



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DIPARTIMENTO DI INFORMATICA

OGD Lesson 008: Target audience & Playtesting

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008. Summary

- Target audience
 - Defining your target audience
- Playtesting
 - What playtesting is good for?
 - Recruiting playtesters
 - Playtesting sessions & methods
- References:
 - Chapters 9 , 10, 11 «Game Design Workshop» by T. Fullerton
 - Chapters 9, 27 «The art of Game Design» by J. Schell
 - Chapters 10, 17 «Game Design» by M. Bertolo & I. Mariani
 - “The Silent Revolution Of Playtests”
http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/132355/the_silent_revolution_of_.php



You are designing for someone
different from you !!

Target audience



Einstein's violin ...

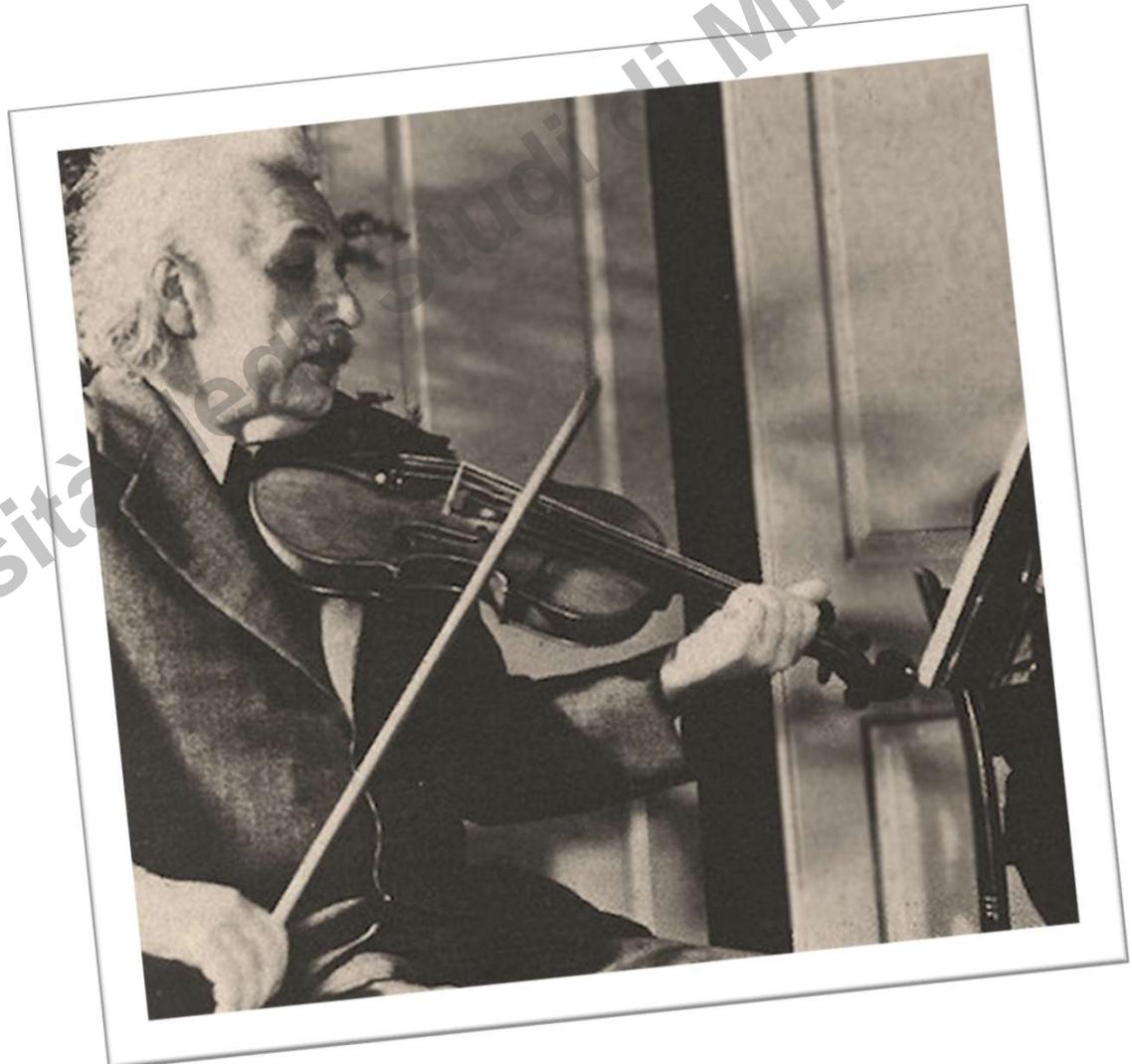
- He decided to play violin instead of talking about physics because he knew:



