



CANADA'S CENTRE
FOR DIGITAL AND
MEDIA LITERACY

Understanding the Rating System

It's important to know what the ratings mean on the video games your children play. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is an industry organization that has developed a rating system for computer, Internet and video games. Most games sold in North America are rated using this system.

ESRB ratings have three parts: rating symbols suggest age appropriateness for the game, content descriptors to indicate elements in a game that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern, and more detailed rating summaries that are available through the ESRB website. To take full advantage of the ESRB rating system, it's important to check the rating symbol (on the front of the game box) and the content descriptors (on the back of the game box); parents are also encouraged to read the rating summaries for the game.

As well as the rating system, the ESRB's Advertising Review Council (ARC) has developed a list of Principles and Guidelines to ensure responsible advertising practices by the video-game industry. ARC is also responsible for responding to concerns or complaints raised by consumers regarding the marketing of video games. Parents can also sign up for a bi-weekly list of new titles, including ratings and content summaries, in the ESRB's newsletter [ParenTools](#).

Below you'll find the ratings and what they mean. For the most up to date list of content descriptors and definitions visit the ESRB website at: www.esrb.org.



Early Childhood (EC): Early Childhood rated games have content that may be suitable for persons ages 3 and older. Titles in this category contain no material that parents would find inappropriate.



Everyone (E): Everyone rated games have content that may be suitable for persons ages six and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal violence and some comic mischief and/or mild language.



EVERYONE 10+ (E10+): Titles rated E10+ have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.



Teen (T): Teen rated games have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.



Mature (M): Mature rated games have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence and/or strong language.





Adults Only (AO): Adults Only rated games have content suitable only for adults. Titles in this category may include graphic depictions of sex and/or violence. Adults Only products are not intended for persons under the age of 18.



Rating Pending: Used only for advertising and/or marketing materials created for titles that have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting a final rating.



Content Descriptor: Over 30 standardized phrases that indicate content that triggered a particular rating and may be of interest or concern.

Keep in mind that a rating may not give you all the information you need about a game's content. As well, online games are not covered by this rating system and some games may have optional, user-created content that will not be rated. Finally, you should find out whether the game can be played with others over the Internet (through a service such as Xbox Live) and if those conversations will be moderated. Parent websites such as Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org) can provide more information on content issues that may occur in a game. As well, many popular games have "walkthroughs" posted on YouTube that allow you to preview the content yourself. The bottom line for parents: always check out a game yourself before letting your kids play it.

