# Death is not the end: design of a meaningful defeat condition in single player games

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## Abstract

The defeat condition is a part of every game, yet is notably one of the least developed mechanics, as the lack of direct academic research material displays. This study investigates the defeat condition in a manner to improve the understanding and creation of a system aiding to deconstruct existing defeat condition in order to approve them and construct solid defeat conditions. Primary research was made in form of a survey to prove the importance of the defeat condition.

In pursuance of this goal, this paper will firstly start with an inspection of the use of the defeat condition in the early years of computer games, showing that its potential was once used to its fullest. Secondary research in combination with a logical approach will further the process in depicting the anatomy of a defeat condition, displaying several elements that can be manipulated.

This paper also offers a visualized and applied system; showing the connection between these parts and how they interact with each other in furtherance of balancing and creating an opportune and meaningful defeat condition.

# Acknowledgements

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## Purpose and Structure

This dissertation tackles the use of the defeat condition in games, looking into the roles of the defeat condition during the progress of game design in order to gain understanding of its capabilities. This dissertation will not focus on the theory of design but on the structure and the opportunities the defeat condition has to offer. This study is creating a system to improve and analyse existing defeat conditions and to provide a blueprint of what is expected of a defeat condition.

The objective lies in improving the understanding of the defeat condition as a tool for game design and an object to further the experience and the meaningfulness of a game. The main purpose of the defeat condition, which is unarguably the limitation and the conditioning of the player, will be analysed and furthered to a point of injecting a selected amount of theories into different key elements of a failure occurrence; the defeat of the player. The author understands that the defeat condition is a very volatile subject which changes its face in every game and genre, which will be mirrored in a cautious approach. Starting by firstly understanding and elaborating the subject and eventually offering several angles a game designer might approach the defeat condition by applying previously mentioned system.

As this is a fragile subject, the structure of this paper is of utmost importance and shall be described at this point before any more information is brought to the matter.

In pursuance of the defeat condition one has to look at all facets, starting at its history to gain insight to a certain extent allowing us to deconstruct the defeat condition. Ranging from the very start in the penny arcade game era to its current form found in nowadays games displaying the issue in this process. After an understanding of the subject is reached, the procedure will continue in displaying the different elements of the defeat condition and the appliance of design opportunities at said elements. Finally a few special defeat conditions in current games will be looked at to make an example of what the defeat condition is capable of in order to increase meaning of a game.

# Defeat Condition

## The Claim

Games are in an ambiguous state, many definitions and categorisation attempts have been made in the academic world: Are games art? Are games purely a form of Entertainment? What is the difference between a Game and other forms of Interactive Entertainment?

These questions won't stop for a long time to come, but what the academic world can settle on is that games can be designed. These statements sound very obvious, but understand the vast amount of subjects and options a game offers to be tinkered with. This dissertation argues that not all of these options are fully explored and realised at this point, especially the defeat condition. The task is not to show that all existing defeat conditions are badly designed, it is to identify and structure the defeat condition, to learn what can be improved upon.

Defeat conditions are important, the primary research (Appendix D) has shown that out of 42 questioned gamers (play times ranging from less than 6 hours played weekly to more than 25 hours weekly in a structure of a bell curve) rated the importance of a defeat condition at 3.79/5. Further questions show that the defeat condition is within the same range as other reasons to stop playing a game, such as "enough played for the day" "game is too easy".

Important to note is also the distribution of suggested improvements of the defeat condition. The participants were able to choose between punishment, coherence, impact on the game and nothing, yet showing a very equal distribution in these stats 14, 15,11 and 0 accordingly, showing a general discontent with the overall design of a defeat condition.

In furtherance of this statement, participants pointed out issues (see Appendix D, Question 6 -Comments) with defeat conditions that will be later picked up in the "Anatomy of Defeat".

25 out of 42 stopped a game solely because of the defeat condition. To put it in a nutshell, the defeat condition seems to be an important part of a game, yet as seen in the primary research lacks improvement in several sections.

The taste of people changes constantly and all form of media is influenced by this change. Games being a growing part of this culture are in ever changing state. The purpose and design of the defeat condition are changing with technology and its gaming community as every other part of game design.

# History and Roles

The development of games started in arcade games followed by homes platforms and eventually in nowadays accessibility through a vast amount of options such as consoles, personal computers, tablets and mobile phones.

## Arcade Games

The era of arcade games was a particular period of time for computer games. It was very expensive to afford a personal computer in order to play games at home, furthermore was the market not well developed to cater to this format of entertainment. The most affordable and accessible way to play a computer game was to venture to a penny arcade. A penny arcade was a place filled with different forms of entertainment such as pool tables, slot machines and the first computer games such as Pong, Space Invaders, Donkey Kong and many more. The particularity of this era though is displayed by the form of design these games where showing.

## Design of an arcade game

As soon as one enters an arcade, in the past or in the present, the most noticeable thing is that every machine requires money to be used. Furthermore the one thing most machines share is the element of randomness, a form of unpredictability of the outcome. Everything is designed to cost the costumer money. Joining the ranks of money makers in such an establishment needed games to be designed accordingly.

The question here lies in the design of a game that offers fun, yet makes a lot of money without sliding into the design of a common slot machine. The core design of arcade games resembles modern games.

*"A functional definition of “game”: an interactive structure of endogenous meaning that requires players to struggle toward a goal"*

*(Costikyan, 2002, p.24)*

Computer games do not cost the player constantly money in a short amount of time as a slot machine would do, as one “play through” offers very little chance to interfere, hence the playtime had to be limited. A breaking point in the progress of playing a game had to be designed with the purpose to get the player to pay, otherwise the player would pay once and be entertained for a longer period which would contradict the philosophy of a penny arcade. As soon as the word “limitation” enters the vocabulary of game design the defeat condition started to become one of the key elements of early computer games.

## Offering fun with a limitation

In pursuance of this design goal games where developed without a win condition. Games that are made to continue with no achievable end. What would make such a game worth playing? Why would one even consider indulging in such a waste of time and money?

In this lies one of the most important functions of the defeat condition, creating meaning. Jesse Schell refers to this as “Endogenous Value”, a system which creates value inside itself.

> *“The more compelling a game is, the greater the “endogenous value” that is created within the game”,* (Schell, 2014, p 42)

In order to achieve a challenging experience the player needs to face an opportunity of failure. In furtherance to maximize or even guarantee the event of defeat; games would be designed with a constantly ramping difficulty level. Once the defeat condition was triggered the player was encountered with several options depending on the game.

**Restarting, continuing for money or ending the run.**

This system standing alone sounds not like fun and knowing the theory of Flow by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (see Appendix A for a brief summary of the theory) player encountered the area of anxiety with certainty. Yet as this paper will continue to point out, a good defeat condition has to be paired and embedded into the design of the game. A failure during a game would lead to a restart, a rehearsal of the situation when the mistake was made in the first place, in other words the player would learn what not to do and how to play the game in a correct way. This way of conditioning is known as “Behavioural Conditioning” and was introduced by B.F.Skinner (see Appendix B for a brief summary of the theory). The defeat condition in combination with “Behavioural Conditioning” would help the player to increase his skill level allowing him to play the game for a longer period the next time around, which would in return embed him into a higher state of emergence according to Flow as challenge and skill has risen. A swift end to ones run is never fun, competing and comparing oneself to another player is, Lazarro would label the variation of fun as “People fun”( Lazarro, 2004) and thus the introduction of the scoreboard was made.

*“The un-winnable form has had a relatively long history in arcade games. It aims to measure its players' ability to endure a particular situation, thereafter ranking their positions on a score chart.”* (Shuen-shing Lee, 2003)

**Behaviour Conditioning, Flow** and **People Fun** in combination with a defeat condition were creating the absolute combination of **fun with limitations**. This is but one example of how a defeat condition can be used in order to achieve both economical and design success.

## Present day

Games as we know them today stay generally in a crass contrast to the design of arcade games. With the introduction of home consoles and personal computers, games started to aim at the players' entertainment over an elongated stretch of time. Player are supposed to enjoy a game and still be challenged, not being torn out of the immersion ever so often by harsh ramping and frequent failure. There was no gain in making games hard. It was important to ensure the players motivation to stay at the game even if a defeat condition would occur.

The problem game designers had to face now is: How to make a game challenging without losing the player? The motivation to fail and still being victorious on the scoreboard was missing, and the only person punished would be the player himself in the event of failure. The safety of the player was assured by systems that started to be more and more available in home console games. Saving was a big element in assuring the players situation and caters directly to the motivational aspect of the basic personal need of "*safety and security*" as displayed in Maslow's "*Pyramid of Needs*" (2012). As the in-game character was save due to several options such as quick saving, check points and auto saving, a larger and more focussed approach to challenges was open for the game design world. The core of the design shifted away from the defeat condition.

