Why Game Genres?
What are game genres and why are they important? A game genre is a type of game that shares various design features with other games within the genre. As a game designer you need to understand the core game features in various game genres. Players that seek out games within a game genre will likely expect to find such features in your game. You can also learn how games in specific game genres implement the normal genre features, which is helpful in designing your own game.

What are Game Genres?
While many games include elements from all of these game genres, there are some games that make the genre features a primary part of the game. The current general game genres are:

- **First Person Perspective Game** – these kinds of games use the first person perspective to put the player in the game.
- **Adventure Game** – these kinds of games are typically third person and include puzzles and exploration as central game mechanics.
- **Role Playing Games** – these kinds of games include a game mechanic that allows the player to progress their character in the game by accruing Experience Points. The game character levels up and, with each level, gets new abilities and capabilities.
- **Strategy Games** – these kinds of games focus on the player making strategic decisions within the game. The player may have to use a turn-based strategic decisions or real-time strategic decisions.
- **Simulation Games** – these kinds of games create some type of simulated process or environment which the player must use to complete goals.
- **Open World Game** – these kinds of games put the player in an open work environment where the player can choose their own actions, destinations, and quests.
- **Platformer Games** – these kinds of games are normally 2D and have the player move a game character through a series of levels/areas and overcome a series of challenges.

Specific game genres could include mechanics from the main game genres, but have their own unique features. These include:

- Horror Stealth Game
- Driving Game
- Hidden Object Game
- Visual Novel Game
- Narrative Game
- Rogue Type Game
- Resource Management Game
- Third Person Combat Game

Basic Game Genres
For each of the following basic game genres the information will be:

- Core game features and mechanics of this genre
- Current games that implement this genre

**First Person Perspective Shooter/Games (FPS/P)**
This game genre is identified by how the player interacts with the game. These games put the player into a first person perspective so that the player interacts with the game in a very direct way. This is the core mechanic of the game, but a wide variety of games have used this perspective. Early games on the PC such as Doom used this perspective in a combat environment. The player could only see what the first person perspective camera showed the game. Even through early FPS/P games were combat oriented, later games used this genre for different kinds of games.

Initially, these kinds of games were focused on combat. Later games focused such game genres on horror/survival and exploration games. The core mechanic of these FPS/P games are:

- The player plays the game through the first person perspective.
- The game camera operates as the player view. Information communicated by the game must fit within this type of player perspective.
- The player can focus the perspective and “look” at things they choose to see. In order for the game to get the player attention, some other kind of game mechanic should get the players attention (sound, visual cues, etc).
- Because of the first person perspective, the player expects strategic decisions to be real-time and not turn-based.

The core game mechanic, the first person perspective, effects various other parts of the game design. For example, if you are creating a FPS combat related game and you wish to communicate to the player where enemies are located you cannot rely on the player focused on where the enemies will appear. You may have to include some other non-visual queues such as sound to indicate to the player that enemies are around. The games from ID such as Doom and Wolfenstein are good examples.

Variations on this game genre are horror and “walking around” games. These latter two share the core mechanic of a first person camera with the FPS/P games, but include game specific mechanics. When a horror/survival game uses the first person perspective to put the player in the game it does so to give the player a game experience with a limited view of the scene. This makes jump-scares and hiding more effective. The game Alien Isolation is a good example of using the first person mechanic to enhance player experience.

“Walking around” games also use the FPS/P mechanic but use the player perspective to enhance the experience of exploration and puzzle solving. Allowing the player to explore from a first person perspective puts the player into the game and enhances the feeling of discovery. The game Whatever Happened to Edith Finch is a good example of this kind of game.

A few puzzle games use the first person perspective to enhance physical puzzle solving. A good example of this is Portal and Portal 2. These games involve physically moving items in the game world or jumping and moving in the game world.

**Adventure Games - Basic**

An adventure game typically includes a mixture of exploration, puzzle solving, crafting, and narrative. Most adventure games are fairly linear in structure with the player moving through the game in an ordered fashion. The player character is normally already defined and not created by the player. If there is in-game combat it is not likely the central mechanic of the game, like FPS Combat games. Examples of classic adventure games could be the Laura Croft games.

The core mechanics of Adventure games would include:

- Linear narrative and goal structure
- Exploration and environmental puzzle solving
- Pre-defined game character with limited modification
- Third person (normally but not always)
- If combat, then simple combat mechanics
Adventure games go back to the early days of gaming as illustrated by the Kings Quest series. These games consisted of a linear narrative, a game character, and a series of puzzles and exploration. More modern games such as Laura Croft, Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice, and the Uncharted series also include linear narratives, exploration, combat, and puzzles.

Many Adventure Games include a structured narrative and structured goals. The player is put into a game story and the player’s goals and challenges follow a linear path. While there may be some open-world areas, the game is structured so the player is taken from place to place in an ordered fashion. The game narrative consists of dialogs and other found narrative elements that move the story along.

