



Rulebook

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The German Developer Award (Deutscher Entwicklerpreis) is the longest-standing award recognizing outstanding achievements in the development of digital games from German-speaking countries. Digital games are considered cultural assets and, as such, constitute an essential part of cultural identity. As an interactive medium, they reflect our society. These rules and regulations aim to present the jury process and award categories in a clear and transparent manner. This document is updated annually to reflect the evolving nature of the medium.

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Submission Phase

The submission phase begins each summer. Games can be submitted online via the form on <https://www.deutscherentwicklerpreis.de/einreichen/>.

The submission deadline for the German Developer Award 2026 (Deutscher Entwicklerpreis 2026) is **September 4, 2026 at 16:00 noon**. Jury deliberations begin at this point at the latest.

A **submission fee of €75 (net) per category and game** applies starting from the first category selected. The fee will be invoiced after the submission is completed and is used to cover jury administration costs. This fee is due even if the submitted project/game is not nominated or is excluded from evaluation due to clearly documented reasons. Invoicing occurs after the submission deadline. Exempt from the fee are submissions for the Ubisoft Newcomer Award (focused on student teams) and the special categories of the German Developer Award.

A **category-specific justification** is required for each submission. For each selected category (e.g., Best Game Design, Best Visuals), submitters must briefly explain why their game excels in that category. These justifications help the jury assess the strengths of each game more accurately.

Eligibility Requirements

In general, all games released on the market between September 1 of the previous year and October 15 of the current year are eligible. Release is defined as either **the start of Early Access or the full release (version 1.0)**, but **not both**. A game **may only be submitted once** in this regard, even if it has significantly evolved since Early Access. Submitters must choose one of these milestones.

Games and projects are only eligible if they meet the following criteria:

1. The game/project was predominantly developed in the German-speaking region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland). This includes a majority of the development/creative team being based in the DACH region and the bulk of the budget being spent there.
2. A current version of the game must be made available to the organizer by the submission deadline. This version will be thoroughly tested and evaluated by the jury. Please do not submit games with severe bugs or that are incomplete, as they are unlikely to be considered.
3. Games containing unconstitutional content are excluded.
4. A game cannot be submitted if it has already been entered in a previous year. **Exceptions apply** (see below).

Clarifications

Re 1) If it is unclear whether a game was predominantly developed in the German-speaking region, the jury will make a final decision after the submission phase.

Re 4) Exceptions to the resubmission ban include games that were previously disqualified for technical or other valid reasons.

Also exempt are games that have undergone **substantial and verifiable changes** in the categories in which they are submitted. These changes must be explained in detail. The jury will evaluate only the updated elements.

Examples:

- In the game design category, a significant change would be if new ways of playing were made possible, for example through a multiplayer mode or new mechanics.
- In the areas of audio and graphics, there would have to be major technical changes, or a large part of the assets would have to be replaced or expanded.
- The addition of a campaign or individual new elements does not count as a significant change, unless the new campaign is largely based on new elements.

Additional Provisions

1. Add-ons may be submitted in all categories. Only the content added by the add-on will be evaluated by the jury. Submitters must clearly describe these new elements (ideally with examples, screenshots, or a change log). Submissions without sufficient explanation may be excluded. The base game will not be re-evaluated unless the add-on meets the above criteria for significant changes (see point 4).
2. Online games, episodic games, mobile games, and games that have been submitted before may be re-entered **only if** they fulfill the requirements for substantial changes (see point 4).
3. If a game is disqualified, the submitter must receive a reasoned explanation by email and may respond. Final decisions rest with the respective expert jury. No refund of submission fees will be granted if a game is later disqualified for valid reasons.
4. Subsequent nomination of a submitted game: In exceptional cases, a submitted game may also be transferred to another category by an expert jury in consultation with the organizer and the expert juries involved. No additional fees will apply.
5. Expert juries may request additional materials such as save files, story summaries, or motivation for submission if deemed necessary.
6. Ports to other platforms are considered the same game. If a port is submitted, it must meet the same criteria for substantial changes as described above.
7. A game can be submitted either for the main categories (defined under 'Outstanding Development Achievement' and 'Main Awards') or for the Ubisoft Newcomer Award. Submitting the same title to one or more main categories and the Ubisoft Newcomer Award is not permitted. Submitters must choose one of the two options.

