



Game impact



REPRESENTING



DIVERSITY

GUIDE TO CREATING CHARACTERS THAT ARE DIVERSE,  
INCLUSIVE, AND RESPECTFUL OF UNDERREPRESENTED  
MINORITIES



# Game impact

**F**ounded in 2016, Game Impact is an organization that seeks to **promote an evolution towards more meaningful, responsible video games.**

We aim to provide opportunities for self-expression, creativity and learning, in a fair and compassionate environment where each and every person is respected. At the start of 2021, Game Impact had 20 active members, as well as many collaborators from different backgrounds (arts, education, game development, volunteering), holding events such as:

- **Roundtables** on the intersection between video games and society (e.g. inclusion in game development, environmentalism, narrative tropes in games...);
- **Casual events**, where a partnered collective drives an activity (e.g. projections and debates with Game Spectrum, playful conferences with Random Bazar);
- **Creative workshops** exploring a specific theme or problem space through artistic experimentation (e.g. scriptwriting, character design, design fiction...);
- **Meet-ups** for people working towards a more progressive games industry;
- **Courses and seminars** for schools and development teams via our [catalogue](#);
- **Informational documents** that acts as primers on societal issues in games;
- **Tabling at festivals and conventions.**

If you'd like to plan an event around this booklet and/or video games for social change, get in touch! For mutual aid purposes, we also help to build bridges between activist groups in the games industry and beyond. Our target audience includes people who play, make, and study video games... as well as those who could do all of those things, but might not be aware of it yet!

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*This document was written in March 2019, translated from the original French in July 2021, and formatted in August 2021 under Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND. It can be shared freely without modification, with credit to Game Impact. We welcome your feedback.*

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## PREAMBLE

# THE IMPORTANCE OF REPRESENTATION

**E**ach and every one of us constructed our identity and perception of the world by relating to fictional characters. These experiences in our youth are also a major factor in our understanding of what is possible as adults. We don't always reproduce what we see 1:1, **but the power of representation shouldn't be underestimated.** When we're exposed to the same images and narratives day after day, we come to accept them as the norm, and don't always question their validity. **It's a slow but effective process of unconscious manipulation.** The most common tropes and media portrayals are reproduced again and again, in a vicious cycle, until they become part of reality itself.

As creators, we have great power and thus, great responsibility. Video games are often born from the desire to share an emotional and positive experience with players. But developers sometimes fail to consider the **power dynamics that structure society.** Mainstream media portrayals contribute to the oppression of minority groups, whether by caricature, by denigration, or by simply not portraying them at all. It's particularly easy for this problem to go ignored when it doesn't affect everyone equally. **Even noble concepts like creativity and freedom of speech can be accompanied by a lack of critical thinking towards dominant ideologies.** Whether we like it or not, art always depicts a certain understanding of the world, and always has some impact on its audience.

**But what about creative freedom?** The idea that diverse, inclusive, and respectful representation requires censorship stems from a limited perspective, in which there are only two ways forward: accept the current trend, or eradicate it. This booklet proposes an alternative solution. Push the limits, create more varied and compelling characters, and substitute lazy stereotypes with rich and progressive designs. Shall we begin?



# GENDER REPRESENTATION

The video game industry was built around a community of **overwhelmingly white, heterosexual men**. From developer and player stereotypes to marketing strategies, this demographic has long been considered the norm, excluding a vast majority of the population. While you might think that the situation has improved in the past decade, tensions still remain; in 2012, #1ReasonWhy highlighted **sexism and harassment in the games industry**, followed shortly by the Gamergate controversy in 2014. Add to that the recent prevalence of booth babes, the sexual harassment and insults endured by female players, and the death threats often received by women and LGBTQ+ people who tend to raise concerns... and it's easy to think of the video game industry as a dangerous place.

