

# HOW TO GET HIRED AS A GAMES USER RESEARCHER

DIRECT ANSWERS  
FROM HIRING  
MANAGERS



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# WELCOME



Getting your first job in games is emotionally draining.

There just aren't that many games user research jobs out there - especially those rare junior roles. Then after sending off an application, you rarely hear back - and get no feedback on why.

If you are lucky enough to get an interview, there is the stress of preparation, and then the tense wait to hear how it's gone.

Worst of all, after all of this - you get ghosted, and never hear from them again.

Hiring managers are inundated by hundreds of applications for most roles and are under enormous pressure to quickly evaluate candidates. This means good candidates who don't sell themselves convincingly get missed.

Wouldn't it be good to know what hiring managers are looking for? Well, I asked them.

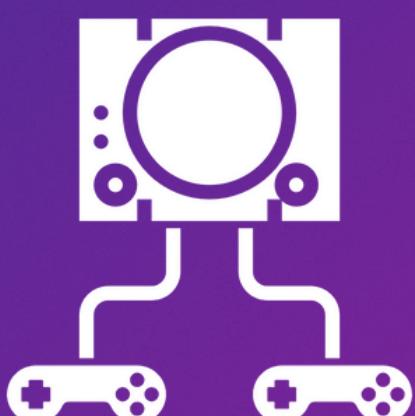
I've interviewed hiring managers from some of the world's most successful games user research teams about their approach, and what they are looking for from candidates. Many of them wanted to stay anonymous, so they could speak freely and share their honest opinions.

This e-book reveals everything - all of the things that hiring managers look for through the application process, and their advice.

It's the perfect partner to our regular [gamesuserresearch.com](http://gamesuserresearch.com) newsletters, to build your games research skills and career opportunities.

Read on to learn how to get hired in games user research.

*Steve*



**GAMESUSERRESEARCH.COM**

# APPLICATION TIME CVS AND COVER LETTERS

*Most job applications start with a CV and cover letter, and it's here that some candidates fail.*

*Hiring managers are receiving hundreds of applications, and so it's critical to ensure your CV and cover letter is clear, relevant and direct.*

*You many also want to read these articles to improve the chance your application gets read:*

*Networking into your first games user research jobs*

*How to get experience before you have the job*

*Let's hear what hiring managers said they are looking for in your CV and cover letter...*

# QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

The best CVs should be short, concise and targeted to the company you're applying for. Volume doesn't count in your favour; get straight to the point - 2 pages at the most.

Don't just list out everything that you've done before; the day to day things aren't as relevant as the successes and accomplishments you've had in past roles. Be specific about what you achieved.

Always focus on the outcomes and impact of your work and tell us about that instead.

**“I've got to get through 10 more resumes in this 20 minute block I stole from some other critical thing I'm supposed to be doing.”**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

# KEEP IT RELEVANT

Don't just apply using the standard CV you always use; make it stand out and show us why you want to work here.

Interpret your experience and tell us why your experience is relevant to the job you're applying for and what impact your work has had on projects. Don't forget specific examples!

In particular, emphasise all the research experience you have, including listing methods. If you're just starting out and lack experience, show us that you have an understanding of the research process and how you have applied this in a real world setting or self directed study.

The best thing to do is to have the job advert up while you're writing your CV and cover letter as a guide to keep you on track.

**“Literally have the job spec up on one side of your screen and your resume up on the other.”**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

# MAKE IT CLEAR

Recruitment software can mangle the presentation of your CV so keep your points clear and make the most important points obvious when viewed at any size.

Research experience, customer service skills and your passion for games are some of the most important points to focus on.

Make it easy for us to find what we need, we can't spend longer on one application than the other. Don't bury the lead, tell us the main things up front.

**“Think of your resume as a product - whatever you want us to see needs to be prominent in your resume”**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

# BE HONEST

If you're new to GUR or are coming from a different sector, be honest - don't make up experience that you don't have.

Instead emphasise your existing experience and tell us how your history and skill set apply to this job.

A great way to stand out is to show that you understand the ways that GUR is different from what you've done before and show us how you've worked proactively to bridge these gaps.

**"It's okay to own the fact that this is probably your first role and you're starting out."**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

**"Be ready with a good story for how your skills and experience will transfer"**

John Hopson

# DON'T FORGET PEOPLE SKILLS

If you have them, emphasise your customer service skills; this is a people oriented job after all, education and experience aren't the only things that matter.

Show us that you can work as part of a team, that you can be collaborative and that you can be pragmatic and respond to challenges.





This may sound obvious but don't forget to tell us why you love games, why you want to work in this industry (if you're new to it) and the positive impact you want to make.