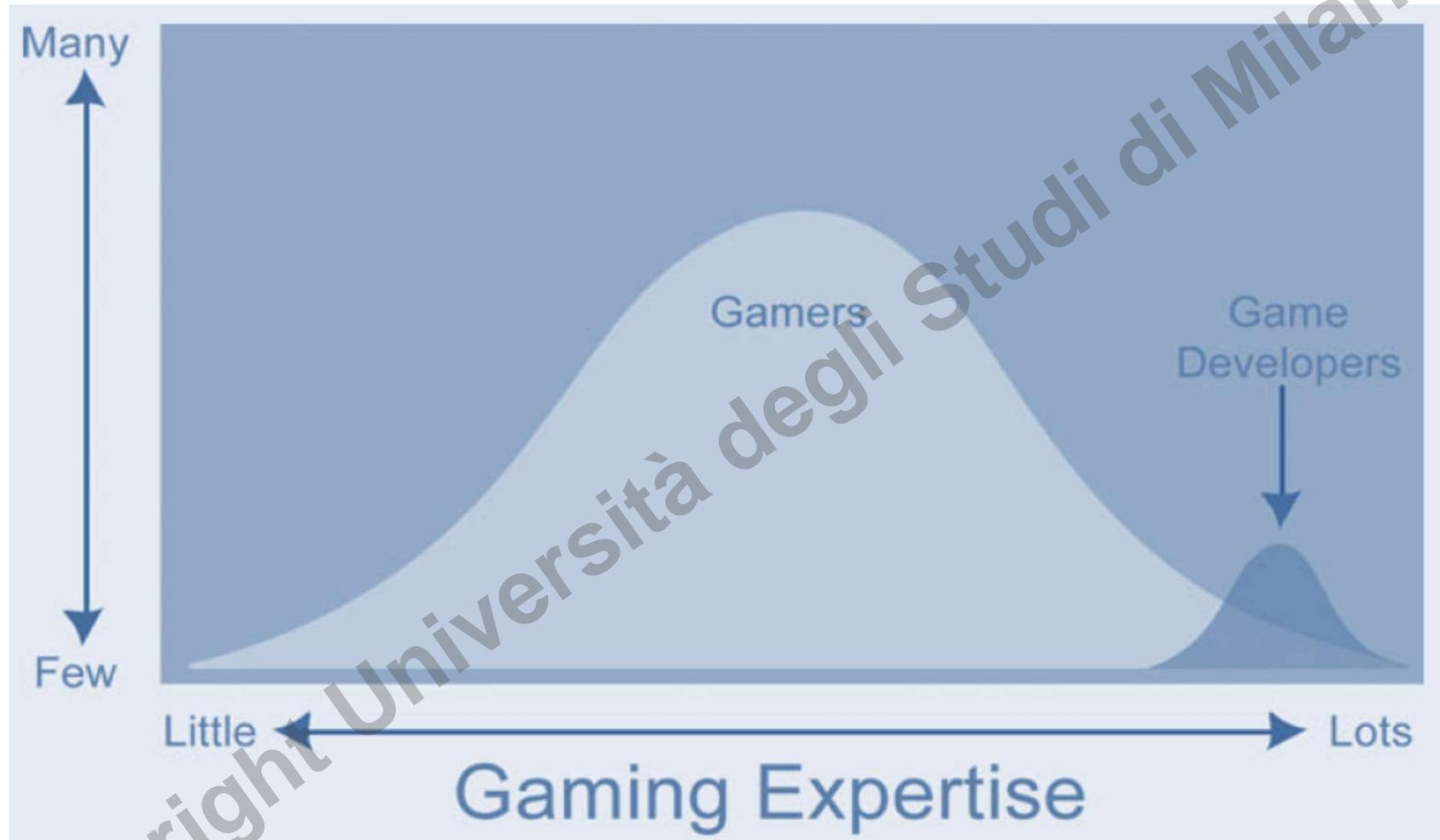
– his audience



– their desire



U have to design FOR a TARGET audience ...



GDs simply **CANNOT** make games that appeals to them, if they want to create something that the majority of gamers likes !!

U have to design FOR a TARGET audience

- First step for a good design: **know your target audience !**
 - Exploit every single occasion to **talk** with your potential players
 - NEVER assume you know the **ludic needs** and **expectations** of your players !! (what u think may turn out to be wrong...)
 - Exploit **interviews** and **observation** to understand players
 - Remember: players may be **unaware** of what they expect for a game (e.g. try to explain why u like a certain game ...)



Lens of the player

- To define your target audience ask yourself:

19 The Lens of The Player 

Illustration by Nick Daniel

To use this lens, stop thinking about your game, and start thinking about your player. Ask yourself these questions about the people who will play your game:

- In general, what do they like?
- What don't they like? Why?
- What do they expect to see in a game?
- If I were in their place, what would I want to see in a game?
- What will they like or dislike about my game in particular?

Classifying players

U need to classify players from **demographic** and **sociological** perspectives:

1. Demographic taxonomy
2. Psicographic taxonomy
3. Players' expectations
4. Context

PERSONAS



1. Demographic classification of players

- Focus on **EXTERNAL** factors
(how they appear):

- Age
- Gender
- Income
- Ethnicity
- Geographics
- Occupation
- Education
- Etc.

... some classification are
more useful than others ...



1. Demographic classification (more useful)



Age (years)	Main characteristics (males and females)
0-3	<u>Infant/toddler</u> : interested in toys. <u>No</u> problem solving skills.
4-6	<u>Preschooler</u> : simple games played with adults (able to read and explain rules).
7-9	<u>Kids</u> : problem solving skills start to develop, more complex games.
10-13	<u>Preteen/tween</u> : very strong interests for specific game types (quite an obsession).
13-18	<u>Teen</u> : specific preferences and interests are evolving and settling (also gender-dependent).
18-24	<u>Young adult</u> : preferences & interests well defined, gradual reduction of parental control, gradual increase of income available.
25-35	<u>Twenties & thirties</u> : Players split into casual and hardcore.
35-50	<u>Thirties & forties</u> : main interest: career and family. More money available. Games should involve the family (consoles, etc.)
50+	<u>Fifties & up</u> : Plenty of spare time and desire for changement: games with social component (golf, tennis, MMORPG, etc.)

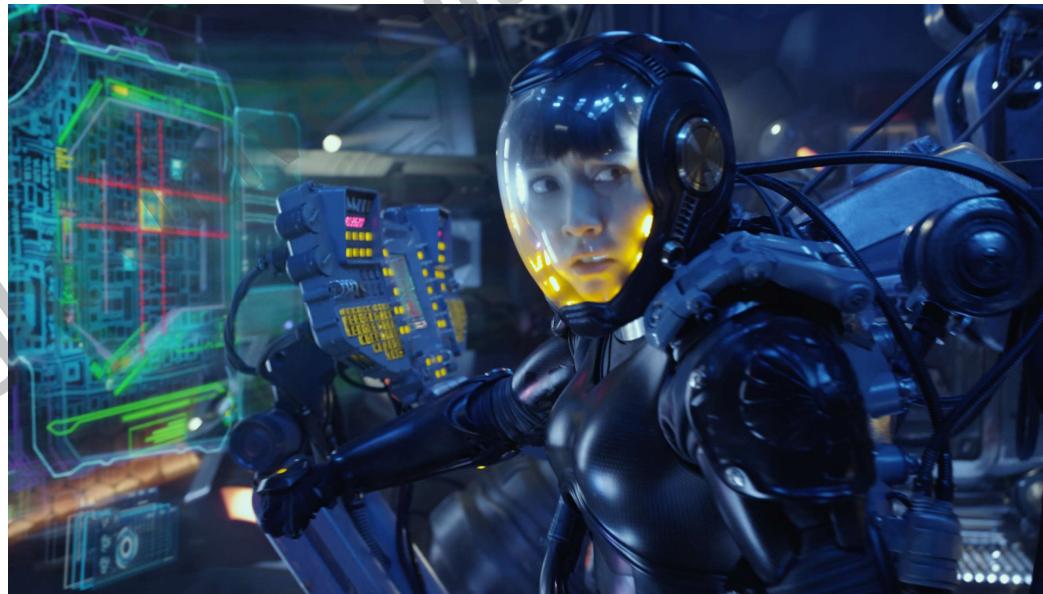
1. Demographic classification of players

... beware of stereotypes!



