



# COOPERATION IN GAMES



## WORKING WITH OTHERS TO ACCOMPLISH SHARED GOALS AND BENEFIT EVERYONE.

Cooperation means working with others to achieve shared goals and benefit everyone. Humans can be selfish and competitive, sure, but it's more instinctual for us to cooperate. In fact, cooperation is a huge reason we've been successful as a species. Some game developers have leveraged the power of cooperation to tackle huge challenges, like in *Foldit* and *Sea Hero Quest*, which transform individual "work" into big data to fight disease and push forward scientific knowledge. Studies show that playing video games in co-op mode can lead to cooperative behaviors in the real world, and can even help negate the effects of violent content. Another perk: coordinated action and movement releases endorphins, giving players a mood boost. Players can cooperate with each other on a team against another group of players, or with each other against the game. In many RPGs, it's also possible for players to cooperate with a group of non-player characters (NPCs) toward a common goal.

### ELEMENTS TO ADD

- + Cooperative play style rather than competitive, or at least a combination of both.
- + Multi-player options.
- + In single-player RPGs, the ability for players to form teams of characters with complementary skills and strengths.
- + The ability for players to help other characters (for example, by healing them), and vice versa.
- + The option or requirement to pool all players' resources and knowledge in order to win.
- + In social games, a culture that rewards cooperation and reminds players to consider their reputation.

### ELEMENTS TO LEAVE OUT

- Single-player mode as the only option.
- An emphasis on ranking individual players rather than teams.
- Mechanics that force players to turn against each other.
- Situations where players end up "out" or "dead" and can't be helped by others.
- Big inequalities among players in power, resources, and status.

## COMMON PITFALLS

### FAILURE TO TEST

When designing for cooperation, designers should routinely check in throughout development to ensure that the win-state or end goal of the game is conducive to cooperative behaviors. For example, in many team-based games the team member who captures the most flags or gets the most kills gets an additional bonus. By introducing a competitive element into a cooperative frame, designers are setting themselves up for failure by encouraging (via the reward bonus) uncooperative behavior.

### LACK OF BALANCE

Pay attention to balance. Players do not need to have identical abilities but their abilities should be equally meaningful. For example, playing as Tails in *Sonic the Hedgehog* can be incredibly frustrating because Tails is frequently left behind or otherwise inactive.

### FRIENDLY FIRE

Just because something is framed as being cooperative or team-based doesn't mean players will play that way. Part of play is exploring the boundaries and so uncooperative behaviors - like team killing - may occur even if that behavior is not rewarded or is even punished. Consider designing the game so that teammates cannot be a detriment to one another, such as including friendly-fire settings, or designing the game so that harm is impossible, like in *Journey*.

## GAME GENRES & TYPES

 MMO & MOBA

 Social Impact

 RPG

 Social Simulation

 Cooperative Play

 Party

## SPECIFIC MECHANICAL REFERENCES

When a player makes too many mistakes in *Guitar Hero*, another player can **help, heal, or resurrect** the bandmate.

When **players fight together** in a pick-up dungeon or a guild raid against creatures in *World of Warcraft*.

When players try their individual best to boost the overall team score, such as in *Dance Dance Revolution's* **team play mode**.

When all players **work together to solve a problem**, such as in *Fold-it*, *Forbidden Island*, & *Forbidden Desert*.

In *Journey*, when more experienced players **act as guides** for newer players.

When players **work tactically as a squad** to defeat another group of live players, such as in *Overwatch*, *League of Legends*, and *Splatoon*.

When players **pool skills and resources** to win as a group, such as in *Forbidden Island*, and *Forbidden Desert*.

When players must **manage a well-balanced party of characters**, such as in single-player RPG's like *Dragon Age*, and *Mass Effect*.

When players from an *Overwatch* team get to **collectively choose and reward** the most valuable player (MVP) on the team that round. **win as a group**, such as in *Forbidden Island*, and *Forbidden Desert*.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR COOPERATION

Lewis-Evans, B. (2015). Antisocial Behavior in Games: How Can Game Design Help? Game Developers Conference. <https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1021799/Anti-Social-Behavior-in-Games>

Kim, A. J. (2014). The coop revolution: 7 rules for cooperative game design. G Summit San Francisco. <https://youtu.be/NlayQD4qcYc>

Honeycut, J.R. (2016). Cooperative games: advice from the experts. League of Gamemakers. <http://www.leagueofgamemakers.com/cooperative-games-advice-from-the-experts/>

Kumar, M. (2012). 5 problems with co-op game design (and possible solutions). Gamasutra. [https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/181576/5\\_problems\\_with\\_coop\\_game\\_design\\_and\\_possible\\_solutions.php](https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/181576/5_problems_with_coop_game_design_and_possible_solutions.php)

Toups, Z., Kerne, A., & Hamilton, W. (2009). Game design principles for engaging cooperative play: Core mechanics and interfaces for non-mimetic simulation of fire emergency response. In Proceedings of the 2009 ACM SIGGRAPH Symposium on Video Games (pp. 71-78). ACM. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ddd1/3511a23b2b0fa59886ba4ca3ebadf48badf4.pdf>