However, it's also important for us to recognize that **gender oppression exists throughout society**, sometimes in ways we don't even notice. Rather than vilify the medium as a whole, it's much more interesting to examine how we portray gender dynamics within games. Recognizing these mechanisms, and doing our best to design experiences that are free from gender stereotypes, means opening our eyes to the world around us. By creating more complex stories and characters, we can **help bring a more diverse audience to video games**. What better reason to start taking action today?

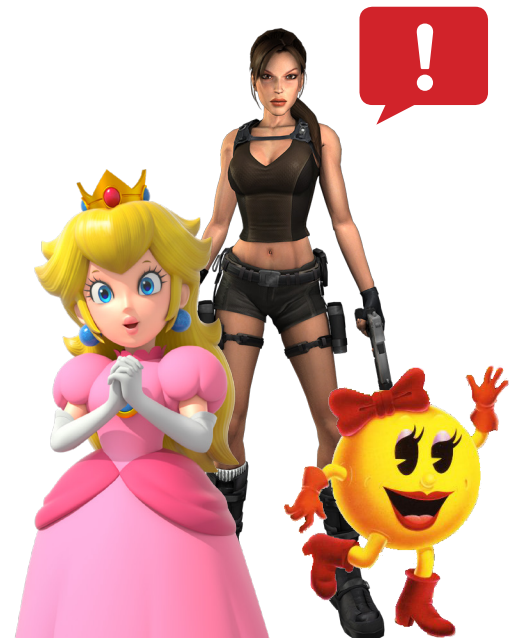
# WOMEN AS OBJECTS

Female characters; just another part of the scenery? While this might sound like an exaggeration, female representation is still far too limited in video games, comics, and film. There are 3 all-too-common destinies for women characters in games: **hypersexualized** to satisfy the male gaze; **kidnapped** to provide an objective for the male hero; and/or eventually becoming the **wife or girlfriend** of a masculine protagonist. Their appearance is a reflection of the **beauty standards** women are often held to: they're young, attractive, and slim, with standardized faces and bodies. This reductive and stereotypical portrayal tends to **drive away female players** and restrict certain video games to a **straight male audience**. Contrary to conventional wisdom, respectfully portraying women doesn't mean sacrificing creativity; here's some tips for designing your own inspiring female characters!

**Use the Bechdel test.** Does your game include more than 2 women? Does the player know their names? Do they talk to each other about something other than a man? If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you probably need to flesh them out a bit more.

**Try a gender swap.** Take the characteristics of your female character and apply them to a male character (or vice-versa); now see if that makes them look ridiculous or implausible.

**Put yourself in the player's shoes.** Ask yourself how you'd react to your character as a player. Are you compelled to protect them, save them, hold their hand, seduce them? Or are you inspired by them; do you want to be more like them, or get to know them?



**Dig a little deeper.** Look for inspiration in places where representations of women are less idealized. Your friend group, your work environment, current events, social media... These are all great places to find different kinds of women doing all kinds of things.

**Check your descriptors.** When you're writing about a female character, pay attention to the vocabulary you use. Have you primarily defined her with adjectives such as beautiful, desirable, or shy? Could you instead describe her as crafty, nimble, tough, spiritual...?



# HYPERMASCULINITY

Have you ever felt like you're **playing the same video game character** again and again? Since the early 2000s, AAA games have churned out many thirty-something white male heroes, with brown hair, square jaws and aggressive auras. They usually carry a massive arsenal to reinforce their strength and masculinity, completing this typically North American vision of a **dominant, assertive, heavily-armed man**. That being said, unlike their feminine counterparts, male characters are rarely idealized to fuel female players' fantasies; rather, they **serve as role models for the player**. Men are encouraged to be strong, silent, even violent, and to avoid **expressing their vulnerability**. This is what we might call toxic masculinity. However, this is a nuanced concept: while men are also held to unreasonable standards, they are still empowered as active subjects rather than as passive objects.

**Make a list.** Enumerate the strengths and weaknesses of your hero. Have you given them any vulnerabilities? Are they different from the usual ones (quick-tempered, impassive...)?

