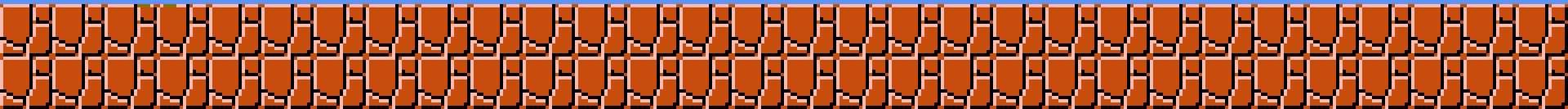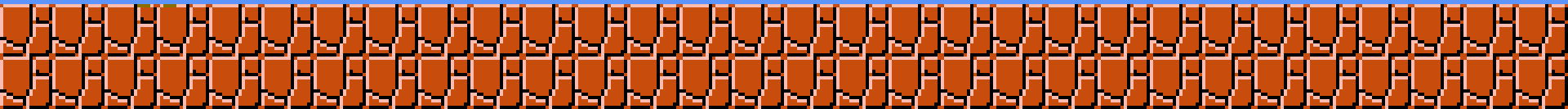# Intro to Game Design

Stefanie Dao

Before we begin...

Game Design vs. Game Development
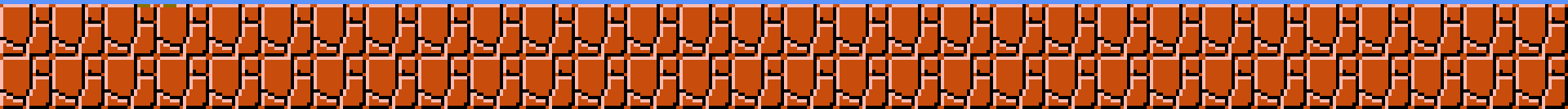
Game Design vs. Game Development

Game Design: The process of determining the design and purpose of the game; the design of mechanics, plot, characters, combat systems, etc.
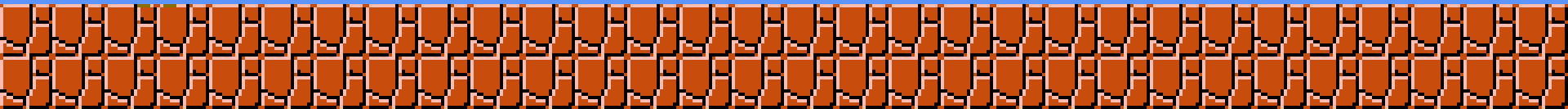
Game Development: The process of turning design into working product; gameplay/engine/AI programming, asset creation, music composition, etc.
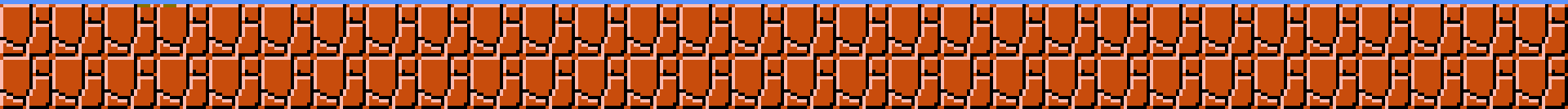
Game Design

- ❏ Elements of Game Design
- ❏ Evaluation of Game Design
- ❏ What is "Fun"?
- ❏ Pitch/Game Design Documents
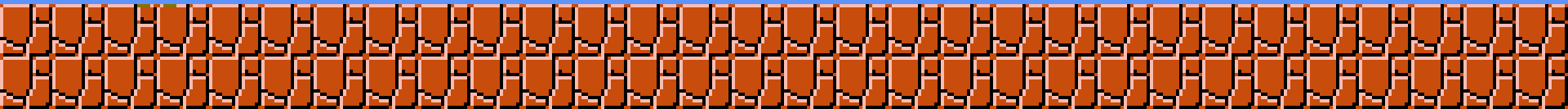
What is a game?

What is a Game?

"A **game** is **structured playing**, usually undertaken for **enjoyment** and sometimes used as an **educational** tool ... many games are also considered to be **work** (such as professional players of spectator sports/games) or **art** (such as jigsaw puzzles or games involving an artistic layout such as Mahjong, solitaire, or some video games)."