> Current trends lead to *"….loss of any sort of failure condition, which now we [designers] have to increase intensity, so no longer can we have a room with 2 enemies, we now have to have an encounter with 40"* (Game Design Round Table, 2013)

# Anatomy of Defeat

"*The goal for a successful game design is to create meaningful play*",
(Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, p3)

Before we move on to deconstruct current games, a structure of defeat conditions, an anatomy must be declared. The defeat condition is not a singular instance but its impact reaches far beyond the mere moment of occurrence. One has to look at all points of view as previously stated in order to determine the meaningfulness of the defeat condition.

*"Meaningful play in a game emerges from the relationship between player action and system outcome; it is the process by which a player takes action within the designed system of a game and the system responds to the action. The meaning of an action in a game resides in the relationship between action and outcome",* (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, p34)

We can adapt the premise of Salen and Zimmerman's description of meaningful play and adjust it to the defeat condition. In this case the focus of the deduction will lie on the relationship between the player and the defeat condition and its outcome in the context of the game. Basing on these definitions of meaningfulness the author is destructing the defeat condition in three elements:

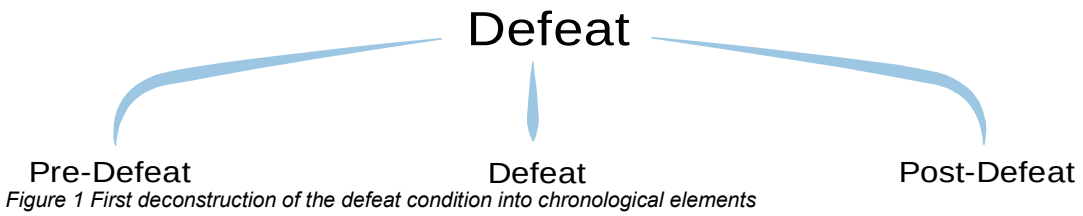

*Figure 1 First deconstruction of the defeat condition into chronological elements*

To further this investigation into the structure, these three main parts of purely chronological orientation will be separated into sub-parts concentrating designable elements:

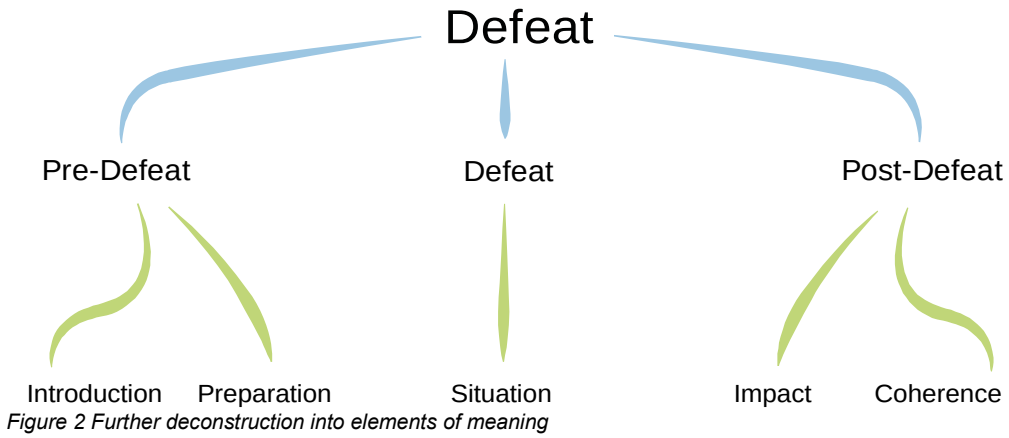

*Figure 2 Further deconstruction into elements of meaning*

# Pre-Defeat:

**Introduction:**

A basic understanding of the game is important to calculate how well the player can estimate what will happen in the event of defeat. Furthermore it will be the point of orientation for the game designer to evaluate the defeat condition. In this first segment all important design objectives can be found which will later in the process resurface: Risk and Reward, value of in game life, punishment and conditioning the player.

The first part of the analysis of the defeat condition is focusing on the foundation of the game and the information the player is given concerning the defeat condition. The introduction to the defeat condition is important as it is the first step in the journey for the game to show the player his limitations and what he is risking if the player is stepping over a boundary or trying something out of order. In the first part of the analysis of the defeat condition is an active design part; the player's role is passive. He is a witness to the world and its rules. The active role is with the game designer and different approaches can be taken in furtherance to create a meaningful experience for the player. “Super Meatboy” (2010), a game by Team Meat, chose the approach to let the player die as early as possible, conditioning him to understand the value of an in game life. On the other side of the scale the first defeat condition might appear far into the game (Heavy Rain (2010)), rendering the experience very different. The introduction to the defeat condition, as mentioned above, as it is the first encounter to the defeat condition; it has a very strong impact into the risk/reward/payoff understanding of the player.

Design Opportunities: Risk and Reward, Value of in-game live.

## Preparation:

The player role is active in this part of the analysis in contrast to the previous segment, "**Introduction**". Preparation is concentrating on the opportunities given to the player. What sort of arrangements are in the hands of the player to prevent defeat? Many games have means and ends to further or increase in game life. Permanent solutions, such as collecting heart containers in "Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time" (1998), that increase the maximum amount of life, or short term items such as potions or first aid kits. Besides these usable elements are different ways to increase one's life expectancy in games. The approach towards a dangerous or demanding situation is what the player learns in the "**Introduction**" yet adjusting the learned elements and getting familiar with the game play system belongs into the part of "**Preparation**" as it is an active choice of the player. As an example found in many games nowadays, is the mechanic of regenerating health. Games with this mechanic usually lack a life bar or other display variations of health, the only indication the player has is an increasingly red tinted screen according to his injuries, for example "Call of Duty: Black Ops II"(2012). The reddish tint fades over time if the player stays untouched for several moments. As "**Preparation**" towards defeat the player will use this mechanic to avoid a defeat condition, hiding while being damaged.

Design Opportunities: Fairness and Blame.

# Defeat:

**Situation:**

This facet is to see as a freeze frame. Just as the defeat occurs everything has to be taken in evaluation. This is the key stone of this analytical process; everything can be put in relationship to this part. The focus lies on what the player is and has in this moment.

What the player is, means the circumstance the player is at this very moment. The importance in this matter is with whom the fault for the failure lays. If the player was not properly prepared, tried something outside of the ordinary, took a big risk or doesn't know how to approach given situation then then the player will see the mistake was made by him, he is able to adjust and try again. He is conditioned by the “**Introduction**” what risks he took, and informed by the “**Preparation**” what his opportunities are to improve his chances. Yet if the defeat condition developed outside of the range of influence of the player, he will feel cheated as there is nothing he could have done to prevent his current state.

What the player has, is important to know in order to manifest the next point of analysis which is “**Impact**”. The player is already familiar with the risk reward system as described in “**Introduction**”, yet the “**Introduction**” is a onetime event, while the defeat condition can occur more often in certain games. As the equipment, currency or experience of the player may increase during the game so does the players ability to lose certain resources.

# Post-Defeat:

**Impact:**

This section of the investigation is looking into the difference between the state of the character during defeat and after the instance the defeat condition occurred. What is the payment a player has to give for failing in an action, if there is no payment, does the player get something out of the defeat. As we learned in history of the defeat condition is that its main purpose is the conditioning and the limitation of the player.

> *"Punishment is easily confused with negative reinforcement, sometimes called "aversive control." The same stimuli are used, and negative reinforcement might be denied as the punishment of not behaving, but punishment is designed to remove behaviour from a repertoire, whereas negative reinforcement generates behaviour"*
> (Skinner, 1974, p.62)

Punishment in game has many different approaches, Jesse Schell describes in his book, "The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses", (Schell, 2014, p.222-223) 9 different forms of

Punishment, ranging from loss of resources to shaming of the player. The importance of this part of the analysis is to evaluate the impact a defeat condition has to the game play, we do know that the impact, the reaction of the game to the players actions is important to create meaningful play, hitherto if the loss or the punishment is big enough to violate the basic needs of the player, in this case : self-actualisation, esteem and safety and security, as describe by Maslow then the game design risks creating another natural braking point in the players emergence and motivation towards the game.