**Leave the Western world behind.** Asian depictions of masculinity are vastly different, both physically (more delicate features, androgyny) and mentally (sensitivity, focus on inner strength). This is just one example of the possibilities that exist outside of Western culture.

**Dare to be emotive.** Give your male characters a rich inner life, with problems that aren't typically portrayed in the media: low self-esteem, body image issues, social anxiety... This should make them more compelling, more endearing, and more believable.



**Update your influences.** Expose yourself to art depicting complex characters of various gender identities. This will help you combat the (false) notion that white, thirty-something "manly men" are the neutral option, and thus easier for players to empathize with.

**Consider the player.** Think about your audience. Is it fair to say they can relate to a character whose main drive is to win a war, or conquer a territory? How would you tell a story that is closer to home for your players?

# MEANINGFUL DESIGN

In any design, **form follows function**. When a video game character is created, their appearance (form) conveys two distinct functions: their role in the story, and their gameplay role. But when it comes to female characters, there's often a third, unspoken function; appealing to the libido of a supposedly male audience. This often **damages the character's credibility**: bikini armor, climate-inappropriate clothing, gravity-defying cleavage, running in high heels... Game developers have notoriously raised eyebrows with their strained narratives to justify sexualizing women. Even "strong female characters" are often sexualized, further reinforcing the idea that women must rely on their feminine wiles to gain power and control.

**Take a step back.** Ask yourself if your character's visual design is consistent with their story and gameplay, and whether – consciously or unconsciously – you've given them sexual, suggestive qualities you wouldn't have given a male character.

**Differentiate nudity and sexualization.** Female characters don't need to be covered from head to toe to avoid sexualization. Women athletes, for example, wear light clothing because it's more practical for sport; this doesn't mean they're particularly sexualized. On the other hand, fully dressed characters can still easily be objectified by their creators.



**Make the right choices.** Every video game character has to forfeit realism at some point or another; what's important is to make sure these inconsistencies support the story and/or gameplay (in other words, that the form supports the function).

**Break the mold.** Video games often present a binary of strong men and attractive women. However, there are many other qualities you can emphasize, like agility, intelligence, or charisma. Think of your characters as human beings rather than ambassadors for their gender.



# LGBTQ+ CHARACTERS

This initialism designates anyone who identifies as **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer**, with the + symbol encompassing many other identities. These sexual minorities are severely underrepresented in video games, and when they are portrayed, they tend to be a source of **comic relief**. These often distasteful jokes perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and are partly responsible for **the harassment encountered by LGBTQ+ people** in the real world. Additionally, video games will often only hint at the queer identity of their characters, leaving queer players to read between the lines and develop their own narratives. Last but not least, “Bury Your Gays” is a timeworn trope whereby **LGBTQ+ characters meet tragic ends**, as if they provide no value to the plot and don’t deserve a happy ending. This is why we encourage you to include more complex LGBTQ+ portrayals in your creations.

**Tell a different story.** When LGBTQ+ characters are explicitly represented as such in a video game, it’s often as a token, and the story focuses entirely on their sexuality. Don’t be afraid to think outside the box, and portray these characters in ways you might not expect.

**Reconnect with your youth.** Think back to your teen years, and the characters you cared about at an age when you were still forming your identity. Imagine how lonely you might have felt if you’d never been able to relate to any of them. Creating complex LGBTQ+ characters widens the possibility space for future generations.



**Consult the experts.** It’s easy to get things wrong if you’re dealing with an unfamiliar subject matter. Diversify your sources, read or listen to personal accounts, and ask your LGBTQ+ friends for their opinion to make sure your portrayals are appropriate.

**Cultivate empathy.** At first, it might seem difficult for a straight person to relate to a gay person, for example. But one of the great things about games is that they let us experience realities different from our own. Well-rounded LGBTQ+ characters with hopes and dreams will make your players feel inspired, outraged, motivated... just like any other character.