Elements of a Game:

- ❑ **Goals**
- ❑ **Rules**
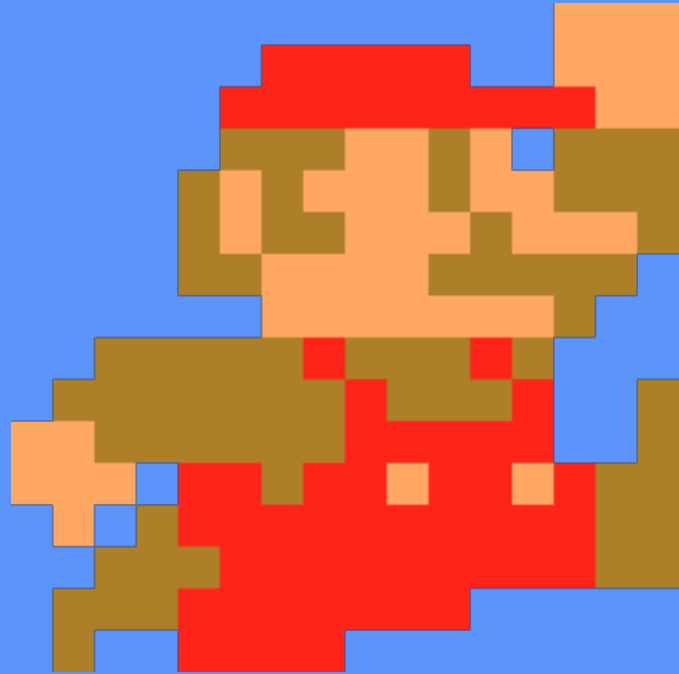- ❑ **Challenge**
- ❑ **Interaction**
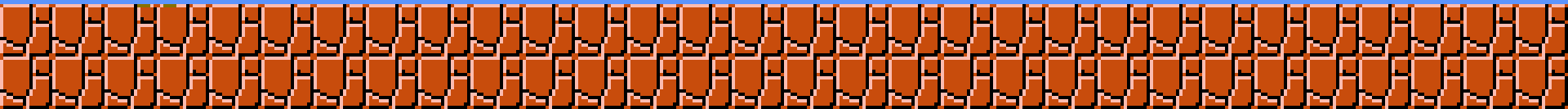
Elements of a Game: Goals

Example: **Super Mario Bros.**

(Nintendo, 1985)

What is the player's goal?

What shows that the player has

finished the game?

Elements of a Game: Goals

Goal:

To reach the end of the stage.

Secondary (Meta) Goal:

To obtain a high score.

Elements of a Game: Goals

Avoid:

- Unclear goals
- Mandated goals
- Arbitrary, senseless goals
  - What are achievements actually worth?

Goals should make sense in the context of the game!
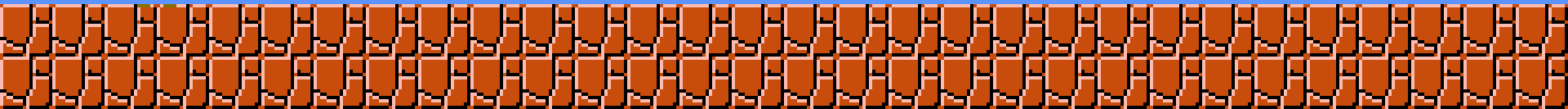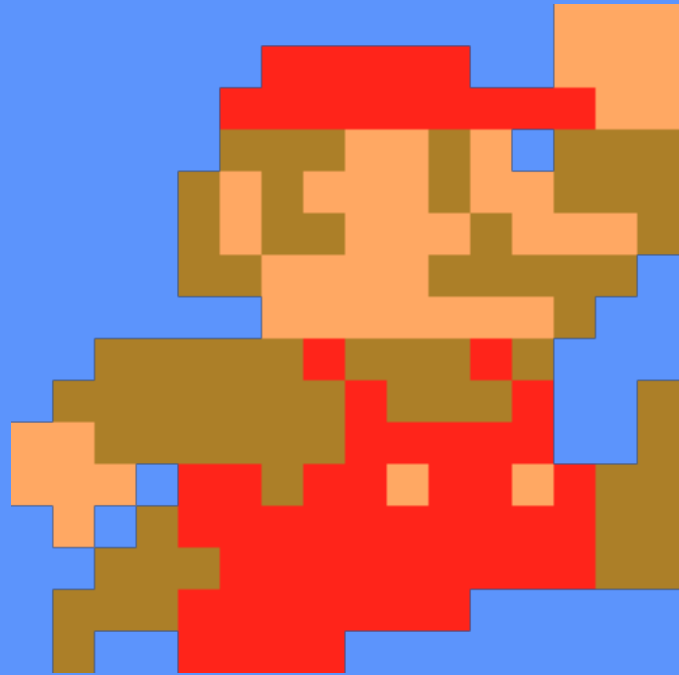
Elements of a Game: Rules

