

## Free vs Paid Games Comparison (Pros & Cons)

On one hand, gaming might be one of the most affordable forms of entertainment given that you are able to get hundreds of hours of thrilling gameplay for a few dozen dollars. It can even cost you nothing at all, as there is a wide range of free-to-play but still high-quality and exciting games.

On the other hand, gaming can be an expensive form of entertainment given that you need to spend some serious money on a gaming PC, game consoles, and, naturally, games if you want to gain access to all the major current-gen titles. It could cost you even more if you want to boost your in-game performance or appearance by purchasing in-game items through microtransactions.

Gaming costs differ dramatically depending on the approach you choose. Both approaches have their adherents, and **for that reason the free games vs paid games debate is always hot and crowded**. Let's try to find out who has the truth on his side.

Free Games Are...Free!

You won't believe, but we have an obvious winner here as **free games** are expected to cost nothing more than nothing, while **paid games** are called so for a reason. But beware that game developers make games not only to entertain you but to make some money as well. **That's why many free-to-play games are only free to a certain extent**. The more you play such a game, the harder it gets to advance further without purchasing some virtual in-game resources for real money. Those games thrive on microtransactions and employ **the freemium pricing strategy**, combining a free product with premium features. Just link a credit card to such a game, and "free gaming" could empty your pockets in a flash.

But don't judge developers too harshly. For them, service-based monetization is often the only **affordable way** to keep their games afloat. Before the mid-1990s, commercial game distribution was controlled by big publishers and retailers, and developers of indie games were forced to either build their own publishing company, find one willing to distribute their game, or distribute it in some form of shareware (e.g. through BBSs). The increased production costs at the beginning of the 2000s made the video game publishers even more risk averse and let them reject all small-size and too **innovative concepts** of small game developers.

As the **Wall Street Journal** noted

*The jump in development and marketing costs has made the videogame industry enormously risk averse. Publishers have largely focused on making sequels to successful titles or games based on movie or comic book characters, which are seen as less risky. They don't green light any more things that will be small or average size games.*

Without publishers' support, small game developers can't afford big marketing campaigns to persuade players to buy and try a new paid title. When a game is free to play, much more gamers will try it. If the game is good enough, gamers will keep playing and start making microtransactions.

That's **the way for small developers to monetize their titles** and get funds for new games. But that doesn't mean that AAA developers can't use service-based monetization.

*According to a SuperData report, last year, the top 10 free-to-play PC games by revenue generated more than three times as much income as the 10 highest-grossing paid titles did.*



### TOP PC GAMES BY REVENUE IN 2017

FREE-TO-PLAY		PREMIUM	
TITLE	REVENUE	TITLE	REVENUE
LEAGUE OF LEGENDS	\$2.1B	PUBG	\$714M
DUNGEON FIGHTER ONLINE	\$1.6B	OVERWATCH	\$382M
CROSSFIRE	\$1.4B	CS:GO	\$341M
WORLD OF TANKS	\$471M	DESTINY 2	\$218M
DOTA 2	\$406M	GRAND THEFT AUTO V	\$118M
ROBLOX	\$310M	BATTLEFIELD 1	\$113M
MAPLESTORY	\$279M	MINECRAFT	\$92M
HEARTHSTONE	\$217M	GUILD WARS 2	\$87M
BLADE & SOUL	\$178M	DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN 2	\$85M
FIFA ONLINE 3	\$163M	RAINBOW SIX: SIEGE	\$67M
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$7.1B</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$2.2B</b>

But if you are on **the paid games side**, don't rush to taunt your cheapskating opponents, because microtransactions don't only apply to free-to-play games. As Star Wars: Battlefront 2 indicated, you could buy a game for \$60 or more and still have to spend 4,528 hours or \$2,100 to unlock all base-game content. EA was forced to remove the controversial microtransaction system from the game eventually, but such practices still exist and Battlefront 2 is not the only paid game encouraging us to purchase additional content.

*Actually, most of the top 10 highest-grossing paid titles above are there thanks to microtransactions as well.*

## Free vs Paid...It's All Your Choice

Some of the world's most popular and beloved games are really free to play. Such titles as **League of Legends**, **Dota 2**, **Team Fortress 2**, or **Fortnite: Battle Royale** offer you hundreds of hours of fun without demanding a single cent in return. Of course, those games have loot boxes or other microtransactions, but paid content includes mostly cosmetic items and isn't necessary for achieving something in one of the virtual worlds.

However, **the choice of paid games is certainly wider**. Among the top 20 games of 2017 according to DMarket, none is free-to-play. So, you definitely have to pay if you want to try some of the best current-gen PC and console games.

*We can also take a look at the most popular games of 2017 on Steam and see that only three out of the 12 platinum top sellers can be played for free.*



This is not the case with mobile gaming, which is the largest and fastest-growing segment of the

video game industry. **Most mobile game apps are free to download.** To make it clear, 92% of mobile games on Google Play were free as of December 2016. iOS games follow the same trend. But that doesn't mean mobile game developers love you more than PC and console game developers do. **The freemium business model is simply more profitable for mobile titles than paid releases.** If you're still not tired of stats, check this out: Minecraft is the No. 1 paid app on the App Store but doesn't even make the top 100 highest-grossing apps there, unlike plenty of free-to-play games. It's easy to conclude that **most of those games use a pay-to-win approach.** Playing them, you'll face limitations that can only be removed by in-game purchases.

### Gaming Experience Is on the Paid Side

As we've seen, certain paid game developers and publishers don't mind overusing microtransactions that directly impact gameplay. But that's still the exception rather than the rule, which can't be said about free-to-play games. **They are much more likely to set restrictions and use tricks forcing you to make in-game purchases.** If you don't want to pay, your gaming experience will be limited by those restrictions. In one case you'll have to wait before resuming a game because your limited time has expired, or some necessary in-game component has gotten worn out. Some other times you will find that you just can't compete with players who don't spare money on in-game boosters. Anyway, that won't be what people used to call fun.

*Once again, there are some paid games that force you to pay microtransactions to get a decent gaming experience. There are also some great free-to-play games only offering cosmetic paid items that don't impact gameplay. But both types are quite rare, and silver spooners do generally have an advantage over cheapskates in terms of player experience.*

### Replayability Value

Replayability is an important aspect of many good games, enabling you to play through your favourite title time and again in many ways. But that value is virtually incompatible with in-game limitations. Once you've mastered and finished a game, you need a quick way to build your new adventure in the virtual world and advance through its early stages. Otherwise, it will just be boring. **Given that limitations are more typical for free-to-play titles, paid games win once again.**

### Summary

It looks like the gaming industry isn't particularly favorable to cheapskates. **There are probably only two types of gamers who can be totally comfortable without paid games:**

- The first applies to dedicated fans of a certain free-to-play title like Dota 2 or Fortnite who just don't need anything else to have fun.
- The other one is casual and undemanding gamers who are fine with a limited choice of free games.

If you're not one of those two, get ready to part with some money. But don't forget what we started from. Compared to other forms of entertainment, gaming is not expensive, as it usually

gives you hundreds of hours of exciting gameplay for a few dozen dollars or even less. You don't have to be a silver spooner to enjoy immersive games experiences.

Check out our [PC vs. Console: What to Choose in 2018?](#) Post to learn all about the upcoming trends in the gaming industry.

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