# RACIAL AND ETHNIC REPRESENTATION

In the United States (where collecting racial statistics is legal), it was discovered that Black and Hispanic people buy and play more video games than white people. Despite this, **non-white people are underrepresented in video games, both on development teams and within the products themselves**. Whiteness is still perceived as the norm, and as a symbol of neutrality. In 2015, when the video game Rust randomly generated avatars with different faces and skin colors, white players protested the “forced politics” of its character creation system. Ironical, since in the vast majority of cases non-white players are forced to embody white protagonists, just as women are forced to pick a male hero. No one complains when asked to play a blue hedgehog or purple dragon, so why is this an issue?

Furthermore, **non-white character portrayals often devolve into caricature**. Pop culture tends to simplify reality in order to quickly gain the audience’s understanding. But in doing so, it creates harmful stereotypes, with very real effects on people who already experience difficulties. Portraying a demographic in the same way over and over maintains popular misconceptions, which can have **devastating real-life consequences**; for example, we know that minorities face more obstacles when applying for jobs or trying to rent a home. If we all decide to take action at our own level, we can ensure we’re not part of the problem.

# IDENTITY VS. STORY

Non-white characters rarely appear in video games, and when they do, they're **often non-playable** and occupy secondary roles. They're also typically found within the same genres. The data might look good; up until the 2000s, for example, there was a decent proportion of Black and Hispanic characters... but they were almost exclusively found in sports games. With the popularization of video games set in urban worlds, non-white minorities would then be reduced to dealers, gangsters, or even terrorists, only **further reinforcing harmful media stereotypes**. When non-white characters are depicted as violent, unreliable, and generally inferior to their white counterparts, they become **a one-dimensional cliché**.

**Look closer.** Tell stories about your characters that don't just revolve around their ethnic or racial identity. It is of course vital to portray your characters' lived experiences and culture, but it's equally important to include them in all kinds of narratives.

**Examine your own prejudice.** When you've been subjected to the same old stereotypes throughout your entire life, it's normal to make subconscious assumptions. Be particularly wary of "positive" biases (e.g. Chinese people are good at math); while they might seem harmless, they restrict minorities to a role that might not fit them.



**Take the human approach.** If you're designing a character with a different skin color than yours, they probably have a different lived experience and cultural background. But they're still a human being, with dreams and feelings just like you. The best way to write a compelling non-white character is to write a compelling human character.

**Stay humble.** Accept that you might not be savvy enough to tell these stories on your own, and take the necessary steps to research and consult with the right people.



# EXOTICIZATION

Ever since ancient times, humans have exoticized other humans, conjuring up romantic images of **faraway and mysterious cultures**. These typically Western stories appeal to our curiosity by presenting different civilizations in a comforting, non-threatening way. However, the word “exotic” doesn’t reflect any geographical reality; Europeans don’t find Australians particularly exotic, despite them being physically distant. Similarly, “exotic fruits” aren’t considered exotic by the people who live where they grow. Exoticized characters are often used as an excuse for **conflating cultures**. It’s also prevalent in **erotic media**; Black women portrayed as wild, Latino men as womanizers, Asian women as submissive... Inherited from our colonial past, these stereotypes **objectify and dehumanize** their targets, and are the reason behind many dangerous and discriminatory behaviors.

**Compare notes.** Make a list of all the fictional characters you know with the same ethnicity as yours, and with a similar backstory (whether it’s rooted in their identity or not). If this exercise is a little too easy, you may be rehashing the same old stereotypes.

**Start at the beginning.** Players find characters interesting because of their personality, their motivations, and the changes they go through. If your first decision as a character designer is racial or ethnic identity, your work may end up lacking depth and thus appeal.



**Know culture from costume.** A character belonging to a certain culture doesn’t need to perfectly encapsulate it. Costumes are a common symptom of this way of thinking. For example, even if kimonos make you think of Japan, the concept of a modern-day Japanese character who constantly wears a kimono doesn’t make much sense.