What are the rules of SMB?

What **can** or **can't** the

player do?

Elements of a Game: Rules

Rules:

Mario **can** walk, run, jump, swim, and stomp in order to proceed to the end of the stage.

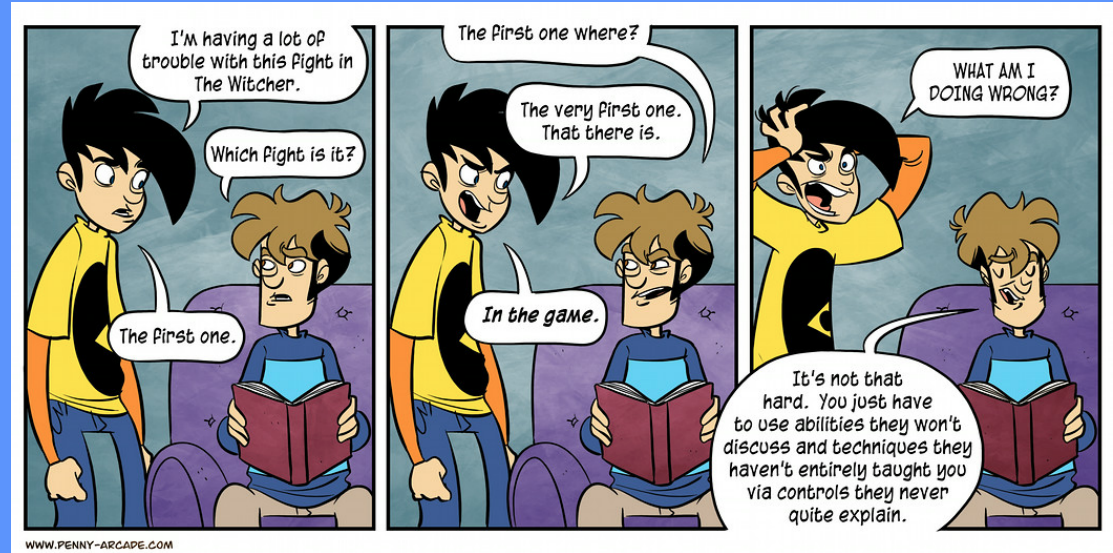Mario **cannot** walk through enemies, lava, etc.

Elements of a Game: Rules

Avoid:

- Breaking context or "natural" laws
  - Water **should** put out fire, etc.
- Rules that arbitrarily change gameplay
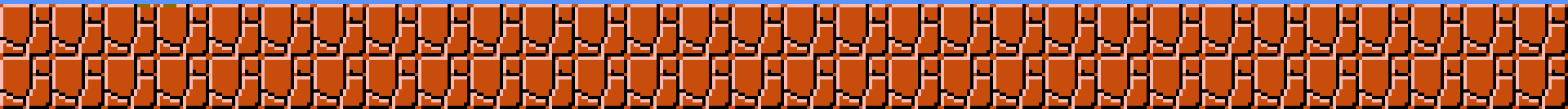
Establish rules from the outset!

Elements of a Game: Challenge

What challenges does the player face in SMB?

What **gets in the player's way** of accomplishing his/her goal?