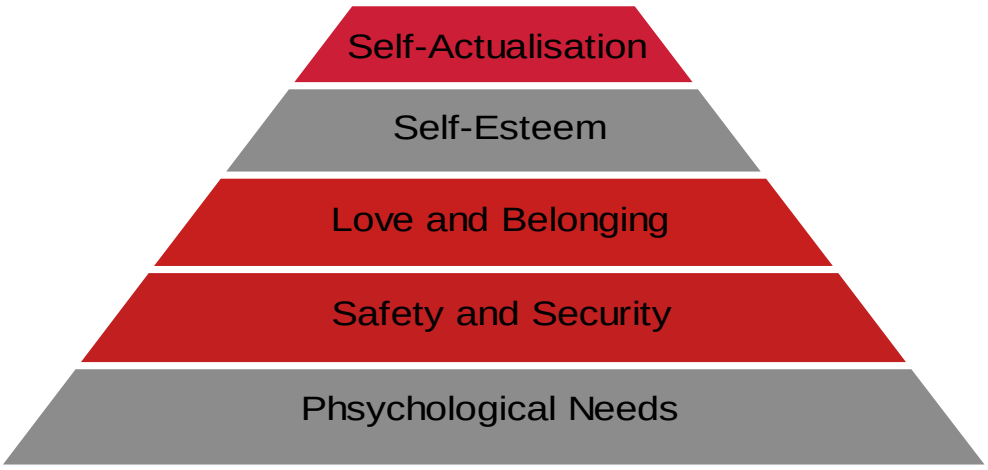


*Figure 3 Maslow's Pyramid of Need*

**Coherence**:

The last segment is focusing on the coherence of the defeat condition within the game world. As the introduction this segment will only occur once as displayed in the graphic below. It is well know that games do not need a high level of realism, and can still seem logical to the player, as described in the opening of Jasper Juuls's book Half Real (p.6), yet it is important to know if the defeat condition is clashing with the lore or the story of the game. We know from Huizinga's “Magic Circle” that payer have to accept the rules of the game world in order to stay in the circle, if the defeat condition occurs in a manner that simply does not fit, it will break the continuity of the game world and leave the player questioning what just happened. Furthermore a defeat condition which is not integrated into the game world will stand in contrast to the definition of “meaningful play” as described by Salen and Zimmerman as the respond of the game towards a failure of the player is not executed in a proper way, rendering the notion less powerful and in the worst case damaging the behavioural conditioning of the player as the punishment will become less and less. As an example to this is the game “The Order: 1886” (2015), when the player fails in one of the many quick time events he gets killed in a cut scene, which seems to be very coherent with the lore, yet the instant reset to the start of the quick time events offers the player countless opportunities to eventually hit the right button and fulfil the task. This clearly leaves the player without punishment of failure rendering an honest try more than unlikely in the next situation with same premises.

> *“Meaningful play occurs when the relationships between actions and outcomes in a game are both discernible and integrated into the larger context of the game. Creating meaningful play is the goal of successful game design.” ”,* (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, p34)

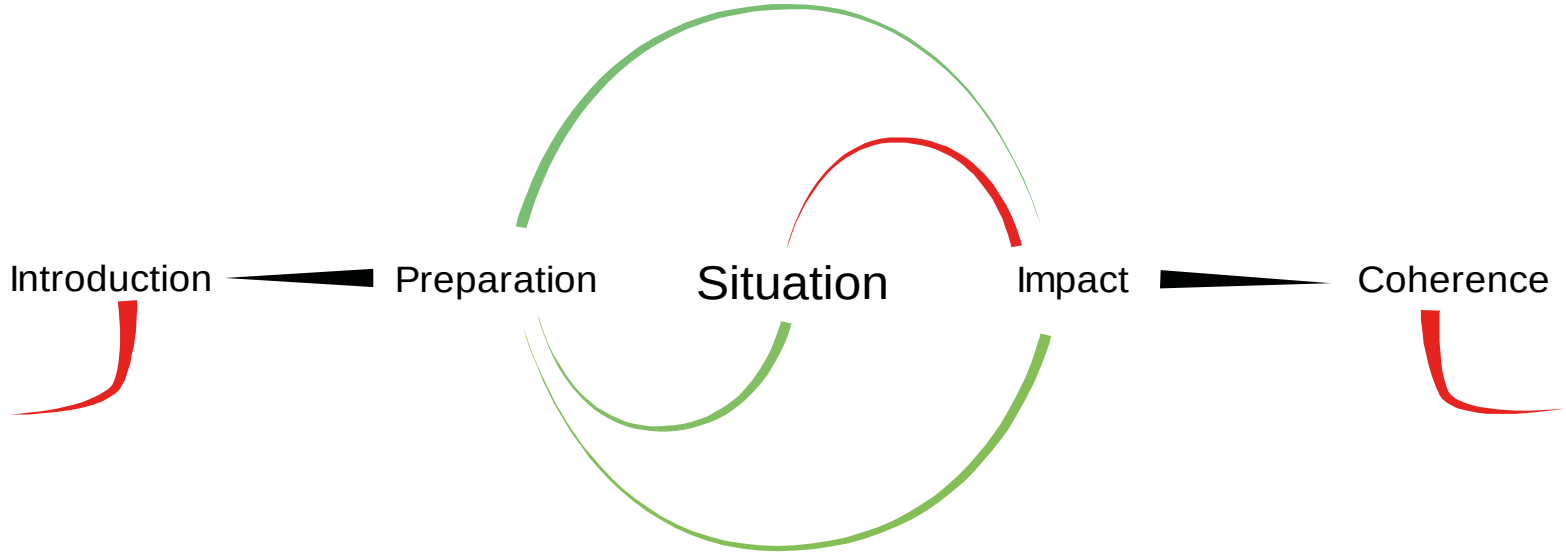


*Figure 4 Visual Display of the relationship between the elements of defeat*

## Combination

In order to understand the defeat condition in a game one needs to use all objectives, **introduction, preparation, situation, impact, coherence** and list them. We can see that **introduction** and **coherence** are onetime events, and can be looked at with simple data collected from the specific game. **Introduction** will tell us about the importance of the defeat condition in the game, the earlier the defeat condition has the potential to occur, the more often will it occur in the game. **Coherence** will have an impact on the understanding of the defeat condition within the lore of the game, the more the game is narrative based in contrast to ludology games the more important is this point. If both Introduction and coherence fail in forming the frame for the defeat condition the rest of the design is neglect able as the foundation has to be fixed first.

Between **introduction** and **coherence** we find **preparation, situation** and **impact**. These three segments influence each other and have to be design accordingly. Important to understand at this point in time is that preparation and impact are designable segments, whereas situation is the outcome of preparing for the impact. The player needs to have the option to prepare him for a possible defeat, either through usable items or adjustable strategy. If a game lacks the balance in difficulty it needs to be beatable by proper use of given items and vice versa. **Preparation** is in direct contact with situation which is in direct contact with punishment. All three elements need to be design together. The **preparation** should allow to avoid any given defeat condition. If the **preparation** is too little, no items available or not enough time to adjust to a new mechanic, the player will enter a situation which in turn influences the **impact** rendering the experience unsatisfying. The dissatisfaction is the feel of being cheated out of a fair challenge.

# Application

Now we will use this system on the defeat condition on a computer game from 2013, Irrational Game's Bioshock: Infinite.

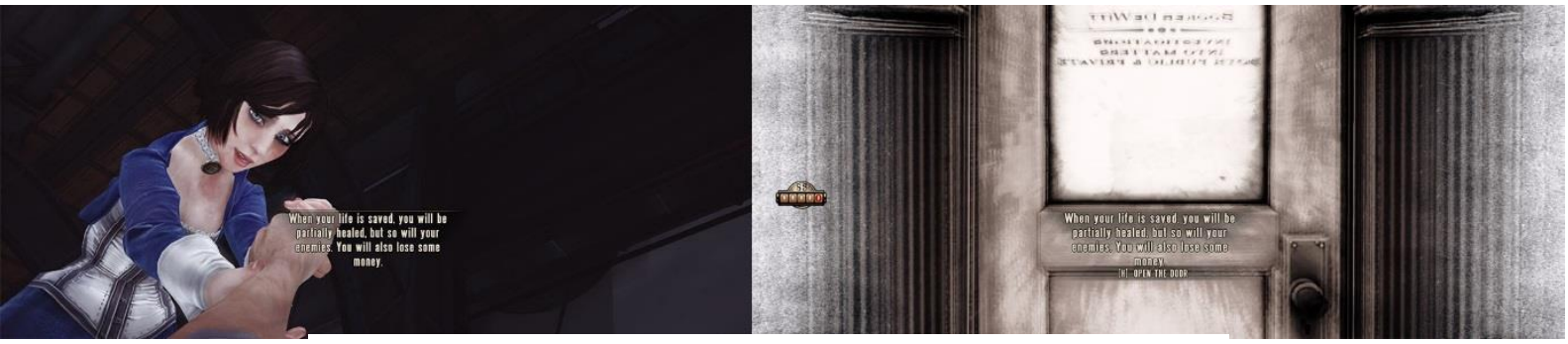


*Figure 5 Screenshot of Irrational Games's Bioshock:Infinite, "Point of Defeat"*

The player is given a health bar and a shield as information of his life resources. If the player is encountering damage from any source, the shield bar will deplete, if the shield bar is completely empty the heath bar is going down next. If the health bar is reaching 0 the player will enter the defeat condition. After entering the defeat condition the player will see a certain cut scene depending on his progress in the game, going through a black and white door or being helped up by his companion, re-joining the game in a location away from the place of death with 75% of the health, losing a small amount of currency and a slight heal of the enemies.

