



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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VIDEO GAME RATINGS

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You asked for information about the current video games rating system.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is an industry organization that has developed a system that rates most games sold in the United States. The ESRB rates video games on a six-point rating scale, from “early childhood” to “adult only.” While the rating system suggests the appropriateness of each game, it does not prohibit minors from purchasing a video game with an “adults only” rating. The rating system is currently voluntary, although most games sold in the United States and Canada are rated by ESRB.

The ESRB rates games as follows:

1. “Early Childhood” (EC) has content that may be suitable for children ages 3 and older and does not contain material that parents would find inappropriate;
2. “Everyone” (E) has content that may be suitable for people age six and older and may contain minimal violence and some comic mischief, mild language, or both;
3. “Everyone 10+” (E10+) has content that may be suitable for people age 10 and older and may contain cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and minimal suggestive themes;

4. “Teen” (T) has content that may be suitable for people age 13 and older and may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and suggestive themes;
5. “Mature” (M) has content that may be suitable for people age 17 and older and may contain mature sexual themes, more intense violence, and strong language; and
6. “Adults Only” (AO) has content suitable only for adults. Titles in this category may include graphic depictions of sex, violence, or both. These products are not intended for persons under the age of 18.

More information on ESRB is available at:

<http://www.esrb.org/ratings/index.jsp>.

Pending federal legislation ([H.R. 287](#)) would require ESRB rating labels on video games and prohibit sales and rentals of adult-rated video games to minors. Several states, including California, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Washington, have passed laws regulating the sale of violent or sexually explicit video games. In the states in which such laws have been challenged, the courts have ruled that computer and video games are protected speech and efforts to ban or limit access to such games violate the First Amendment.

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