What **aids** him/her?
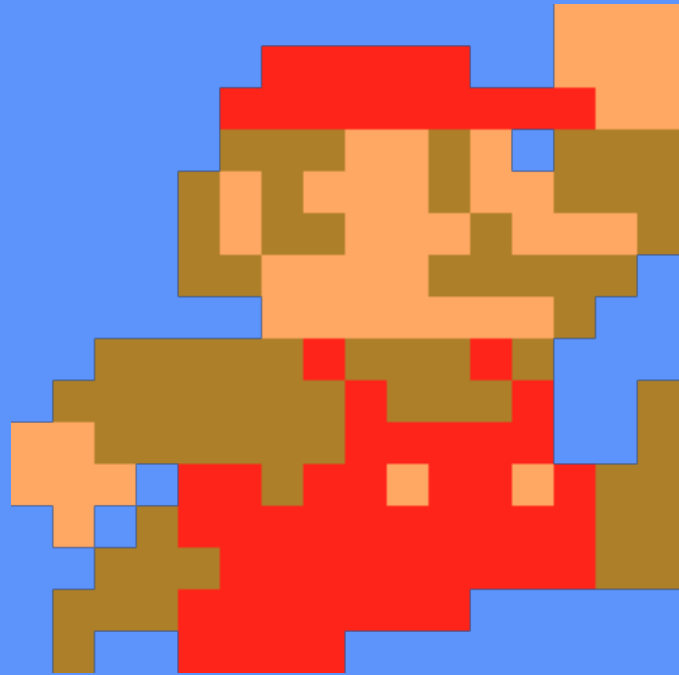
Elements of a Game: Challenge

Challenge:

Enemies, pitfalls, terrain

Components:

Mushrooms, stars, coins

Ask yourself: What makes achieving the goal interesting?
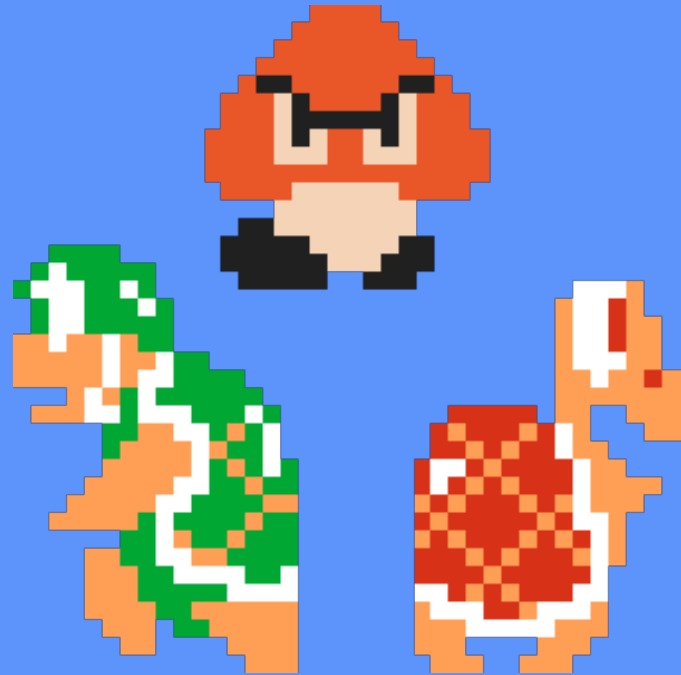
Elements of a Game: Challenge

Avoid:

- Again, breaking consistency
  - Challenges should derive from established game logic
- "Guide Dang It"
- Game-breaking mechanics
  - ex. Oddjob
  - Mechanics that make the game *un*-interesting
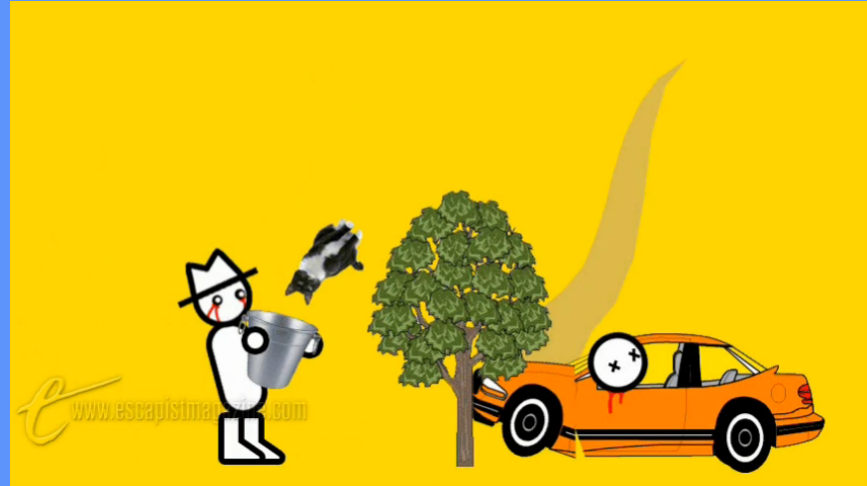
Elements of a Game: Interaction