**Introduction:**

Death is introduced in the game in an early state. The opportunity for the player to die in the first hour of play is given and due to the amount of enemy encounters likely. Nonetheless the defeat condition costs the player only a few seconds of game time, a little bit of health and a small amount of currency. The player is conditioned that dying is part of this game and if it happens it is not of greater impact.

**Preparation:**

Bioshock: Infinite offers several levels of preparation, the player is able to buy ammunition and upgrade his weapons to improve the situation, furthermore the usage of in game powers can be levelled up and arranged in a personal favour. Additionally the companion, Elizabeth allows strategically value in fights which can be calculated and used. To sum the perpetration is on a level of usable items and strategically which renders it optimal.

**Situation:**

As this is a general evaluation of the games defeat condition and we already know that introduction and preparation are done to a good level we can assume that the game is following the theory of flow and the players skill is increasing over time and therefore his evaluation of preparation as well.

**Impact:**

Here we have two very important pieces of information. Firstly the in the **introduction**, the first appearance of the defeat condition, the evaluation for the punishment was that it does not have a big impact. Yet if we assume that the defeat condition may occur more than just once on a single occasion in the game the effect of the loss of currency will stack. If the currency is lost, the preparation will get less and less for said circumstance. The **situation** might turn worse and worse and might end up in a complete stop of the game. Certainly the strategically part of the preparation is still existent yet a point of breaking flow was detected by this analysis.

**Coherence:**

Coherence of the defeat condition is firstly hard to grasp making the player wonder, but is presented in a way that it fits again into the world of Bioshock and is explained in the later plot of the game. Therefore the coherence is fine in this game.

**Result:**

In total we can now conclude that the defeat condition in the game Bioshock: Infinite is coherent, not too often appearing mechanic, with a punishment system that increases in attempts for single challenges. The only problem we can deduce is the ramping of the impact that directly influences the preparation. As verdict the procedure would suggest to adjust the punishment in a manner that it does not directly compromise **preparation**.

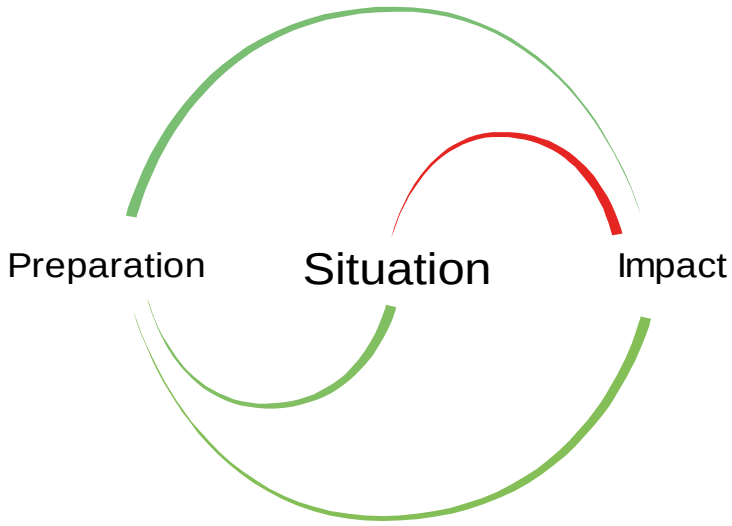


*Figure 6 Display of the relationship of a defeat condition after the first appearance (introduction and coherence fall out of the equation)*

# Defeat as Opportunity

Not all games have the defeat condition as a necessary side effect. Several games adapted the defeat condition and turned it into a notable part of the game. The defeat condition can be optimised and prepared using the system demonstrated by this dissertation, yet design wise are no limitation to what one can do to the defeat condition. Games, such as the Dark Souls II (2014) and Lord of The Fallen (2014), combine the defeat condition with a motivational tool and the lore of the game, in pursuance of a greater experience and emergence. The Dark Souls Series is set in a universe of the dead, hence the defeat condition is used to make the player understand the lore of the game world. Furthermore is the player able to collect experience, called “souls”, by defeating enemies, which in return form the currency of the game to purchase weapons or to level up at a save point. If the player dies without spending his collected “souls”, those “souls” will drop at the point of defeat and the player will re-spawn at the last safe point used. In order to get his experience back, he has to venture back to the point of death to collect his souls again. If he dies while trying to get his lost souls back, the dropped experience will fade.

This defeat condition combines motivation to endure the challenge again that lead to defeat in the first place as ones resources are on the line, combined with the lore of the player being trapped in a circle of death and resurrection.

Lord of The Fallen uses a similar mechanic yet adding pressure on the player to retrieve his lost experience faster as the amount of experience collectable slowly decreases.

Another game that used the defeat condition as an opportunity to further the game experience is Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor (2014), which uses the “Nemesis” System. Nemesis are the enemies in the game, which are all computer generated and have their own trades with each play through of the game. Every time the player dies by the blade of one of his Nemesis this enemy gets stronger and grows in rank and power. The defeat condition in this game is designed in a manner that can alter the game participants themselves. A normal grunt Orc can end up being a Warchief with his own following and army. The higher up a “Nemesis” is the better is the reward for killing said enemy.

This defeat condition can be used in two ways: Firstly from the game designer’s perspective it is motivating the player not to die in order to avoid creating stronger and stronger enemies.

Secondly it can also motivate skilful players to die on purpose in pursuance to create a new challenge and to collect the reward.

# Conclusion

This dissertation started out to fill the gap in game design literature depicting the defeat condition. The academic world of game design is far advanced concerning topics similar to rules, goals and how to make the general experience of playing a game fun. Failure and punishment are also a well-researched area including names such as Jasper Juuls and B.F Skinner, yet the simple matter of death, defeat seems to be rather neglected.

After conducting immense secondary research into the field of defeat condition this study was able to create a simple structure for a defeat condition with the limitation to single player games. Even within this limitation a vast opportunity was shown on how to look at the defeat of the player and which elements react to each other. This structure can be applied to any given single player game in order to improve or analyse the current state of the defeat condition. Furthermore it works as a blueprint for designers to create a complete and solid defeat condition that should render players content with the experience as it tackles disliked events as shown by the primary research (Appendix D Question 6).

Furthermore is this dissertation a work of foundation, it concludes a solid version of a defeat, on which can be built creative options as shown in the paragraph of "**Defeat as Opportunity**".

By and large the defeat condition is an important part of game design, and has several options a game designer should keep in mind when creating a game. It does not take much to destroy the emergence or the consistency of a playing experience, and it does take a lot to create a system that will keep the player happy. To conclude the defeat condition is in a basic system completely analysed and deconstructed in a visual manner that can be followed easily, what needs to be researched now is how to utilize that gained knowledge in combination with common design. How can we increase the defeat condition and how far can we go when building up on the foundation laid by this dissertation.

**The system of introduction, preparation, situation, impact and coherence is placing the first stone in the complete design of a meaningful defeat condition.**

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# Pictures and Graphs

Figure 5 “Point of Defeat”, Irrational Games, Bioshock: Infinite (2013), Author’s screenshot

All visuals in this dissertation were produced by the author Dominik Mueller.

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# Appendix A

## Flow

“Flow” is a concept created by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes a structured approach to create the perfect experience, called “flow”. This theory includes one of the only systems used for emergence building up on the assumption that a state of enjoyment needs to be created by looking at the balance between applied skill and challenge.

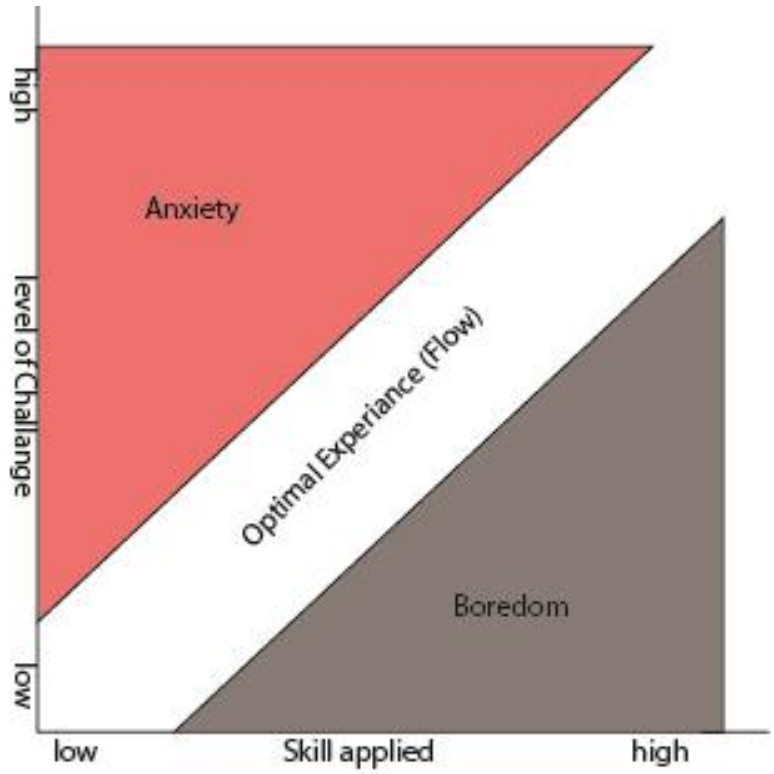


*Figure 7 Flow Channel as discribed in Flow: the psychology of ptimal experiance p.74*

The optimal experience can be reached if the skill the player can apply is growing with the challenge given to the player.