Adventure games that don’t make combat a core mechanic will often include puzzles. These can be environmental puzzles (finding stuff) or actual puzzles (solved using clues). These puzzles are often elements of the game narrative and the game structure. For example, in Laura Croft games various physical puzzles are used to move the game and the game narrative along. A puzzle must be solved in order to open a tomb in order to get a piece of a larger puzzle.

Since Adventure games don’t normally allow the player to define their character, the game character is set from the start of the game. The player inhabits a game character and plays that character throughout the game. While the character may “level-up” in terms of skills they are still the initial game character.

Many Adventure games use a third-person mechanic with the camera over-the-shoulder. This allows for more complex environmental puzzles and exploration and puts some distance between the game character and the player. However, there are Adventure type games that effectively use the first person perspective. One of these is the game Firewatch in which you play a forest ranger trying to solve various mysteries. Another example is the Return of the Obra Dinn in which you play an insurance investigator trying to solve various mysteries. In this latter game, the identify of the game character is not the focus of the game but the solution to the game puzzles are.

While the main mechanics of Adventure games is not combat, like it is in some FPS games, many Adventure games have combat. This game mechanic is not necessarily complex, as it is in FPS shooter games, but some Adventure games allow the player to choose different weapons. A variation on Adventure games is the third-person combat game in which the player combat mechanic is the primary focus of the game. These kinds of games will rely more on strategic decisions and the combat is normally much slower than FPS combat games.

**Role Playing Games**

Many Computer games have roots in tabletop games. A good example are Role Playing Games (RPG). The early RPG games arose out of the tabletop game Dungeons and Dragons (D&D). The tabletop game from which inspired computer RPG games was a game in which the players inhabited characters described in a D&D book to engage in adventures. Some important elements to this paper based game was:

- Characters were defined by the player and characters had different classes/races (Dwarf, Elf, etc)
- Characters had Attributes that matched their character type
- Characters had Skills that could be set when the character was defined by the player
- The game world is open and allows the player to explore and perform quests in any order
- Characters increased their Attributes and Skills (levelled-up) based on playing the game
- Battles included randomized outcomes that were affected by the character Attributes and Skills
- Gameplay consisted of a group of characters engaging in Quests
- The game setting was based on the Tolkien universe

These D&D elements were well established in the tabletop game. Players met and engaged in adventures under the direction of a Dungeon Master. These kinds of games were widely played before computers became able to run games. When early computers became powerful enough to run computer games one of the first types of games were Role Playing Games based on the old D&D tabletop games. (Actually, one of the first computer games was the text-based game Adventure which consisted of text descriptions and allowed the user to input directions to the game.)
As RPG games were developed, two different versions of the RPG were developed. This is the difference between RPG games and JRPG games. Role Playing Games (RPG) were based on early D&D structures which focused on the gameplay and leveling. JRPG (Japanese Role Playing Games) focused more on narrative and linear structure than western RPGs. In addition, JRPG games used more turn-based combat mechanics than western RPGs which used real-time combat mechanics. The Final Fantasy series was based more on JRPG traditions than western RPGs. Western RPGs include more character story expressions while the JRPG games put less focus on customizing the character and more on following the game narrative in a more linear fashion. Western RPGs put the player in a story and allow them to make decisions, while JRPGs tell a story and allow the player participate in the story.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_rvM6hubs8 (JRPG 1)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8aiEsiW9lM (JRPG 2)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cmkdoz5LjdE (JRPG 3)

Early computer games, such as the Ultima series, implemented many of the ideas. The game character could be customized (limited), the game character would level up in terms of skills as they played, and the game world was very open-ended and the game structure was a quest-based system. Of note, the games Ultima 4 and Ultima 7 were very popular and set the structure for future RPG games.

One of the central game mechanics for RPG games is character leveling. This means that as you play the game your character increased skills and attributes. This is done by getting Experience Points (XP) and using these points to upgrade you character. You can choose which skills and attributes to upgrade, which in turn gives you additional options in the game mechanic.

Many modern RPGs allow the player to define their character before starting the actual game. Games like Fallout and Skyrim allow the player to customize their game character in a variety of ways. There are several reasons for allowing the player the ability to customize their character. One reason is that RPG games want the player to be immersed in the world. The game wants the player to emotionally invested in the game character so that when the game character levels up the player can decide how to customize their character.

A feature found in most RPG games is the open world structure of the game. Open world games create a sandbox environment in which the player can complete quests and progress through the game in random order. While there are likely story related quests that must be followed in a particular order, open world games contain a number of side quests that can be completed in any order. This gives the player the experience of being able to explore the world on their own terms and a sense of freedom to explore at random. Games such as Skyrim, Fallout 4, and the Witcher 3 include this kind of game structure.

Another feature of RPG games is the ability to level up the game character. As the player accrues XP they can spend this XP on various characteristics and skills of the game character. This is sometimes called a Skill Tree and represents the various skills that you can assign to character based on the amount of XP acquired by playing the game.

Classic RPG games were set with early third-person games such as Baulders Gate, Fallout, and Star Wars set many of the patterns for RPG games. Later games such as Oblivion, Morrowind, Fallout 3 and 4, and Mass Effect, extended these classic RPG games and became widely popular. These games had most of the classic RPG features including a quest based game structure and character leveling. Modern RPG games such as the Witcher 3 and Cyberpunk 2077 extend these classic RPG features.