Enthusiasm and passion go a long way. Tell us about some of your favourite games you're playing at the moment; that will help set you apart from all the other applications we get.

**"We're looking for someone that really wants to do this"**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

**"It's so important to communicate that you like games and want to work in this industry and positively impact it"**

Jack Dunne

# DO YOUR RESEARCH

Before you apply, learn a bit about the company. Go online, check out their blog, even talk to staff and include a bit about this in your cover letter before you click send. This really makes for a quality application and shows us that you're interested.

On that note; details matter. Don't stumble over little things like spelling the company name wrong and if the company sends out a questionnaire as part of the application, complete it thoughtfully; it's all an extension of the application process after all.



# GO THE EXTRA MILE

A good cover letter is so important, it tells the story of why you want to work for us and the curiosity you have for the role you're applying for and that can be really powerful.

If you're starting out or are coming from a different sector it is really impressive when you can demonstrate that you've gone that extra mile to get some practical experience.

You might volunteer to run a one off study for an indie games company; have a blog where you post usability studies, do a piece of games research, attend conferences or link to a portfolio in your CV. It doesn't have to be much, little things make a big difference.

**“In cases of limited examples or experience, initiative and creativity can go a long way”**

Anonymous

# THINGS JUST GOT SERIOUS

## INTERVIEWS

*You got the interview - fantastic!*

*Many studios and publishers have multiple rounds of interviews, with different audiences. They might include interviews with:*

- *Senior researchers, exploring your research expertise*
- *Peers to check that you are a nice person who they can work with*
- *Other disciplines, to explore whether you can talk about work credibly to non-researchers*

*This article on example interview questions can give some inspiration on what to be ready for*

*Here's hiring manager's advice, and what they are looking for in these interviews...*

# BE PREPARED

Do your research on the games company before the interview and check out free resources online, their youtube, twitter, discord channels. This all helps to show an interest and curiosity in the job you've applied for. Bringing this knowledge to the interview is what we want to see.

Play the game the studio makes for a few hours beforehand too; this again will show you care and it'll tell you a lot about what the company's values too.

**“Don’t treat all research jobs as equal - put effort into understanding each one.”**

Anonymous

# TAKE YOUR TIME

Interviews are fundamentally a chance for us to get to know you and more about your past experience and that you can communicate clearly.

It's not about catching you out with questions you won't expect. If you need clarification on a question, ask us. If you need to pause to consider an answer that's great. Don't feel that you need to say the first thing that comes into your head. A considered and thoughtful answer will always be the best choice.

**"It's always okay to ask for clarification - It's not meant to be a quiz. We're trying to get you to give us your best answer."**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

**"I don't believe in gotcha questions, but I do want to make sure that they can speak intelligently about their history and previous research projects."**

John Hopson

# INTERVIEW ANSWERS: GIVE EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

In an interview, we want to see that you can demonstrate relevant experience with research and know how to get good data.

This research design experience doesn't exclusively need to come from GUR, we hire outside the field too and have given jobs to people from neuroscience, psychology, sociology and anthropology backgrounds too. Any experience designing studies for humans will give you tons of experience.

Once you have given examples, we then want to see the insights from the studies and the impact your research had.

**“Strong fundamental research skills and a flexible brain. We very rarely do the same study twice, so the right candidate needs to have a strong foundation combined with the ability to apply them to novel problems.”**

John Hopson

# INTERVIEW ANSWERS: UNDERSTAND GAME DEVELOPMENT

A common mistake we often see is people confusing playing games with knowing about how the games industry works.

We want to see that you play and are interested in games but more than that we want you to demonstrate an appreciation for what games developers are trying to achieve and an understanding of game mechanic. We want to check you can work in collaboration with developers to make quality games.

**“We care that you play games.”**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen



We will often use scenario based questions to find out this information because it gives an indication about how you approach a problem and from this we can see how you work with others.

In fact, it's often hearing about the things that have gone wrong that can be the most impactful in learning more about you and how you approach a problem.

**"I like to dig into things that have gone wrong, or difficult relationships, or areas of conflict – everybody has them. How the applicant talks about those areas of conflict and how they frame them to themselves and to you also says a lot about them."**

Kirk Rodgers

# INTERVIEW ANSWERS: BE A TEAM PLAYER

It's really important for us to know that you are someone that can communicate well and work as part of a team. We want to know if you can work with empathy and open communication, not just within your immediate team, but across the organisation, to get results.

Essentially we are looking for people that will treat everyone with respect.

