

I was a video game sceptic, but now I'm a fan

adapted from an article by Jessica Furseth

- 1 Gaming is a surprisingly “love it, or just don’t get it” kind of activity. I’ve tried video games a few times over the years, as people seemed to be having so much fun with them. But I never got into it. Last year, though, my curiosity was piqued again as I watched my partner Luke play the newest *Mario* game with his children. One slow Sunday, I picked up the Nintendo Switch. No one was more surprised than me when I kept coming back to the game.



- 2 Video games often get a bad rep – however unjustified – for being violent, and bad for attention and literacy. But according to Celia Hodent, a game user-experience consultant with a doctorate in psychology, gaming can add many positive things to people’s lives. “A good game can put you into a flow state,” says Hodent – that feeling when you’re fully immersed in an activity, and time flies because you’re enjoying yourself. “When you’re watching a film or listening to the radio you may eventually check your phone. But when you play a game, you have your hands on the controller. You’re not getting distracted. You have to pay more attention, and you’re more immersed in the task,” says Hodent.
- 3 *Mario Odyssey* was especially soothing when I felt tired and restless – perhaps because it was an absorbing environment where I was in control. In other words, I was enjoying playing *Mario* because I was getting better at it. Things made their own kind of sense in the *Mushroom Kingdom*, and figuring out how that world worked was rewarding. But I won’t be jumping over fire rings to punch a giant turtle in the real world. Do the skills I have been gaining translate into other walks of life?
- 4 There are many examples of how purpose-built computer games can be effective at teaching things, ranging from how kids can confront bullies to innovative thought for corporate problem-solving. “Recent research projects have applied computer game technologies to police armed-response training, cancer cell modelling and the virtualisation of historic keyboard instruments,” says Kenny McAlpine, an academic at Abertay University, Dundee, who specialises in gaming.

- 5 But when it comes to games designed for entertainment, it's harder to tell exactly what real-world benefits they can have. Some specific evidence has been discovered: researchers in Sweden found that playing *Tetris* immediately after a traumatic event reduces the likelihood of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, probably because the game interrupts memory consolidation. In addition, cognitive neuroscientist Daphne Bavelier found that playing an action game such as *Call of Duty* for 10 hours will improve a person's detail vision and multitasking skills, and almost double their capacity for tracking moving objects even five months later.

- 6 I picked up *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* over the festive holidays. I knew it would be more frustrating than playing *Mario* on assist mode. 12, Luke says it's the best game he's ever played, so I figured that it might be worth some initial hardship. I know now that the further into the game I get, the better it will be – and that figuring things out and learning is what makes video games so rewarding, and ultimately, so much fun.

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