

G54GAM Coursework 1: Game User Research and Design Analysis

Summary

This coursework is worth 30% of the overall module assessment and is to be **conducted individually**.

Observe experience(s) of playing in order to critically document and analyse the game design and play of an existing, publicly available (commercially or freely) video or computer game of your choice. Describe how formal design concepts can be, or not be, identified in the game, and how these manifest in the experience of the game.

Your report should be between 2000-2500 words in length, and should be submitted by

3pm Monday 19th March 2018

Submissions should be made as .doc, .docx or .pdf files electronically via Moodle. Standard penalties of 5% per working day will be applied to late submissions.

Instructions

Step 1: Plan your observation, seek ethics approval

Identify a game that you wish to observe, but think practically. You will need to arrange for your participant(s) to play the game and be able to observe them. As mentioned in the introductory lecture many free games are available at <https://itch.io/>, or alternatively Unreal Tournament can be played via Unreal Engine installed on the machines in A32. Other students on the module would be ideal participants.

Next, complete and generate the necessary Ethics Checklist, Information Sheet and Consent Forms. Be sure to read and answer the questions carefully. It is expected that your activities will be minimal risk and will not involve the collection of personal data – if you do not believe that this will be the case then please arrange to discuss this with me. ¹

See me in the Thursday lab sessions to approve your Ethics Checklist.

Important: Failure to obtain informed consent via the correct forms from all participants is considered a serious academic offense and will be treated as such. Failure to seek appropriate ethics approval **before** conducting any research is similarly an offense, and will lead to any results or writing derived from the research being discarded. ²

1

<https://workspace.nottingham.ac.uk/display/CompSci/Research+Ethics+Guidelines+for+Academic+Staff%2C+Researchers+and+Students>

2

<https://workspace.nottingham.ac.uk/display/ResEth/Code+of+Research+Conduct+and+Research+Ethics>

Step 2: Observe and Capture User Experience

Invite your participant(s) to play the game as they would normally and observe them playing. You are aiming to measure player *behaviour* – the actions that the player takes in the game – and player *attitude* – the player's opinions on what they play. Direct observations of gameplay provide direct objective insights into player behaviour while interrogation of the player's experience provides insights into their attitude.

Watch the player playing and make note of what they are doing in the game, and how they are doing it, in as much detail as you can. Pay attention to in-game events (these will be most of your observations), control inputs and spontaneous player comments.

After the game ask the player to complete the Game Experience Questionnaire in order to capture their subjective view of the game experience.

Step 3: Report Writing

Consider the data that you have captured via the GEQ scoring system and Hochleitner et al's Heuristic Framework for Evaluating User Experience in Games (available on Moodle). These will highlight key elements of the game that you can consider in your report. Your report should follow the broad structure given below:

- A brief **overview** of the game (~500 words maximum)
- **Analysis** of the game design

You should consider one or both of the following themes with respect to your chosen game:

- Identify and describe the core mechanic of the game, the micro and macro choices and whether and how they could be considered to be meaningful.
- Identify, categorise and describe the challenges present in the game, their relationships, and whether these lead to a player experience with a specific (implicit or explicit) aesthetic.

For each of the above you should provide rich descriptions or vignettes of fragments of game play that you observed where these elements are apparent in the game in order to justify your analysis, and surmising how these elements are reflected in the measurement of the game play experience. It is expected that you will draw upon material covered in the lectures in order to demonstrate high quality analytical reasoning.

- **References**

List of references cited in your report using an appropriate referencing style.

- **Appendix**

Your appendix should include any additional material to supplement your analysis, for example the completed Game Experience Questionnaire.

The maximum length of the final report is 2500 words (excluding references, appendices and annotations to any images or diagrams). We reserve the right to ignore submitted material after the first 2500 words for the purposes of assessment.

Hints

Depth over breadth. As evidenced by Stuart's paper³ on Counter Strike the unpacking of a brief but representative and often repeated activity provides a wealth of insights with which to understand a game and games of a similar genre, rather than trying to describe everything that happens at a high level.

Critical documentation does not mean giving a **negative** commentary as to why you think a game may have a *bad* design. Instead you are aiming to evaluate the design of the game using the lens of game design theory that has been expounded in the lectures.

Avoid writing **subjectively**. Critical analysis is necessarily subjective – you are giving your evaluation as an *expert*, and the game experience questionnaire is also a subjective measure – however the focus should be on the subject of your analysis, not on yourself. I.e. avoid “I think”, instead “the game can be described as... because...”

The aim of this exercise is not to write a walk-through of a game, it is to assess your ability to **generalise** the elements of a game and describe them in terms of existing **frameworks**.

Screenshots can be used to illustrate a feature in the game that is representative of a key concept or challenge, or a common event in the game play, however they are only valuable when referred to and integrated with the text.

When **referencing** external sources pay attention to both the formatting of the reference but also that the source is clearly identified. A URL for a Google image search query is not an appropriate source.

³<http://www.cs.nott.ac.uk/~pszs/files/reeves-2009-experts-at-play.pdf>

Assessment Criteria

The coursework will be assessed against the following areas using the standard criteria⁴

	Marks Available
Quality of Analysis The analysis correctly draws on examples to identify and describe key game design elements, reflecting on their relationship to appropriately measured experience, evidence of wide reading and reference to module lectures.	70
Quality of Academic Writing The report reflects elements of critical thinking and quality academic writing. That is, the writing should be coherent, precise, objective, concise, succinct, fluent, lucid, original, reflective and exhibit the characteristics of critical thinking in the development of solid arguments.	20
Quality of Presentation This refers to the case study analysis has good structure and organisation, correct English lexicon and grammar, correctly formatted and appropriate citations/references.	10
Total	100

Plagiarism

Plagiarism or other academic offenses will be dealt with using the standard University procedures⁵, and may result in a mark of zero for the entire assessment, module or year.

Pay attention to the correct attribution of sources – specifically you must not copy passages of text without highlighting them as third party and referencing the source.

You must not solicit, or attempt to solicit a third party to complete part or all of your report.

⁴<https://workspace.nottingham.ac.uk/display/CompSci/Marking+Criteria>

⁵<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicservices/qualitymanual/assessmentandawards/academic-misconduct.aspx>