The core features of Role Playing Games are:

- The game character skills and attributes can be changed (leveled-up) based on playing the game and accruing experience points (XP).
- The game structure consists of completing quests to get XP.
- The game world is normally open and gameplay is non-linear

Many modern RPGs use these core features but include some additional game features:
• Game Character customization by the player
• Companions that support the player during gameplay
• Resource management and crafting
• NPCs that interact with the player

Examples:

**Strategy Games**

Most games include various strategic elements when they allow players to make decisions to reach an objective. Some games use strategy as one of the central game mechanics. Many of these kinds of games are based on military or political situations. Players must make strategic decisions to achieve objectives in military battles or achieve political and economic objectives through building, trade, and other actions. Early games included Civilization, Dune II, and SimCity. Strategy games normally have the core game mechanics:

• Achievable objectives are presented to the player
• Strategic options are presented to the player and linked to objectives
• Information is included in the game that allows for players to make decisions
• Strategic decisions are normally done in a turned-based way

Examples:

**Simulation Games**

Simulation games are designed to challenge the player by creating a simulation of a device or process. The player must manipulated the simulation in order to achieve objectives. A simulation could include an object, such as driving or flying, or a process such as cooking, running a business, or running a country. Many simulation games include a set of core game mechanics:

• Strong tutorial sections on basic steps for using the simulation
• Resource management tools
• Short-term objectives and long-term objectives
• Consistent simulation procedures and player interaction

Examples:

**Open World Game**

Many games now include an Open World structure. An open world structured game has the following features:

• Large areas within which the player can explore. Many open world games include a fast travel system once the player has unlocked areas.
• Varied environments so the player can recognize areas they are exploring
• Environmental landmarks and/or player maps so the player can navigate the world.
• Completing tasks in a non-linear fashion, typically quest based
• Main quests tied to the game story and secondary quests

The important element to an open world game is the ability of the player to backtrack to a previous area. Linear games typically won’t let the player go back to a previous area and the gameplay is designed to move the player in one direction. While many RPG’s have an open world structure, this is not necessary confined to an RPG. Many adventure
Games will have a limited open world structure in which the player is confined to larger areas within which they can explore, but must move into another enclosed area in order to progress the game.

Examples:

Platformer Games

These kinds of games types were represented by very early computer games on consoles. Games like Mario and Donkey Kong were classic platformer games. Modern games such as Celeste or Gris are also platform games. These types of games have the features:

- Many are 2D side-scrolling in form
- The player must overcome obstacles, navigate areas, solve puzzles, and fight opponents in a fairly continuous order.
- Game mechanics typically focuses on physical challenges (using the game controls) for navigation and combat.
- Level design is fairly linear and the game challenge/skill flow chart is fairly consistent.

Examples:

Specialized Genres

Within these general game genres there are a number of more specialized kinds of games:

- Horror Stealth Game – These kinds of games typically include some kind of horror element menacing the player and the game mechanic whereby the player must hide and avoid their opponents and has limited ability for combat. Examples of such games are Alien Isolation and Outlast

- Driving Game – these are games where the player is driving a car, typically from a first person perspective. Such games involve racing or some other direct competition.

- Hidden Object Game – these kinds of game include a pattern matching game mechanic where the player is presented with a complex graphic image and must identify specific items. Examples would be the game Little Folks.

- Visual Novel Game – these kinds of games present a very linear story through character presentation and dialog. The player is given a very limited ability to make choices and there is likely a significant amount of text presented on screen. There may be multiple endings to such games but most of these games tell a structured story using simple graphics with little player input. Examples of this would include the game Unavowed.

- Narrative Game – these kinds of games include a very strong narrative element and a linear story. While not as structured as Visual Novel Games many of these narrative games don’t let the player make too many choices but could include elements that allow the player to control the outcome of the game. Examples would include The Last Of Us (no ending choice), and Life is Strange (ending choice). Many of the games created by TellTale are narrative games focused on the game characters and the story, but have (mostly) a linear structure.

- Rogue Type Game – these are games that focus on player skill/challenge mechanics. Player death normally forces the player to return to a (rare) respawn point or to the start of the game. Such games are typically 2D in structure. Examples would be Below.
• Resource Management Game – These kinds of game focus primarily on resource management. The player must collect, craft, sell, and buy items they need to progress in the game. Examples would be No Mans Sky.

• Third Person Combat Game – while these are not FPS games they are focused on combat mechanics to progress through the game. The third-person perspective is used and many of these games are squad based strategy games. Examples would be the Division.

• Puzzle Games – These kinds of games have a primary focus on puzzle solving. The player must complete a series of physical or mental puzzles in order to progress through the game. An example would be Portal and Portal 2.

• Walking Around Games – These kinds of games include the First Person Perspective game mechanic but don’t include any combat mechanics. The goal in these games is to solve puzzles, explore, and build up a narrative through exploration and puzzle solving. – Examples would be Everyone Went to the Rapture, and Whatever Happened to Edith Fitch.