**"One of the things that we're honestly looking for in the interviews is candidates treating everybody with respect, or treating interviewers from diverse backgrounds equally."**

Kirk Rodgers

**"If somebody takes a very "us versus them" mentality when describing stakeholders, then that's a red flag."**

Kirk Rodgers

# INTERVIEW ANSWERS: ABILITY TO PERSUADE

A truly important skill is to communicate how you can take research findings, demonstrate the impact and convince stakeholders and senior managers to take action.

Presentation skills are so important; essentially you need to be able to convince others that the changes you have proposed are worth the money it will cost to make them.

Someone who can encourage teams to take action based on research is an ideal candidate.

**“You can do the most perfect study in the world, and if no one does something about it, it might as well not have existed.”**

Kirk Rodgers

# INTERVIEW ANSWERS: PROACTIVE LEARNER

A person that has the ability to identify an area for development and self-teach is an asset. If someone has a track record for doing this that is great.

You can't be an expert in everything, but it's great if someone's area of expertise can enrich and compliment skills that already exist within our team and support each other to develop.

**“I look for somebody that is really good at one thing and is able to add that knowledge and experience to the team.”**

Kirk Rodgers



# LET'S GET HANDS ON

## TASKS IN THE HIRING PROCESS

*A task is a common part of many games user research interview processes.*

*Some teams may give you a game, and ask you to identify usability issues with it. Others describe a scenario, and ask for a study design.*

*Here's what hiring managers said about the tasks they set candidates.*

# HIRING TASKS

Generally tasks fall into two categories; game usability reviews and study designs. Remember these tasks demonstrate how you might tackle these jobs with us, so give them real thought, think about what we want to see and how you can demonstrate this during the activity.

Sometimes we won't say what the task is in advance but we'll give you a heads up on the game so you can get familiar with it beforehand. In a games usability review we're looking for; an understanding of the design intent behind game features, the ability to speak objectively about usability positives and justification for the usability issues discovered.

We're also interested in your overall writing and presentation style. Your ability to communicate with clarity and impact is really crucial.

A good study design answer should clearly state your objectives, identify appropriate research methods and scope the study appropriately based on other factors, particularly project timelines.

**“I use a short written test early in the hiring process to assess core research skills and writing skills. The questions are pretty basic, but it’s amazing how many candidates can’t tell the distinction between correlation and causation or write a coherent paragraph.”**

John Hopson



# FURTHER EDUCATION

*According to previous industry surveys, 70% of games user researchers have a postgraduate degree. For interviewers, this is a common shortcut to showing that the candidate probably understands how to design a research study.*

*But it's not the only way to show this experience (and can sometimes even make it harder!)*

*I've written previously about how to convert your academic or industry experience into a games user research role, but read on to hear how hiring managers have described their own opinions on academic and other experience.*

# UNDERGRADUATE VS POST GRADUATE EXPERIENCE

Postgraduate candidates usually have the edge because they usually have more hands on research experience, which is incredibly valuable. We would consider interviewing someone without this, but you would need to be able to demonstrate why your experience in other industries (if you're transitioning careers) can have the same benefits.

**"Post-graduate qualifications matter, in as far as they help candidates step into roles with a broader expertise in research methods, and a more rigorous approach."**

Kirk Rodgers

UX research draws across different research disciplines and often hiring from outside the industry can bring diversity and different perspectives that enrich teams. As long as you can convey why your experience is relevant, it'll be fine.

**"In many cases in my career hiring from another background or industry has added diversity of thought and made the team function better as a whole."**

Anonymous

Our mindset when hiring is all about risk reduction. To avoid being seen as a risk, you need to show us that you have the skills and experience to do the job well.

**"Risk is a lot of what a hiring manager is thinking about. What if I get this wrong? What is the consequence of that?"**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

# GETTING A ROLE WITH A PHD

In GUR, it's not only necessary to have a thorough understanding of research methods but to also take this knowledge and convince others to act.

Stakeholder relationships are crucial and these often need to be made quickly and thoroughly. For many small teams, bringing on a PhD with no practical experience can be a gamble, because there will likely be a steep learning curve in the practicalities of game development which can sometimes be challenging.

**"Games research is conducted under a lot of constraints, including delivery time, state of the build, [and] limited access to players."**

Anonymous

**"As smart and educated as I was, I was not the least bit prepared for the things that were actually going to happen, things that I'm actually going to be asked to do in industry."**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

When PhDs are recruited, it's a time commitment to match them to appropriate projects - understanding that they have expert theoretical knowledge but lack project management and relationship management experience.

When applying it's necessary to find ways to get this practical experience to help secure the jobs you want. Check out our advice for how to do this in the next section.

**"A PhD with zero years of user research experience is a pain in the ass"**

Anonymous Hiring Manager (with a PhD!)