Submission in the “Studio of the Year” Category

Studios are eligible only if they meet the following criteria:

1. The studio's headquarters is located in the German-speaking region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland). The majority of the development and creative team and the main budget investment must also be based in the DACH region.
2. The justification for submission must be supported by evidence (sources, links, screenshots, etc.) referring to the last 12 months.

Jury Work & Structure

The Jury

The jury begins its work after the submission phase at the latest and selects all nominees and winners. **Expert juries** are formed from the **Grand Jury**.

The Grand Jury describes the overall jury of the German Developer Award, which is made up of experts from the German-speaking games industry, including journalists and academics. They have been added over the years of the event's existence and actively participate in the jury's work. New members are added upon application and qualifications by the organizer. Members of the Grand Jury can become expert jurors by applying to join a specific category's expert jury. Each member is assigned to exactly one expert jury.

Each **award category** has an expert jury of **5 members**, each with extensive experience in the field.

To ensure objectivity: a jury member involved in the development of a submitted game may not sit on the expert jury for that category. However, they may participate in other categories.

Jury Responsibilities

All jury members must actively participate and commit to:

- Attending online jury meetings (kick-off in early September, final voting mid-October).
- Maintaining confidentiality about jury participation (until nominees are announced) and about all jury discussions (permanently).
- Thoroughly playing and evaluating all games in their category. In categories with many entries, a system is used where only the most promising titles are played extensively by all.
- Submitting ratings and written feedback for each game using the jury tool.

Jury members receive all necessary materials. Jury identities remain confidential until the jury work is complete.

Each expert jury nominates 3 entries and selects one winner. Nominations and winners are recorded in the jury tool and confirmed by all jury members. Each nominated entry receives a written evaluation. All submitters have the right to request access to their final ratings and evaluations after the awards ceremony.

Award Categories

The German Developer Award 2026 will be awarded in the following categories.

Outstanding Development Achievement

- Best Audio Design
- Best Game Design
- Best Graphics
- Best Story
- Best Technical Achievement

Main Awards

- Best Indie Game
- Best Casual Game
- Best Game Beyond Entertainment
- Innovation Award
- Best German Game*

Special Awards

- Studio of the Year
- Ubisoft Newcomer Award
- Jury's Choice Award
- NRW Empowerment Award

Definitions & Evaluation Criteria

Best Audio Design

This category examines the extent to which the game benefits from a successful mix of sound effects, music and voice output. It is assessed how well the overall artistic realization was carried out and which cultural elements were integrated. A good sound design supports the game in all areas and is never intrusive. The following questions, among others, are important for the evaluation: Do the sound and music help with the gameplay, for example by conveying time pressure or danger? To what extent do they support immersion in the game world and its credibility? How appropriate and atmospheric are the sounds? How well are distances and transitions handled? Is the final mix successful? How high is the variance of music and sounds and how high is their repetition rate?

* Please note: Entries cannot be submitted in these categories, for details see 'Definitions and evaluation criteria'.

Best Game Design

In this category, a game is judged on how well the rules of the game work with its freedoms and limitations and how motivating the resulting gaming experience is. This includes the following questions for the evaluation: How well are the game elements interlinked? How well does the balancing work? What challenges do players have to overcome and how are they rewarded? How new and innovative is the game principle? How motivating are the game loops? How are usability, game introduction and accessibility rated?

Beste Graphics

This category describes the overall visual composition of the game, the artistic realization of the game idea and the effect of the graphic presentation. Whether a game uses realistic graphics is illustrative or artistic: the graphic presentation must be coherent and fit the theme and the events in the game. The following is assessed in this category: Is the game visually varied? How attractive are the main characters and game world? How high is the quality of the graphic elements and effects? How well do the graphics convey the mood and credibility of the world? Are players rewarded with the graphics and special effects?

Best Story

A good story draws players into the game through its artistic realization and makes them root for the game world and its characters. The story accompanies the player throughout the course of the game and can be just as motivating as it is emotionally stirring. This category assesses how coherent, exciting, meaningful and believable the story, game world and characters are. It also examines how well the narrative path works and the quality of the dialogue used. Possible questions: Are there innovative approaches in the narrative? Can the player expect exciting twists or unexpected turns? Is there any interactivity in the storytelling that reacts to the player's actions? Is the story entertaining and entertaining?

Best Technical Achievement

All game elements must be implemented in such a way that the gameplay functions smoothly. The following aspects are important in this category: What technologies have been developed for the game, for example in the areas of graphics, physics, AI, 3D sound or multiplayer mode? Can the game be played smoothly? Are the technical features important for the experience of the game and do they set the game apart from other games?