**Give them a voice.** Imagine your character describing themselves. If you can’t picture them using the same vocabulary as you’ve been using, particularly if it feels uncomfortable or absurd, you might have already begun exoticizing them.

# CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

This phrase is used to describe when a dominant culture borrows elements from a minority culture for its own (often financial) benefit. A lack of knowledge leads to the **dis-respectful usage of sacred or socially important symbols and artifacts**. Typically, their meaning and origin are ignored, while emphasis is placed on their aesthetic value. Codes and rituals are reappropriated by people who don't experience the same oppression, prejudice, or racism as the communities they were taken from. This practice is also a remnant of our **colonial and imperial history**, which is the root cause of inequality between most civilizations; it's impossible to talk about "cross-fertilization" when it relies on the same power dynamics that have existed for centuries. Ignoring the minority groups that speak out against cultural appropriation amounts to **denying them their identity**.

**Go beyond appearances.** If you're uncertain about a visual element in your character's design, do your research! Learn about its true significance, and the context in which it should appear. Make sure it's meaningful, rather than a frivolous accessory.

**Embrace complexity.** It's tempting to take shortcuts when it comes to representation, because a culturally rich video game might come off as impenetrable or boring. But it can be a successful wager; for example, *Ōkami* (2006) managed to explore the depths of Japanese mythology while remaining a beloved action-adventure game.



**Harness the medium's potential.** They say history is written by the victors, but video games (and fiction in general) have the power to give a voice to the silenced. It's a great medium for shedding light on the past experiences and struggles of minority cultures.

**Discover your heritage.** Cultural appropriation often comes from a well-meaning desire to create rich and diverse fictional worlds. But you don't need to look to other cultures to do so! Start by exploring the myths, costumes, dances and historical events of your own region; you might find some forgotten gems.



# HISTORICAL AND FANTASY WORLDS

Non-white characters lose out in both of these worlds, and that's not the only thing fantasy and historical fiction have in common. The creators of historical worlds often rely on **high school memories and cinematic depictions of the past**; without forgetting that many high school history books erase the experiences of minorities in the first place. Historical stereotypes often serve as a basis for fantasy, especially medieval fantasy, and tend to reflect the societal norms of today. A common process in fantasy video games is replacing a non-white culture with a humanoid species. **In a genre that doesn't shy away from magic and dragons, why are majority white civilizations justified by a desire for realism?** Because the goal of this "realism" is to portray the norms defined by dominant culture.

**Refresh your memory.** Recent research has shown that the importance of non-white people in Western history has been wildly underestimated. Renewing your historical knowledge is crucial to avoid inaccuracies and stereotypes; in doing so, you might discover entire chapters of history that have long been shrouded in silence.

**Mix things up.** Dividing your fictional land into regions inhabited by different peoples might seem like a simple way to deepen your world lore. However, it's a slippery slope towards exoticization, or even segregation. How might you make these groups more fluid?



**Shuffle your cards.** The appeal of fantasy often lies in its diverse worlds, especially in terms of geography and population. But the protagonists are typically white male heroes, travelling like tourists from region to region. Instead, why not try putting the members of these different civilizations at the heart of your story?

**Broaden your perspective.** While it's essential to depict non-white people in fiction, avoid the tokenization trap. Make sure your characters and civilizations have some kind of backstory... it will only help to make your world richer.



# DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

When you think of disabilities, you might immediately picture a wheelchair user, or perhaps someone who was born completely blind. A disabled person is someone whose limited capabilities create difficulties in resolving everyday situations. **Disabilities are as diverse as the people who experience them.** Disabled people are the most fluid minority group that exists; anyone can experience a disability, at any point in their life. According to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), disability is a multi-dimensional concept, relating to:

- the **body functions and structures** of people, and impairments thereof (functioning at the level of the body);
- the **activities** of people (functioning at the level of the individual) and the activity limitations they experience;
- the **participation** or involvement of people in all areas of life, and the participation restrictions they experience (functioning of a person as a member of society);
- the **environmental factors** which affect these experiences (and whether these factors are facilitators or barriers).

