



# Your guide

# to using games to teach tablet skills



GIRDA  
Gameplay for  
Inspiring Digital  
Adoption



**Good Things**  
Foundation



# About this guide

## Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed to help you to introduce older people to tablet computers, by using games. It doesn't matter if you're helping friends or family members, people you live with, or people you support as part of your job or a volunteering role.

You don't need to be a computer expert to help someone. If you feel confident using the internet by yourself, you know enough. Even if you feel you are only one step ahead of those you're helping, using games can help you to be a good teacher.

## How to use this guide

You can use this guide in different ways. You can read through it all, before you get started, or you can dip into it whenever you need to. Even if you've been helping someone with the internet for a while, it can still be useful. The contents page explains where you can find different topics.

If you'd like to help people move on from games to doing other things on a tablet, like using the internet, there is some advice at the end.



This guide is produced by Good Things Foundation, a national charity that helps people to get online, in partnership with Erasmus+ and Middlesex University. It is an output of the GIRDA research project (Gameplay for Inspiring Digital Adoption).



Please email [hello@goodthingsfoundation.org](mailto:hello@goodthingsfoundation.org) if you would like a digital version of this booklet.

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**Key**

## **principles**

Helping someone learn how to use a new tablet should be fun and rewarding for both of you. Some older people think that technology is complicated, and worry that they won't be able to learn how to use it. You can help them overcome these fears by following some simple steps.

# The right language

Computers and the internet have their own language: words and phrases that can be confusing to someone who's not familiar with them. Often, knowing this new language isn't essential, at least in the beginning.

You might think that you don't use complicated computer terms - or that you even know any. But remember, even the simplest words might seem complicated to the person you're helping.

- Try to use familiar words for unfamiliar things, like 'picture' instead of 'icon'. This makes technology feel within reach for the person you're helping.
- There's no right or wrong way to explain things, as long as it works. Stop and ask the person you're helping: 'does that make sense?' And remember that what works for one person, might not work for someone else.
- Only name and explain the things someone needs to do the task at hand. Save the more detailed answers, exceptions and alternatives for another day.





# Who's driving?

When someone learns to drive, they sit in the driving seat! Most people learn best by doing, not by watching someone else.

- Make sure you've done anything complicated in advance, like connecting to WiFi or installing a game.
- Let the person or people who'll be playing the game hold and control the tablet.
- If they're not sure what to do, encourage them to try things and explore - it will help them to understand that nothing bad can happen.
- Reassure them that you'll step in if there's a problem, and that there's no way they'll damage the tablet just by touching it.
- The aim isn't to move forward as quickly as possible. Resist the temptation to lean in and do something for someone just because they're doing it slowly. If someone gets stuck, try providing hints and suggestions to start with.

- At the same time, know when to step in. Getting completely stuck can be really offputting, especially for someone who's only just started. If you don't think someone can move forward at all with just you explaining, tell them that you'll sort out the problem - but make it clear that they've not done anything wrong.
- Some first time learners may try and use their finger nail rather than the pad of their finger tip on the screen, or hold the tablet with their thumb or palm resting on the edge of the screen. In either case the tablet won't respond as they want. Show them how to adjust the position of the hand to get an effective contact with the touch surface.

# Patience, patience, patience

Playing games can teach older people how to use a tablet, but the most important things you can give them are the confidence and motivation they need to carry on by themselves.



- Be prepared to repeat things - maybe more than once. And never draw attention to the fact you're repeating yourself, or how long it's taking someone to complete a task.
- Be ready to answer questions about things that you might take for granted, like error messages or requests for information. It gives people confidence to know the how and why of what you're showing them.
- Don't assume knowledge - if someone thinks they're 'supposed' to already know something and they don't, they can feel like they've failed before they've even started.
- People aren't learning machines. If someone complains that they have forgotten (or will forget) something, remind them that this is completely normal and doesn't mean that they can't learn with practice. You can suggest they make notes, or do anything else that will help them remember.
- Above all, make sure everyone's having fun. There's no rush for people to learn things - if they're enjoying themselves, they'll want to do more.





## **Games, tablets and learning**

Playing games on a tablet or computer is fun and social. It can also be a great way to help older people get comfortable with technology, and learn how to use a device in a risk-free way.

