypad

The piece of equipment with the game controls on it. Sometimes it is held and moved as part of the game (such as with the Nintendo Wii) and sometimes it has buttons which can be pressed and/or a joystick control.



Joystick

A vertical button on a handset which can be moved to navigate the game.

Level

A section of a game – in most games the player must progress through several different levels which get progressively more difficult, or which require the player to build up different sets of skills.

Lives

Some games give players a number of lives, they must try to avoid being killed or failing a task to progress in the game.

Missions

An assignment, quest or activity which must be completed in order to progress in a role-play or action game.

Multiplayer game

A video game that more than one person can play at the same time. They do this using computer networking or a game system.

Online games

Games which can be played online and can involve interaction with players on other computers anywhere in the world.

Off mission

Deviating from the mission or set activity – in some games you can go ‘off mission’ and engage in activities which don’t help you progress further in the game but may be enjoyable nevertheless. Sometimes referred to as ‘roaming’.

Platform

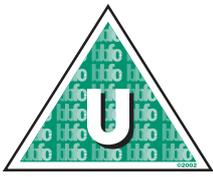
A specific set of hardware used to play a game.

Strafing

Using the game controller to move the player character sideways whilst shooting at the same time.

Third person shooter

A game in which the player assumes a character but can see that character moving around – the game is not seen from the character’s point of view.



Games Genres

Like films games come in many different genres. Here are some with examples and definitions:

shoot-'em-up

A game with emphasis on shooting characters or objects. The player will assume the role of shooter and sometimes develop different skills. The game can be first or third person (famous first person shooters include **Quake** and **Halo**).

beat-'em-up

A game with a focus on fighting/combat scenes (eg **Mortal Kombat**).

action adventure game

Any game that emphasises combat and fighting but which doesn't fit neatly into the shoot-'em-up or beat-'em-up genres. Action adventure games often have a long running story element eg the **Lara Croft Tomb Raider** series.

role-playing game

A game in which the players adopt a role and interact with other characters (eg the **Final Fantasy** series or **World of Warcraft**).

sports simulation

A game in which the player uses the console and control to develop skills in a sports world (eg **Fight Night**, **FIFA**, **Tony Hawks**).

driving game

A game with a focus on driving (eg the many **F1** games or the **Burnout** series).

survival horror game

A game which takes place in a horror scenario, such as zombies taking over the world. Like horror films horror games will often include elements designed to frighten the player (eg **Resident Evil**, **Silent Hill**).

platform game

(eg **Super Mario Bros**, **Sonic the Hedgehog**, **Ratchet and Clank**, **Spyro the Dragon**).

strategy game

This would include real-time or turn-based military strategy games or historical, economic, city building simulation games, (eg **Age of Empires**, **Sim City**).

puzzle game

A game in which the player solves visual or sound puzzles, often against the clock or completing several levels. (eg **Tetris**).

mini-game

A short video game often contained within another game. They are always smaller and simpler than the game in which they are contained.

expansion pack

Additional material for an existing game, usually a role playing game (eg **The Sims** or **World of Warcraft**). They usually contain new game areas, missions, characters or weapons and sometimes extend the games storyline.