**Essential Board Game Terms**

**(terms modified from Board Game Geek)**

**abstract**

Generally means simplified instead of detailed. In the context of games, it is an overloaded term which usually means "without theme or story" or "not highly detailed; simple, elegant rules without lots of chrome" but "abstract" also sometimes used to mean "pure strategy (no randomness)" Often used as opposite of thematic.

**abstract strategy game**

1) A game generally limited to two players and perfect information (i.e. no randomness) often with incidental or irrelevant theme. (Chess does have a theme, but it can be ignored. A bishop is just the name of a piece that moves diagonally.)

2) A game with no theme.

**alpha player**Also called, "Leader Effect." In a derogatory sense, it is where one player tends to take the lead and may boss others around, telling them how to play. This has been a common complaint to Cooperative games in general. In a positive sense, it can also refer to a true leader who would listen to the group and guide them to consensus, share insights, teach others to see the angles and develop a team mentality.

**Ameritrash**n. A catchphrase for "American style boardgames". In general, this means games that emphasize a highly developed [theme](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#theme), player to player conflict, and usually feature a moderate to high level of [luck](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#luck). Examples of classic Ameritrash games include [Axis & Allies](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/98/axis-allies), [Dune](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/121/dune), [Cosmic Encounter](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/15/cosmic-encounter), [Talisman](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/714/talisman), and [Twilight Imperium](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/24/twilight-imperium). See the [Ameritrash](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/Ameritrash) page for more information.

**beer & pretzels game**n. A game so [random](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#random) that long-term [strategies](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#strategy) are nearly impossible, and with such a goofy [theme](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#theme) that it is played as a humorous diversion rather than a real competition. Frequently these games feature several [mechanisms](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#mechanism) that can interact with each other in surprising ways. [Wiz-War](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/589/wiz-war) is an example of a beer & pretzels game. (See also [light](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#light))

**broken**adj.(usually applied to a game) Having problems that result in a disappointing play experience. A game might be considered broken if even poor play can lead to a victory, if it frequently ends in a stalemate, or if one strategy invariably wins. (See also solvable)

**card drafting**n. a game mechanism where players select cards from a subset of the available cards to form a deck or hand or to select the next card to play. Examples: [Fairy Tale](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/13823/fairy-tale), [7 Wonders](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/68448/7-wonders), and [Agricola](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/31260/agricola), where a hand of cards is passed around and players select individual cards before passing the cards remaining in the hand. [Magic: The Gathering](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/463/magic-the-gathering) (multiple variants) and [Race for the Galaxy](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/28143/race-for-the-galaxy) (variant) where players draft cards to form decks that they then use to play the game.

**CCG**n. Abbreviation for Collectible Card Game. This type of game uses a basic rule structure and a large assortment of cards which each have characteristics that contradict or supplement the basic rules. Each player selects a number of cards that they own to create a deck which they use in the game. This allows players to predetermine their [strategies](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#strategy). The game rules define how many cards must be used and how many copies of each single card are allowed. Cards are sold in "booster packs". Packs contain a fixed number of cards and usually include one "rare" card, some "uncommon" cards, and the bulk of the pack contains "common" cards. Rare cards are generally more powerful or efficient than uncommons or commons, which can lead to the problem that the person who has spent the most money on cards wins. The original collectible card game was [Magic: The Gathering](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/463/magic-the-gathering). Other examples are [Middle-Earth](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1915/middle-earth), [Pokemon](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/2165/pokemon-trading-card-game) and [Netrunner](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1301/netrunner)

**cooperative game**n. A game where all players work together on the same team, trying to beat the built-in artificial intelligence of the game system. Examples include [Pandemic](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/30549/pandemic) and Forbidden Island.

**deck building game**n. a game featuring a mechanism where players each play from their own deck of cards but, through the course of the game, additional cards are selected for inclusion in the players' decks which will be drawn and used in future reshuffles of the deck. Often these games require players to discard their hand each turn forcing a high rate of card turnover. The founding father of this genre is [Dominion](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/36218/dominion) with many examples following including [Puzzle Strike](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/67928/puzzle-strike), [Nightfall](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/88408/nightfall), [A Few Acres of Snow](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/79828/a-few-acres-of-snow), and [Thunderstone](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/53953/thunderstone).

**designer game**n. synonym for [German game](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#German_game) This term emphasizes the credit usually given to designers of such games, unlike mass-market games which usually credit only the publisher.

**dice-fest**n. 1. A game that uses a whole bunch of dice to determine game outcomes.   
 2. A game that has a very [random](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#random) nature because of die results.

**dry**adj. Overly mechanical or lacking in thematic elements.

**economic game**n. A game that models a micro-economic (i.e. business or industry) or macro-economic (i.e. nation or colony) system. Typically, players will have to invest in various factors of production: capital improvements (like power plants, RR track, settlements & cities), raw materials/resources (fuel, wheat/sheep/wood/brick/rock) & labor, in order to gain income, which is then re-invested into more factors of production to produce more income, etc. Money is NOT always present in an economic game, but it often is. Likewise the presence of money may not neccessarily indicate an economic game. Examples: [1830: Railways & Robber Barons](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/421/1830-railways-robber-barons), [Monopoly](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1406/monopoly), [Puerto Rico](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/3076/puerto-rico) and [The Settlers of Catan](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/13/the-settlers-of-catan)

**end-game**n. The final time period in a game, which will usually determine the victor. [Strategies](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#strategy) during this period often vary slightly from [strategies](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#strategy) used during the earlier portion of the game.

