

FORMATS

The format games curation takes can be highly varied, including one-night events, longer festivals, temporary exhibitions, and permanent museum collections and archives. Determining the scope of the particular format you're working in and specific concerns and issues related to that format is an important step in planning the activity. Generally, formats are informed by what type of work you are presenting, the venue in which you are presenting it, your target audience, and the time period of the activity.

Often a project may start with a specific format in mind, for example, you may already have an event or institution or venue in mind to work with, which determines many things about the shape the project will take. However, even within these situations, there are a lot of details to consider and decide upon to focus and refine the focus and long term impact of your activity. In other cases, things like the budget you have, the types of video games you want to include, the spaces you have access to, and the amount of time you have to put into the project can determine what format is most appropriate.

This section offers a list of example format for games curation events to consider, and a list of issues and related questions that are important in judging which format is best for your activity, or the ideal requirements for a specific format you have in mind. Finally, some brief summaries of different past activities highlight the main considerations and problems curators have run into when working in various formats.

Examples of Formats:

- [Game Are For Everyone nights](#) are an example of one-night events.
- The [Biome Gallery](#) is an example of an online gallery space that presents special exhibitions and work by Biome Collective members.
- [Now Play This](#) is a short term festival that has taken place in a gallery space and online.
- [The Blank Arcade](#) is a series of short-term exhibitions held in conference and gallery spaces.
- David Wolinsky's [Don't Die](#) series is an ongoing archive of interviews with people involved in gaming culture.
- [The Strong Museum](#) is a permanent museum and collection of video games as well as other toys and play-related artifacts.

Questions to Consider When Choosing Formats:

- **Budget:** How long can you sustain the activity for, and what equipment costs and other expenses (publication, artist fees, programming, venue staff, etc) can you afford?
- **Venue:** Do you already have access to a particular space for the activity? For how long? How much will it cost to rent a space that suits your needs?
- **Time:** What length of time suits your goals best (one off, temporary, ongoing)? Are you scheduling for a period that overlaps with other similar activity in your area, or presents other challenges to participation? Who will be responsible for promoting the activity within its active period, documenting it, and maintaining the documentation? Is there a plan in place to pass off these responsibilities in case of a change?
- **Durability:** If there are components visitors will need to touch or use, will they be durable or

periodically replaced? Have you incorporated spares into your budget? Is there budget for interfaces to be constructed in a more durable way? Do you have a contingency plan for presenting a work that is broken, run out, or out of order?

- **Safety:** What are potential safety and accessibility risks with the venue and activity? (Low light, flashing light, noise level, stairs, uneven footing, alcohol available, motion controls or VR headsets in close quarters, etc.) Can these risks be mitigated over the entire course of the activity, and are alternatives available for accessibility challenges?
- **Programming:** Are there things like a talk series, opening party, tours, or other programming happening alongside your activity? How do they fit with the curatorial framing, and where do they take place? Do you need to limit who can come along or sell tickets to ensure the venue is not overcrowded?
- **Interpretation:** What is the curatorial framing of your activity? What is your expected audience and the level of familiarity that will inform the framing? How will artist information, label text, and instructions be presented in the space? Are there local or institutional regulations about this, or a printer that is typically used? Will you offer multiple versions to increase access?
- **Participants:** Do your participants need to be present for setup/servicing/facilitating/documenting the work? How will you pay for them to be present? If there is not budget or ability for them to be present, how do you make this a worthwhile opportunity for them, and ensure the way their work is set up meets their standards?
- **Documentation:** What information will you maintain about this activity, and how will it be saved (and backed up) in physical and digital formats? How public will this information be (fully public, available to researchers, etc) and how will it be accessed? Is there any way to make this information more accessible (image description, searchable, etc)? How do you hope people remember this activity, and what do you hope for them to learn from it?

Examples From Experience:

Co-curating the 2016 edition of The Blank Arcade involved working with a small new media gallery space to curate a selection of works that would be sustainable over three months with their usual team of one or two invigilators. The works we were able to select from an open call had to be balanced with our exhibition budget and existing equipment, which also had to cover a small publication, gallery interpretation, an opening event and talk series. While the gallery space was accessible and well-lit, and invigilators were trained to assist or demonstrate works for visitors who would have trouble playing any of the included works, a piece with moving robotic parts was a challenge to keep working throughout the longer exhibition period, though fortunately the artist was local and able to help troubleshoot it when issues arose. Label texts with both artist information and descriptions of how to use the games on display were professionally printed. A photographer was hired to document the events through photography and the curator also photographed the exhibition setup and created a diagram of it prior to the opening, and recorded survey responses from visitors about their experience. The publication, which featured interpretive texts for each featured game, as well as an essay from both curators, was freely available in the gallery and digital copies are hosted on each curator's website.

Working with We Throw Switches on Games Are For Everyone Nights V and VI, I was able to curate highly experimental and ephemeral approaches to displaying experimental first-person horror games. Because the event was only a few hours long, durability was not a significant concern and visitors were encouraged to fully engage with the environment created around the game. The event was funded and number of visitors managed through ticket sales. In the venue, the lights were low and the footing was occasionally uneven, due to it being a historical building then used for concerts and

parties, so special care had to be taken to reduce trip hazards, leave enough of the floor clear for crowds, and offer sufficient seating to encourage engagement with longer games. The sale of alcohol also limited the audience for the event. Information on the artworks and curatorial framing was provided by both illuminated signs provided by We Throw Switches and texts provided by the artists in the space, or selected and contributed by the curator. These were presented in the manner of “feelies” or props to enhance the environment the game was experienced in. This event was primarily documented through photographs and diagrams of the space before and during the activity, as well as visitor observation and note-taking.

Working with Now Play This to feature a zine library at their annual festival involved curating a set of publications related to the themes of the festival and working with zine distros, online shops and creators to gather the publications by the exhibition date. It also involved working with the director to gather functionally appropriate furniture, like bookshelves, sofas, chairs and crafting tables for the zine area, as well as a photocopier and craft supplies that had to be replenished throughout the activity. Clear labelling and signage was important to separate the area for reading zines and the area for zine-making. A system to record lost or damaged zines was also developed. A schedule to ensure the area was always supervised during the festival was also essential to minimize lost or damaged publications, and to facilitate contributions to the festival zine. This activity was documented through photography and a spreadsheet used to document the included zines, as well as a zine made in the library space throughout the festival which documented the festival's events program and visitor responses. The zines from the library are also now a travelling collection available for other events.

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