2. Psicographic classification of players

- Focus on INTERNAL factors (in the player's mind):
 - **Study players' lifestyle** to understand how their activities, habits, interests and ideas influence their preferences
- There are many (see marketing studies): in the game industry it is quite diffused the **Bartle's classification**

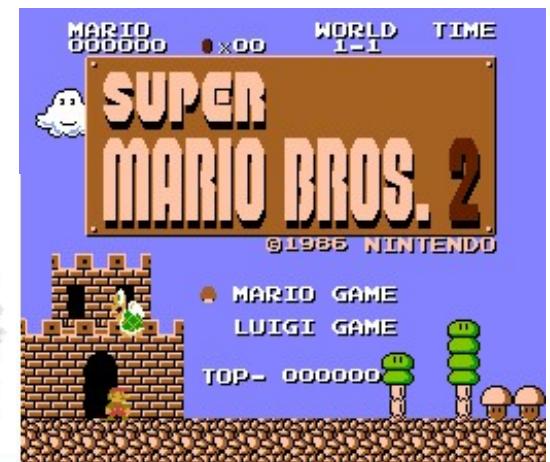


3. Players' expectations

Players' expectations stem from culture, age, etc., and they may vary/evolve in time

- Beware of:
 - Cultural agreements (e.g. white is the mourning colour in many asian cultures)
 - Reaction to specific symbols (e.g. red is associated to danger)
 - Visual aspects (e.g. cartoonish vs 3D realistic graphic induce different expectations about the game experience)
 - Genre-specific conventional rules (e.g. «experience» in RPGs)
 - Player experience with similar games

If underevaluated, «problems» may arise (e.g. Super Mario: the Lost Levels)



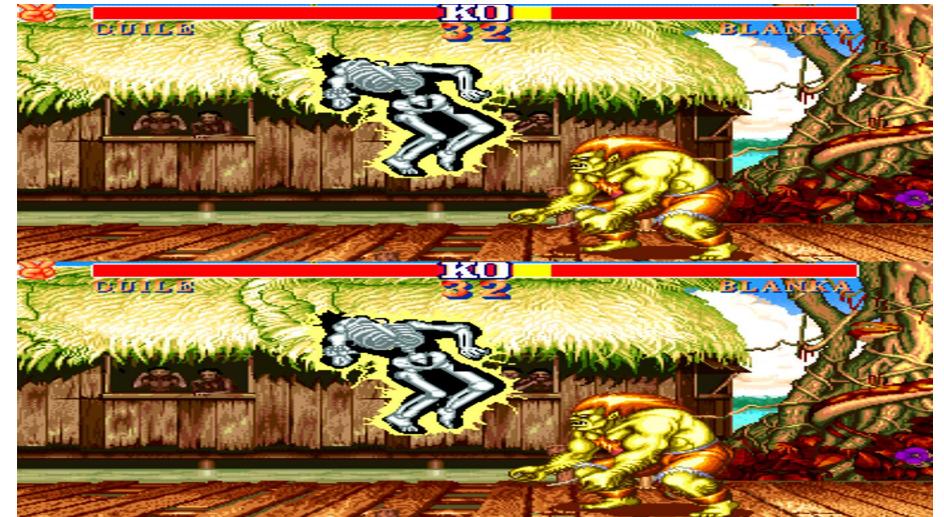
4. Context

- Remember that people may change favourite game type according to:
 - **Psychological status** (stressed, relaxed, etc.)
 - **Place**: at home, commuting, with friends, on holiday, etc.)
 - E.g. u cannot use an Oculus in a railway station/airport



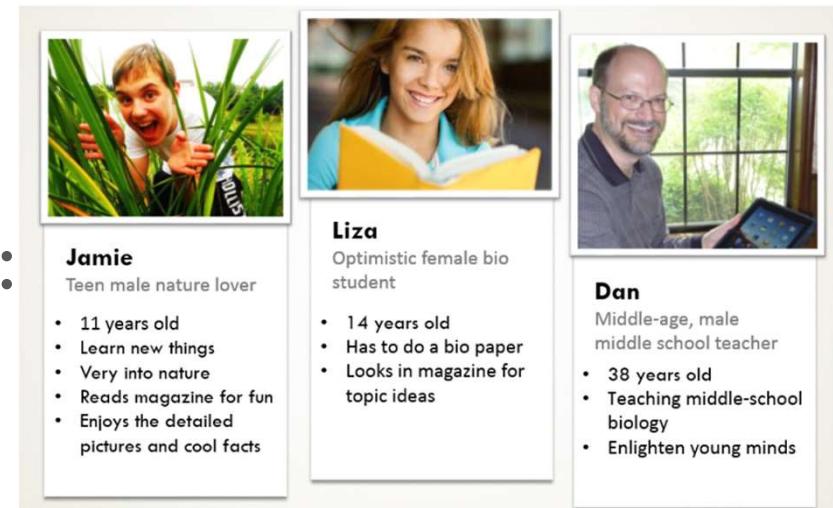
4. Context & pleasure

- Pleasure derived from playing can vary (also according to the **context**):
 - Anticipation
 - Completion
 - Delight in another's misfortune
 - Gift giving
 - Humor
 - Possibility
 - Pride in accomplishment
 - Surprise
 - Thrill
 - Triumph over adversity
 - Wonder
 - Etc.



... and you obtain: Personas !!

- Method widely diffused among interaction designers and adopted for game design
- Main idea: create **archetypes of your players**, as detailed as you can and design for them!
 - Characteristics derived from demographic/sociological/ cultural/context/etc. analysis
 - Give them name, face, etc.
 - AVOID average «player»
(no-one has «between 1 and 2 kids» ...)
- **Reverse/complementary** approach:
 - Define the profile of your non-player!



Examples (from a project for Steam - www.jfarny.com/planet.php)

Danny



"I need the perfect multiplayer experience that allows me to vent after work while I catch up with my old college friends."

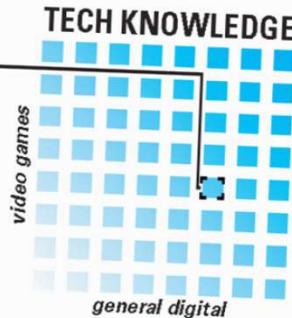
[image: flickr.com]

QUICK FACTS
location: Kansas City, KS
occupation: salesman
age: 24

GOAL
to purchase a video game console that has the most first-person titles with online multiplayer.

EXPERTISE
medium - this individual knows a decent amount about video games and current technology.

TECH KNOWLEDGE



BACKSTORY

As a junior level sales representative for Cerner, Danny mostly uses video games as a way to stay connected with his old college buddies. His new job keeps him pretty busy so it's important for him to spend his free time doing something relaxing.

While he was in college, he would play the original Halo with his friends after classes via split screen and system link. Now that Danny no longer lives in the same city as his friends, he needs to find the perfect console for first-person shooters that have a good multiplayer experience. Part of playing online with his friends is also a chance to catch up on what everybody's doing as well as venting some frustration, so good voice quality in game is a must as well. He has heard that the best sound quality will always come from controllers systems and controllers that are wired versus blue-tooth. In short, Danny knows what he wants, but isn't exactly sure which gaming package fully suites his needs.

PART OF PLAYING ONLINE WITH DANNY'S FRIENDS IS GETTING A CHANCE TO CATCH UP, SO HE NEEDS GOOD VOICE QUALITY IN GAME

Examples (from a project for Steam - www.jfarny.com/planet.php)

Barbara

I want to spend as much time as possible playing games with my grandkids.

[Image: flickr.com]

QUICK FACTS
location: Golden, CO
occupation: retired nurse
age: 72

GOAL
to buy a video game console that has games that she thinks she can play and a controller that's not too complicated to use.

EXPERTISE
low - this individual knows next to nothing about video systems or technology in general.

