

# Mind Games

When it comes to computer games, First Person Shooters (FPS) don't have the best reputation. Ever since the days of Wolfenstein and Doom, these so called "violent video games" - or as some dramatically insist on referring to them, "murder simulators" - have been blamed by some for a perceived increase in violence in society at large.

This trend is particularly true in America, where gun related violence is far more common than here in New Zealand due to the difference in gun ownership policy between the two countries.

In many of these games the most you actually see of the character you control is their hand and the gun they are holding. Your interaction with the world and most who inhabit it is limited to causing as much destruction as possible, and killing before you yourself are killed.

It's difficult to imagine much good coming out of such an inherently hostile situation; if such games indeed hone anything in those who play them, many people would argue, it is building on their killer instinct.

Writing this article as somebody who has played probably more than his fair share of such games over the years, who like the vast majority of his fellow players is a peaceful and law abiding citizen, I feel I have to say that such a generalisation could not be

further from the truth. Playing violent video games does not make you more violent as a person. There is a body of scientific research that suggests that playing them is not only mostly harmless, but may even be good for your brain in a number of different ways.

Multitasking, or the ability to perform a number of different activities at one time, is one area of day-to-day functioning which has been demonstrated to actually benefit from time spent playing FPS games.

While playing your average game of this genre, you are constantly bombarded with a number of different choices to make and tasks to complete, and being called upon to make these decisions with a high degree of accuracy and efficiency if you are to be able to play the game well.

It is interesting to note that studies have demonstrated that people who regularly play FPS games scored better in tests measuring their multitasking abilities compared to non-gamers, being able to concentrate on more activities at once and perform them with less errors.

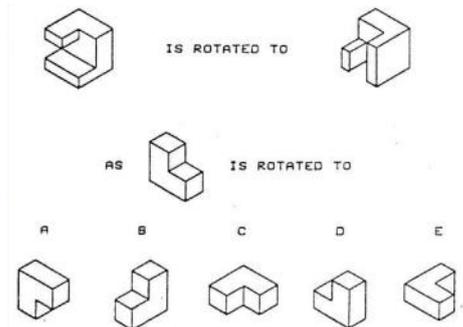
It is a widely held belief that spending time in front of the screen, be it a computer monitor or a television set, can be detrimental to your eyesight.

Again, scientific testing has demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case; people who regularly play computer games

have been shown to be able to see a greater amount of fine detail than those who do not, and also be able to detect smaller changes in contrast than their nongaming counterparts.

This could translate to being able to read the fine print on documents or medication bottles more easily, or being better able to see and react to cars and other objects when driving in fog and low light conditions.

Other tests have shown that FPS players score better on tests designed to measure their spatial awareness. These tests involve identifying the correct rotated shape from a selection of different choices, similar to the sample given below.



*In this example, "D" is the correct answer.*

It has to be pointed out that, as with many things in life, moderation here is the key; it is possible to have "too much of a good thing". However, as part of a balanced schedule of activities, FPS gaming is really so much more than just wasted time.

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