

# Introduction to the World of Gaming



So, you're interested in incorporating gaming into your library at some level, but you're not quite sure where to start. The good news is, there are tons of great resources that discuss video games, and some of them are even library-specific.

If you've never played the Wii before or have never experienced the disorientation of trying to control an on-screen character in first-person view (why am I stuck looking at the ceiling?), this article is a great place to start.

We will give you a brief introduction to the current gaming landscape, which we hope will serve as a diving board for your entrance into the world of gaming.

## What is a video game?

Video games use an input device – it could be a wireless controller with multiple buttons, a guitar with coloured keys, or just the number pads on your cell phone – to control an entity on a screen. The images displayed on the screen give feedback to the player, who in turn responds with additional input. If you've played *Snake* or *BrickBreaker* on your cell phone, you've played a video game. Games are running off in all directions – from micropayment downloads on the iPhone to several hundred dollar setups in the basement. So where do you fit in this spectrum?

## What's the difference between the Wii, the PS3 and the XBOX 360, and which one do I want?

This is an important question with a complicated answer. While games now exist on all kinds of different devices, the types of games and systems you will probably be working with in your library are either computer games (usually called PC games) or console games. The short answer is that you want to choose the system (or systems, if you're lucky!) that play the most software that you're interested in. Most gamers cannot afford to own all three major consoles, but there are great games out for all of them. The choice between systems can be difficult and depends on your needs.

Some games, created by **third-party developers**, are made available on multiple systems. Examples of games that have been released on all three systems (and sometimes other platforms such as PC and PS2) are *Guitar Hero III*, *Rock Band*, *NHL 2K9*, and *Tiger Woods PGA Tour '09*. **Third-party developers** are not part of the company that creates the console, while **first-party developers** are (for example, Nintendo itself develops the games in the Mario franchise, which are available only on Nintendo consoles).

## Nintendo: Wii, DSi

The Wii, the DS, and the newly-launched DSi are all Nintendo products. In this latest generation of systems, Nintendo has positioned itself as family-friendly, active and interactive, and fun for all ages – from the very young to the very old. Long-running

franchises such as *Mario*, *Metroid*, and *The Legend of Zelda* are all part of the Nintendo family and are represented in games playable on the Wii and the DS (a handheld, portable system with a touch screen and a regular screen).

The Wii and its games tend to be less expensive than the competitors, but prices can still add up. The total cost in Canadian dollars to purchase the system, one game, and three additional controllers is \$549.92.

Unlike the Xbox 360 and the PS3, there has only ever been one version of the Wii since its launch in November 2006. The Wii has shipped 50 million units worldwide and is the best selling console in the current generation. The DS Lite has sold over 75 million units, and the DSi (an updated DS Lite with a camera and online functionality), which launched in April 2009 in North America, has already sold over 2 million units.

## Pros

1. Backwards-compatible with all GameCube games and GameCube controllers: you have a huge catalogue of games available for a reduced price.
2. Popular games from the 80s and 90s, such as *Super Mario Bros.*, as well as new games developed for the Wii, are available to download (for a fee) through the Wii Shop channel.
3. Motion-sensitive, wireless controller allows for physically active input – many games incorporate player movement into the game mechanics.
4. Many games are fairly simple to play, and the player is often guided by on-screen instructions. However, with the Nunchuk attachment, the Wii controller does have 10 buttons plus the **D-pad**, giving it similar functionality to the more complex-looking controllers of the other systems.
5. Many popular games are available only for the Wii, and most are rated "Everyone" or "Teen" by the ESRB. In contrast, most of the successful games for the other platforms are rated "Mature" and cannot be sold to players under 17.
6. Some games have online functionality and rankings, allowing players to compete with others around the world. There is no cost to connect your Wii or DSi to the internet, and there is no charge to subscribe to any of the 'channels' offered on the Wii (news, weather, etc.).

## Cons

1. The graphics for Wii games run at a maximum of 480p and the system is not as powerful as the Xbox 360 and the PS3. For that reason many third-party games that are released for the other systems either do not come out for the Wii, or are released later due to the significant differences in the Wii's capabilities and unique input devices. For example, *Rock Band* came out for the Wii more than six months after it was available on the PS2, PS3, and Xbox 360.

