

Stuck in the Game

107, 108, 109, 110. 110 times you've played one level in a stupid video game. Its upbeat but now vexatious music plays silently in your head as you hover your game cursor over the play again button. Will you continue?

Improvement is a weak word to describe your goal in this game now. Improvement: is it passing that checkpoint? Is it finally being able to brag to everybody you play against? What is it?

"I just want to be better." Better?

"Better at this game." Better how?

"I want to be better than the rest." Better than who?

The term "better" after long hours of playing this game makes this goal of yours more unachievable the more undefinable it becomes. Either you reach that checkpoint or keep wondering if you got "better."

The number one rule about improving your gameplay is improving your muscle memory. The improvement of your muscle memory is directly correlated to how well you can perform the movements that conform to this one gamemode.

Now imagine working on one level for five hours, only to realize you made no progress from the first time you played this level. In the beginning, you thought it was a gift to be this talented. You thought this game was easy, you thought you understood every in and out of this game. But as you continue playing to break your highscore, you realize that score was your average, and improving feels insufficient with each hundredth of a percent you get better. Do you continue playing?

You peer into the lower corner of your screen; what pops up after finishing the level is the pixelated number of 85.49%. This is the accuracy of your hits within the game. The game tells you this is the equivalent to the letter grade of a C... a C?¹ The ranking system is an infinite race. You keep running without knowing how far behind nor far

¹ Juliane M. von der Heiden, Beate Braun, Kai W. Müller, and Boris Egloff, "The Association Between Video Gaming and Psychological Functioning," NCBI, last modified July 26, 2019, [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6676913](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6676913).

ahead you are. The only thing that gives you that tiny bit of satisfaction is this percentage.

(?) You will remember this.²

You will remember that this is tied directly to how good your muscle memory is. This is how good you are. Your muscles, your person. After a while, you become paranoid as to if this muscle memory is worth building.

You want to search up the highest scores, to see if you're good enough. You ask your friends for their scores, to see if you're good enough. Then you look at your score. Are you good enough?

[Search... how to improve muscle memory for gaming]

4 Critical Muscle Memory Training Tips for Gamers³

"1. Only Perfect Practice Makes Perfect"

The grind for perfected muscle memory is all about daily check ups. This is similar to a plant; you need to have the time to check in on it or its growth will be stunted. However, the thing that stops you from growth are those hiccups; the hiccups within your muscle memory. You have to be able to train around each and every one of them until your fingers are so indented into the keyboard that the letters WASD are completely rubbed off the keycaps. And if you can't reach that level, you're not perfect. You've made no progress.

"2. Isolate the Mechanic You Intend to Develop"

At this point you should be able to locate your issue. So what is it? Don't worry, you're completely alone in this process. If you start developing skills for the wrong muscle I can only not help you at all. Have you ever wondered how muscle memory works? Even though you are able to develop the skills for the wrong muscle, it's not like it will be worth the work you put in because it ends up fading away if you don't keep training it.⁴ How wonderful!

² The "(?)" (insert character) will remember this" is common in episodic adventure video games which indicates that a character is impacted by your actions and will react in a certain way later in the game. This impact can affect the ending or what happens later in the story.

³ "4 Critical Muscle Memory Training Tips For Gamers," Esport Labs, last modified March 25, 2021, esportlabs.com/4-critical-muscle-memory-training-tips-for-gamers.

⁴ Gretchen Reynolds, "How 'Muscle Memory' May Help Keep Us Fit," The New York Times, last modified March 31, 2020, nytimes.com/2020/03/25/well/move/coronavirus-exercise-muscles-fitness.html.

“3. Use Adaptogens”

Just as plants need to get nutrients from soil, muscles require that too. Oh wait, I forgot to mention... this whole “training” and “scientific research” doesn’t matter too much because there are formulas of adaptogens you can buy. Ah yes, the time you spent putting into this game from the two previous steps should have been time putting into your part-time job. Instead of wasting your time being a lazy slacker, you could have boosted your focus, reflexes, and reaction time all with the help of a 30 dollar pill.⁵ Increase your win rate, easy!

“4. More Short Practice Sessions”

Did I mention you have to practice yet? Oh... ignore that third section because maybe you should be practicing. *Tsk*. Don’t sue this article over not giving practical advice. I forgot to mention, this isn’t about the section where I talked to you about how “only perfect practice makes perfect.” No, silly. Because now, you are required to put your full attention to your gaming and your gaming only. I still can’t believe you aren’t a professional at this after the amount of time you put into this game.

