PEGI administrators | game and app ratings

How Games are Examined

Content Declaration Questionnaire

The first part of a rating is the PEGI questionnaire from which the game developer declares what the game contains.

This covers elements such as violence, sexual content, bad language, drug use and more. After completing this questionnaire the developer is then provided with a provisional rating that can be used for advertising.

The next stage is for the developer to provide us with evidence for their questionnaire answers which includes video footage and a copy of the game. These are then examined thoroughly to ensure that the questionnaire was accurate.

This process has been specifically developed for games, as it would be impossible for an examiner to sit and play every aspect of every game we receive, given the multitude of possible scenarios that modern games can deliver to players. Take Grand Theft Auto V for example, here it would take weeks if not months to see every element the game contains. By being told the most notable elements in each game we can be sure that the rating isn't lower than it should be due to something that may have been missed.

The responsibility lies with the developer to ensure that all pertinent content has been declared. If they fail to do so and a game is given a lower rating than it should have, they could face a fine of up to €500,000. They would also have an illegal product for sale and would have to withdraw it from sale.

Video Footage Examination

Developers must provide us with video evidence of their declaration answers.

This video footage is then assessed and analysed to see if there was anything missed or misinterpreted from the questionnaire, before examining the game itself.

In addition to this developers are also required to send all cinematic videos or 'cut-scenes' separately. Quite often the violence depicted in these can be more extreme than during the actual gameplay.

If we find something in the video footage that doesn't match the questionnaire we contact the game company to inform them of a potential change in the age rating. This also gives them the opportunity to edit parts of the game if they wish to keep a certain rating.

Game Examination

The final stage is the examination of the game itself. Typically we are sent beta versions of the game. These are content complete, but unlike the final product they still have menus left in for development purposes. These allow the player to skip levels, acquire better weapons and become invincible. We then use these functions to quickly progress through the game when needed to get to the most pertinent parts.

An important aspect of testing the game itself is to try out things that may not have been shown in the video. For instance, investigating the physical effects of different weapons or exploring all the ways in which your character can be harmed.

A complete examination takes between 4 and 10 working days, after which the developer is sent their formal licence containing the rating symbols they must use. In addition to the age rating there are also content labels to explain to the consumer why the game attained its rating.