Interaction:

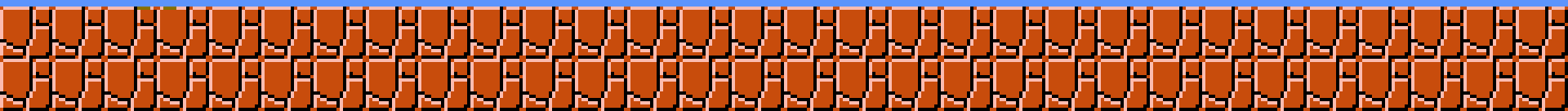Who is the **audience**? How does the player **control** the game? Does the game **respond** quickly? Accurately? How can the player **affect** the game? What does the player **feel** because of the game?

Games require voluntary participation!
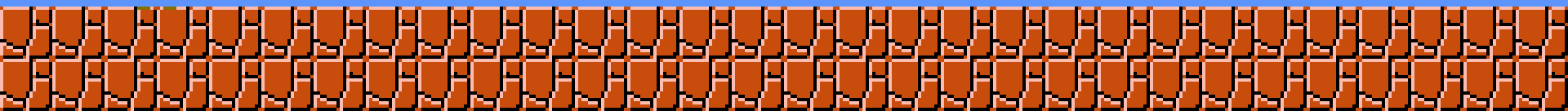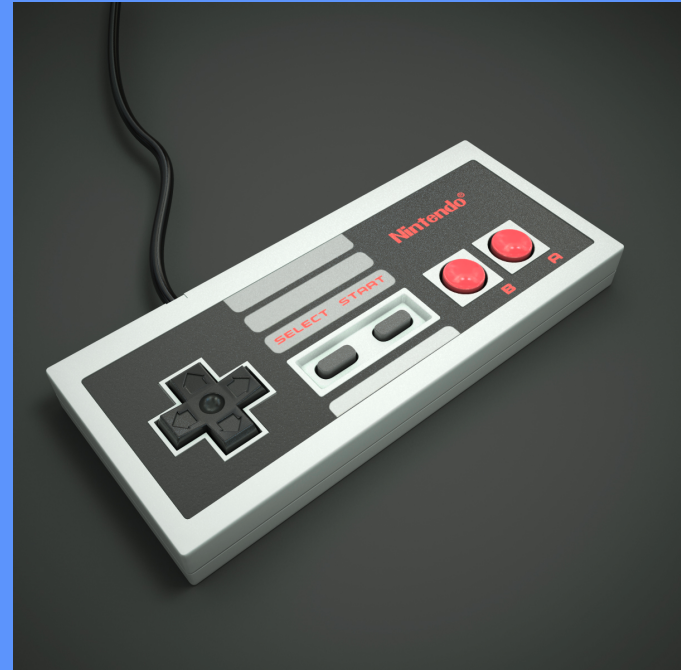
Elements of a Game: Interaction

Avoid:

- Technical issues:
  - Camera controls
  - Collision boundaries
  - Broken/inconsistent physics
- Input issues:
  - Unclear inputs
  - Lack of player effect
    - Limited choices

Discussion:

What makes a good game?

Alternatively: What makes a *bad* one?