While 1 in 4 adults in the United States have some type of disability, they are rarely depicted in the media. **Disabled people have long been stigmatized in our society**, perceived as burdens destined for specialized institutions, or never leaving their homes. While creative efforts to include more disabled people in fiction should be applauded, there are still many negative stereotypes to reckon with. The accessibility of video games themselves is also an important topic, which stands to benefit each and every player.

# VARIETY AND NUANCE

Media often depicts **the same, most visible and easy to identify disabilities**; paraplegic or tetraplegic wheelchair users, deaf and blind people with hearing aids or canes. **The spectrum of disability contains much more nuance**, however, and these shortcuts can create a lot of false perceptions. Physical and motor impairment may be constant, or triggered by a variety of situations, notably fatigue. It can affect range, precision, and strength of movement. Visual impairment can occur at birth, or develop over time through illness or injury. This includes complete or partial blindness, hypersensitivity to light, difficulties distinguishing shapes or colors... Just a few examples of **the immense variety that exists behind the clichés**. The same thing goes for mental disorders; you might think of an autistic person as either a socially awkward genius, or completely dependent on medical care. In reality, **the manifestations of autism are much more fuzzy and diverse**.

**Add depth.** Just like for gender and racial representation, don't make disability the only defining quality of your character, or they risk becoming a stereotype. Your character is human above all; their disability is only one of many aspects of their identity.

**Do your research.** The disabled experience can be so complicated that it's impossible to understand without consulting an expert. There are many disabled people who are willing to share their story and are easy to get in touch with, so seize the opportunity when you can.



**Consider gameplay.** The same disabilities tend to be represented over and over again because they are easier to show players. Gameplay, however, is the perfect tool to express different capabilities: use your creativity to allow your players to experience fatigue, discomfort, limited movement, loss of eyesight, etc.

**Go into detail.** Each individual's situation is a complex combination of one or several disabilities and their associated symptoms. The same disability might be experienced in a variety of ways, depending on the person experiencing them, their lifestyle, and their personality.





# COUNTERING BIASED NARRATIVES

In media portrayals, disabilities are often associated with **exaggerated moral values**. On one end of the spectrum, these narratives rely on **feelings of pity and misery**; by depicting able-bodied people as the norm, emphasis is placed on what the disabled person might be “missing out” on or unable to do. Mental illness is not excluded from this, with the trope of the psychiatric patient who is a danger to themselves and others, and the overuse of asylums as horror settings. On the other end of the spectrum, stories focus on the **exceptional heroism of disabled characters**. In fact, it’s because they’re disabled that they’re exceptional: wheelchair users with high-tech gadgets, blind psychics, prosthetically augmented amputees... as if they were expected to compensate for their disability. Mental disorders also receive this treatment, from the autistic prodigy to the intellectually disabled adult with a heart of gold. One way or the other, these stereotypes are to be avoided completely, as they contribute to a negative perception of disability as well as **holding disabled people to impossible standards**.

**Check your sources.** You might think you know everything about a certain disability because you’ve seen it portrayed many times, but these are rarely adequate portrayals. If you want to represent a “well-known” disability (e.g. paraplegia, blindness, autism, schizophrenia...), examine where your knowledge about it came from.

**Stay neutral.** Creating a disabled character may not feel like enough, and you might feel compelled to make them inspiring, too. However, in doing so, you risk falling into the exceptional heroism trap. Just seeing disabled people existing in the world – without being held to unattainable ideals – will have a much stronger impact on your audience.



**Accept limitations.** We feel closer to characters that know their capabilities than we do to all-powerful superheroes who constantly outdo themselves. Your characters don’t need to transcend expectations to be compelling!

