

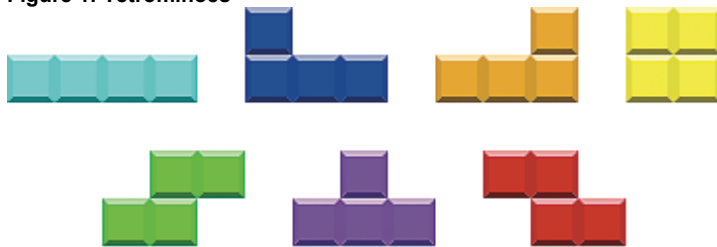
Tetris

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Formally simple and logically complex *Tetris* (*Tetris* 1985) knows no peers when it comes to simple yet addictive game play. Players determine the position and orientation of one-sided tetrominoes—shapes composed of four, square blocks each—which fall sequentially from the top of the screen into the grid-based playing field below. Players rotate the falling tiles in 90-degree increments and move them strategically sideways, working to create a horizontal line of blocks without gaps. Doing so allows players to clear the line, earn points, and make room for the relentless march of new tiles entering from above. Non-Newtonian gravity known as "naïve gravity" allows blocks to remain floating above the gaps, decreasing the chances for an easy completion of lines. The seven different tetrominoes continually appearing from the top of the screen in random order are commonly referred to as I, J, L, O, S, T, and Z. (Figure 1, tetrominoes) The game ends when the player "tops out," that is, when one or more of the stacks of tiles reaches the top of the playing field leaving no room for new tiles to enter.

Designed by Alexey Pajitnov in 1985 and inspired in part by the mathematical elegance of the pentomino-based puzzle games he loved to play in his native Russia, *Tetris* extends the experiential space of a seemingly small 10 x 20 square grid into an infinite vertical plane. While players see a limited space of play ordered through strict Euclidian geometry, the game space theoretically extends forever beyond the top edge of the screen. Players anxiously anticipate the type of tile to appear next and must reorient each piece in both space and their mind as they search for a choice alignment. Once a row is complete traditional versions of the game move the stacks of tiles downward by a distance equal to the height of the cleared rows below them. Thus we find a tessellation or tiling of the plane with no overlaps or gaps rewarded with the return of a space of equal dimension. Players claim space to gain its simultaneous erasure. Sequencing the never-ending supply of interlocking tiles in such a way as to leave no cell empty works to locate players within a maddening paradox—while the game supports a spatial logic based on construction what remains onscreen is that which players have failed to complete. Rather than the well-ordered grid Tetris players desperately seek they face instead a highly original architecture of misstep and mistake.

Figure 1: Tetrominoes



Tetris for the NES, 1989



Tetris for Game Boy, 1989