TECH KNOWLEDGE

video games	high
general digital	low

BACKSTORY

As a retired senior citizen, Barbara spends most of her time babysitting the grandkids after school while their parents are at work. In the winter time, it gets to be too cold to play outside in the yard, so she has to find indoor activities that will keep the children occupied. Cards are a regular staple, but lately her grandkids have been getting into video games. Barbara doesn't particularly mind that the children want to play games, as long as their homework gets done first. Since her husband Gary passed away last year she can get a bit lonely around the house by herself all day and really wants to utilize the time she has with her grandchildren. She has decided that she wants to buy a video game console that the kids can use while they are over, though Barbara needs one that she can use as well. Games that require complicated button combinations or good hand-eye coordination are not something that Barbara thinks she could easily pick up.

BARBARA CAN GET A BIT LONELY AROUND THE HOUSE BY HERSELF AND WANTS TO REALLY UTILIZE THE TIME SHE HAS WITH HER GRANDKIDS

Examples (from a project for Steam - www.jfarny.com/planet.php)

Evan



QUICK FACTS

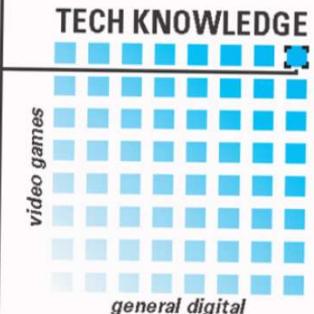
location: Atlanta, GA
occupation: student
age: 20

GOAL

to find the **perfect mouse and keyboard combination** for first-person shooter games that he could also use for schoolwork.

EXPERTISE

high - this individual knows a lot about video games and works with technology every day.



BACKSTORY

As a second year at Georgia Tech, Ben has found a core set of friends and adjusted to his intense course load. Ben has currently moved into an apartment with three other individuals who lived on the same dorm floor as him last year. One of the

things that they all have in common is that they like to play a lot of PC games. If they have time, Ben and his roommates will host a LAN party and invite others over to play competitive team-based games like Team Fortress. One of the things that Ben and

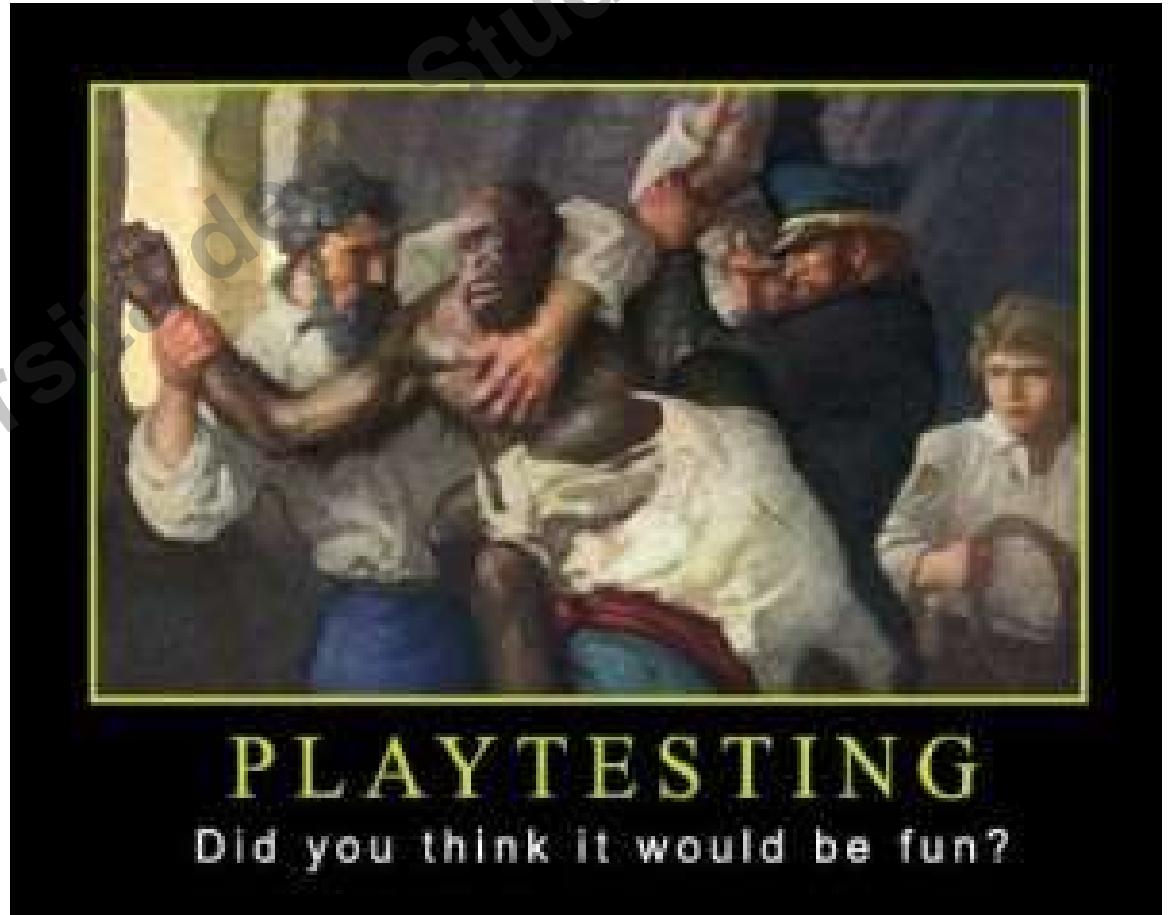
his friends are constantly talking about is their tech gear; how much ram their PC has, how high they can adjust the visual setting on the latest games, and how they map out in game macros on their mice and keyboards. It's been awhile since Ben updated

his gear and decides he wants to get a new, gaming specific keyboard and mouse. His friends all give him advice based on what they like, but Ben's looking for that perfect fit for his play-style.

BEN AND HIS FRIENDS ARE CONSTANTLY TALKING ABOUT THEIR TECH GEAR AND HOW THEY MAP OUT KEYBOARD MACROS

And now: ...

Playtesting



Playtesting may feel like ...