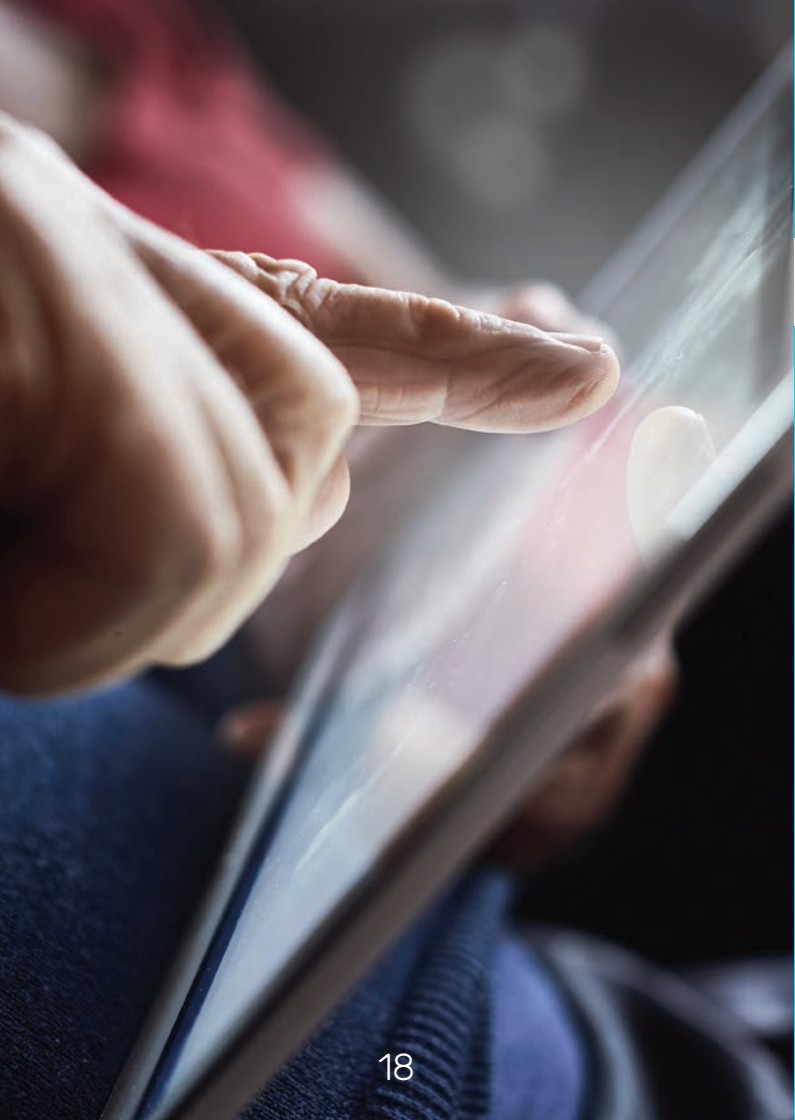
# How can games help?

Playing games can be a great way to learn something new. Here are some of the benefits.

- Using technology for the first time can be scary. Games can take away that fear, by making the process fun. If people are playing a game and enjoying themselves, they're less likely to think of what they're doing as 'learning'.
- Playing the right kind of games can encourage people to be social. As well as being a good thing in itself, this also makes for happier, more motivated learners.
- Games encourage peer support. For example, if you have one person who knows how to use a tablet, and the other who knows the rules of a game, they can teach other. With the right kind of support, someone could become a great teacher, even if they only know a little more than the person they're playing with.
- Tablet games can teach all kinds of important things. This includes how to use the touchscreen (things like tapping and swiping), but also the knowledge that mistakes can be put right, and that it's okay to experiment.









# Groundwork

## Devices and connections

Before you get started, you need to make sure that you have the right number and right type of tablets, and (for some games) an internet connection. Here's some advice on how to do this.

