

The Gamer's Glossary

Accessibility

A game's capability to support players of all types, specifically those with sensory, physical, or cognitive impairment or any disability that might affect the enjoyment of the experience.

Alpha Release

An initial, incomplete version of a game. Alpha versions are usually released early in the development process to test a game's most critical functionality and prototype design concepts.

Animatic

A partially animated storyboard with sound effects used during early game development.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligences (AIs) Are algorithms used to generate responsive, adaptive or intelligent game behavior, primarily in non-player characters. This is separate from the technology that creates new or derivative performance.

Asymmetrical

A competitive game where the players do not stand on equal ground, or in which the competing teams each control different characters or elements that are unique from their opponents. A common variant one-versus-many, in which a single player competes against everyone else, but usually with significant advantages.

AR

Augmented Reality (AR)

Supplementing a real-world environment with computer-generated perceptual information, which may add to or mask the physical environment.

Avatar

The player's representation in the game world.

Battle Royale

An online multiplayer genre in which players compete to be the last person or team standing, often with scavenging, survival, and area exploration elements. A shrinking zone of play often time-limits the match.

Beta Release (beta testing)

An early release of a game, following its alpha release, where the game developer may seek feedback from players and testers to remove bugs prior to the product's commercial release.

Cinematic or Cutscene

A game segment that exists solely to provide detail and exposition to the story. Cut-scenes are more likely to be generated by the in-game engine while cinematics are pre-recorded.

Collective bargaining

When a group of less powerful individuals who share similar goals, unite in negotiations with a common, more powerful opponent.

Critical Path

Also called the golden path, this refers to the most direct point from game beginning to end for completion of the core story or experience without experiencing side content, replay, or other optional elements.

Cross-Platform

Describes a multiplayer game that can be played with other players on a separate platform, such as Xbox and Playstation.

Cross-Save

Describes a game in which save data can transfer between different platforms upon which that game appears.

Derivative Work

A work that includes elements of an original, previously copyright-protected work.

Developer

An individual or studio that builds and maintains a game.

Dialog or Conversation Tree

Found primarily in adventure games, a means of providing a menu of dialog choices to the player when interacting with a non-player character so as to learn more from that character, influence the character's actions, and otherwise progress the game's story. The tree nature comes from typically having multiple branching levels of questions and replies that can be explored.

DLC

Downloadable Content (DLC)

Additional content for a video game that is acquired through a digital delivery system.

Emergent Gameplay

Gameplay experiences that arise through player experimentation, creativity, or discovery, rather than the game's programmed structure.

Employees

Workers whose wages are issued on an IRS form W-2 and the employer withholds federal and state taxes.

Environmental Storytelling

The art of arranging a careful selection of the objects available in a game world so that they suggest a story to the player who sees them.

Expansion Pack (Add-on)

An addition to an existing role-playing game, tabletop game, video game or collectible card game. These add-ons usually add new game areas, weapons, objects, characters, or an extended storyline to an already-released game.

Fair Use

a legal doctrine that promotes freedom of expression by permitting the unlicensed use of copyright-protected works in certain circumstances.

Financial Core

Financial Core (also known as FiCore) is a legal carve out that permits workers opposed to participating in a union to be employed under the benefits of a union's contracts without compelling them to be a member of that union. Workers with FiCore status are called "fee paying non-members". The Financial Core Supreme Court ruling came out of General Motors's (GM) dispute with the United Auto Workers (UAW) Union and applies to all unions in the United States.

First-Party

Game development that comes from the company that manufactures a particular video game console.

First-Person

First-person view is through the eyes of the protagonist.

FPS (2 meanings)

1. First-person-shooter (FPS) describes a shooting game played with a view through the eyes of the protagonist.
2. Used to describe the number of Frames-per-second (FPS) appearing onscreen. A higher number is indicative of better visual quality.

Game Engine

The codebase on which a game runs. There are different subsets of engines, such as specialized ones for physics and graphics.

Game Mechanics

A term that describes how a particular game functions and what is possible within the game's environment; the rules of the game. Typical game mechanics include points, turns and/or lives. An unanticipated and novel use of game mechanics may lead to emergent gameplay.

Guild

A collective bargaining organization for independent contractors. Examples include the WGA, DGA, PGA, etc.

In-app or In-game purchase

A microtransaction in a game or app, usually for virtual goods in free or cheap games.

Independent contractors

Workers whose wages are issues on an IRS form 1099 NEC (non-employee compensation) and the worker is responsible for their own taxes. Employers aren't required to provide independent contractors with standard benefits, such as PTO and sick leave, or contribute to their health insurance coverage or retirement plan. Overtime protections also don't apply to Independent contractors. Hiring 1099 independent contractors costs about 30% less than W2 employees.

Indie

Games that are independently produced, or may alternatively have an indie "feel," even while following a more traditional production model. In either case, a combination of innovative systems or narrative, experimental nature, artistic goals, unique aesthetics, or small team size earns a game this label.

Intellectual Property (IP)

Creations of the mind, such as inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce.