Is this really what the competitive nature of video games are like? Was your awareness of the unrealistic expectations of casual video gamers really not all in your head?

You remember the time you first decided to play this game last year because you saw your friend playing the game. Remember all the fun times you guys had together? Having fun... isn’t that why you should play video games?

You reflect on your own relationship with the game. What’s the point of feeling distress at something that’s supposed to bring you joy? You become aware of the damaging habits that are sustained through the toxic mindset within these competitive video games.

You switch your cursor back and forth between the exit and the continue button. You know what the best decision for you will be. You decide to quit the game.

⁵ These are real pills (VALIS) and it’s not even just one you have to take daily, it’s 4 PER serving.

Bibliography

“4 Critical Muscle Memory Training Tips For Gamers.” Esport Labs. March 25, 2021.

esportlabs.com/4-critical-muscle-memory-training-tips-for-gamers.

The main purpose of this article is to provide gamers with tips to improve their gameplay through muscle memory. The organization, Esport Labs, main focus is to help players' self-awareness in their games. However, these articles are written specifically towards gamers to feed into the idea that there is an easy solution that everybody can follow to be able to reach the top leaderboards.

Heiden, J. M., Braun, B., Müller, K. W., and Egloff, B. “The Association Between Video Gaming and Psychological Functioning.” NCBI. July 26, 2019.

ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6676913.

Within my essay, I annotated this source because I was inspired by the research done on gaming towards mental health. I specifically labelled the part I talked about the grading within this one game, *osu!*, which tends to be very strict towards the ranking of players due to its raw scoring. This is also an article that proves my point through its scientific research for the bad mental health that constantly affects gamers who play video games.

Reynolds, Gretchen. “How ‘Muscle Memory’ May Help Keep Us Fit.” *The New York Times*. March 31, 2020.

nytimes.com/2020/03/25/well/move/coronavirus-exercise-muscles-fitness.html.

The main purpose of this article was to explain to readers how they could, at home, exercise their muscles through the use of previously developed muscle memory. The reason I used this *New York Times* article is to back my writing up with research for the second part of my mock article. I wanted to make sure that my statements about muscle memory were all factual.

Intention Statement

Stuck in the Game is a lyrical essay about the damage of competitive video games towards mental health. I chose to write this lyrical essay in second person because I wanted the reader to live through my experience as their own. I thought it was important for the speaker to be involved within the story especially for the mock article portion of my essay that talks specifically at the person reading it. Examples of techniques I used within this lyrical essay include rhetorical questions, metaphors, colloquial language, paradoxes, and an onomatopoeia. Throughout the essay, I tend to use colloquial language to focus on the personal level I try to put the reader on. The colloquial language itself is deeply based on my own speaking voice and I tried to make that clear within my essay. The language tends to transition into rhetorical questions because I want the reader to understand my position of uncertainty when it comes to comparisons between me and other people, and I also really wanted to demonstrate how I usually progress certain situations in my head in real life. Along with rhetorical questions, I tend to use paradoxes. I typically tend to be really sarcastic when it comes to talking about serious topics, and especially with generally contradictory topics that are talked about by people who are unaware of the reaction of their audience. With my use of colloquial language through the other parts of my essay, this is the reason I use paradoxes in the mock article section. When it came to metaphors, they were there to represent emotions and emphasize points that are significant towards the progression of the essay timeline. For the one onomatopoeia, I used it to better describe the emotion of the original Esports article writer. Ultimately, my goal was to make it obvious that there was a specific way I felt when trying to write specific lines. Next, all of my research sources were used for different reasons. For the first, I used it to help my argument to describe the degrading mental health of gamers. The second one I used on the specifics of muscle memory usage. The final was the outline of my mock article; which was there to prove that these gaming articles believe in the miracle that every gamer can easily become a competitive champion and avoid the deep understanding of their audience that tend to struggle with mental health from competitive gaming. As I said earlier, my essay is structured as a timeline from little understanding of the effect of this fictional game on mental health to a final awakening of awareness towards how dangerous competitive mindsets can become. During peer review, my readers enjoyed the mock article section since it dug through the deep thoughts of the insensitive writers of the original Esports article. It was a new style of writing for me specifically, and it had a lot of stylistic writing within it and different creative arrangements.