2. Each controller requires two double-A batteries. The controller itself is not rechargeable, but rechargeable batteries can be used.

3. There is not much internal storage capacity – only 512 MB. If you install or download a lot of games, you can run out of space and have to rely on SD cards for additional storage capacity.

4. The controllers are expensive – they consist of the main part (the Wii remote - \$44.99) and an attachable piece called a Nunchuk (\$24.99). Some retro games also require the use of a Classic Controller (\$24.99). The system only comes with one Wii remote and one Nunchuk.

5. The Wii does not play DVDs or audio CDs.

**Hot exclusive games:** *Mario Kart Wii*, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, *Animal Crossing* series, *Brain Age* series, *Cooking Mama*, *Dr. Mario Online Rx*, *Wii Fit*, *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*, *Pokémon* series, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Tetris Party*, *Wario Ware: Smooth Moves*, *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*, *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, *Ace Attorney* series.

## Microsoft: Xbox 360

The Xbox 360 was the first current-generation console to be released, and it launched in November of 2005. It is the only console manufactured by Microsoft that is currently supported. Microsoft does not have a handheld gaming platform. Over 27 million Xbox 360s have been sold.

Several versions of the console have been created since its launch, and the system has experienced multiple price cuts. As such, a very basic version of the system with only 256 MB of storage space is available for cheaper than the Wii. There are currently three different versions of the 360 available, which allows users to choose the system that best fits their needs and budget.

When it launched, some units had numerous hardware problems and were prone to errors – some even mysteriously stopped working, showing only a “red ring of death” on the console upon start up. There have been upgrades to the hardware since then and the problems are not as common anymore. Microsoft has also extended the warranty on the system in response to these technical problems.

The total cost in Canadian dollars, not including taxes, to purchase the mid-level Xbox 360 console, three extra wireless controllers, and one game is \$519.95.

### Pros

1. The Xbox 360 plays CDs and DVDs, and through a subscription to Xbox Live, users can download Netflix movies (extra cost), retro games, and other media.

2. Controllers can be purchased wired (\$49.99) or wireless (\$59.99). Wireless controllers run on double-A batteries, but a rechargeable pack is also available.

3. Because it has been available for longer than the other current generation systems, developers have had more time to create games.

4. The Xbox 360 can display games in high definition, at a resolution of 720p, 1080i, or 1080p, depending on the game.

### Cons

1. Limited backwards compatibility with the Xbox, Microsoft’s first console. Not all games from the original system are playable and an online list must be consulted to determine if your game is supported. Xbox controllers are not supported by the 360.

2. The 360 is the only system which charges to connect to its online services. There is a “silver” version of Xbox Live for free, but it does not support multiplayer gaming or Netflix movie streaming. The “gold” level costs \$59.99 CDN for a one-year subscription, or \$24.99 for three months.

3. Though the original wave of hardware problems has been resolved, some users do still encounter breakdowns that require shipping the unit back to Microsoft for repair or replacement.

4. Out of all the platforms, the 360 has the highest percentage of M-rated games in its top 10 most critically acclaimed games.

**Hot exclusive games:** Many Xbox 360 games are also available for Windows, such as *Braid* and *Mass Effect*. True exclusives are *Fable II*, *Gears of War 2*, *Geometry Wars*, the *Halo* trilogy, *Saints Row*, *Viva Piñata*, *Project Gotham Racing* series.

## Sony: PS3, PS2, PSP

Sony is in an interesting position, having broken onto the gaming scene in North America in 1995 with the PlayStation. Its popularity ushered in the age of disc-based games rather than cartridges. In 2000, the PS2 was released, which remains the highest selling console of all time, currently at 140 million units. Remarkably, the PS2 is still being sold in stores today, and games are still being released for it, including versions of very popular games such as *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero*. Like the Wii, the PS3 was launched in November of 2006. The PS3 has gone through a number of different hardware versions and price cuts, attempting to find the best combination for the consumer. Some previous iterations have been discontinued, and there are some differences between the versions in terms of backwards compatibility (currently-produced systems do not play PS2 games).

The PS3 has only sold 21 million units so far, but like its previous consoles, Sony expects it to have a long lifespan and to build its audience through the years as HDTVs become cheaper and more popular. Sony’s proprietary HD format, Blu-Ray, is supported by the PS3, and until recently it was one of the least expensive Blu-Ray players on the market.