# Getting hold of devices

- Find out if any of the people you're helping already have a tablet, but don't know how to use it. You can encourage them to start having fun with it.
- If you're supporting older people as part of your job or volunteering role, find out if you can secure budget or funding to buy tablets. Make the case that you'll be promoting the wellbeing of the people you're supporting in lots of ways: through social contact, staying mentally active, and learning how to use the internet.
- Tablets don't have to be expensive. You can find second hand tablets online, or try searching for 'best budget tablets'. Before you invest, you can look at reviews or ask someone you trust for advice.

## Getting connected

- If the games you're playing need an internet connection, make sure there's one in the place where you want to play. Check that you can connect a tablet and browse the internet without problems. Try different parts of the room - maybe some places are better than others.
- If you need tablets to be connected to the internet, make sure that you know the right WiFi network name, password, and any other details you might need to get online. Although your own device might remember these things for you, somebody else going online for the first time might have to enter these details.
- Make sure any devices you're using are fully charged, with software updated, and can connect to the internet if you need them to. This means you can avoid problems just when you're trying to get started!

# Choosing games

Choosing games and activities for new learners can be tricky – especially avoiding ones that are too fast, have too much distracting advertising, or try and get players to spend money. It might only be when you play a game with learners that you can see what works well. It's good to have a choice of games available – a game might be great for one person, but boring or confusing to someone else. Here are some tips on choosing games.



- The tablet you're using should have a place where you can find games. For Apple tablets (iPads) this is called the App Store. For Android tablets, it's called Google Play. For Windows tablets, it's the Microsoft Store.
- Plenty of games are completely free, while others cost up to a few pounds.
- Some free games include what are called 'in-app purchases': they're free to download but players may be asked to spend money during the game. There's no need to do this. If a game isn't fun to play without spending money, or keeps bothering the player to do so, you should find a different one.
- Remember that free games are more likely to include adverts, or encourage players to spend money while playing. These things can be intrusive, and are a good reason to try games yourself before you let others play them.
- You might find there are lots of versions of some games. If you're not sure which one is best, there should be reviews that will help you decide.

### Choosing games - continued

- Find a game that the person you're helping is interested in. You can choose an online version of a traditional game that people already know, like chess or card games. But there are a lot of games designed specially for tablets that are easy to play and explain, and lots of fun. There's a list of suggestions below.
- Make sure the game you choose is at the right level. Think about how complicated it is to understand, as well as how much speed and dexterity the player needs. If it's too easy people will lose interest, and if it's too hard they will get frustrated. You can change the level of difficulty on a lot of games and puzzles - if players aren't sure what they're doing, start them out at the lowest level.
- It's best to avoid games with complicated rules. You should be able to explain the rules quickly to the players, or be confident that they can pick it up for themselves through play. Otherwise you'll spend lots of time explaining the rules over and over again!



- Different games are useful for teaching different skills. It's best to start with games that give players experience of some of the most simple and common touchscreen gestures, such as tap and drag. You can then move on to games which teach more complex gestures such as zooming and object rotation.
- If you can't get a good internet connection in the place where you want people to play games, don't worry. Most tablet games work fine if you're not online, once they have been downloaded.
- Before anyone else plays a game, try it yourself. Make sure that it works, is at the right level, and doesn't keep asking players to spend money. Also, if you're going to help someone play the game, you should have an idea of how to play it yourself!

# Different types of games

### Matching games

Players tap to swap coloured pieces, creating lines of three or more matching pieces to win points. The rules of these games are simple and play is based on tapping, the easiest touchscreen gesture. Popular titles include Bejeweled and Candy Crush Saga, both of which can be downloaded for free.

### Picture puzzles

There are different types of picture puzzle games available. Tile swap puzzles are easier to play: players start with a jumbled picture of square tiles, and swap by tapping on tiles until the picture is complete. Traditional jigsaw puzzles are a little more complicated: players usually have to keep their finger on the screen to 'drag' pieces into place, and sometimes also rotate pieces to make them fit by either 'double tapping' or using two fingers at once. One game may have lots of puzzles available to complete - usually some are free, and extra sets of puzzles can be purchased for a small cost.

## **Word and number games**

There are free and paid-for versions of the classic word game Scrabble available, and a similar free game called Words With Friends. Players can play against a computer opponent, other players during a dedicated game session, or take turns to complete a game over several days - a good incentive to use a tablet by themselves! Crosswords, word searches and number puzzles like Sudoku are also available; like picture puzzles, these have the advantage of providing lots of individual puzzles within a single game. They also help players get used to using a tablet's on screen keyboard.

