Computer Games Laboratory 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: https://www.usabilityfirst.com/glossary

Game Designer

Advocate for player

But: easy to forget about player

Designers quest to make game live up to own vision

Playtesting to align vision with current game experience

Playtesting – Process

Continual iterative process
- Cycles get 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 divers 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 (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 by these games?)

Finally: Playtesting with Target Audience

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 are totally stuck)

Playtesting Session

Welcome and thank them (bring cookies)

Remind them that you are 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!

Afterwards, interview them and discuss their experience

Playtesting Session – Example

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

Really – shut up!

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

Online
- Like one-on-one
- Video call or stream

Playtesting Session

Most challenging aspects:
- Learn to listen & not respond
- Accept criticism and dont 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

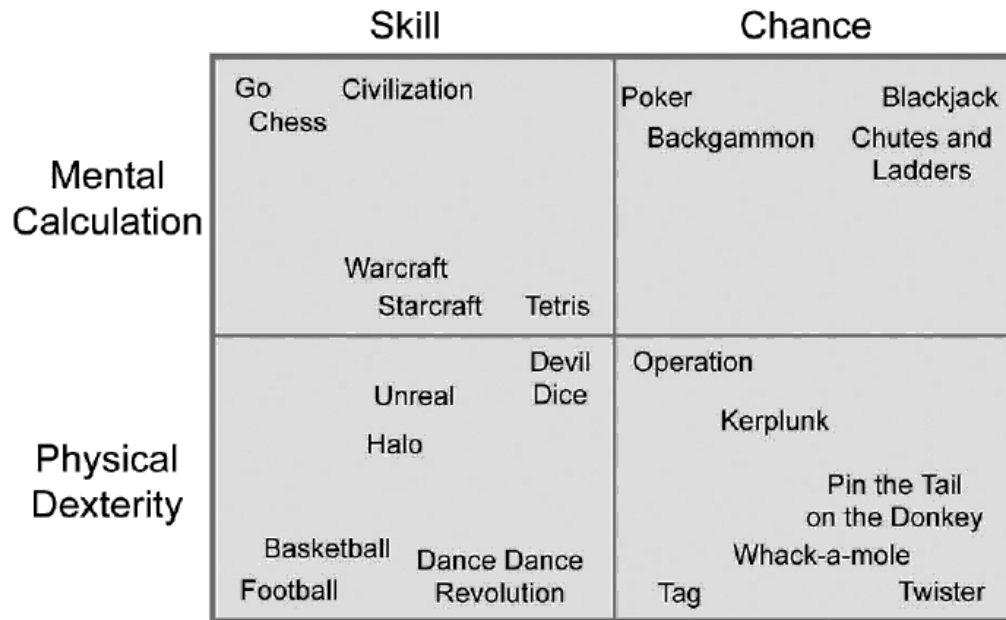Get discussion started using the "play matrix"

Play Matrix

Stimulate discussion & analyze gameplay

Let testers plot your game on the matrix

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

Learn the type of players
- Strategy
- Action
- Gambler
- Casual

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 navigations seem confusing?

Why did you move to that locations?

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 impressions 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 the 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 the feedback match your expectations?

Is there a clear conclusion that can be drawn?

What changes to the game should you make?

Additional 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.]

Computer Games Laboratory

Questions?