Good vs. Bad Design

Good Game Design:

- ❏ Clear goals
- ❏ Responsive gameplay
- ❏ Immersive, contextual space
- ❏ Engaging elements: characters, plot, extras
- ❏ Player control; player decisions clearly affect game world

Poor Game Design:

- ❏ Unclear or absent goals
- ❏ Non-intuitive, non-responsive gameplay
- ❏ Illogical, disjointed space
- ❏ Unnecessary, arbitrary elements
- ❏ Lack of reaction in game world

Good vs. Bad Design

Goals, Rules, Challenge, Interaction:

A poorly designed game may contain **all** of the above, but if not implemented in a **coherent** and **cohesive** way, a game's design will still fail!
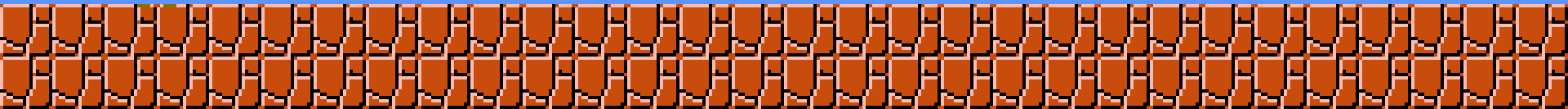
Discuss: "Fun"?

How does a design achieve "fun"?

4 KEYS 2 FUN

MASTERY "THE BRASS RING"

The 4Keys 2Fun:
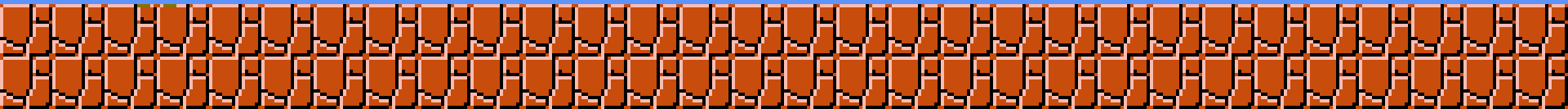Player Experience (PX) is how player interaction creates emotion. Best selling games use emotion from four types of interactions to capture attention and motivate play. Use the 4Keys 2Fun to paint attention onto any UI like Velcro and color it with emotions to match a brand or the task at hand.

HARD FUN
FIERO

Hard Fun
Provides the opportunity for challenge, mastery, and feelings of accomplishment. Hard Fun focuses attention with a goal, constraints, and strategy.

Easy Fun
Inspires exploration and role play. Fun failure states, fantasies, or simply enjoying the controls enchants and captures the imagination. Easy Fun is the bubble wrap of game design.

CHALLENGE

SKILL

GROUP

STRUCTURED

GAME WORLD

EXPECTED

SOCIAL BONDING

VEHICLE FOR IMAGINATION

PEOPLE FUN
AMUSEMENT

EASY FUN
CURIOSITY

MORE: add points & new strategies

fiero

LESS: add fun failure states

frustration

relief

emotions

MORE: add off-track play

curiosity

surprise

MORE: add care taking & competition

admiration

amiero

exploration
fantasy
creativity

wonder

awe

actions
goals
obstacles
strategy

actions
communicate
cooperate
compete

PX

actions
emotions

actions
emotions

emotions

repetition
rhythm
collection

amusement

amici

LESS: require more skill

LESS: add badges & rewards

actions

emotions

SOLO

REAL WORLD

OBTAIN

NOVEL

OPEN ENDED

ASPIRE

MORE: tangible & meaningful rewards

relaxation

zen focus

excitement

LESS: allow more experimentation

Serious Fun
Purposeful play changes how players think, feel, behave, or make a difference in the real world. The excitement of games enlivens otherwise boring tasks. Serious Fun is play as therapy.

SERIOUS FUN
EXCITEMENT

People Fun
Provides the excuse to hang out with friends. People are addictive, and these mechanics over time build social bonds and team work. Everyone wants to spend more time with their friends.

