COMP09095 Level Design
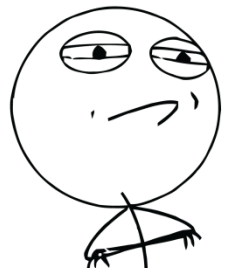
Week 05 Lecture – Designing Challenges

Choosing Challenges

Once you have decided on the concept for your level, start to consider:

- How does the player interact with the level?
- What challenges the player?
- How does the player overcome the challenges?
- What changes as the player progresses through the level?

Choosing Challenges

- A level is an obstacle course
- Challenges and obstacles cause the player to interact with the level
- Need to create a consistent sense of accomplishment for the player
- This will make them want to continue
- Avoid causing frustration or confusion for the player

Choosing Challenges

Different kinds of challenges:
- Obstacles
- Enemies
- Traps
- Puzzles

Mix these challenges together and you have the skeleton of a level

Testing Challenges

"Sandbox" level:

- Test level with placeholder content only
- Use with playtesting
- Help determine if challenges are fun
- Shows how difficult challenges are to defeat or get past
- Can help identify design/technical issues before entire level is built

Types of Challenges

Simple Roadblock:
- Slows player without stopping
- E.g. jump a fence or railing, open a door
- Add player interaction to your level
- Can be used to make other challenges, e.g. combat, more interesting
- Place simple roadblocks throughout your level to create player interaction and increase interest

Types of Challenges

Enemies:
- Any character, vehicle etc. that can cause harm to the player character
- Think about size, movement, attack style in relation to how you design the areas in your level
- No more than one or two new enemy types per level
- When introducing a new enemy, do it in a new and dramatic area

Types of Challenges

Traps:
- Part of the environment
- **Always** give the player some kind of warning or cue about the presence of a trap
- Can be used to speed up or slow down the pace of the level
- Add interest and excitement for the player

Types of Challenges

Puzzles:

- Challenges that require some brainpower to solve
- E.g. "Lock and Key" puzzle
- Can be used to give a change of pace in the level
- Used well, they can add to player sense of achievement

Player Skills

- Challenges are overcome by skills which enable the player to progress
- E.g. movement abilities or attack skills based on different weapons
- Player character starts with few skills and acquires more as play progresses
- Often games use a short tutorial level to teach the fundamental skills

Player Skills

- Will you include additional skills in your level?
- How will the player acquire them?
- Not too many – can be overwhelming for the player
- Space them out through your level – gives the player time to learn
- Combination of skills can add interest

Types of Level

- The design of an **immersive level** with **interesting challenges** and **appropriate skills** are the essentials for creating fun for the player
- The majority of game levels are standard levels, but there are also other types

Types of Level

Standard level:

- Base levels in a game
- Typically 90% of game is standard levels
- Highest priority for the game designers
- Not all the same or even similar – each standard level can be a different player experience

Types of Level

Hub level:
- Connects all the other levels together
- Allows players to return at frequent intervals and give them a reason to return
- Common in RPGs, adventure games, platformers
- Not the same gameplay model as other levels
- Multiple start and exit points
- Complex to design

Types of Level

Boss level:
- Boss is much more challenging than other enemies
- Can have multiple bosses and a "final boss" – climax of the game
- Often a boss level is specifically designed around how the boss attacks
- Provides a break from standard levels

Types of Level

Bonus level:

- Normally not connected to the overall story of the game
- Completion not necessary to proceed to next level
- Provides a break from other levels
- Can be shorter than standard levels, with different gameplay
- Gives player a reward for extra effort
- Can be designed as "Easter Eggs"