

Communication Design prototype – Assignment 2

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Intention

Clear communication and effective feedback are achieved when the mechanics of a game are understood by the player and gain enjoyment from interacting with them. My aim was to be able to get my mother to understand what was happening during the prototype, and for her to explain it back to me correctly. I wanted to achieve this as she would perceive the game differently than a game designer would, thus giving a better idea of how well the game communicates itself.

My hypothesis is that the prototype will be better to understand from an outsider's perspective with the help of communication elements such as an improved combat log, colour coordination and visual and audible cues. These features should also help with improving the player experience and feedback.

Process

Before adding feedback changes, the system was improved by playtesting the game and changing the values of the heal move to be 3-6 HP. I wished to make there be a greater incentive to use it. Furthermore, if the enemy was to just constantly attack, it felt quite unfair that one of the player's moves has a chance of missing. To fix this, a percentage requirement was needed for the enemy to land an attack, that being 85%. This way, the player could take a risk and opt for a hard attack or heal, with the chance of the enemy missing its attack and making the regained HP higher than if they were hit that turn.

With the prior created combat log, a primitive form of data communication was already in place. To better communicate the impact of a move, colour was added to highlight to the player what had just happened in the turn. Blue represented the damage that the player output, red represented the enemy hit or an attack missing, and green was used to symbolise a heal. The move descriptions were also highlighted in their corresponding colours to allow the player to subconsciously connect the events that were happening with their choice of move.

The move texts were changed to have the actual possible damage output shown, such as the Solid Attack showing it could do between 3 and 5 damage. Furthermore, for the Hard Attack, a hover function was added, where the player could check what percentage was required for the move to hit. The text was underlined in blue to draw the player's attention and resembled a hyperlink which can be hovered over, and this hover acted as a more dynamic communication for the player to interact with.

Sounds were added to give a good sense of feedback for the moves that the player chooses. When a move was to hit, the player was alerted of it through a sword sound. A whoosh sound was added for missing moves and a hum was for healing. A new mechanic was added which would detect when a player would score above 7 damage and award them through a particle effect and a ding sound effect. This critical hit function could encourage the use of the hard attack, but the chance to miss was always still there to create a choice dilemma.

A final feature to help the player navigate at the end of the battle, was the Exit and Try Again buttons, to communicate that the player has these two options instead of expecting the player to click Escape on their keyboard to leave.

Reflection

The hypothesis was successful as after playtesting with my mother, she was able to recite what had happened, as well as expressing joy when hitting a critical hit or when the enemy's attack missed. Planned features such as every combat log line being a different colour due to the choice of move or it being the enemy's turn was not achieved, however, due to struggling with text coding and not understanding rich text enough.

The process of improving communication design was far more instinctive than originally thought, as I found myself adding content intuitively that made the game feel better and more fun to interact with. Colour is a very important tool when communicating content effectively and assigning the different moves their different colours allowed players to be able to comprehend quickly what had just happened.

Furthermore, the particle effects and sounds greatly added to the feedback produced by the game, proved through the playtesting done by my mother and her subsequent visible enjoyment of the new system. The hover function for the hard attack was not an initial idea, but the hidden percentage made it feel unfair to the player, so a more dynamic way of interaction was implemented to improve this issue.

This assignment made me realise how vital communication and feedback design is when it comes to expressing the core systems of a game. The whole purpose of a game is to serve as a form of entertainment, and by adding elements that engage and better communicate the actions of the player, they are far more inclined to want to continue to interact with the system.