

Playtesting



What is Playtesting?

- The “most important” activity in game design
- It is NOT
 - Just “play the game and gather feedback”
 - Design review with team
 - QA and debugging
 - Focus group
 - Usability Testing

What is Playtesting?

■ It is

- Getting insight into how players experience game
- Informal/qualitative \leftrightarrow structured/quantitative
- Answers questions
 - Is the game functioning the way you want
 - Internally complete?
 - Balanced?
 - Fun?

When do we Playtest?

- Iterative
- Less fundamental changes as process progresses
- “Let’s wait till we have a beta product ... players will get the best experience”
 - NO!

Steps in Playtesting

- Selection
- Recruiting
- Preparation
- Controls
- Analysis

Recruiting and Selection

- Self testing
 - Reveal glaring problems
- Then testing with friends
 - Not objective
- Then test with strangers
 - Selection is important
 - Target demographics...but widest selection possible

External Testers: Half-Life

- People near Valve's offices who sent in registration cards
- Designers sit quietly while player struggles
 - Designer takes notes
- Typical 2-hour session
 - 100 action items
- First 20-30 sessions absolutely vital
 - Learn what was fun
 - 200 sessions total

Half-Life: Fine tuning

■ Add instrumentation

- Player position, time, health, weapons
- Activities:
 - Game save, dying, being hurt, solving a puzzle, fighting a monster...

■ Graph series of sessions together

- Spot too long with no encounters
- Spot long periods of too much health
- Spot long periods of too little health

Half-Life

- Most important playtesting outcome:
- Clearly identified good and bad ideas
- Allowed people to...

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Abandon Bad Ideas

- Playtesting provides the evidence needed!

Running a playtest session

- Don't talk too much
 - Use a script
- Let the user make mistakes/figure things out
 - “It's the game that's broken, not you”
- Think aloud
- Interview/survey
 - Beware of leading questions

Running a playtest session

- Don't be defensive
- Beware...testers will want to please you
 - If they can't say *why* they like it, you have a problem
- Groups generate ideas
- Individuals evaluate
- Can use groups, individuals, or combination

Running a playtest session

- Note taking critical
 - Video or audio recording
- Interview
 - Examples in GDW
 - Your-game specific questions needed
 - Don't wear out your participant

Playtest data

- Objective or subjective
- Quantitative or qualitative?
- What can you measure?
 - Develop clearly defined questions to answer with data
- Test control situations
 - New feature, special event, common technique, the end of the game

Objective / Subjective / Quantitative / Qualitative

■ Objective / Quantitative

- How many times did the player die during the level?

■ Objective / Qualitative

- Did you understand the in-game tutorial? (y/n)

■ Subjective / Quantitative

- “On a scale of 1 to 10, how fun was the play test session?”

■ Subjective / Qualitative

- “What did you think of the 2nd boss?”