



ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

ESRB ratings

game publishers

retailers

privacy online

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Rating Process

During the final stages of development and prior to a game being released to the public, game publishers submit responses to a detailed written ESRB questionnaire (often supplementing such responses with lyric sheets, scripts, etc.), specifying exactly what **pertinent content** (as defined by ESRB) will be in their game. Along with the written submission materials, publishers must provide a DVD that captures all pertinent content. This includes typical gameplay, missions, and cutscenes, along with the most extreme instances of content across all relevant categories including but not limited to violence, language, sex, controlled substances and gambling. Pertinent content that is not playable (i.e., "locked out") but will exist in the game code on the final game disc must also be disclosed.

Once the submission is checked by ESRB for completeness, which may also involve ESRB staff members playing a beta or alpha version of the game, the video footage is reviewed by at least three specially trained **game raters**. ESRB raters must be adults and typically have experience with children, whether through prior work experience, education or through being parents or caregivers themselves.

Upon reviewing the DVD, each rater recommends an appropriate rating category and content descriptors. However, this initial recommendation is merely intended as a starting point from which the raters will collectively deliberate about what rating should be assigned to the game. Once the raters reach a consensus, ESRB staff reviews their recommended rating category and content descriptors, conducts a parity examination where appropriate to maintain consistency in rating assignments, and issues a certificate with the official rating assignment to the game's publisher. A **rating summary** is finalized shortly thereafter, providing additional detail about the key factors that contributed to the rating assignment, including specific examples of game content or attributes. The publisher may either accept the rating as final or revise the game's content and resubmit it to the ESRB, at which time the process starts anew. Publishers also have the ability to appeal an ESRB rating assignment to an Appeals Board made up of publishers, retailers and other professionals. Unless a different publication date is requested by the publisher, the complete rating information (rating category, content descriptors, and rating summary) is posted on the ESRB website 30 days following the assignment of the rating.

When the game is ready for release to the public, publishers send copies of the final product to the ESRB. The game packaging is reviewed to make sure the rating information is displayed accurately and in accordance with ESRB requirements. Additionally, ESRB staff, including raters (time permitting), play-test the final version of a variety of games - including but not limited to games which generate consumer inquiries to ESRB and those which receive broad consumer exposure - to verify that all the materials provided by the games' publishers during the rating process were accurate and complete.

Console Download Games

As of April 18, 2011, games that will only be available for download directly through console and handheld storefronts (such as Microsoft Xbox LIVE® Arcade, Nintendo Wii® or DSi™ Shop and Sony



SEARCH FOR GAME RATINGS

SEARCH BY PUBLISHER
OR TITLE KEYWORD

☐ Title or ☐ Publisher

SEARCH BY RATING

Any

SEARCH BY PLATFORM

Any

SEARCH BY CONTENT

Any

For Multiple selections,
open the pulldown again and
make an additional selection.

RESET

SEARCH

JUN 24 2011

PlayStation® Store) are rated via a streamlined rating process. Publishers of these games are required to complete a form containing a series of questions that address content across relevant categories (as described above). The responses to these questions determine the game's rating, which is issued to the publisher once a DVD reflecting all disclosed content is received by the ESRB. Rating summaries are not available for games rated via this process.

All games rated in this manner are tested by ESRB shortly after they are made publicly available to ensure that appropriate ratings have been assigned. In the event content was not fully disclosed by the publisher, either the rating displayed in the store will be promptly corrected or, in egregious cases, the game will be removed from the store.

Downloadable Content

Downloadable content (DLC) that will be appended to an existing, previously-rated product need only be submitted to ESRB for rating if its content exceeds that which is in the existing "core" product. Otherwise, the rating assigned to the core product is applicable to the DLC as well. Where, however, DLC content exceeds the rating assigned to the core product, it must be submitted to ESRB and a different rating will be associated with this DLC.

For information about the ESRB Enforcement System, [click here](#).