

Discipline

Game design

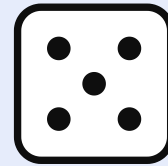
Designs the rules, goals and challenges of a game, board or digital, so that playing it produces the intended experience.

In Spanish

Diseño de juegos

Origin

Salen and Zimmerman (2003); Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004)



What it deals with

A game designer controls only the rules; the experience appears when someone plays. That is why you design by playing and testing again and again.

Principles

Rules

They say what can be done and what you want to achieve.

Play

From the rules comes what people do when they play, which isn't always what was planned.

Experience

What you design, in the end, is how playing feels.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Make a playable prototype, even a paper one, from day one.

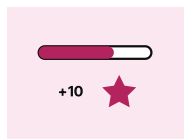
✗ Avoid

Judging a game by its written rules without watching it played.

👁 Don't fall for it

Watch people play without explaining anything: what isn't understood on its own needs redesigning.

Concepts



Concept

Gamification

Using game design elements in something that isn't a game.

Connections

Builds on

■ Cognitive psychology

■ Flow

■ Self-determination theory

Related to

■ Experience design

■ Interaction design

■ Behavioral design

■ Design for children

Authors and works

2003	Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman	Brought together the foundations of the discipline by looking at games as rules, as play and as culture.
2004	Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc and Robert Zubek	Proposed the MDA framework (mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics) to connect what is designed with what is experienced when playing.

Sources

Original sources

- Salen, K., & Zimmerman, E. (2003). Rules of play: Game design fundamentals. MIT Press.
- Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., & Zubek, R. (2004). MDA: A formal approach to game design and game research. In Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI (WS-04-04). AAAI Press. [View source \(https://aaai.org/papers/ws04-04-001-mda-a-formal-approach-to-game-design-and-game-research/\)](https://aaai.org/papers/ws04-04-001-mda-a-formal-approach-to-game-design-and-game-research/)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.