Computer Games Laboratory

Playtesting

Playtesting vs. …

- Internal design review

- Quality assurance testing

- Focus group testing

- Usability testing

Slides mainly based on sources [1] and [2]: citations omitted for readability

Playtesting

- **Testing in order to gain an insight into how players experience the game**
- **Most important outcome:**
  - Identify good and bad game aspects
  - Allow game designers to *abandon bad ideas*
  - Playtesting provides the necessary evidence
  - Make game complete, balanced, and fun to play

Playability & Playtesting

- ## Playability

  The degree to which a game is fun to play and usable, with an emphasis on the interaction style and plot-quality of the game; the quality of gameplay.

  Playability is affected by the quality of the storyline, responsiveness, pace, usability, customizability, control, intensity of interaction, intricacy, and strategy, as well as the degree of realism and the quality of graphics and sound.

- ## Playtesting

  Testing of games (including usability testing), examining pace, flow, narrative, controls, entertainment value, appeal for different target populations, challenge, novelty, etc.
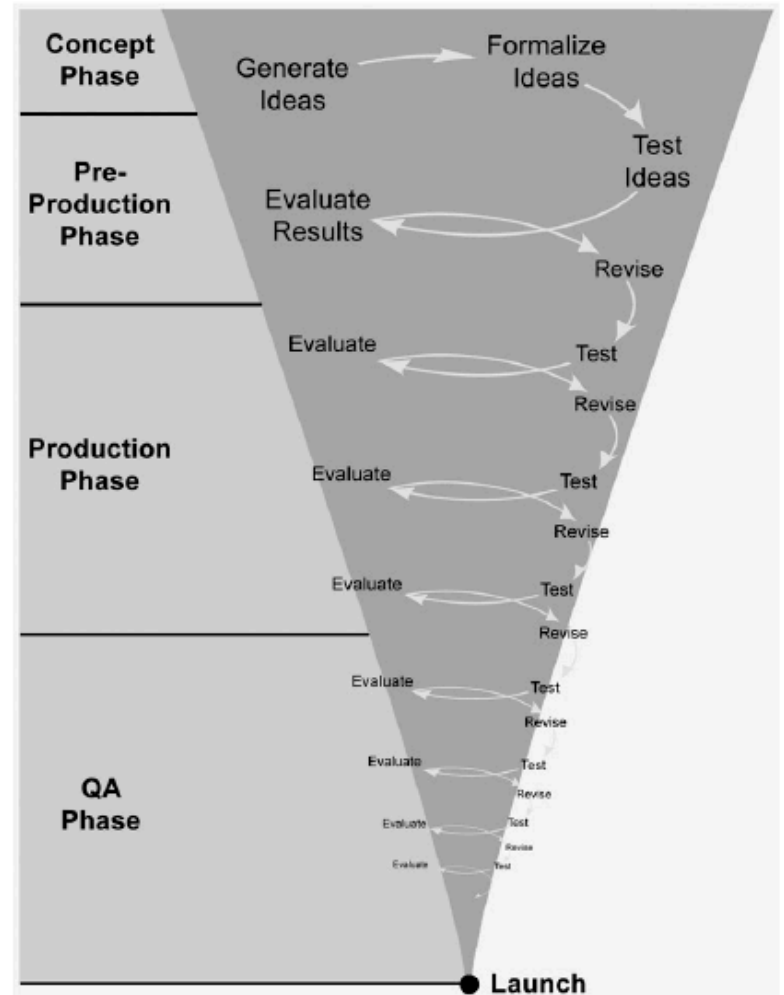
From: http://www.usabilityfirst.com/glossary

Game designer

- Advocate for player
- But... easy to forget about player
  - Designers quest to make game live up to one's own vision
- Playtesting is a continuous process

Playtesting – Process

- **Continual iterative process**
  - Cycles gets tighter
  - Smaller issues
  - Perfecting at end
- **Playtesting in beta is too late**
  - No major changes
  - Finetune only!
- **Playtest from start**