## **Traditional games**

Lots of traditional games such as chess, draughts, backgammon and card games are available online. Players can play together on the same tablet if it's large enough, or sit next to each other and use separate tablets. People may be interested to find out that they can play online against other people. Bear in mind that tablet versions of games may not behave the way they do in the real world. For example, pieces may 'jump' back to where they came from, if they're put in the wrong place. Even if people understand the rules of the game, they might have questions about these kind of differences.

# Different types of games - continued

### Sports games

There are lots of simple games for sports enthusiasts, including bowling, golf, snooker and pool, football, and darts. Different games teach different touchscreen skills, and some are easier than others - as with any game, make sure you try them yourself, before getting anyone else to play.

### Other games

Fruit Ninja, where players can practise the 'swipe' gesture by slicing flying fruit.

Angry Birds, where players learn how to hold and drag an object while trying to knock down towers.

## Other creative activities

Simple creative activities like drawing or colouring are a gentle way of getting someone used to a touchscreen. Some first-time users may struggle to find the right level of contact to complete a simple point and drag action, and this is the simplest way for them to pick this up.

## The right environment

- Choose the right place. A good place to play should be reasonably quiet. Make sure that there are comfortable chairs, that it's not too warm or cold, and ideally has natural daylight - without the sun shining in anyone's eyes or on the tablet screen.
- If you're helping one or more people in a community setting (like a care home or sheltered housing scheme), don't hide behind closed doors. Try to set up games where others can see what's happening, and come and ask questions if they want to. If they see others having fun, they're more likely to join in.
- If you can, make sure that tea, coffee and biscuits are available!

# How to introduce games

- 'Learning to use computers and the internet' won't motivate everyone, and you don't even need to mention this. Focus on the fun and social aspect of playing games together - something that more people are likely to find appealing.
- If you're working with a group of people, try and find someone in the group who's energetic and a good organiser: you're looking for someone who can get others interested!
- Think about where you're going to play games. Will this work at an existing social event, like a coffee morning? Or should you set up something new, like a dedicated games club?
- Don't just rely on posters and leaflets. Tell people what you're doing, and ask them to pass it on - word of mouth is very effective! If possible, get an idea in advance of who will turn up, and what they'd like to do.
- Don't push games on people. If they have a clear idea of what they want to do online, they might feel that playing games is a waste of time. And if they're not interested at all, you could put them off even more.









## Helping people to play

Once you've chosen the right games or activities, you need to make sure that the people you're helping are getting the most out of the experience. Be on hand to talk to them, observe them and encourage them. With a bit of work, you should be able to get them helping and learning from each other!

# Getting to know your learners

Playing games is about having fun, and one of the ways you can make sure this happens is by getting to know your learners before you start.

- If you're helping someone you've not met before, introduce yourself and find out a little about them.
- Some older people may have some hearing loss – try and find a quiet place for the lesson. Others may have difficulty reading small print. They may need their reading glasses, but you can also use the zoom function or change the tablet text size so they can see more easily.
- Another common issue is arthritis affecting the hands, that may make using a tablet awkward or painful. You can try changing the angle of the tablet to improve comfort, or provide a cheap 'stylus' that might be easier than using fingers.

# First steps

When people start playing for the first time, try and stay close at hand to begin with - even if all players seem to know what they're doing. There are a few things you should bear in mind, so the experience works for everybody.

- What will work depends on the people and place. If you have others helping you, or some players with experience using a tablet, it might be possible to have several games running at once. But if you're on your own, or players are very new to tablets, keep things small to start with. If you're not sure, start with one or two people playing on one tablet, or a tablet each.
- Make sure that players know that you'll step in if there's a problem, and that there's no way they'll damage the device just by touching it.
- If you have several games going on at once, make sure you can provide 1-to-1 support if required without people having to wait for a long time. It might not make sense to try and get everybody started at once. Or you could see if there's anyone else who can help: it could be a colleague, a neighbour, or a volunteer.