An important note for this category: Entrants must specify which middleware is used to run the game. This is because the jury must consider which services a team has provided itself and which come from generally available software.

Best Indie Game

This category recognizes innovative games that are independent of current conventions and have been developed by independent teams. The criteria for a game to be considered an indie game are as follows:

- The submitting studio has developed the game itself and financed it as an independent studio.
- The brand name of the game is owned by the developer studio.
- The game was developed largely without the influence of third parties according to its own creative goals.

A game/studio does not have to fulfil every criterion. However, the expert jury is required to assess these criteria in addition to evaluating the game. The submitting studio is advised to address controversial criteria in the submission.

The expert jury also assesses the finished product in relation to the available resources (team size, development time, funding). As indie games are heavily dependent on a committed community, existing feedback (for example from forums and distribution platforms such as Steam or Kickstarter) can be used for the assessment.

Best Casual Game

This category is intended to recognize games that are particularly intuitive and easily accessible and/or are also suitable for a little pastime in between. The expert jury asks the following questions, among others, when assessing these games: How easy is it to start playing? How well do the learning and leveling curves work? Can the game be played even after a longer break (a few days) or could the players have forgotten important events or information? Is the game suitable for short sessions (e.g. 10 or 20 minutes)? Do the players quickly get into the action after starting the game?

Best Game Beyond Entertainment

This category recognizes digital games that primarily use the interactive games medium to convey particularly effective messages and content. The expert jury has the task of analyzing the submitted games with a focus on the communication of these messages; their entertainment value plays a subordinate role here. They will ask themselves the following questions, among others: What experiences, knowledge or emotions are conveyed? Does the game use these aspects to support the confrontation with real problems and do players learn something from them? To what extent are the topics addressed currently important and helpful? Does the game help to scrutinize social conflicts?

Innovation Award

The Innovation Award recognizes games that stand out due to their particularly innovative content, artistic elements, gameplay or technologies. Titles that pursue new and pioneering approaches, push boundaries and set new standards are honored. For example, games set trends that have a lasting impact on the industry - whether through revolutionary gameplay or the use of advanced technologies. Questions for evaluation include: Does the game introduce new game mechanics? Are parts of the narrative concept unique? Are there technical achievements that surpass previous possibilities? Have bold new paths been taken to offer players an innovative gaming experience?

Best German Game

This is the most prestigious category. All members of the Grand Jury vote on the winner. Only games nominated in other categories are eligible. No direct submissions are possible. The vote is conducted anonymously through an online tool after all expert juries have completed their work. The game with the most votes wins.

Studio of the Year

This category recognizes outstanding achievements by a studio within the last 12 months and relates to the same period as submitted games. The jury considers aspects that are verifiable and comprehensible. These relate primarily to the following aspects: Community management, social, cultural and societal commitment, marketing / PR. Has the studio stood out in the past year through its community management? Was there any particular social or societal commitment? Was a marketing/PR campaign particularly successful last year? To ensure traceability and to enable the jury to make as objective a decision as possible, only well-founded submissions will be considered in this category.

To also allow submissions from third parties, no submission fee is due for this category.

Ubisoft Newcomer Award (Non-cash prize: Mentoring & IAB)

The Newcomer Award is a non-cash prize provided by Ubisoft that **honors** the best debut work. The winning team usually receives professional mentoring from Ubisoft and a place at the Indie Arena Booth during gamescom. There is a separate submission form and a separate set of rules for the Ubisoft Newcomer Award. The games in this category will be judged by a panel of experts.

Jury's Choice Award

With the special jury prize, the German Developer Award recognizes the exceptional commitment of teams that contribute in a special way to the positive development of the German games industry. The focus is on studios and publishers who have created added value for the industry through their attitude, initiative or sustainable impetus. In justified exceptional cases, the award can also be presented to individuals or institutions. Games cannot be entered in this category.

To also allow submissions from third parties, no submission fee is due for this category.

NRW Empowerment Award

This special award is presented to a marginalised individual who has made a lasting contribution to the further development of the German-speaking games industry over the past twelve months through outstanding professional achievements, exceptional commitment, inspiring ideas or innovative approaches – particularly with regard to the promotion of diversity and equality. The award honours people who inspire and encourage others and enrich the industry in an exemplary manner.

To also allow submissions from third parties, no submission fee is due for this category.