Concept Phase	Generate Ideas	Formalize Ideas
Pre-Production Phase	Evaluate Results	Test Ideas / Revise
Production Phase	Evaluate / Test / Revise	
QA Phase	Evaluate / Test / Revise	

Launch

Playtesters

- **In the very beginning... yourself!**
- **Early stages: friends & family.**
- **Eventually: strangers**
  - The more diverse the better
  - Most objective & give best feedback
  - Not in love with game, not bored with it
  - May feel uncomfortable at first

Playtesters – Ideal Testers

- Use community (uni, clubs, sports, etc)
- Post online/newspaper (more sources)
- When enough applicants, screen them
  - Want articulate people to convey opinions (Can they hold a conversation over the phone?)
  - Basic demographics (Hobbies, why did they apply, how often do they buy these games?)

Finally: Playtesting with Target Audier

Prototyping Stage	Playtest on Your Own	Playtest with Confidants	Playtest with Target Audience
1) Foundations	●		
2) Structure	●	●	
3) Formal Details			●
4) Refinement			●

Playtesting session

- Your role: investigator
  - Uncover what testers truly think
- Don't explain rules
- Don't explain your vision
- Don't teach them how to play
- Don't answer questions
- Don't help them unless they're totally stuck

Playtesting session

- Welcome and thank them
- Remind them that you're testing the game, not their skills
- Request that they talk out loud throughout and ask questions even though you won't be able to answer
- Don't lead!
- Afterward, interview them and discuss their experience

Observe!!

YOU

Playtesting session

- Intro (5 min)
- Warm up discussion (5 min) (use questions)
- Play session (15-20 min)
- Discussion of Game Experience (15-20 mins) (use questions)
- Wrap up (2 mins)

Playtesting session

Important:

- Be grateful & thank testers

- Bring cookies

Playtesting session

- **One-on-one (ideal)**
  - Quietly watch over tester's shoulders
  - Take notes

- **Group (less work)**
  - Same, but with a group
  - Try to minimize group dynamics

Playtesting session

Most challenging aspects:

- Learn to listen & not respond

- Accept criticism and dont be defensive

Really - shut up!

If communication (e.g. btw. Testers) -> NON-VIOLENT communication:

- What did I observe?

- What impression / feelings did that cause with me?

- What would be my request for you?

Playtesting session

- **Feedback forms**
    - Provide standard list of questions
- **Interview or discussion**
    - Talk about experience afterward

- **Get discussions started using the "play matrix"**

Play Matrix

- **Stimulate discussion & analyze gameplay**

	Skill	Chance
Mental Calculation	Go Civilization Chess Warcraft Starcraft Tetris	Poker Blackjack Backgammon Chutes and Ladders
Physical Dexterity	Devil Unreal Dice Halo Basketball Dance Dance Football Revolution	Operation Kerplunk Pin the Tail on the Donkey Whack-a-mole Tag Twister

Using the matrix

- Ask your testers to plot your game on the matrix.

- Ask players where they want to move the game to.

- Ask them what needs to be changed to move the game towards their preferred quadrant.

- This is a also a good chance to learn the type of players.
  - Strategy
  - Action
  - Gambler
  - Kids

Taking notes

- In-game observations
- Post-game questions
- Revision ideas

- Questions should be designed to illuminate specific issues.

- Beware of leading questions!

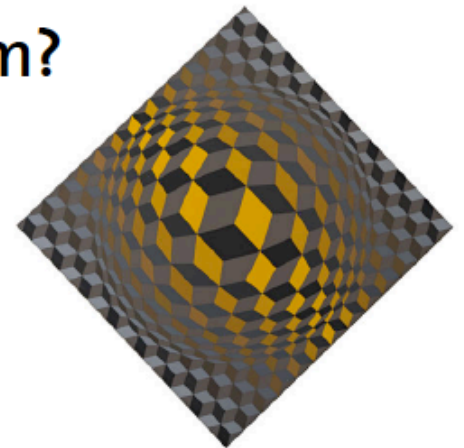- Don't overwhelm testers with too many!