*You are cordially invited
to tell me why I suck*

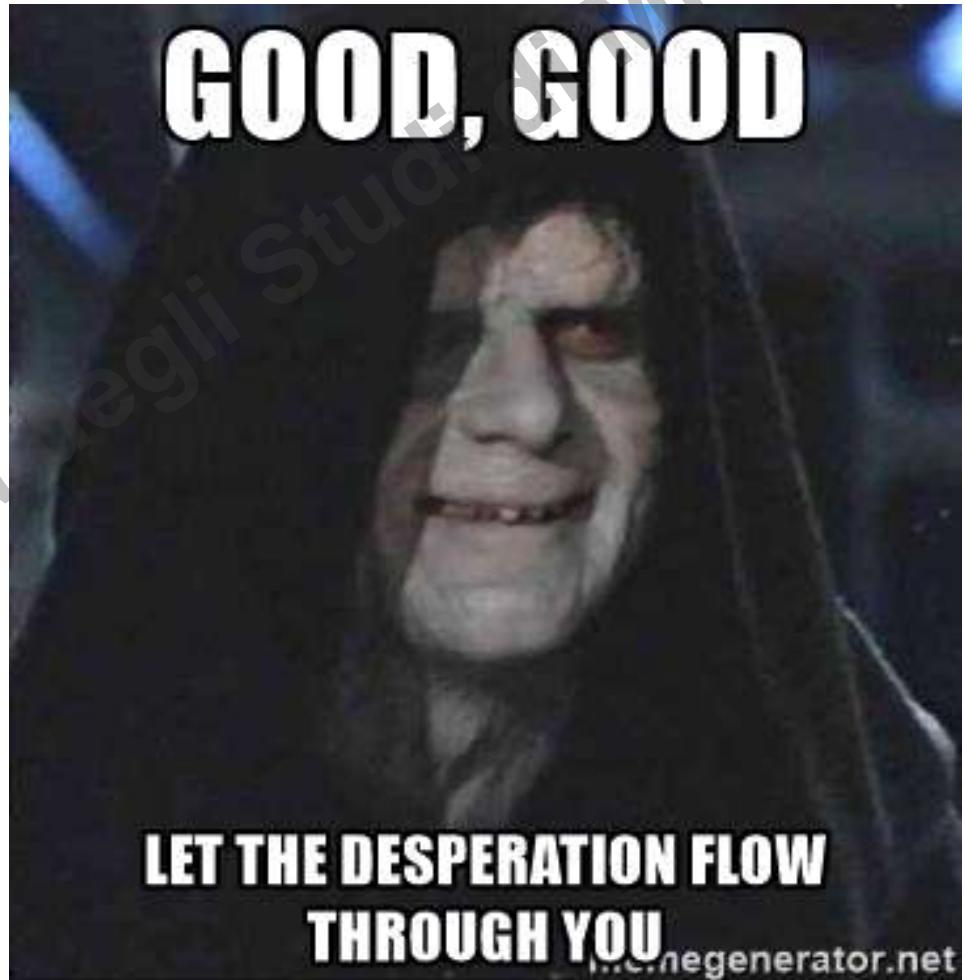
Bring a friend -

R.S.V.P.

Playtesting goal

- Make clear to you that **some of the decisions you were completely comfortable with are completely wrong ...**

PS yes, it hurts ..



What playtesting is NOT ...

- GD & team play game and discuss features



INTERNAL DESIGN REVIEW

- Rigorous test of the sw



QUALITY ASSURANCE
TESTING

- Marketing executives looking playtesters and discussing sells



FOCUS GROUP TEST

- Using data hooks



USABILITY TESTING

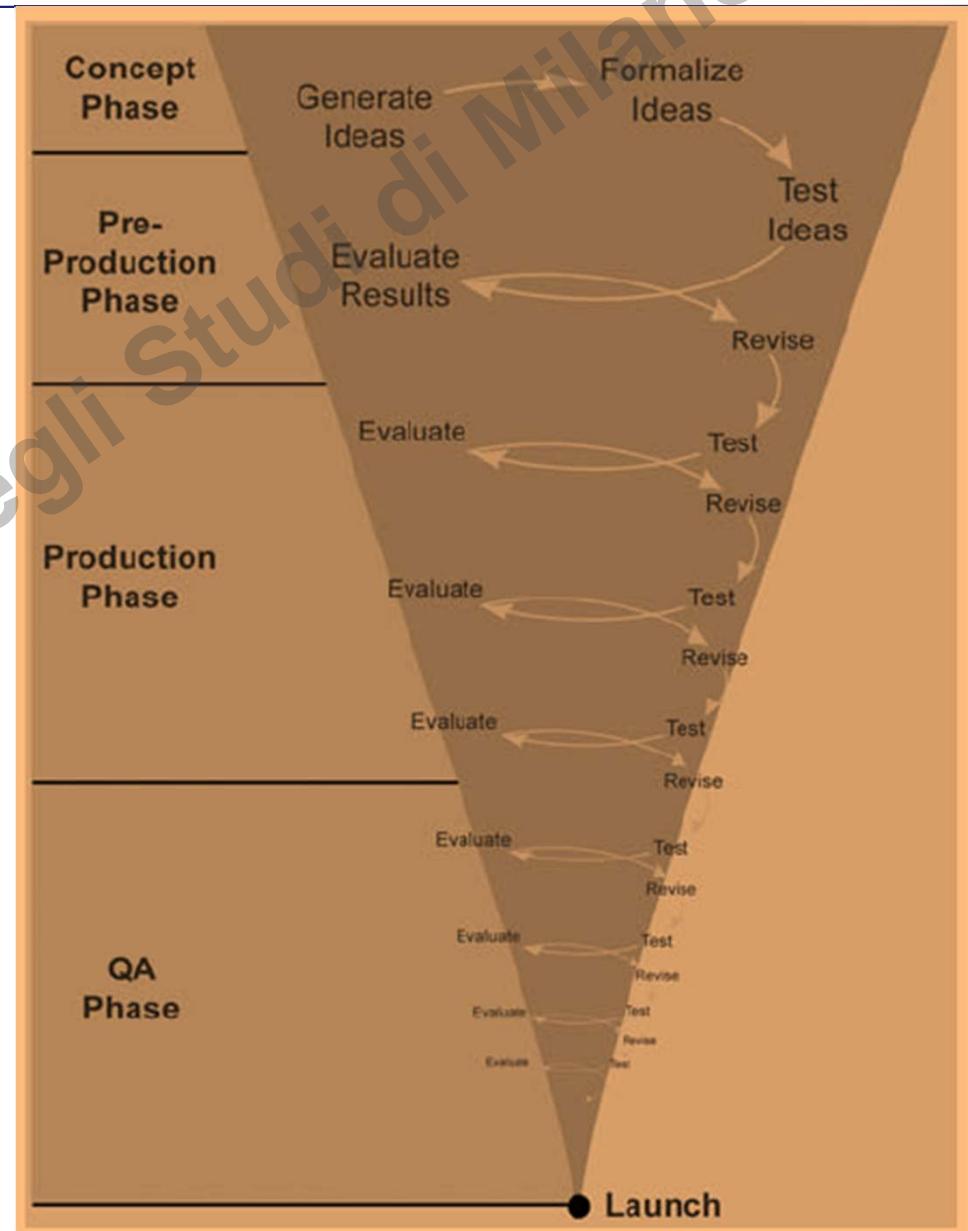
Play...what?

- **PlayTESTING:**
 - the **MOST** important activity for the GD, and the **LEAST** understood!
 - **MUST** be performed during the **WHOLE** design process
- **Goal of PT:** gaining useful feedback to improve the overall game experience:
 - The game should be **internally complete, balanced, fun to play!**



Playtesting & iterative design

- GD MUST keep a strong relationship with players' needs & perspective throughout the design and production process
- Continual **ITERATIVE** process (**playtest -> evaluate -> revise**) guarantees that the game stays OK and that problems to solve get smaller & smaller



Playtesting questions

1. Why?
2. Who?
3. Where?
4. What?
5. How?



- What data will I collect after the play session?