If the skill is too low the player will enter in the area of anxiety as he is overwhelmed by the challenge. Yet if the challenge is to easy the player will enter the region of boredom. Neither of both states is wished in game design, therefore game designers aim to enter the “flow channel”.

*“With an uncanny sense for the fine balancing of challenge and skills, he would make sure that the game would yield the maximum form of enjoyment…”*
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 53)

# Appendix B

## Magic Circle

Johan Huizinga describes in his book “homo ludens – a study of the play element in culture” published 1950 (originally published in 1938), a concept known to the game design world as the “Magic Circle”. The “Magic Circle” is known as a concept describing the situation created when “play” is occurring. This theory explains that a play is always taking place in a sort of playground, a place with

> *“ Play Demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it “spoils the game”, robs it of its character and makes it worthless.”* (Huizinga, 1950, p10)

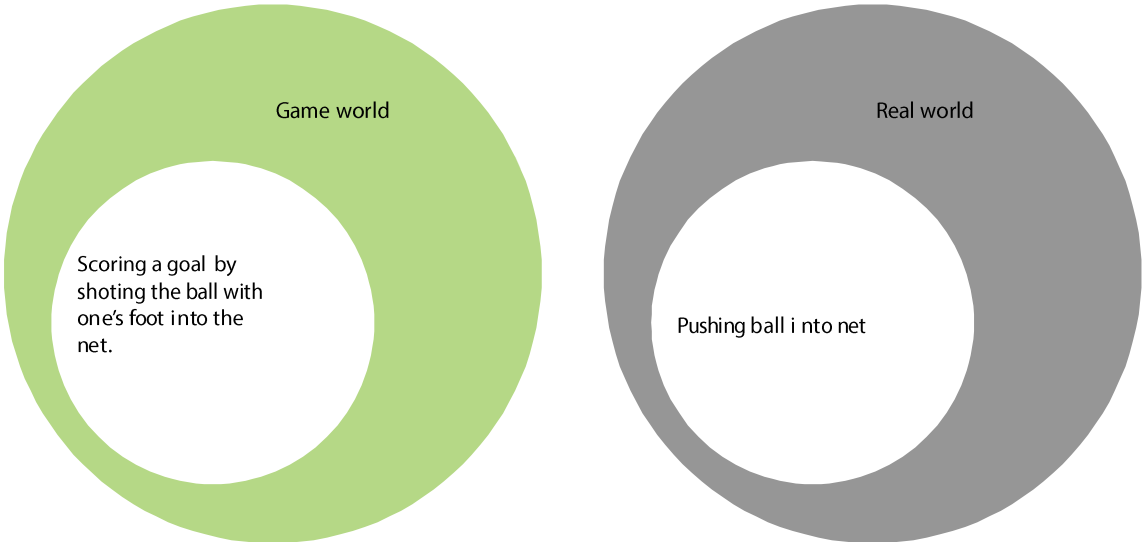


*Figure 8 Visualisation of meaning inside the Magic Circle*

The important part is that the place known as “magic circle” is a place of rules. This translates perfectly into the modern world of game design:

> *“A game is a system in which players engage in artificial conflict, defined by rules in a quantifiable outcome”* (Salen, Zimmerman, 2004, p.80)

This is a definition of “game” by Salen and Zimmerman, as seen the identification of the “magic circle” fits into the concept of said definition. Important for this dissertation is that within the “magic circle”, the playground the arena as Huizinga is also naming it, rules are to be accepted and not to be dismissed. These rules include everything from normal games rules as we know them, to the premises of the game world, a goal is only a goal on a football field etc. To further this train of through, if the player of a game is not able to accept the display of defeat in a game then the game fails to create a “magic circle” and is therefore not able to create a situation in which play can occur.

# Appendix C

## Behavioural Conditioning

B.F Skinner is a pioneer in the realms of behavioural condition. This theory is the system of conditioning someone, a person, an animal, in our case a player, by offering him reinforcements according to the action the player made. In order to create behaviourism, a structure, a habit must be built and the person/animal to be reinforced, need to have an adjusted response to its actions. If the object is doing something wrong it gets punished, if it does something right, it gets rewarded. The important lies in giving constant reinforcement in order to keep the whished behaviour going.

*"The behaviour occurs because appropriate mechanisms have been selected in the course of evolution. "* (Skinner, 1974, p.47)

It stays in close similarity to the previously mention definition by Salen and Zimmerman of "meaningful play". For this dissertation the importance in this theory lies within the opportunity of conditioning the player by either using reward or punishment. As explained in the paragraph of "Anatomy of Defeat" we can see that punishment is a big part of "Impact". Yet as a games designer one should keep in mind that positive reinforcement is always better then negative, which should only be used to limit the player, not to control him.

*"The desire for approbation is perhaps the most deeply seated instinct of civilized man"* (Skinner, 1974, p.181)

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# Appendix D

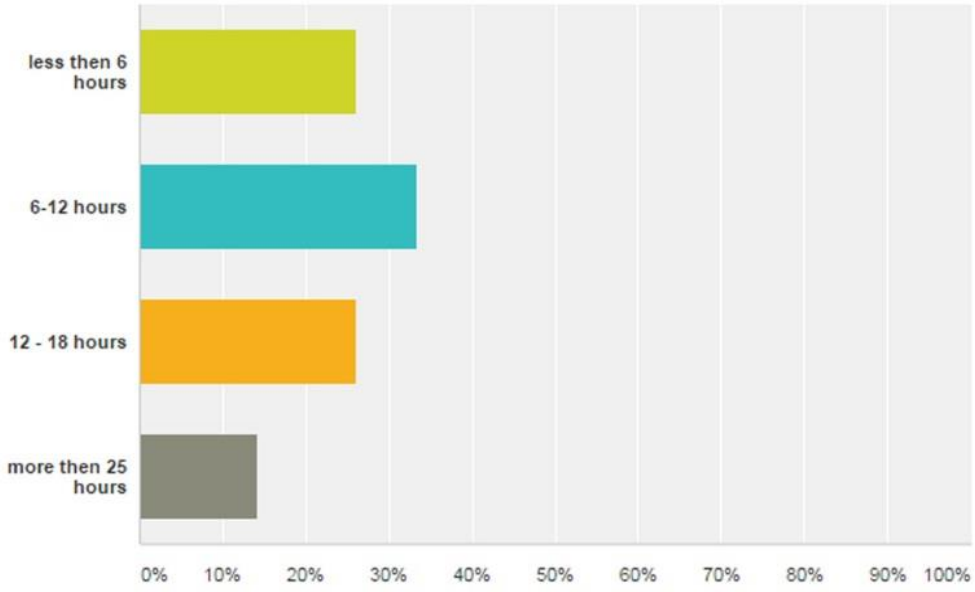
## Survey- Results

Question 1:

Q1 Customize Export

### How much time do you usually spend on playing games during a week?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1

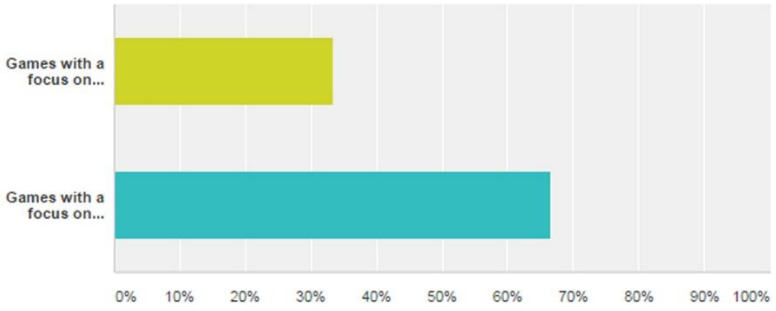



| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| less then 6 hours | 26.19% | 11 |
| 6-12 hours | 33.33% | 14 |
| 12 - 18 hours | 26.19% | 11 |
| more then 25 hours | 14.29% | 6 |
| Total | | 42 |

