Playtesting

Your job in conducting a playtesting session is to take on the role of an observer and investigator who gives playtesters access to the game, leads them through a useful playtest, records what they say and do and later, analyzes their responses. Rather than telling players what to think about your game or explaining how it works, let them play it with minimal or no explanation. Allow them to make mistakes. See how each person approaches the game. Maybe your rules are confusing. Provide them with answers if they get really stuck, but for the most part, let your testers figure it out. You will learn much more from the mistakes players make than you will if they play the game flawlessly based on your explanations.

Some simple questions you will usually want to ask:

1. Overall, what were your thoughts about the game?

2. What were your thoughts about the game play?

3. Were you able to learn how to play quickly?

4. What is the objective of the game?

5. How would you describe this game to someone who has never played it before? What would you tell them?

6. Now that you have had a chance to play the game, is there any information that would have been useful to you before starting?

7. Is there anything that you did not like about the game? If so, what?

8. Was anything confusing? Please take me through what you found to be confusing.

Types of playtests:

One-on-one: Take notes and ask questions both during and after the session.

Group testing: Get a group of people and allow them to playtest your game together. This works best for physical prototypes, but is also useful for digital prototypes if you have access to a lab and several computers. You observe the group and ask questions as they play.

Online testing: Let the players create data for your game to see how it fares, bug free or not without having to pay extra fees.

Feedback forms: You give each person who playtests your game a standard list of questions to answer after playing and them compare the results. You can do this online as well, using something like SurveyMonkey.

Interview: You sit down face-to-face with the playtesters and give them an in-depth oral interview after the playtest session. This is not a discussion, but more of a verbal quiz.

Open discussion: You conduct either a one-on-one discussion or a group discussion after a round of playtesting and taking notes. You can either promote free-form discussion or have a more structured approach where you guide the conversation and introduce specific questions.

Playtest Plan

The playtest plan for each team should contain the following elements:

• Heading. "Playtest Plan for [game name]", team name, date, version.

• Playtest manager. Which team member(s) will be assigned the task of performing playtests, and recording the results from playtests? If this varies by week, a week-by-week listing should be given.

• Recruiting playtesters. How will the team attract other people to play the game? Recall that you will need to playtest at least 3 prototypes by week 9. Finding, motivating, and retaining playtesters is a critical issue, and one that can be a challenge. This can include such activities as sending email to the game undergraduate list, putting up paper flyers around campus, convincing friends and family to participate, doing a testing swap with another capstone team, and so on. This section also needs to identify how many playtesters the team is aiming to have in each playtest session

• Playtest logistics. When and where will the team conduct its playtest sessions? The lab is one possible location, though it does get busy at nights. For teams making games for specific devices (iPad/iPhone/Windows Phone 7/PS 3), gameplay testing needs to take into account the number of devices available to the team. Playtesting should ideally occur at times when these devices are not needed for development.

• Testing focus. For each week of playtesting, what gameplay issues does the team want to focus on? Controls are one issue that typically benefit from early attention. Others include the ability to learn the game, ease of completing initial levels, overall fun factor, etc.

• Test script. What is the sequence of steps that will be performed during playtest sessions? This typically takes the form of a welcome, asking about gameplay experience, having the playtester play the game (with in-game notetaking), then some form of post-play questionnaire or interview. This does not need to provide exact text that playtesters say (it's not a film script), but it does need to provide sufficient detail so that playtests can be performed uniformly over time, to ensure results are comparable across weeks.

• Questionnaire/interview guide. For post-test interaction with players, what specific questions will be asked? Are these free-form questions, or will a questionnaire be used with a predefined range of possible answers? How long do you expect this to take?

• Playtest report. The playtest manager(s) will be producing a report to the team on playtest results. What is the template for this report? This should typically involve elements such as: number of playtesters, experience level of playtesters, part of game played, important results (i.e., all players had trouble at a specific spot, all players had trouble with controls, etc.), and specific recommendations for changing the game. Feedback on the specific gameplay focus of the week should also be provided. However, the format of this report is expected to vary somewhat from team to team, since it will start to include information from automatically-collected gameplay metrics (which vary by team).

Observations and Playtester Comments

In-game Observations

[Your thoughts as you watch the testers play]

In-game Questions

[Questions you ask the testers as they play]

1. Why did you make that choice?

2. Does that rule/control/action seem confusing/

3. What did you think that would do?

4. What is confusing you?

Postgame Questions

[Questions you ask the tester after they have played]

1. What was your first impression?

2. How did that first impression change as you played?

3. Was there anything that 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 moment of the game?

7. Did the game feel too long, short, or just right?

Formal Elements

1. Describe the objectives 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. What elements do you think could be improved?

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 awkward, clunky, or confusing?

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.]