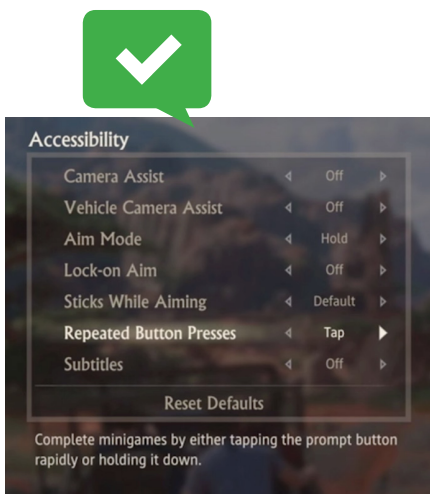
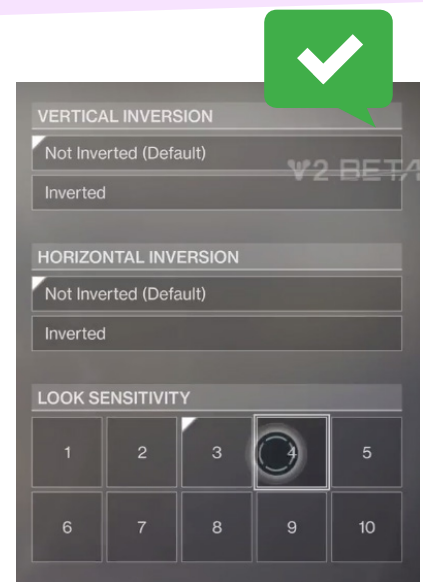
**Demonstrate to educate.** Being specific and realistic when representing a disability doesn’t mean checking every possible symptom off a checklist. Illustrating a variety of experiences and lifestyles will give your audience a whole new perspective on disability, without needing to appeal to their pity.

# MOTOR & SENSORY IMPAIRMENT

Video games are often thought of as an escape, allowing players to let go of reality for a few moments. However, they don't always offer this experience to disabled players, since **they encounter the same accessibility problems in games as they do in everyday life**. Video games designed for a younger audience can be very demanding in terms of speed, coordination, and eyesight. These settings are often impossible to adjust and can completely prevent players from engaging. The industry relies on mass production and **rarely creates opportunities for customization**. Yet including an extra port on existing controllers would be enough to accommodate additional controls (e.g. bigger joysticks and buttons, visual or vocal commands) without losing warranty. The situation is improving, however, and events like #GAconf are gaining in popularity. Microsoft is the only large console manufacturer to have made a significant commitment so far, with the **Xbox Adaptive Controller**.

**Let players choose.** If you decide to include a quick-time event or puzzle in your gameplay, you might prevent certain players from making progress and accessing the rest of the experience. Offer an alternative that these players can enjoy, without taking anything away from those who are able to complete the original sequence.

**Think ahead.** Many accessibility options are easy to include, as long as they're planned early enough in development. For example, remapping controls, adjusting mouse or joystick sensitivity, and changing font size or color are generally not too difficult to implement.



**Remember the menus.** So your game can be played with a keyboard or controller. Cool! But have you thought about the UI (user interface)? If the main menu can only be accessed with one of these, your game's accessibility has been cut by half before it's even begun.

**Stay informed.** Keeping up to date with digital accessibility news – and not just when it comes to new consoles and video games – will help you discover new problem spaces to consider next time you're working on a game. See [the Youtube channel « Just One Hand »](#) or the [game-lover.org](#) and [handi-gamer.fr](#) websites.



# COGNITIVE & PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPAIRMENT

Cognitive and psychological impairment encompasses a wide variety of issues, from dyslexia and reading difficulties to memory loss and dyspraxia (also known as developmental coordination disorder). While it's important to portray these disabilities, it's also **crucial to deepen your understanding of players**. The autistic character Symmetra from Overwatch (2016) was designed with auto-aim, making her more accessible to disabled players, as well as newcomers to the first-person shooter genre. Unfortunately, the players who picked her experienced so much hate and mockery that Blizzard has since chosen to remove this characteristic. Giving players the option to **adapt the gameplay to their capabilities** creates a more unified experience; let's aim for equity, not just equality!