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The Lens of Playtesting



Illustrated by: Chris Daniel



Playtesting is your chance to see your game in action.
To ensure your playtests are as good as they can be,
ask yourself these questions:

- Why are we doing a playtest?
- Who should be there?
- Where should we hold it?
- What will we look for?
- How will we get the information we need?

1. Playtesting question: WHY?

- Playtest = **prototype of the game experience**
- You must playtest with specific goals in mind

- Do men and women play differently?
- Do kids like my game better than adults?
- What strategies do players find on their own?
- Is level 3 too long?
- Are players ever frustrated?
- Which parts of the game are the least/most fun?
- Etc. etc.



NB: prepare this list IN ADVANCE !

Playtesters MUST be chosen carefully ...

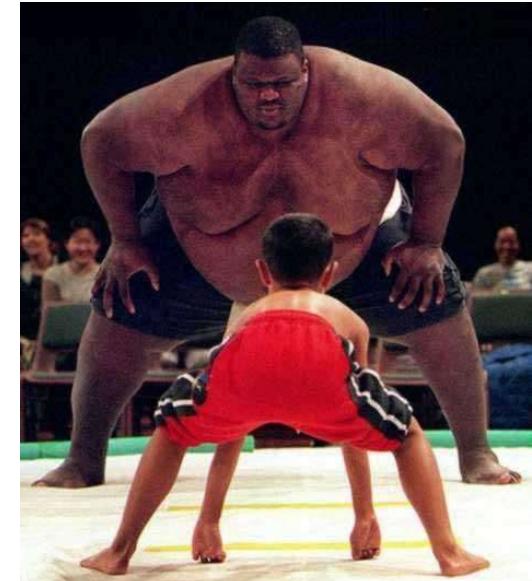
Wants to playtest a casual game for mobile, appealing to adults commuters in a big city ...

... hires a group of teens leaving in a rural area, going to school by bike



Finding the ideal playtesters

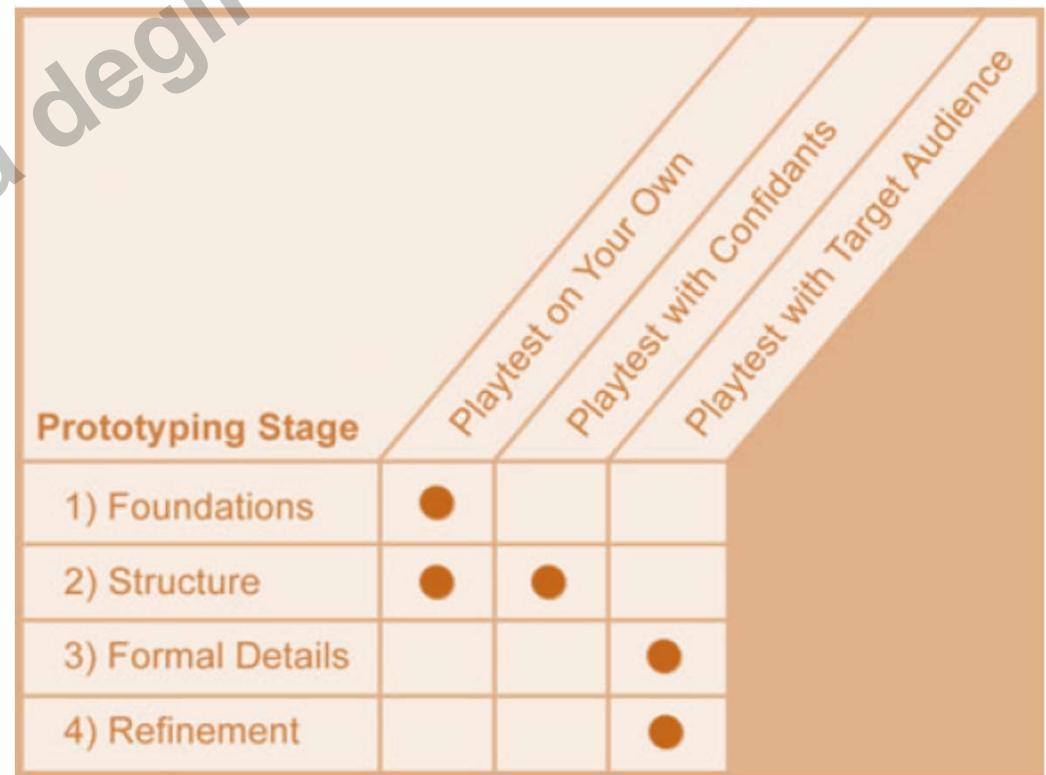
- Is someone who represents your target audience!!
 - Gives more valuable feedback
 - Is able to compare your game to similar games
 - Knows what she (dis)likes
- How to find them?
 - Tap in your community
 - Post in blogs, forum, ...
 - Recruit among students, FoF, ...
- Fundamental characteristic:
 - Able to articulate enough to convey opinions (test in advance through quick interview)



PS: don't be paranoid: they won't steal your ideas!

2. Playtesting question: WHO? (Recruiting playtesters)

- **Your own**: ok at the very beginning
- **Confidants** (friends & relatives): ok very first stages. Beware of biased view!
- **People you don't know**: relates you honestly about the game problems!



2. Playtesting question: WHO? (Recruiting playtesters)

1. Your own/developers

- Pros:
 - Already there, as long as you need
 - Meaningful & thoughtful feedbacks
 - No NDAs
- Cons:
 - Too close to the game (distorted opinions)



2. Playtesting question: WHO? (Recruiting playtesters)

2. Friends & families

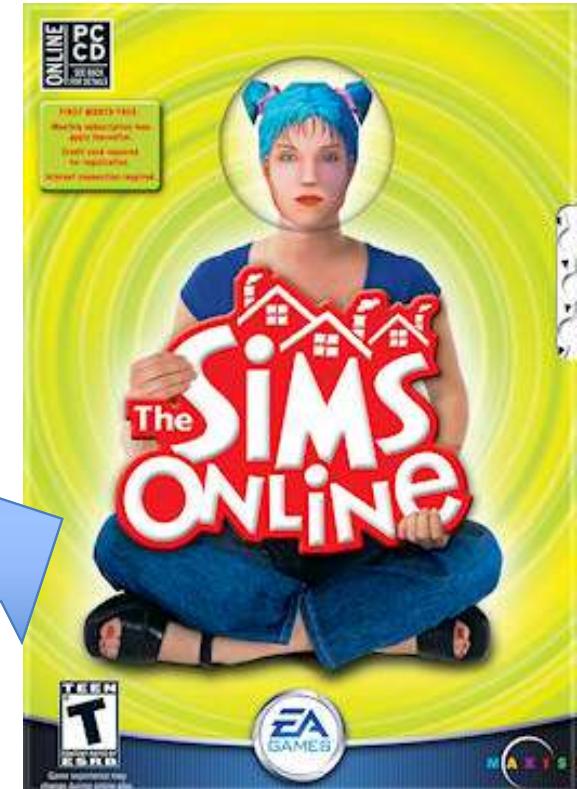
- Pros:
 - Highly available
 - Comfortable to talk to
- Cons:
 - They don't want to hurt your feelings (??)
 - They like *you* => they'll *try to like your game*