Q2 Customize Export

## Which style of games do you prefer?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1

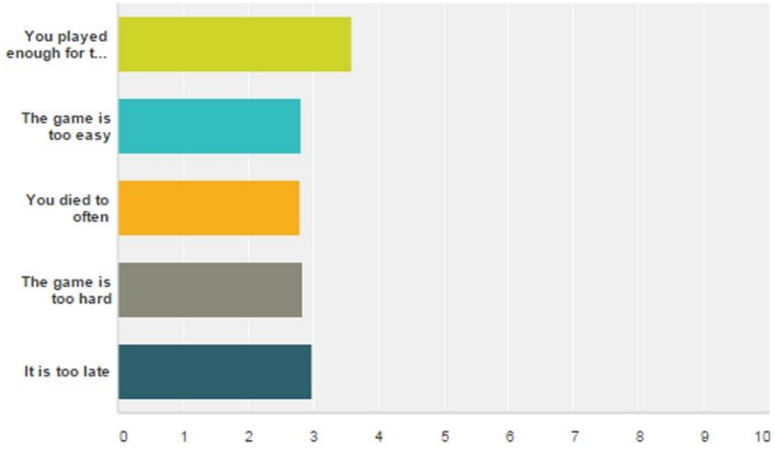



| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Games with a focus on narrative elements | 33.33% | 14 |
| Games with a focus on gameplay elements | 66.67% | 28 |
| Total | | 42 |

Q3 Customize Export

## How would you rank these reasons to stop playing a game. (1 = most frequent reason)

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1



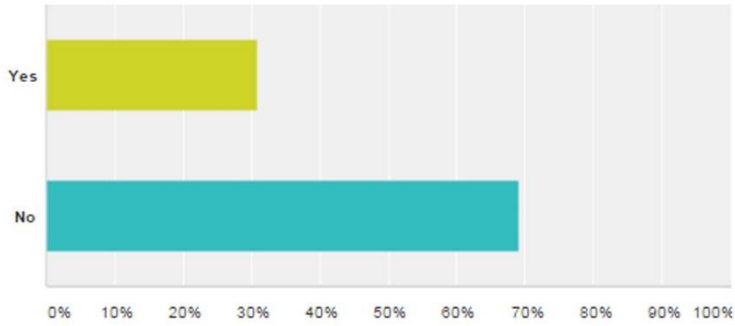

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total | Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| You played enough for the day | 33.33% 14 | 19.05% 8 | 28.57% 12 | 11.90% 5 | 7.14% 3 | 42 | 3.60 |
| The game is too easy | 21.43% 9 | 14.29% 6 | 14.29% 6 | 23.81% 10 | 26.19% 11 | 42 | 2.81 |
| You died to often | 7.14% 3 | 26.19% 11 | 23.81% 10 | 23.81% 10 | 19.05% 8 | 42 | 2.79 |
| The game is too hard | 14.29% 6 | 19.05% 8 | 21.43% 9 | 26.19% 11 | 19.05% 8 | 42 | 2.83 |
| It is too late | 23.81% 10 | 21.43% 9 | 11.90% 5 | 14.29% 6 | 28.57% 12 | 42 | 2.98 |

Question4:

Q4 Customize Export

## Do you mind dying in games?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1




| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 30.95% | 13 |
| No | 69.05% | 29 |
| Total | | 42 |

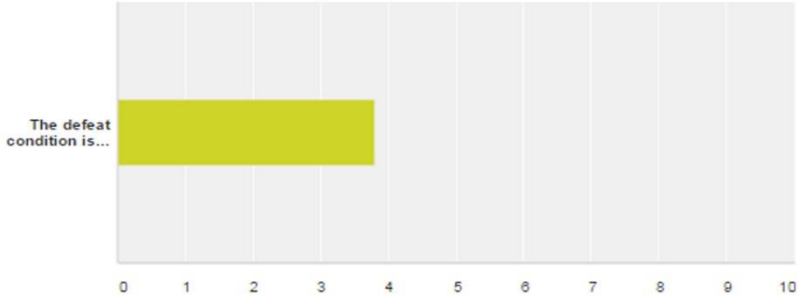
Comments (37)

Question 5:

Q5 Customize Export

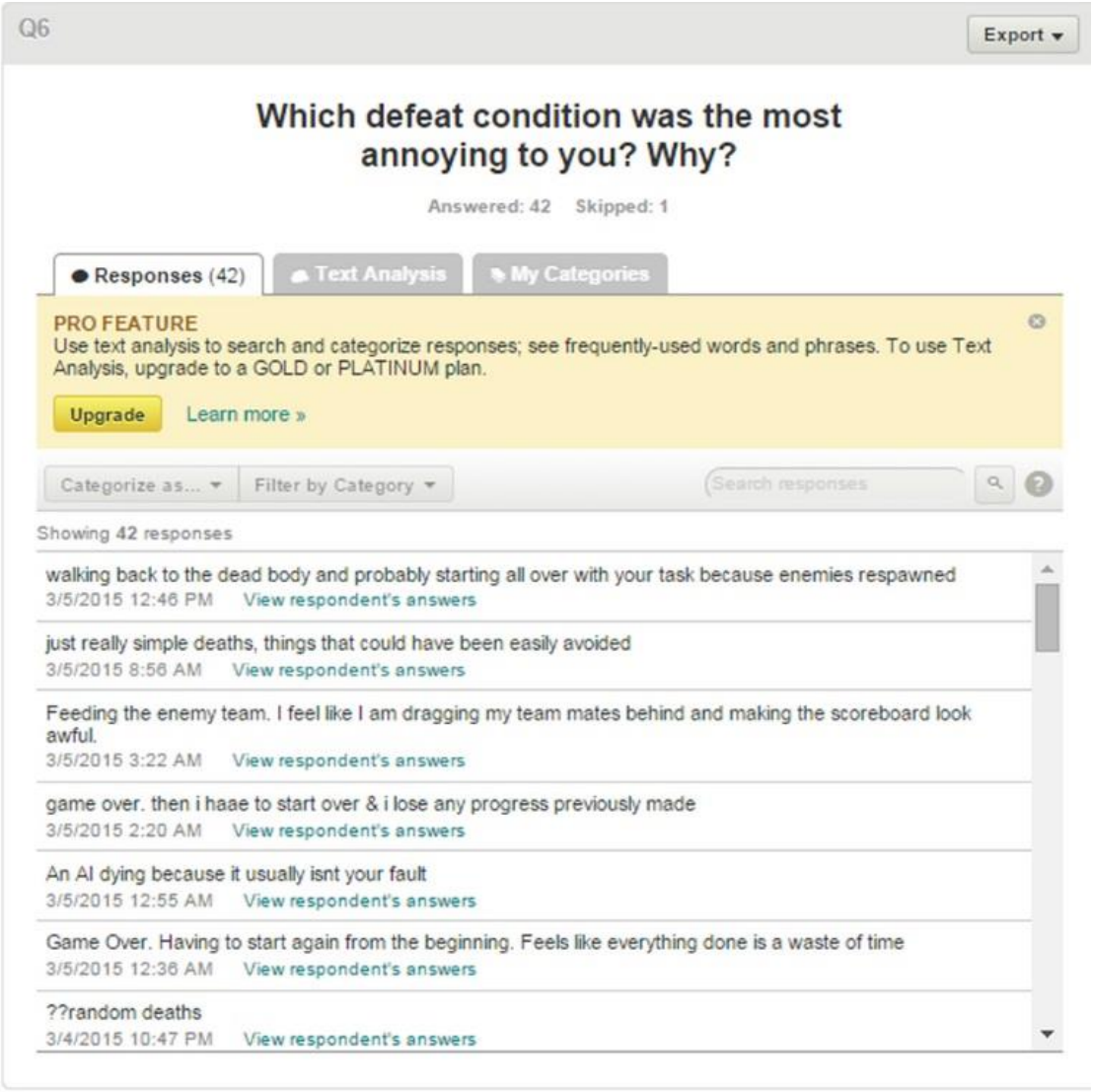
## What do you think about the value of the defeat condition in games (death, respawning, game over etc.)?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1




| | not important at all | (no label) | same as every other game element | (no label) | very important | Total | Weighted Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The defeat condition is... | 4.76% 2 | 7.14% 3 | 21.43% 9 | 38.10% 16 | 28.57% 12 | 42 | 3.79 |

Question 6:




walking back to the dead body and probably starting all over with your task because enemies respawned
3/5/2015 12:46 PM View respondent's answers

just really simple deaths, things that could have been easily avoided
3/5/2015 8:56 AM View respondent's answers