## Helping people to play

- If someone is very unsure of themselves, try and sit with them as they play - maybe they could play with you to start with. Check how they're doing: are they having trouble performing particular touchscreen gestures? Do they seem nervous, or make negative comments about their abilities? Watching and listening can help you to decide what game and what setup will work best for them, and what kind of support you should provide.

# Manage group dynamics

- If someone has more skills and experience, and is explaining the game to others, you might be able to encourage them to help the group. But if they're dominating and taking over, step in and encourage quieter people to take their turn.
- You want to make sure that all the players are advancing - either because one player is teaching others, or because all the players are working it out together - and that nobody is being left behind.
- Don't be afraid to shake things up. Suggest to people that they try new games or play with different people, if you think the current setup isn't working.

# If players get stuck

- The aim isn't to move the game forward as quickly as possible. Resist the temptation to lean in and do something for someone if they're doing it slowly. Getting stuck from time is not a bad thing - it encourages players to work together to solve problems.
- At the same time, recognise where a problem is causing frustration or if it doesn't look like the players are able to resolve it themselves. You can give hints on what to do; if that doesn't work, consider stepping in and sorting it out yourself.
- Things going wrong is a good opportunity to show people how to put things right. Show them options to replay, or undo a mistake - knowing that this is possible can make people more willing to explore.









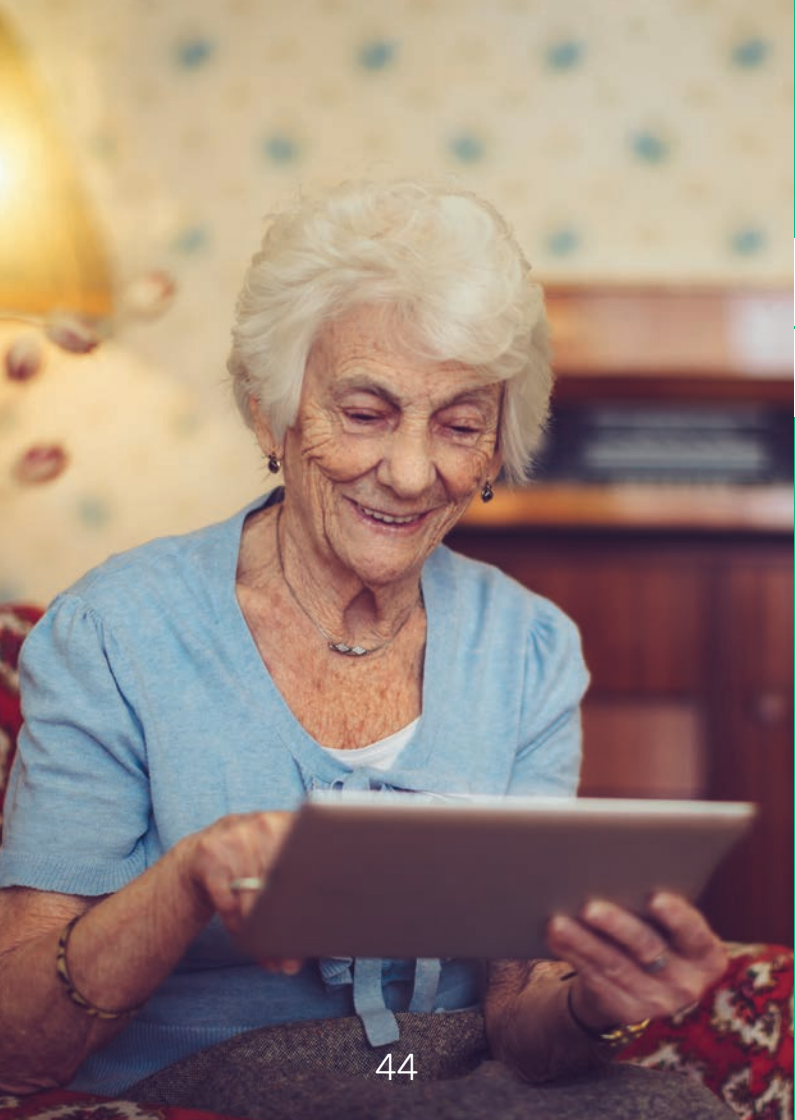
## **Moving on from games**

There are lots of benefits for older people playing tablet games together, and it doesn't matter if this is all they do. However, after a while you might want to introduce some players to the idea that they could do more: keep in touch with family and friends online or find websites on things they're interested in.

