

# Playtesting

# Playtesting vs. ...

- Internal design review
- Quality assurance testing
- Focus group testing
- Usability testing

# 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>

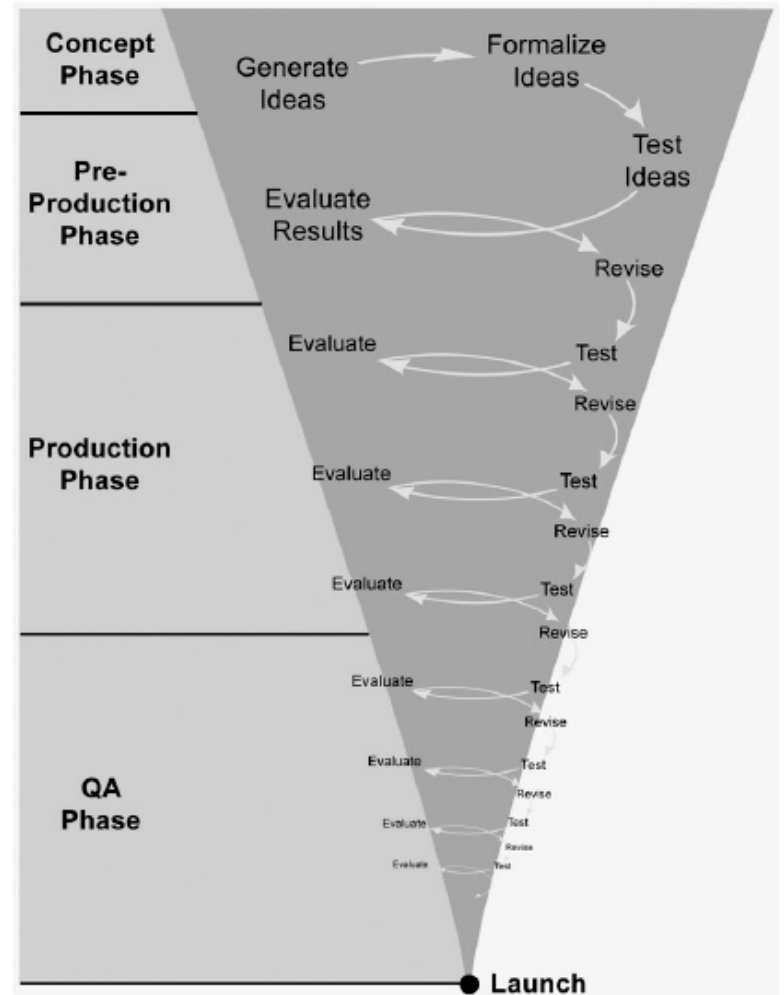


# Game designer

- 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



# 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 Audience

<b>Prototyping Stage</b>	<i>Playtest on Your Own</i>	<i>Playtest with Confidants</i>	<i>Playtest with Target Audience</i>
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 Rules

- Playtest before you think you are ready: is it too early for you to playtest? if yes: playtest anyway!
- Strategize for early playtesting: Simplify your project to allow for playtesting today!
- Know why you are playtesting: What is the key question you want to have answered?
- Prepare & try out variations
- Be grateful to your playtesters
- Design the learning experience of players (testers)
- Blame yourself not the testers
- Know your testers
- Don't explain: shut up!
- Take notes: prepare notes sheet
- Don't entertain, be selfish!
- Encourage your playtesters to talk aloud!!
- Notice everything, not only the things you want to see!
- Shut up!
- REALLY SHUT UP!!!!
- See the big picture: stay focused on the IMPACT of the project not the project itself
- Don't be afraid of data: what is the data that will answer your questions?
- Answer a question with a question
- Hunger for failure
- Discuss what happened: the more concrete your questions, the more useful answers
- Ask for feedback & collaborate with playtesters
- Face the truth even if it hurts
- Embrace the unexpected

# 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

- **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 and not respond
  - **Accept criticism and don't be defensive!**

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 Backgammon Blackjack Chutes and Ladders
Physical Dexterity	Unreal Halo  Basketball Football Dance Dance Revolution	Devil Dice 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?

## 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

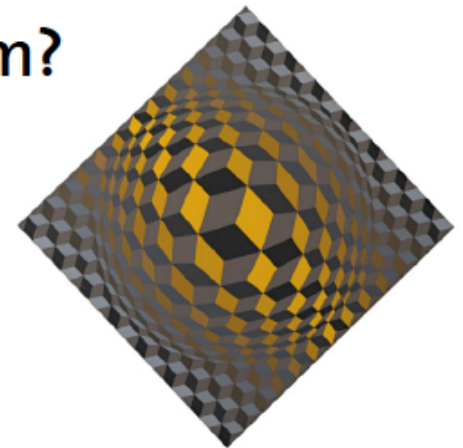
1. Overall, how would you describe this game's appeal?
2. Would you purchase this game?
3. What elements of the game attracted you?
4. What was missing from the game?
5. If you could change just one thing, what would it be?
6. Who do you think is the target audience for this game?
7. If you were to give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

## REVISION IDEAS

[Ideas you have for improving the game.]

# 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?

# 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.mspix>
- Usability in website & software design  
<http://www.usabilityfirst.com/>
- Playtesting in Halo 3  
[http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/15-09/ff\\_halo](http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/15-09/ff_halo)

1. Tracy Fullerton: Game Design Workshop, CRC Press, 2014
2. ETH Game Programming Lab 2007 Slides, ETH Zurich, Computer Graphics Lab