2. Playtesting question: WHO? (Recruiting playtesters)

3. **Expert gamers:** hardcore gamers that have played every variety of the type of game your are making

- Pros:
 - Love to playtest
 - Give very useful and technical feedback
 - Able to compare your game to similar ones
- Cons:
 - More selective and demanding than average players => risk to overtune the game for the «elite» tastes



2. Playtesting question: WHO? (Recruiting playtesters)

4. **Tissue testers:** they have never seen your game before (they can only be «used» once)

- Pros:
 - Fresh eyes on your game
 - Notice things you have gotten used to
- Cons:
 - Games are meant to be played multiple times => they cannot be appealing only to tissue testers



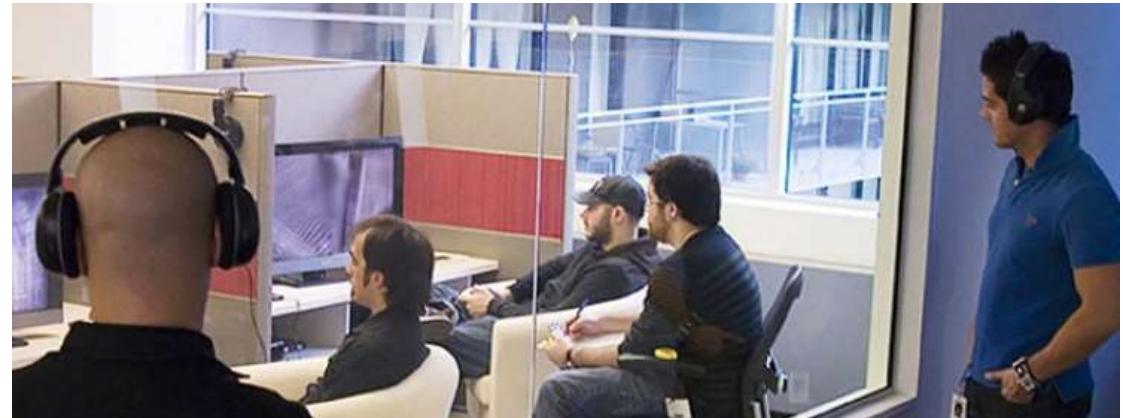
3. Playtesting question: WHERE?

1. In your studio

- Pros:
 - Convenient
 - The whole team can observe the testing session
- Cons:
 - Testers may feel uncomfortable to have fun where someone is still working

2. In a playtesting lab:

- Pros:
 - Perfect!
- Cons:
 - Expensive!



3. Playtesting question: WHERE?

3. At some public venue (college, school, museum, shopping mall, game fest, etc.)

- Pros:
 - Cheap & many testers
- Cons:
 - May become difficult to find «right» testers
 - Testers may be distracted

4. At the playtester's home:

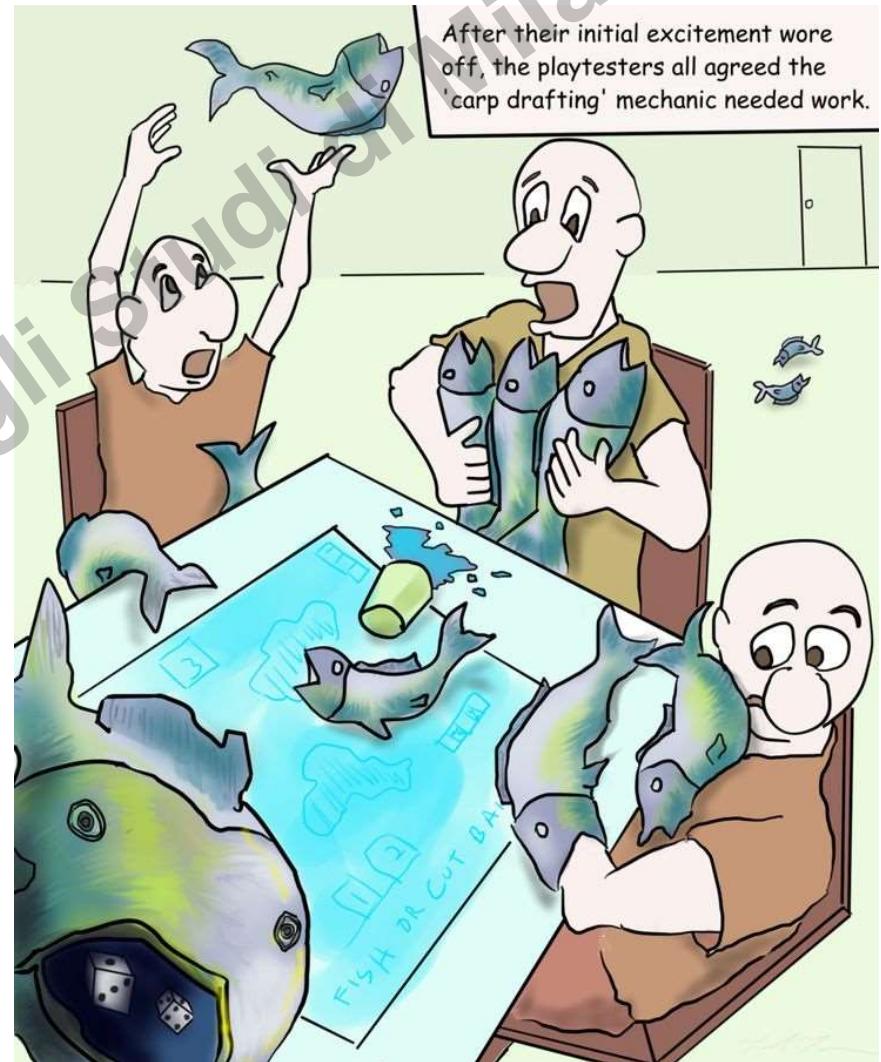
- Pros:
 - Game played in its natural habitat under real conditions (with friends and social interaction, too)
- Cons:
 - Limits playtest
 - You need to bring ad hoc hardware for running prototype sw



3. Playtesting question: WHERE?

5. Online

- Pros:
 - Lots of testers & hw configurations!
 - Needed for massive games
- Cons:
 - You won't get the same level of insight when you are not in the same room with the player
 - Impossible to keep secrets



4. Playtesting question: WHAT?

WHAT will u look for in your playtests?

1. Things **you know** you are looking for

- Questions in the «why?» list
- Make sure to collect right answers to EVERY questions (maybe you'll need more than 1 session)

2. Things **you don't know** you are looking for

- Listen to your players deeply: everytime something put of the ordinary happens find a way to understand it

E.g.: girls like your game more than boys when you'd expected the opposite? Etc.



5. Playtesting question: HOW?

- Remember that:

YOU DON'T COME IN THE BOX!