## Moving on from games

- Remind them that they've learned lots of skills, just by playing games. They know how a tablet works, and they're not afraid to use it!
- Even so, moving on to learning how to use the internet might be a scary idea for someone who's never been online. Explain that you don't want to show them everything, but you think there are one or two things that they might find useful. Explain what the benefits are, and give them the chance to ask questions.
- Agree simple goals, at least to start with: on the first day it could just be checking the weather or what's on TV, which can give people a sense of instant achievement.
- When you think the time is right, develop longer-term goals based on a learner's interests, such as online 'window shopping' at a favourite store, or having a video call with a relative.
- Don't rush them: if they're not ready to start right now, try and agree a time that you can both put aside.
- Let them feel in control. Tell them they can stop anytime they want to.
- This doesn't have to be a big commitment, but you should be prepared to make yourself available long-term if the person you're supporting needs you.







# Staying safe online

Once older people start using the internet for the first time, they have to start dealing with the risks that go with it. They may have heard that the internet can be a dangerous place, and without personal experience it can be hard for them to put this information into context. If they want to become confident internet users, you will need to help them deal with these issues.

### Staying safe: general tips

- Don't brush the issue under the carpet. Don't pretend risks don't exist, and deal with misunderstandings with respect. Getting plenty of information and asking questions helps people to feel confident and in control of the situation.
- Make it clear that if you follow some simple steps, it's easy to stay safe.
- Make sure the person you're helping understands to stop what they're doing, and not agree to anything they're not sure about without checking with you or someone else they trust.
- If the person you're helping wants to find out how to keep children safe online, there's plenty of reliable information available - the BBC and Childline websites are a good place to start.

- If the person you're helping mentions an usual email or phone call, or has seen something online that they're not comfortable with, ask them to give further details. You can report problems or request information on different websites, including the police and Crimestoppers. Run an internet search describing the problem, to find the most appropriate route.

# Viruses and software

- Install good antivirus software on the device of the person you're helping; a lot of trustworthy options don't cost a penny. Search for 'best free antivirus software' online to see what's currently available.
- Make sure that software on their device is up-to-date. Most software will tell you if a newer version is available. Viruses and malware can slip past antivirus programs and infect devices by exploiting programmes that haven't been kept up-to-date.



# Shopping and banking online

Even fairly confident internet users can feel unsure about shopping or banking online. Going from just looking for information to entering personal financial details is a big step. If you think the person you're supporting could benefit from the cost savings and convenience of transacting online, there are some important things to remember.

- There are websites where you can find reliable, clear information that will help you to explain to someone how they can stay safe. For example, the Money Advice Service has pages dedicated to online shopping.
- As with anything else, don't force the issue. If they're happy to shop and bank offline, leave the conversation - at least for today. Older people especially can enjoy visiting banks and shops in person. People are motivated by more than just convenience!

# Beyond games: more help & information

If you and the people you're helping want to move beyond games, here are some things you can do:

- **Get our free guide.** Order a free copy of 'Your Guide to Helping Older People Use the Internet'. It's a guidebook similar to this one, that tells you everything you need to know about starting to help older people to use computers and the internet. You can request a copy by email at [hello@goodthingsfoundation.org](mailto:hello@goodthingsfoundation.org).
- **Join the National Digital Inclusion Network.** Joining the National Digital Inclusion Network is free, and can help you in lots of ways. You can get expert help and advice, apply for funding, and you'll receive free marketing and other materials.  
If you'd like to join the network, or find out if there's a Digital Inclusion Hub in your area, visit [www.onlinecentresnetwork.org](http://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org).

- **Get in touch with us.** Good Things Foundation is the organisation behind this guide, and the National Digital Inclusion Network. We're a Government-funded national charity committed to social change, especially helping people with computers and the internet. If you'd like free advice, you can email us at [hello@goodthingsfoundation.org](mailto:hello@goodthingsfoundation.org) or call **0114 349 1666**.



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