In-game questions

- What did you feel as your turn ended?
- Does the navigation seem confusing?
- Why did you move to that location?
- Why are you pausing there?

Post-game questions

- How did the controls feel? Did they make sense?
- Did anything feel clunky or awkward?
- What was your first impression?
- How did that impression change as you played?
- Was there anything you found frustrating?
- Did the game drag at any point?
- What was missing from the game?
- If you could change just one thing, what would it be?
- If you were to give this game as a gift, who would you give it to?

Formal elements

- Describe the objective of the game.
- Was the objective clear at all times?
- What types of choices did you make during the game?
- What was the most important decision you made?
- What was your strategy for winning?
- Did you find any loopholes in the system?
- How would you describe the conflict?
- What elements could be improved?

Final Analysis

- Review notes & answers to questions

- Does feedback match your expectations?

- Is there a clear conclusion that can be drawn?

- What changes to the game should you make?

Collection of Questions

IN-GAME OBSERVATIONS

[Your thoughts as you watch the testers play.]

IN-GAME QUESTIONS

[Questions you ask the testers as they play.]

1. What did you feel as your turn ended?
2. Does the navigation seem confusing?
3. Why did you move to that location?
4. Why are you pausing there?

POSTGAME QUESTIONS

[Questions you ask the testers after they have played.]

General questions

1. What was your first impression?
2. How did that impression change as you played?
3. Was there anything you found frustrating?
4. Did the game drag at any point?
5. Were there particular aspects that you found satisfying?
6. What was the most exciting thing about the game?
7. Did the game feel too long, too short, or just about right?

Formal elements

1. Describe the objective of the game.
2. Was the objective clear at all times?
3. What types of choices did you make during the game?
4. What was the most important decision you made?
5. What was your strategy for winning?
6. Did you find any loopholes in the system?
7. How would you describe the conflict?
8. In what way did you interact with other players?
9. Do you prefer to play alone or with human opponents?
10. What elements do you think could be improved?

Dramatic elements

1. Was the game's premise exciting?
2. Did the story enhance or detract from the game?
3. As you played, did the story evolve with the game?
4. Is this game appropriate for the target audience?
5. On a piece of paper, graph your emotional involvement over the course of the game.
6. Did you feel a sense of dramatic climax as the game progressed?
7. How would you make the story and game work better as a whole?

Procedures, rules, interface, and controls

1. Were the procedures and rules easy to understand?
2. How did the controls feel? Did they make sense?
3. Could you find the information you needed on the interface?
4. Was there anything about the interface you would change?
5. Did anything feel clunky or awkward?
6. Are there any controls or interface features you would like to see added?

End of session

1. Overall, how would you describe this game's appeal?
2. Would you purchase this game?
3. What elements of the game attracted you?
4. What was missing from the game?
5. If you could change just one thing, what would it be?
6. Who do you think is the target audience for this game?
7. If you were to give this game as a gift, who would you give it to?

REVISION IDEAS

[Ideas you have for improving the game.]

Links

- **Playtesting chapter from Game Design Workshop**
  http://www.tar.hu/gamedesign/gamedesign0057.html

- **Experimental gameplay project**
  http://www.experimentalgameplay.com/

- **MS Playtesting**
  http://www.microsoft.com/playtest/default.mspx

- **Usability in website & software design**
  http://www.usabilityfirst.com/

- **Playtesting in Halo 3**
  http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/15-09/ff_halo

Sources

1. Tracy Fullerton: Game Design Workshop, CRC Press, 2014

2. ETH Game Programming Lab 2007 Slides, ETH Zurich, Computer Graphics Lab