- Your role is:
 - Investigator
 - Observer
- Control yourself and:
 - Do NOT explain the game
 - let them figure out by themselves what to do
 - Keep QUIET



Playtesting session: phases 1.2

1. Introduction (2-3 mins.)

- Welcome
- Brief explanation of the process
- Recording should be notified



2. Warm-up discussion (5 mins.)

- Questions to find out about games they play



3. Play session (15-20 mins.)

- Explain the game is a WIP
- Explain you are testing the game, not their skills
- Ask to “think out loud”
- Sit in the back, observe and take notes!



Playtesting session: phases 2.2

4. Discussion of game experience (15-20 mins.)

- One-to-one discussion with testers
- Prepare in advance a set of questions (should be refined as the development progresses):
 - What were your thoughts about the game/game play?
 - Were u able to learn how to play quickly?
 - Is there anything that u didn't like?
 - Was anything confusing?
 - Etc.

5. Wrap up

- Thanks testers
- Collect contact info
- (give a gift - if any)



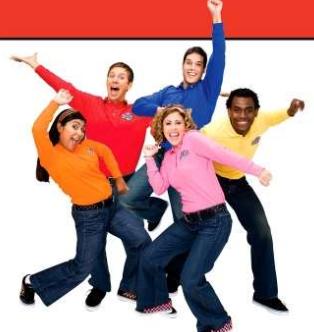
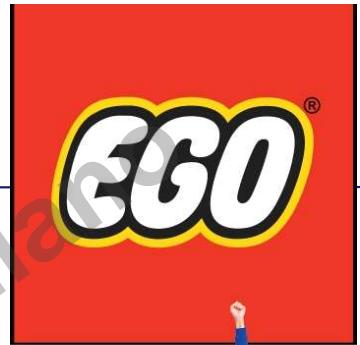
Playtesting session: critical aspects

- Listen playtesters' (critical) feedback without responding
- Try to ignore your ego: take feedback without emotional response
- Try to embrace criticisms: it's better to hear the bad news now, than to read later from game critics ...
- Be a good listener and maintain objectivity ...

otherway...

your playtesters won't be honest and will tell you only what you want to hear!

=> **TOTALLY UNUSEFUL**



Methods pf playtesting

BEWARE:
group dynamics ARE GOOD for generating idea,
(very) BAD for evaluating them!



Methods of playtesting

- **One-to-one testing:**
 - Sit down with individuals and watch them play (using a one-way mirror if u are “rich”...)
- **Group testing:**
 - A group play together - OK for physical prototypes
- **Feedback forms:**
 - Standard list of questions - OK for quantitative data
- **Interview:**
 - Face-to-face after the playtest session
- **Open discussion:**
 - One-to-one/group after the playtest session
- **Data hooks:**
 - For “rich”, but fundamental for next generation games

... or a mix of the above methods



The Play Matrix

	Skill	Chance
Mental Calculation	Go Chess Civilization Warcraft Starcraft Duke Nukem Quake Half-Life	Poker Backgammon Blackjack Chutes and Ladders
Physical Dexterity	Unreal Halo Basketball Football Dance Dance Revolution	Devil Dice Operation Ker-Plunk! Pin the Tail on the Donkey Whack-a-Mole Tag Twister

Useful for stimulating the discussion
(e.g. ask them to place your game)

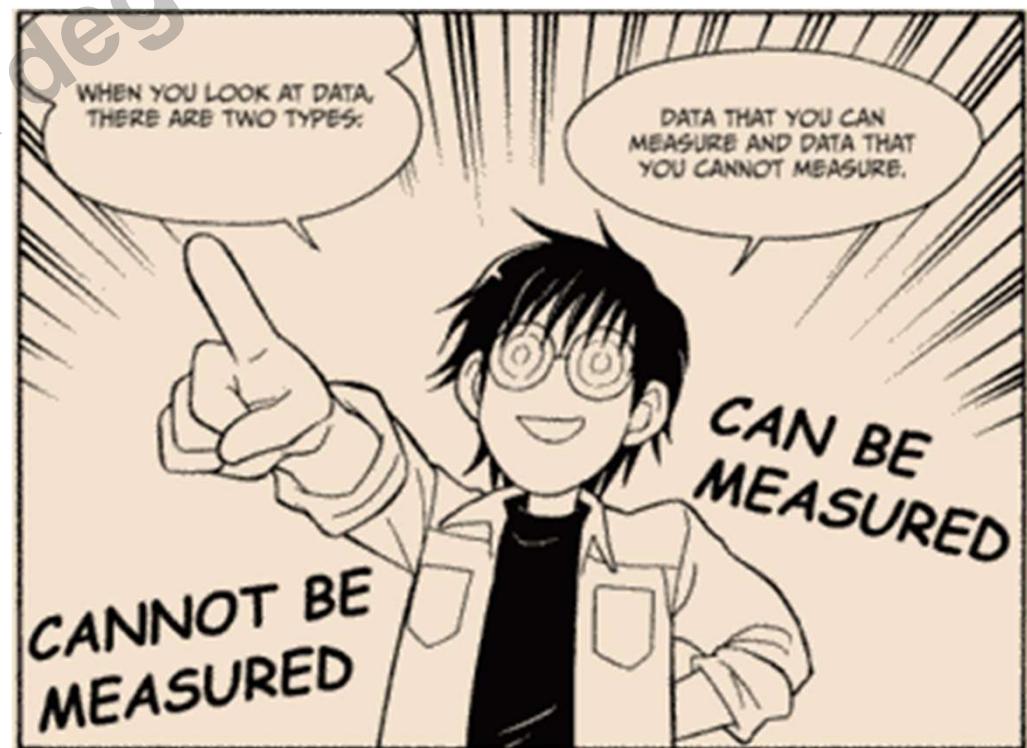
Taking notes ...

- ... it's absolutely **IMPERATIVE!**
- should be filed chronologically
- Should include:
 - In-game observations
 - Postgame questions & answers
 - Revision ideas
- Can be used:
 - To collect also QUANTITATIVE data
 - To prioritize problems and revisions



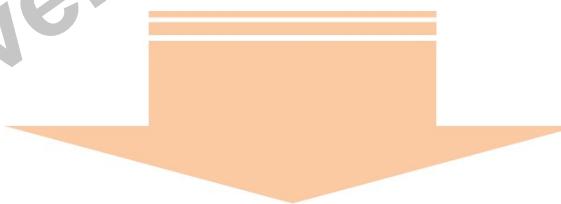
Quantitative data

- If u want to collect also **quantitative** data (e.g. number of clicks, average time to do something, etc.), beware of:
 - **Not being buried in stats** (measure **ONLY** what you need, and define it **IN ADVANCE**)
 - **Not being misled by stats** (e.g. playtesters new to the game may need more time than usual, etc.)
- PS read: The Manga Guide to Statistics



Testing specific situations

- You do not need to make playtesters start from the beginning, you can create **ad-hoc prototypes** to test **specific situations** that may arise in the game:
 - Near the end
 - When a player is by far more powerful than others
 - A particular level
 - Etc.



Test control situations



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