Feeding the enemy team. I feel like I am dragging my team mates behind and making the scoreboard look awful.
3/5/2015 3:22 AM View respondent's answers

game over. then i haae to start over & i lose any progress previously made
3/5/2015 2:20 AM View respondent's answers

An AI dying because it usually isnt your fault
3/5/2015 12:55 AM View respondent's answers

Game Over. Having to start again from the beginning. Feels like everything done is a waste of time
3/5/2015 12:36 AM View respondent's answers

??random deaths
3/4/2015 10:47 PM View respondent's answers

GTA, I get ran over by a car on the highway then walk out of the hospital a few seconds later
3/4/2015 10:10 PM View respondent's answers

NES type of defeat: Game over, you lose everything and have to start all over again no matter how far you got before. That's the worst kind. Good thing we have emulators these days. On the other hand, if you don't lose ANYTHING and it doesn't matter if you die or not... That's not fun either. I mean, what would be the point of being able to die then?
3/4/2015 9:41 PM View respondent's answers

Don't know
3/4/2015 9:23 PM View respondent's answers

Permadeath, theres nothing worse hours of work, forgetting to save and then dying ( See .Hack Series)
3/4/2015 9:23 PM View respondent's answers

cazador in fallout, hard hitting and continued poisoning
3/4/2015 9:14 PM View respondent's answers

Permadeath, Anything that results in wasted time
3/4/2015 9:08 PM View respondent's answers

death because the fact you get so far on one part only to die in a stupid way like getting knocked down by a car
3/4/2015 9:02 PM View respondent's answers

game over after losing so many lives
3/4/2015 8:59 PM View respondent's answers

instant death
3/4/2015 8:56 PM View respondent's answers

Ones in which you are penalised, because it can sometimes be seen as punishing the player for tackling a situation in a certain manner which wasn't necessarily wrong.
3/4/2015 8:55 PM View respondent's answers

Loosing to a 90th minute goal on fifa. Cause usually i've dominated the game
3/4/2015 8:54 PM View respondent's answers

don't know
3/4/2015 8:23 PM View respondent's answers

FIFA. Games will often swing one way or the other, seemingly out of the player's control. Defeat gives the impression of incompetence at the game, yet it occurs with what seems like random abandon.
3/4/2015 7:33 PM View respondent's answers

Death when you have to start from last checkpoint
3/4/2015 7:19 PM View respondent's answers

a
3/4/2015 6:45 PM View respondent's answers

Game over. Have to start all over again.
3/4/2015 5:37 PM View respondent's answers

Dying on a Killstreak, because it stopped my progression
3/4/2015 5:32 PM View respondent's answers

Poison
3/4/2015 5:06 PM View respondent's answers

"Trial and error" in nearly every jump n run game
3/4/2015 4:58 PM View respondent's answers

time over, enemies over run my team but me, undefeatable bosses e.g. morrowind endboss
3/4/2015 4:58 PM View respondent's answers

Regenerating health makes people not plan far ahead.
3/4/2015 4:49 PM View respondent's answers

please see q4
3/4/2015 4:19 PM View respondent's answers

Game over, since I have to start my progress over again
3/4/2015 3:59 PM View respondent's answers

Being killed unreasonably. For instance, shooting an AI thousands of times on target but they don't die, to then be killed yourself within 2 shots.
3/4/2015 3:41 PM View respondent's answers

When game has auto-save (Prince of Persia Sands of time. It saved over a pit so I had to restart the whole game) or the save points come after two difficult bosses and not in the middle.
3/4/2015 3:40 PM View respondent's answers

something like Resident Evil. Death which forces hefty replay
3/4/2015 3:38 PM View respondent's answers

The "you're out of live, but not dead yet" thing in guild wars 2 was massively annoying to me. Tough it was helpful sometimes it was just a timestealer for everyone involved in most cases.
3/4/2015 3:36 PM View respondent's answers

Old generation games where you have a set number of lives, and no matter how far in the game you would loose all your progression. e.g adventures of lolo
3/4/2015 3:34 PM View respondent's answers

Ally health depleted as a defeat condition. The AI functions seperately from the player and often takes more damage because of it sometimes it becomes impossible to win
3/4/2015 3:31 PM View respondent's answers

bugs, cheap deaths, BS etc. bcos i dont feel it's up for my skill to decide
3/4/2015 3:26 PM View respondent's answers

When there is like nothing you can do!
3/4/2015 3:21 PM View respondent's answers

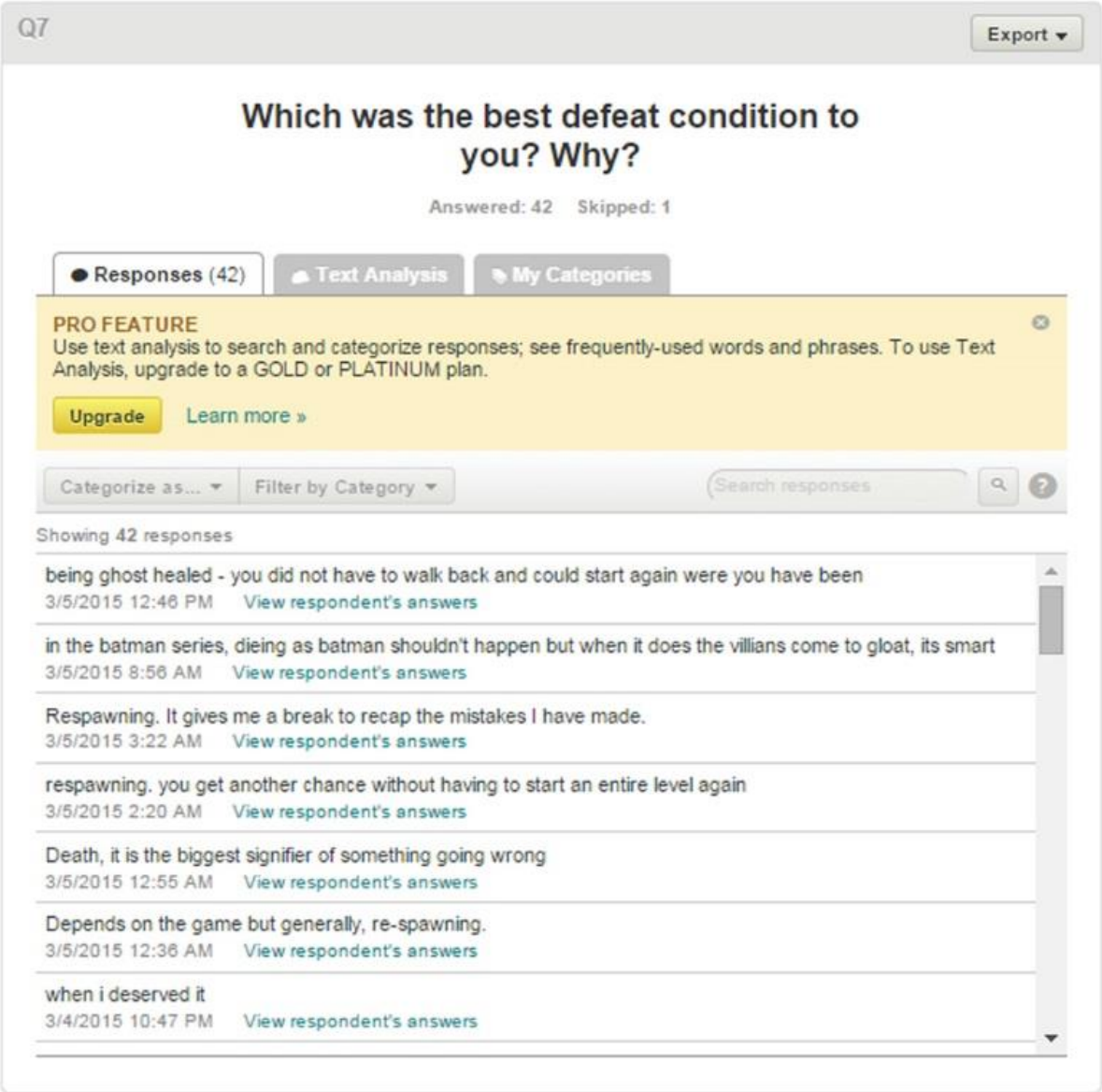
Dying and having to start the game from scratch, or if the last checkpoint/savepoint was quite a ways away, is pretty annoying
3/4/2015 3:19 PM View respondent's answers

Death caused by lag/connection
3/4/2015 3:16 PM View respondent's answers

Respawn, I'd want the defeat to actually matter.
3/4/2015 3:12 PM View respondent's answers

Death by glitched out mechanics. Can't do anything about it.
3/4/2015 3:12 PM View respondent's answers

Question 7:




being ghost healed - you did not have to walk back and could start again were you have been
3/5/2015 12:46 PM View respondent's answers

in the batman series, dieing as batman shouldn't happen but when it does the villians come to gloat, its smart
3/5/2015 8:56 AM View respondent's answers