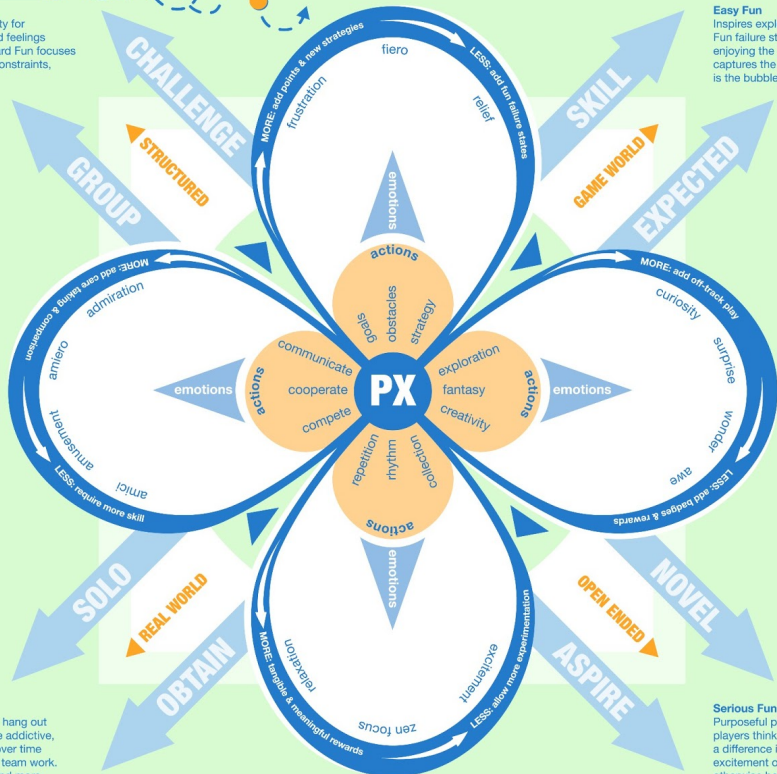## PROVIDE MEANING & VALUE

The 4Keys 2Fun is based on XEODesign's independent contextual interviews of 60 players playing their favorite games in SF and STL 2003-2004. Free white papers: www.xeodesign.com/whyweplaygames.html.
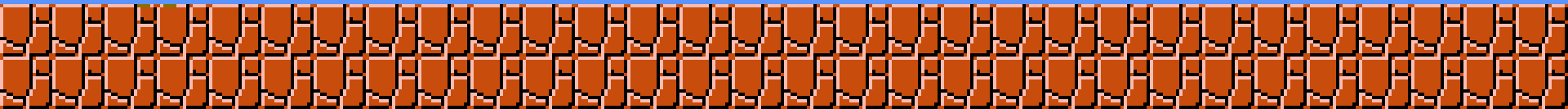
XEODesign

Elements of "Fun"

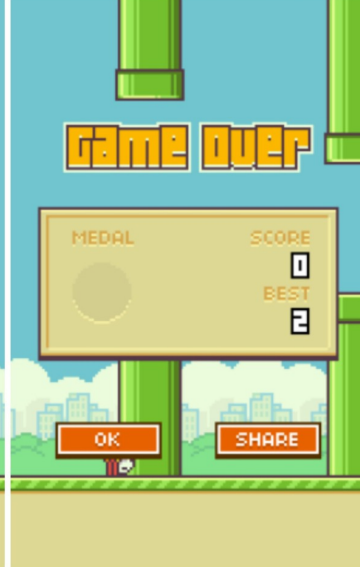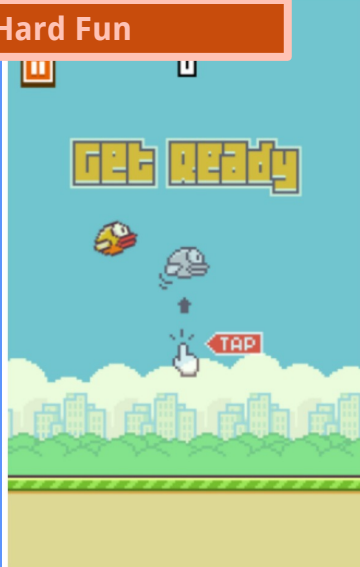**4 Keys to Fun** (From Nicole Lazzaro, XEODesign):

- ❏ **Hard Fun (Fiero):** Challenge, triumph, mastery

- ❏ **Easy Fun:** Exploration, roleplay, curiosity

- ❏ **Serious Fun:** Exciting and purposeful

- ❏ **People Fun:** Social, teamwork, bonding

Examples?

Hard Fun

Easy Fun

Serious Fun

People Fun

Other Elements of "Fun"

Aesthetic: Quality graphics, sound, music, space, morals
Challenge: Difficulty suited to target audience; grows with experience
Emotional: Connections to and investment in characters, story
Interactive: Player effect, allowance for decisions
Mechanical: Abilities, powers, innovative methods of input

Each of these aspects should support and interact with the others; focusing too much on one at the expense of the others results in imbalanced game design.