The cost to purchase the 80 GB version of the PS3 (there is also a 160 GB version), three additional controllers, and a game is approximately \$634.95 CDN, the most expensive of the home console systems.

In addition to its home consoles, Sony also manufactures the PlayStation Portable (PSP).

### Pros

1. The PS3’s graphical abilities are considered to be slightly better than the 360’s, and with Blu-Ray functionality, you also have the next-generation home theatre. You can play games and movies at 1080p – provided you have a television that will support it!

2. There is no charge to play PS3 games online and the PlayStation Store features downloadable content and original games.

3. PS3 games are on Blu-Ray discs, giving game creators a huge amount of storage space, which results in great graphics, lots of extra media, and special features.

4. Sony has cultivated relationships with some excellent, high-quality franchises over the years, including the *Final Fantasy* and *Metal Gear Solid* series.

5. The controllers are rechargeable, which is done by plugging them in to the system, meaning that you can still play while your controller is charging – it's just on a short leash. The charge lasts for about 30 hours of play.

### Cons

1. It is the most expensive of the systems. If you don't have an HDTV, it's not really worth the price.

2. High value of the system could make it more tempting for theft.

3. The console itself is very large and heavy, making it a tight fit in some people's entertainment systems, and also more difficult to transport.

**Hot exclusive games:** *Gran Turismo 5* (expected 2009), *God of War III* (expected 2009), *Killzone 2*, *LittleBigPlanet*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Ratchet & Clank*, *Resistance 2*, *SingStar* series, *LocoRoco 2*.

### Computers: Gaming on the PC and Macs

The choice of computer is up to the individual, but most games are released PC compliant first, while Apple versions may be released a little later. System prices vary on both depending on the specs you want to go with.

The most important thing to consider when choosing your system is the video card. It is best to go with the most recent ones as games are constantly evolving and need powerful systems to get the best visual effect. The Nvidia GeForce GTX 295 is the most recent, released in January of 2009, but the price at \$539.99 may be a little rich for a library. There are other brands of video cards such as Radeon and ATI available as well, and for varying prices depending on the generation. When choosing one, check the specifications for your computer games before upgrading to be sure you are getting the best for your needs at the most reasonable price.

### Pros

1. You do not need to buy a specific system in order to play the games you want. Often the games that are released for platforms are also released for computer systems.

2. As long as you have the internet then online play like with MMO (Massively Multiplayer Online) games can be installed and enjoyed by your patrons.

3. Computer games can be played at anytime in the library, encouraging patrons to come in and therefore explore the collection beyond the computer.

### Cons

1. Online games often require a subscription. For example, the **MMORPG**, *World of Warcraft*, has the option of \$14.99 per month, a three-month plan of \$13.99 a month and a six-month plan of \$12.99 a month.

2. The games cannot be lent out to patrons since there are copyright laws and a ToS (Terms of Service) agreement that limit the number of installations.

**Hot exclusive games:** There are many games available for the computer that can't be played anywhere else: *Warcraft II*, *Warcraft III*, *World of Warcraft*, *Guild Wars*, *Diablo*, *Diablo II*, *Crysis*, *SimCity Societies*, *The Witcher*, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadows of Chernobyl*, *Warhammer 40,000 Dawn of War*, *Civilization IV*, *102 Dalmatians*, *Art Attack – Digital Art Attack & Comic Creator*, *Barbie Explorer*, *Bella Sara*.

**Note:** Because Microsoft manufactures the Xbox, many of the games that come out for PCs are also available on the Xbox platform.



### Next Steps

Now that you know the major players and their characteristics, you are well on your way to being immersed in the video game world. We hope that this issue of YA Hotline will be helpful to you. In addition to reading our articles, other great ways to get acquainted with the gaming world include renting games and systems, talking to both avid and casual gamers, and checking out popular gaming websites such as [joystiq.com](http://joystiq.com), [1up.com](http://1up.com), and [gamefaqs.com](http://gamefaqs.com)! Keep an eye out for news from the biggest gaming conventions, where Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft tend to make a big deal about announcements. New software and hardware developments are often revealed at these conferences, such as the Tokyo Games Show, E3, the Game Developers Conference and the Consumer Electronics Show.

