



# OREGON GAME PROJECT CHALLENGE

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **So what is the Oregon Game Project Challenge (OGPC)?**

OGPC is a program that uses game development as a means of engaging students in various STEM/STEAM disciplines while having loads of fun. OGPC uses games as the medium to bring it all together.

### **Why Games?**

Games sometimes get a bad rap, but they are no worse than any other medium. TV, movies, and even books range in quality from dumb and objectionable to thought provoking and inspiring. The same goes for games. Vegging out for eight hours a day in front of an Xbox is probably not a good life choice, but nor is watching eight hours of daytime TV.

What is different about games is that they are interactive. And because they demand viewer involvement, many people find them much more engaging than being the audience for non-interactive media. OGPC seeks to make use of this attraction to drive learning. A large number of kids are already passionate about games - why not encourage them to learn skills and develop problem solving skills through creating their own?

Creating games requires a wide range of artistic, technical and soft skills. Because of their passion for what they are creating, many participants are inspired to spend countless hours studying advanced programming concepts and learning new art skills to bring their ideas to life.

### **What Do Teams Do?**

Each year, OGPC announces a new theme (examples of past themes include *"Space Race"*, *"Internal Obstacles"* and *"What Makes a Hero?"*) A team's primary objective is to build a game that explores that theme and share it at the OGPC main event. To build their game, teams must design the game play rules and goals, write a story and develop characters, create art for the visuals, record sound and music and write computer code to make it all work. Then, at the main event, they must present their work to professional judges and "sell" their product.

Game creation through OGPC encompasses the entire STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) focus in one unified program. It bridges disciplines in way most academic courses do not and encourages students with differing strengths to work together.

## **How does my student get involved?**

Your student can either join a team at a local school or sometimes through other organizations. If no team is around, they can form a new one with as few as two people (though we generally encourage students to include more people to get the best experience). Students learn about the challenge at the Game Jam kickoff event, and work on creating the game throughout the season until the Main Event in April.

## **How can I get involved?**

You don't necessarily need to do anything except support your student! If you are interested, you can coach or help out with a team. This mostly entails guiding the students, helping them if conflicts arise, and ensuring that any questions are answered. You can help out without any game development experience of your own. Simply by answering questions and directing students to YouTube or other internet sites to find tutorials or other information can make a huge difference.

We can also use volunteers at the Main Event. These people just help things to run smoothly and on schedule. We rely on our great volunteers to make our events possible!

We also operate on the graciousness of our sponsors. We are always looking for partners to support us with money, in-kind donations, or items to use as prizes and giveaways. If you work for a company that has programs that fit with our needs, consider making them aware of us. We'd be glad to answer any questions or provide materials outlining our needs.

## **How does the season actually work?**

After the Game Jam kickoff event, students will immediately be able to go to sessions for learning about game design including hands-on experience coming up with ideas and refining them into a design. At the same time, coaches and mentors can receive training on what to expect during the season and how to make their teams successful.

Once the event is over, students work on their own until the end of the season. Some schools/teams meet after school once or twice per week, some coaches who are also teachers might incorporate the work into related classes. Other teams might just meet at team members' homes as needed and work on their own time. There is no structure imposed by OGPC so each group can figure out what works best. The coach's or mentor's job is to help the members work together effectively, removing roadblocks as needed, so they can do their best work. Coaches and mentors can assist with how to use tools, how to organize ideas, or how certain processes work, but all work needs to be performed by the students.

## **My child has never created a game. Where would s/he start?**

Typically, ideas from the Game Jam will carry over into final ideas so some of their design work will already be complete at the Game Jam. Team members will complete their design,

then decide who is responsible for different items like graphics and sound. No single member needs to know how to do everything. A successful team should include:

- **Artist:** This person creates the pictures used in the background, the moveable images for characters or items (sprites), or maybe 3d models.
- **Musician:** This person creates music for the game. Not all games use music, but they make a better experience when it's there.
- **Programmer:** This person writes code, or uses visual tools like Scratch or GameMaker
- **Sound creator:** This person makes any sound effects, such as footsteps, picking up an item, power up, or whatever else is needed.
- **Writer:** Most games tell a story. The writer creates the descriptions, character dialog, and any other elements that tell that story.

If no one is starting out as a programmer, the visual tools like Scratch or GameMaker require little or no typing, and there are many YouTube videos to get you started. Programming, music composing, drawing, and other skills require specialized software, but fortunately much of this can be done with free apps. Most teams never need to spend any money to create their game. Even tools that cost money usually have a free version for student or non-commercial use. Many teams find it helpful to use Microsoft OneDrive, Google Drive, or Dropbox to keep their work safe and accessible so they don't lose it on a flash drive. Below is a list of some software to get you started. There are other free tools available, and some groups may choose to use paid or donated non-free software.

## **Can my student just find pictures online for the game?**

In addition to or instead of using tools to create sound and image assets, some teams prefer to search online. There is no rule that students must create all assets, \*however\* all assets must be free to use (public domain or creative commons licensed). Also, teams must not take credit for other's work and should disclose the source of materials used.

Using Google/Bing image searches is generally discouraged as it can be difficult to determine if a file has an appropriate license policy. The following websites are good places to find resources that are OK to use:

- FreeSound.org
- OpenGameArt.org
- Jsfxr (<http://github.grumdrig.com/jsfxr/>) - Generate 8-bit sound effects

## **Our family uses a Mac. Is this going to be a problem?**

There is no requirement for games to be Windows or any other specific platform. Students have brought games for Windows, Mac, iPad, Android, Oculus Rift, and even custom hardware. The main requirement is that students bring all necessary hardware to play their game as nothing will be provided. They will not need to play their game on any other machine, and once they setup their game they will not need to move it for judging. Some teams use screen capture software to record videos of their games so they can be shared on YouTube. This is completely optional, but makes it easier to show off a game while making a last-minute fix!

## **How does the Main Event and judging work?**

At the end of the season, students will bring their work (and computers/laptops) to the Main Event to show it off. Much of the fun revolves around playing each other's games and seeing how others interpreted the theme. There are several sets of judges who will circulate to evaluate the game based on technical prowess, adherence to the theme, and how much fun it is to play. The judging criteria is released in advance and includes a list of achievements that correspond to points. An example would be "Have someone from outside of your team test your game" for two points or "Compose original music" for five points. At the end, the points are added up to determine the winners.

## **How is the judging kept fair across different ages and abilities?**

First, the teams are split into middle school and high school levels. Second, first-year teams can be considered for a special "Rookie" category prize in addition to other prizes. Third, there are prizes given for Game Design, Art and Assets, Theme and Style, Professionalism, Programming, and other focus areas. Some teams will prioritize art over story, or programming over music. The different prizes work to create more opportunities to recognize the many great games that are entered.

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We'd love to hear from you! Contact us with any questions:

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