

Challenge Type	Classic Example
Economic Challenges	
Accumulating resources or points (growth)	<i>Civilization</i>
Establishing efficient production systems	<i>The Settlers</i>
Achieving balance or stability in a system	<i>SimEarth</i>
Caring for living things	<i>Creatures</i>
Conceptual Reasoning Challenges	
Sifting clues from red herrings	<i>Law and Order</i> , solving crimes
Detecting hidden meanings	<i>Planescape: Torment</i> , understanding characters' motivations from vague hints
Understanding social relationships	<i>Faade</i> , reconciling a quarreling couple
Lateral thinking	<i>The Incredible Machine</i> , building a machine from limited parts
Creation/ Construction Challenges	
Aesthetic success (beauty or elegance)	<i>The Sims</i> , assembling a photo album
Construction with a functional goal	<i>Mind Rover</i> , designing a fighting robot

The Graphics Versus Gameplay Debate In the early days of video games, the weakness of its display hardware seriously limited a game's graphics. Most of the game's appeal came from gameplay. With the growth of modern display technology, the graphics have taken on much greater importance, and creating them now consumes the majority of a game's development budget. Some designers and programmers, especially those who have been around since the early days, have become rather annoyed at the new dominance of graphics. They insist that graphics must be subordinate to gameplay in game design, and as proof, they point to examples of games with great graphics but very little gameplay, which offer poor value for the money.

This emphasis on graphics caused a serious problem in the early 1990s, when Hollywood studios thought they could take over the game industry

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 How Video Games Entertain

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because they could create better visuals than game publishers could. However, they failed. Hollywood didn't understand software engineering, didn't understand interactivity, and most important, didn't understand gameplay. The public refused to accept games with bad gameplay, no matter how spectacular the graphics. After a few false starts, Hollywood learned to work with game publishers rather than trying to become game publishers themselves as they realized that the two groups bring complementary skills to creating games.

We believe the graphics versus gameplay debate is no longer a meaningful one. The truth is that graphics and gameplay must work together to produce the total play experience. The graphics create the setting, which both sells the game and involves the player in the game's fantasy. The gameplay provides the challenge and things for the player to do. Both are essential to the player's enjoyment of the game.

The Importance of Harmony Good games and game worlds possess *harmony*, which is the feeling that all parts of the game belong to a single, coherent whole. This quality was first identified by game designer Brian Moriarty. In his lecture, "Listen: The Potential of Shared Hallucinations," Moriarty (Moriarty, 1997) explains the concept of harmony so well that, with his permission, we use his own words to describe it:

Harmony isn't something you can fake. You don't need anyone to tell you if it's there or not. Nobody can sell it to you, it's not an intellectual exercise. It's a sensual, intuitive experience. It's something you feel. How do you achieve that feeling that everything works together? Where do you get this harmony stuff?

*Well, I'm here to tell you that it doesn't come from design committees. It doesn't come from focus groups or market surveys. It doesn't come from cool technology or expensive marketing. And it never happens by accident or by luck. Games with harmony emerge from a fundamental note of clear intention. From design decisions based on an ineffable sense of proportion and rightness. Its presence produces an emotional resonance with its audience. A sense of inner unity that has nothing to do with what or how you did something, it has something to do with **why**. Myst and Gemstone both have harmony. They have it because their makers had a vision of the experience they were trying to achieve and the confidence to attain it. They laid down a solid, ambient groove that players and their respective markets can relate to emotionally. They resisted the urge to overbuild. They didn't pile on a lot of gratuitous features just so they could boast about them. And they resisted the temptation to employ inappropriate emotional effects. Effects like shock violence, bad language, inside humor.*