What’s a videogame?
NVM EXPLAINER 001
What do you mean by “videogame”?

Even though they are all around us and played by more people than ever, agreeing on what we mean by ‘videogame’ is surprisingly hard. Let’s try out some definitions...
“Videogames are all about stories”

Epic adventures with complex storylines...
A huge cast of characters with detailed dialogue...
And maybe even a dramatic twist at the end!

That’s definitely a videogame!

But hang on...
Why are there blocks falling from the sky?
Who knows?
Who cares?
The blocks keep falling!

What is the story of Tetris?
Is there one?
Does it matter?

If Videogames are all about stories...

Tetris is definitely a videogame, isn’t it...?!
“Videogames are all about interactivity!”

We can all agree on that, right?

Mario jumps because we press the button.

We’re driving the car in Gran Turismo.

We’re controlling those Tetris blocks.

There are a lot of controllers, because videogames are all about controlling!
But what about watching?

YouTube and Twitch have shown us that millions of people love to watch playing.

Esports is a HUGE and growing industry

And lots of modern games even have spectating modes built in

So, maybe videogames aren’t *always* about interactivity...
“Videogames are played on games consoles”

OK, this seems pretty straightforward

If you want to watch DVDs, you use a DVD player. You want to listen to CDs, you use a CD player. You take photos with a camera

If you want to play videogames, you need a videogame console.

Simple, right?
Videogames are everywhere else too...

On a mobile phone.
On a TV remote.
Or a touchscreen tablet.
Or in an arcade.
Or on an Amazon Alexa.
Or on Facebook...
Videogames keep changing!

They don’t stand still.

There are updates to fix bugs or introduce new features. Some games have new Seasons that can transform the whole game.

And it’s not like TV. You can’t go back to Season 1. It’s gone. Forever!
Whose game do you mean?
Games need players, and remember that every playing of every game is different for every player!

When we say ‘Sonic the Hedgehog’ do we mean that play-through that you were BRILLIANT at?

(Or the one where I couldn’t get past the first level...)
Different controllers, stories, systems, platforms... that's what makes videogames exciting.

Just when you think you know what they are, something brand new comes along.

And that means museums need to work really hard to collect and preserve games.

Because videogames are always being reinvented, we need to keep developing new techniques to look after them.

Perhaps the only thing we can agree, is that there's no easy definition!
What’s a videogame?
NVM EXPLAINER 001

NVM Explainers are short guides to some of the key questions and ideas that we think about at the National Videogame Museum.

We’d love to hear what you think about them!

thenvm.org