Isometric

An angled graphical view reveals the characters from above and to the side and shows more of the surrounding environment than a top-down perspective might allow.

Let's Play

A type of video game walkthrough done by players, through screenshots or video, where the player provides commentary about the game as they work through it.

Live-Service

A designation for a game supported by multiple ongoing updates, patches, and changes, often over years, and representing major or even fundamental restructuring of major mechanics or available experiences. Sometimes called living games.

Localization

The process of editing a game for audiences in another region or country, primarily by translating the text and dialog of a video game. Localization can also involve changing content of the game to reflect different cultural values and censoring material that is against local law, or in some cases self-censoring in an effort to obtain a more commercially-favorable content rating.

Meta

Most-effective-tactics-available (meta) refers to a generally agreed upon strategy by a game's community; the combination of character build, weapons, or other factors that lead to the highest chance of success in a game.

MMO

Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games involve a large community of players co-existing in an online world, in cooperation or competition with one another.

MMORPG

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing game (MMORPG)

An MMO that incorporates traditional role-playing game mechanics. Games such as EverQuest and Dark Age of Camelot were progenitors of the genre. The most popular and most well-known game of this type is World of Warcraft.

MOBA

Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) games feature two teams competing on an established environment or battlefield, often delineated by distinct travel lanes. Players usually control a single character whose weapons or abilities expand throughout the match, often with strategic implications.

Moral Rights (droit moral)

There are 2 types of moral rights under copyright law:

1. Right of Paternity

The author's right to have their name on a work, to use a pseudonym and to remain anonymous.

2. Right of Integrity

The right of the author to object to any changes to their work that may harm their reputation as an author.

New Exploitation Rights

The right to use IP in all media, formats, modes of transmission, and methods of distribution, dissemination, exhibition or performance now known or that may be developed in the future; referred to as "New Exploitation Methods".

Open World

A game world where the player has much greater freedom in choosing the order that they visit areas within the world, rather than being restricted to a pre-defined or heavily constricted order of visiting areas.

PC and NPC

Player Characters (PCs) are in-game avatars controlled by the player, and are usually the protagonist. Non-Player Characters (NPCs) are any characters in the game that the player does not control; also may be referred to as a Bot.

Procedural Generation

A method of level, character, or other feature generation that algorithmically mixes random elements to create a unique result, often to present a novel experience to the player each time they engage with the game.

PvE

Players-versus-Environment (PvE) describes a game or mode where one or more players face off against computer-controlled enemies or challenges.

PvP

Players-versus-Player (PvP) describes a game or mode featuring direct competition or combat between players.

Publisher

An entity that releases, publishes, and sometimes distributes a game to the public. Publishers sometimes finance the development studio or may own or operate their own internal studios. In some cases, the publisher and developer are the same.

Real-Time Strategy Game (RTS)

A genre of video game where the player controls one or more units in real-time combat with human or computer opponents.

Right-To-Work state

Any state that has laws that protect workers from having to join a union. Right-to-work laws are lobbied for by corporations because they undermine union's ability to retain members.

Role-Playing Game (RPG)

A genre in which the human player takes on the role of a specific character "class" and advances the skills and abilities of that character within the game environment.

Royalty

A revenue share of sales, a percentage. Royalties start at the sale of unit one and continue in perpetuity of sales.

Sandbox Game

A game with a gameplay element that gives the player a great degree of creativity to complete tasks towards a goal within the game, if such a goal exists. Some games exist as pure sandbox games with no objectives; these are also known as non-games or software toys.

Season Pass

A style of monetization in which players pay a fee for access to specific in-game content as it's released. Sometimes a tiered layer of progression unavailable for those who haven't paid for access.

Strike

An organized stoppage of work conducted by workers in order to impose bargaining power against employers.

Taft-Hartley act of 1947

A federal law that gives non-union performers a 30-day period in which to join a union after working a union job. the Taft-Hartley form is a 2-page form that an employer fills out to hire a non-union performer.

Third-Party

Development of games or content for one or more consoles (or other hardware) from a company that does not make or release the console.

Third-Person

Third person view shows the protagonist on the screen.

Transformative Work (Rights)

A work that makes use of copyrighted material, but does so in a way that the resulting work is deemed original.

Triple A (AAA)

An industry term indicating high budget games from the most prominent publishers or developers.

VR

Virtual reality (VR) is an interactive experience taking place within a simulated environment, that incorporates mainly auditory and visual, but also other types of sensory feedback like haptic. Current VR technology commonly uses headsets or multi-projected environments, sometimes in combination with physical environments or props, to generate realistic images, sounds and other sensations that simulate a user's physical presence in a virtual or imaginary environment.

Work-for-hire

A work where the employer—not the employee—is considered the legal author.

UI

User Interface (UI) refers to the components, menus, and graphical elements that help a player navigate a game, including but not limited to health, maps, currency, or abilities. A user interface may include a Heads-Up Display (HUD) of information available during play, such as an ammo counter.

Union

A collective bargaining organization for employees. Examples include SAG-AFTRA, IATSE (crew), IBEW (electricians), etc.