Respawning. It gives me a break to recap the mistakes I have made.
3/5/2015 3:22 AM View respondent's answers

respawning. you get another chance without having to start an entire level again
3/5/2015 2:20 AM View respondent's answers

Death, it is the biggest signifier of something going wrong
3/5/2015 12:55 AM View respondent's answers

Depends on the game but generally, re-spawning.
3/5/2015 12:36 AM View respondent's answers

when i deserved it
3/4/2015 10:47 PM View respondent's answers

The one in Destiny because it explains how you are revived
3/4/2015 10:10 PM View respondent's answers

Shovel Knight (platformer) does it well: you lose a little money when you die, which you can recollect if you do things right the second time, but the more you die the more you lose. It motivates you to try harder next time - you do want to get that money back so you can buy upgrades.
3/4/2015 9:41 PM View respondent's answers

dont know
3/4/2015 9:23 PM View respondent's answers

Permadeath, as annoying as it is it causes 100% concentration and adds to the realism of a game
3/4/2015 9:23 PM View respondent's answers

large unexpected explosion or hidden booby trap
3/4/2015 9:14 PM View respondent's answers

Anything that maintains momentum within the game
3/4/2015 9:08 PM View respondent's answers

respawning as you get a chance to try again and complete the level
3/4/2015 9:02 PM View respondent's answers

re spawning just carries on from where u left of
3/4/2015 8:59 PM View respondent's answers

respawning
3/4/2015 8:56 PM View respondent's answers

Any one that can allow the player to learn from and/or figure out their mistakes or next strategy.
3/4/2015 8:55 PM View respondent's answers

Dying in battlefield online. It's kinda part of the game and is embedded in the game mode. Plus it helps you improve as a player
3/4/2015 8:54 PM View respondent's answers

don't know
3/4/2015 8:23 PM View respondent's answers

Pokemon. Battles have a large tactical aspect, without being overly punishing or extremely difficult - yet still provide a sense of accomplishment and an obvious sense of in-game progression.
3/4/2015 7:33 PM View respondent's answers

Being revived as you wait a little then can carry on playing
3/4/2015 7:19 PM View respondent's answers

a
3/4/2015 6:45 PM View respondent's answers

Load free savable savegame. Possibility to try hard parts more often without runnig around half an hour before.
3/4/2015 5:37 PM View respondent's answers

Erm...im not sure
3/4/2015 5:32 PM View respondent's answers

Death by sword fight
3/4/2015 5:06 PM View respondent's answers

"Demon Souls/Dark Souls 1&2" and Telltales "The Walking Dead" for example, as death is a main feature of the game itself. No "game over", but some kind of "living with consequences" instead.
3/4/2015 4:58 PM View respondent's answers

still waiting for it...
3/4/2015 4:58 PM View respondent's answers

Death, having to wait for the end of the round makes people more careful/frightened which makes them generally more predictable/manipulable.

3/4/2015 4:49 PM View respondent's answers

fable 2 had my favourite defeat condition of respawning in the same spot and not having to restart the scene
3/4/2015 4:19 PM View respondent's answers

respwaning, since I can continue from where I died.
3/4/2015 3:59 PM View respondent's answers

One which has a learning outcome, that allows progression once you learn how to overcome it,
3/4/2015 3:41 PM View respondent's answers

Uhh... smooth like in Bioshock Infinite. Takes away some resources but revives you at a ok point
3/4/2015 3:40 PM View respondent's answers

VVVVVV or SuperCrateBox. instant respawna
3/4/2015 3:38 PM View respondent's answers

I liked the thing in Dark Souls very much. It was a kind of punishment but never unfair, as you could retrieve everything you lost. Besides you could always choose to leave it, give up and pay your price. Also you even got a chance to earn a bonus by killing the foes on your way.
3/4/2015 3:36 PM View respondent's answers

Games where you simply respawn at the last safe location. Dyling light for exmample you will respawn at the last safe location, however you will still loose items you had used which encourages players to not be reckless with their resources but players will not be severely punished
3/4/2015 3:34 PM View respondent's answers

Death in a puzzle game or platformer as it taught me that my current actions were not correct and the solution was elsewhere
3/4/2015 3:31 PM View respondent's answers

skill/speed challenges, these are things that i can effect and work towards solving
3/4/2015 3:26 PM View respondent's answers

When there is like nothing you can do!
3/4/2015 3:21 PM View respondent's answers

Restarting the same challenge, having to re-do minutes of game time, possibly over and over again can be a reason to stop playing the game.
3/4/2015 3:19 PM View respondent's answers

Better opponents
3/4/2015 3:16 PM View respondent's answers

Game over, see above.
3/4/2015 3:12 PM View respondent's answers

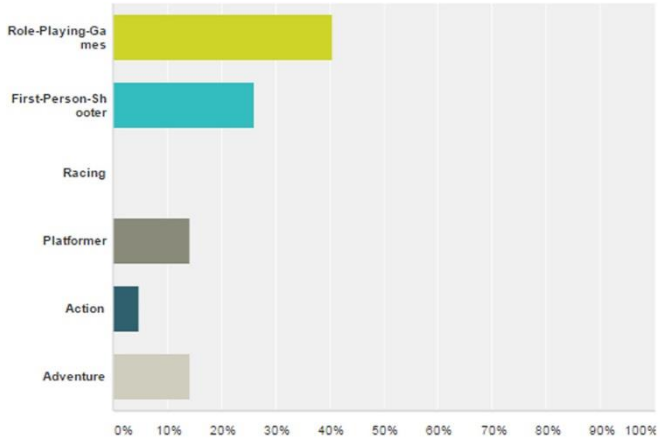
Defeat by a really well designed challege. Why, because once you best that challenge you feel great about it.
3/4/2015 3:12 PM View respondent's answers

Question 8:

Q8 Customize Export

**In which game genre is the design of the defeat condition most important to you?**

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1



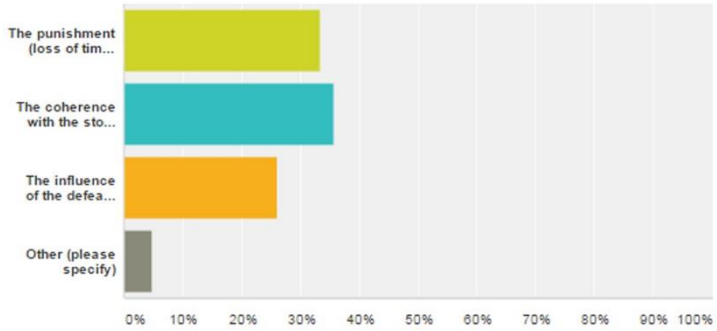

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Role-Playing-Games | 40.48% | 17 |
| First-Person-Shooter | 26.19% | 11 |
| Racing | 0.00% | 0 |
| Platformer | 14.29% | 6 |
| Action | 4.76% | 2 |
| Adventure | 14.29% | 6 |
| Total | | 42 |

Question 9:

Q9 Customize Export

**What do you think needs to be improved on defeat conditions?**

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1




| Answer Choices | | Responses | |
|---|---|---|---|
| The punishment (loss of time, loss of resources, restarting the challenge) | | 33.33% | 14 |
| The coherence with the story of the game | | 35.71% | 15 |
| The influence of the defeat condition on the game | | 26.19% | 11 |
| Other (please specify) | Responses | 4.76% | 2 |
| Total | | | 42 |

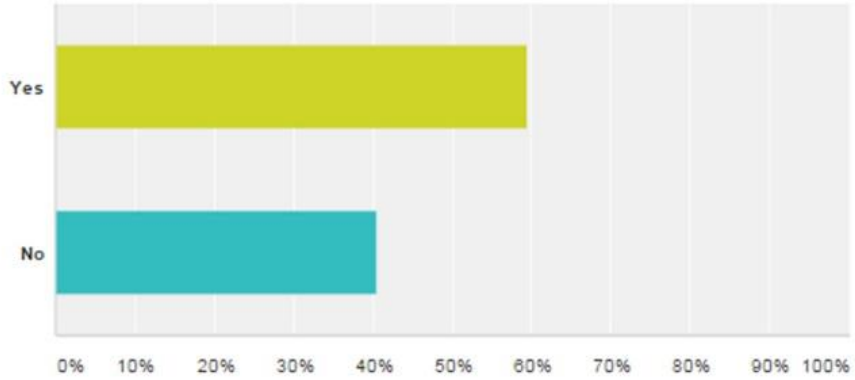
Question 10:

Q10

Customize Export

**Did you ever stop a game because of the defeat condition?**

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1




| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 59.52% | 25 |
| No | 40.48% | 17 |
| Total | | 42 |