**Keep it simple.** Use clear and concise language, avoid walls of text, and choose a font that is readable or specifically designed for people with dyslexia. Make sure your icons are highly visible, and discard flashing imagery. All of these tips will prevent you from souring the player's experience.

**Make access easy.** Multiple complex menus before a game has even started can be a barrier for people with dyspraxia or short-term memory problems. Including a preconfigured "quick start" option can be a simple solution for much of your audience.



**Provide options.** The survival horror game Perception (2017) offers the ability to adjust your fear levels and turn off the protagonist's interior monologue, while Grounded (2020) includes an arachnophobia safe mode. In doing so, these games become infinitely more accessible to different psychological profiles and provide a better experience for all.

**Be considerate.** If you want to depict potentially traumatizing elements in an unexpected context, think about your players with anxiety, PTSD, or phobias, and include an optional warning system. Give them the opportunity to mentally prepare, skip the scene, or even exit the game entirely.

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The characters mentioned throughout this guide are the property of their respective creators. Their designs are reproduced here solely for educational purposes.

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Ash – Streets of Rage 3, 1994

Krem – Dragon Age: Inquisition, 2014

Kweena – Final Fantasy IX, 2000

Publicité – Les Sims 4, 2014

**P. 10 – RACIAL AND ETHNIC REPRESENTATION:** see p. 11 to 14

## **P. 11 – Identity vs. story**

F.A.N.G – Street Fighter V, 2016

Nightwolf – Mortal Kombat 9, 2011

Franklin Clinton – Grand Theft Auto V, 2013

Nilin – Remember Me, 2013

Lincoln Clay – Mafia III, 2016

Alyx Vance – Half-Life 2, 2004

## **P. 12 – Exoticization**

Anna Williams – Tekken 6, 2007

Maya Mahabala – Dragon Quest Heroes, 2015

Citra Talugmai – Far Cry 3, 2012

Lakshmi Bai – The Order: 1886, 2015

Sabal – Far Cry 4, 2014

Ana – Overwatch, 2016

## **P. 13 – Cultural appropriation**

Mario – Super Mario Odyssey, 2017

Kali – SMITE, 2014 Aloy – Horizon Zero Dawn, 2017

Ushiwaka – Okami, 2006

Nuna & the arctic fox – Never Alone, 2014

Kaniehtíio (Ziio) – Assassin's Creed III, 2012

## **P. 14 – Historical and fantasy worlds**

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time, 2003

Geralt de Riv – The Witcher 3, 2015

Pandaren – Warcraft III The Frozen Throne, 2003

Aveline de Grandpré – Assassin's Creed III, 2012

Freddie – Valiant Hearts, 2014

Sazh Katzroy – Final Fantasy XIII, 2009

**P. 15 – DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY:** see p. 16 to 19

## **P. 16 – Variety and nuance**

Theresa – Fable III, 2010

David Archer – Mass Effect 3, 2012

Ozwell E. Spencer – Resident Evil 5, 2009

Quarian Infiltrator – Mass Effect 3, 2012

Taimi – Guild Wars 2, 2012

Hanako, Shizune & Rin – Katawa Shoujo, 2012

## **P. 17 – Countering biased narratives**

Amy – Amy, 2012

Nathan 'Rad' Spencer – Bionic Commando 2, 2011

Sirhan Dogen – Ace Attorney 2, 2011

Jeff 'Joker' Moreau – Mass Effect Franchise, since 2007

River Wyles – To the Moon, 2011

Chloe Price – Life Is Strange, 2015

## **P. 18 – Motor and sensory impairment**

Sensitivity settings menu – Destiny 2, 2017

Accessibility settings menu – Uncharted 4, 2016

## **P. 19 – Cognitive and psychological impairment**

Symmetra – Overwatch, 2016

Fear level settings menu – Perception, 2017

Font choice – The Last Door, 2013