**euro / eurogame**n. synonym for [German game](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#toc82) This term emphasizes the more frequent publication of German-style games in other countries in Europe.

**Eurotrash**n. 1. A derogatory catchphrase for "European style boardgames"  
 2. A boardgame designed/published in Europe that seems to emulate Ameritrash games in style and mechanics.

**Expansion**n. additional equipment for a game, usually sold separately. Expansions can be used to add a [variant](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#variant) or add additional [scenario](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#scenarios), to add more players for the game, add new maps or tracks for a game, etc. Some game companies have distributed small expansions for free at conventions or on the internet.

**experience game**n. A game that emphasizes "the experience of playing" over acheiving victory. Role Playing Games (RPG's), party games, open ended games are sometimes called experience games.

**family game**n. A game that typically has simple rules, a short playing time, relatively high levels of [abstraction](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#abstract) and [player interaction](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#player_interaction), and requires three or more players. A large percentage of these games originate in Germany.

**gateway game**n. A game with simple rules that are easy to teach non-gamers in order to attract new players into boardgaming as a hobby.

**Kingmaker**n. A player, himself in a losing position, that has the power to decide who will win a given game.

**mass market game**n. A game often sold by mass market retailers, like WalMart, Toys 'R' Us or Target. Hasbro (Parker Brothers, Milton Bradley) and Mattel are large manufacturers of mass market games. Examples: Monopoly, Risk, Scrabble, Uno, etc.

**mechanism**n. (also mechanic). Part of a game’s rule system that covers one general or specific aspect of the game.

**Metagaming**

n. a broad term usually used to define any strategy, action or method used in a game which transcends a prescribed ruleset, uses external factors to affect the game, or goes beyond the supposed limits or environment set by the game. Another definition refers to the game universe outside of the game itself.

In simple terms, it is the use of out-of-game information or resources to affect one's in-game decisions.

**party game**

n. A game that is designed for large groups of people and emphasizes social interaction, creativity, and/or volubility. Examples: [Taboo](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1111/taboo), [Charades](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/5122/charades)

**perfect information game**

n. A class of game in which players move alternately and each player is completely informed of previous moves, which implies there is no hidden information within the game. This class of game is frequently restricted to having no [random](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#random) elements during play - such as the roll of dice - but [random](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#random) elements are allowed during game setup. Examples: [Chess](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/171/chess), [Through the Desert](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/503/through-the-desert)

**player interaction**

n. The degree and frequency with which players can affect each other during a game. High player interaction can reduce a game’s [downtime](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#downtime). Games with little or no direct player interaction are sometimes referred as Multiplayer Solitaires.

**playtest**

v. To examine the rules of and play a prototype game in order to find possible improvements and determine its viability.

**PnP**n. Print & Play. Print & Play games or expansions are files that contain artwork (boards/cards/etc.) and rules that are made available on the Internet. Anyone who wishes to may download them, print them out and play them.

**press your luck game**

n. A game where players can repeatedly choose to perform a random event on their turn. They temporarily collect points each time, but usually receiving nothing on the turn if an unfavorable event happens. They must voluntarily end their turn to permanently keep the points. Examples: Can't Stop, Diamant/Incan Gold, Pass the Pigs.

**solvable**

adj. (applied to a game) Where one player can always inevitably win or force a draw when a particular [strategy](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#strategy) is employed, regardless of any strategies used by the other player(s). [Tic-Tac-Toe](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/11901/tic-tac-toe), [Nim](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/11753/nim) and [Connect Four](http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/2719/connect-four) are examples of a solved games. (See also [broken](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#broken))

**theme**

n. 1. The topic or subject matter of a game. adj –atic. 2. Having rules and mechanics based on assumptions regarding the subject matter of the game. Often considered the opposite of [abstract](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#abstract).

**variant**

n. An alternate form of a game that may involve new or modified rules or pieces. Often played to add a change of pace to a game that has gotten stale. See [expansion](http://boardgamegeek.com/wiki/page/glossary#expansion).

**VP**

n. Victory Points. Sometimes pronounced either "Veeps" or "Vee Pees". Plural can be spelled VP's, VPs or just VP. Points accumulated for completing various actions which count towards victory. Some games use the term "points" to refer to other factors--movement points, action points, etc.

**worker placement**

n. A term used to describe the game mechanic which involves a "token-based, turn-limited, locking action selection menu." Players, in turn order, place tokens (aka workers) to select various actions presented on a board, cards, tiles, etc. Once an action is selected, it usually cannot be selected again on that round. Often players may think of this as a supervisor deploying workers on various jobs. A very popular game mechanic used in many recent games such as: Agricola, Caylus, Stone Age, Pillars of the Earth, etc.

**zero-sum**

adj. A property in games where all wins by one or more players are matched by losses of the other players. The wins and losses will always add up to zero. Poker is a good example, all money won by the players was lost by other players at the table. Most two player games are trivially zero-sum in that for one player to win, the other must lose.