Another difference is language and report writing. Academic writing is often designed for a different purpose and so it's important to be mindful that industry communication is pitched at a different audience. Many games companies want research to be condensed to '5 good things, 5 bad things' about the game, so it's really important to have the right data, condense the information and be ready for questions; which is a skill that many will need to practise.

# UNDERSTAND HOW GAMES ARE MADE

*Practical experience helps you stand out from the crowd. But it's hard to get experience before you're working in the industry.*

*I've previously written about how to get practical experience before you work in the industry for the games user research site. Showing you understand how the industry works, and how to apply your experience helps you get ahead.*

*I've also written about how to create a portfolio to show your experience, and how to network without making it weird!*

*Here's what hiring managers said about getting experience.*

# LET'S GET THAT PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

**"You aren't a cool industry veteran. You don't want to try to pretend that you are."**

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

The hard fact is that if you are completely new to the industry, or if you are straight out of academia, it is difficult to get jobs if you have little practical, demonstrable experience. Here's how to get some:

## DO A PRO BONO PROJECT

Work with a small indie developer and review their game; this will give you some tangible real life experience to talk about in an interview.

## MAKE A PORTFOLIO AND LINK TO IT IN YOUR CV

Do an independent expert analysis of a game and post it on LinkedIn or a blog. This shows a lot of proactiveness and is useful for possible employers to see how you'd approach tasks like this.

## **ATTEND CONFERENCES AND MAKE CONNECTIONS**

Get a sense for some of the challenges faced by games studios. Opportunities are shared on LinkedIn and the GRUX discord channel, so being present on these is a good way to stand out and demonstrate commitment.

## **DO YOUR RESEARCH**

Read more about the game development process before an interview (particularly if you're coming from outside the sector) because that will enable you to highlight your transferable skills, and be prepared to talk about many of the differences within the games industry too.

## **JOIN RESEARCH MODERATION TEAMS**

Some companies employ moderators as a more junior role than a full 'user researcher' role. Those teams are often much more open to chances to people that have lots of potential to learn the skills that they need to progress.

## GIVE CONTRACTING A GO

This may not be your top choice long term but getting a few projects can be a great way to demonstrate that you are able to take your academic experience and connect with real world examples of games practice.

Although it can be really frustrating, you do need to be patient to get a job in games user research.

**“Be patient, build up your skills, build up your resume, find ways to work. There are lots of indie teams out there that just would love someone to come in and help them with some light UXR. You get experience that you can talk about. They get a better game, so everybody benefits.”**

Kirk Rodgers

**“If you are completely new to the industry unless you have a pro bono work or portfolio it is hard to lead on a games project when you have never done one before”**

Jack Dunne

# SHOW YOU UNDERSTAND CONSTRAINTS

**“Every game is a series of compromises.”**

Kirk Rodgers

Whether you are coming from academia or transitioning from another sector, it is invaluable to show that you understand and appreciate the development community, and recognise the challenges that go into games development.

Games are made by people with the best intentions who have reacted to constraints and changing circumstances along the way.

**“A mistake that I see a lot is people that are blogging about the UX of other people’s games. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. But if the tone is “how on earth could these people have made these decisions? This is so stupid” then that sets off warning bells for me.”**

Kirk Rodgers

# CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY

## FOR STUDENTS & NEW GURS:



*How To Be A Games User Researcher* is the bestselling book on how to get your first job in the games industry.

Learn how to be a games user researcher, and discover

- How games development works and where research fits in
- How to plan, run, analyse and debrief high-quality playtest studies
- The importance of building relationships with game teams
- How to start a career in user research
- The skills you need to show to excel at job interviews



Every month get free email lessons, career interviews from experienced researchers and the latest entry level jobs to continue your games user research journey.

Find more at [gamesuserresearch.com](http://gamesuserresearch.com)

## FOR DEVELOPERS:



Playtest Kit makes playtesting and user research accessible to everyone.

The toolkit distils thousands of hours of playtesting expertise into a set of templates, guides and tools designed for teams who value playtesting, but don't have a dedicated user researcher to run them. Created in collaboration with game designers, producers, community managers, UX designers and solo developers, the toolkit makes iterative game development simple.

The comprehensive playtest system allows you to efficiently find suitable playtesters, design live and remote studies, write surveys, and analyse messy playtest data to draw reliable conclusions.

Find more at [playtestkit.com](http://playtestkit.com)

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Thank you to all the hiring managers who took part in our interviews this year**

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Kirk Rodgers

Jack Dunne

Adams Greenwood-Ericksen

John Hopson

+ the many hiring managers who asked to remain anonymous

**WANT TO CHAT ABOUT  
PLAYTESTING + GAMES  
USER RESEARCH?**

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