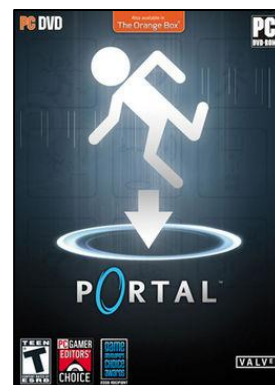


Portal: Impact Guide

For Players

Portal and *Portal 2* are games developed by Valve Corporation available for consoles and PCs. The games are first-person puzzle solving games but also provide rich narrative development, interesting characters, and have developed a strong cultural impact including merchandise and a popular series of internet memes. The popularity of the *Portal* series stems from the quality of the games and from the way the games teach players how to play them so seamlessly. Indeed, *Portal* is one of the very best games at presenting players with embodied learning and scaffolded instruction – a model for 21st century teaching.



How to use this guide: Players – We’ve identified several interesting or important themes in the game. As you play through, reflect on your play. How have you experienced these themes? Are there other important ones present in the game? What kind of impact does your play allow in the larger world? Answer the questions we’ve provided – but feel free to add more at www.gamesandimpact.org.

Warning: Questions contain some spoilers about the games.

Theme: Problem Solving

Portal begins with a player alone in a test chamber; solving puzzles is a key mechanic for both the gameplay and for the story of the game. Puzzles gradually get more difficult as players are given tools sequentially in order to build on top of their previous solutions.

Game

- Why do you think the game doesn’t give you the portal gun immediately? What is the point of limiting you in the early part of the game?
- Why do you think the test chambers are designed the way they are? What do you think the game’s designers are trying to teach you?
- At the end of the 19 test chambers, you begin the second part of the game where you get to face GLaDOS directly. Was the entire game just a tutorial? Is that effective? Did the juxtaposition between test chambers and the “behind-the-scenes” area of Aperture give you problems?

Player

- How did you solve the puzzles? Did you primarily use a specific strategy, trial-and-error, or intuition? Why did you choose the technique(s) you did?
- Did you ever get stuck on a puzzle? What happened? How did you solve it? What caused you to get stuck – was it an assumption you had, or a problem with the game itself?
- Have you played through the game more than once? Do you think you could solve it faster the second (or third) time through? What have you learned? Is the game less “fun” if you can solve it

more easily?

What was your favorite test? What was your least favorite test? Why? Is there any relationship between them?

World

- How do you solve problems in the real world? Is it different than how you approached Portal? Why? Does problem solving in games differ than real-world problem solving? How?*
- Is there anything you can learn from Portal that you can use in your everyday world? What is it? How will you use it?*
- How would you describe this game to someone who has never played it? Would you recommend it to others? Why? What do you think they can learn that is valuable?*

Theme: Spatial Awareness

Part of the marketing campaign for the original *Portal* was the tagline: “Now you’re thinking with portals.” The games use three-dimensional space in unique and challenging ways; players must rethink their orientation to the world in order to solve many of the puzzles throughout the games.

Game

- The game uses space differently than many other games. Do you think they do it effectively? Was it clear how portals work? How could they have changed it? Would it have made it better?*
- Many of the puzzles require numerous steps to complete. How did the game let you know? Were the signs necessary, or did they make the game too easy? Why might designers have included those signs?*

Player

- Did you ever experience the “thinking with portals” phenomenon? What did it feel like?*
- Did you have any difficulty thinking about space in ways the game wanted you to (momentum, orientation)? How did you overcome this difficulty?*
- Did you try any experiments with portals and the space (like making an endless fall, or trying to get a companion cube to hover between portals)? Why? Was it fun? Did it help you in solving the actual puzzles? How?*

World

- How do you feel about three-dimensional space? Do you consider yourself good at manipulating objects in 3D? Did this game help you re-think space? How might that affect your everyday experiences?*
- If you could use one feature of the game in the everyday world, what would it be? How would you use it? Why did you choose that one?*
- Should Portal be used to teach physics? Why or why not? Would you recommend it to teachers?*
- Did playing the game change how you see the world around you? How? Why do you think it did so? Is that a good thing?*

Theme: Tone/Voice

Players are introduced to the character of GLaDOS as a benign computer guide in the early parts of the game, but eventually realize her malicious intentions through her continued monologue. GLaDOS serves as the main antagonist, but is also a source of great humor and provide a kind of narration for the player's progress through the game.

Game

- *Why do you think the designer's included a "narrator" in the game?*
- *Do you think GLaDOS should have been hostile right away? Why do you think the designers chose to have her slowly reveal her malevolence? Was this effective?*
- *At the beginning of Chamber 9, GLaDOS states that the "next test is impossible." Why do you think she lied?*
- *What was the cake? Why did GLaDOS promise it to you?*
- *The player character, Chell, is never shown (except through your own portals) and never speaks. Why do you think the designers chose this kind presentation? How did it juxtapose with GLaDOS?*

Player

- *What was your first impression of the voice guiding you through the game? When did you notice there was something "off" about her?*
- *Did listening to GLaDOS help you or hinder you? Was it motivating to prove her wrong? Did you care?*
- *Did you believe her when she claimed test 9 was impossible? Did it make the chamber harder for you?*
- *Did you feel sorry for GLaDOS?*

World

- *Why do we choose the words we choose? How can you tell when someone has different motivations than they let on?*
- *What do you do when you feel manipulated? How can this game help you deal with those situations?*