

Toolkit for Improving Game Quality

Overview

The <publisher> need to get better at predicting which games will be **successful**, analysing the cost/benefit of their games, and ultimately, at delivering the best **quality** to their audience.

A **toolkit** has been designed which will allow **both** *developers and the publisher* to **assess the quality** of a game throughout its development, using the same tools.

The toolkit will provide a **common language and framework** which can be used to **objectivity** assess all games.

The Toolkit

The toolkit is designed to be used **throughout the entire development phase**, from analysis through to release.

This document describes how the toolkit can be used at the following phases of development:

1



Assessing others' games

2



Designing your game

3



Evaluating the player experience

Analysis

Game Analysis

Identifying **best practices** in existing games and bringing them into your own game design is a key way to improve game quality.

A method of assessing games based around **10 core game components** has been designed.

The 10 game components do not evaluate the overall quality of the game, but rather focus on **barriers to enjoyment**.

The 10 game components

Usability

1. Introduction

The game's initial experience (menus, introduction to concepts)

2. Controls

How the user physically interacts with the game

3. UI

The visual and auditory interface

4. Feedback

The player is given clear feedback at all times

5. Goals

The player's aims and objectives

6. Pace

The rate of user interaction and game speed

7. Focus

All mechanics / features are essential to gameplay

8. Replay

There are compelling reasons for the player to return

9. Social

The player can share elements of the game experience

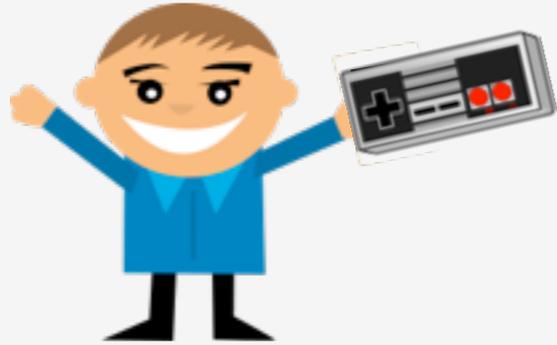
10. Fun

Overall, the game is enjoyable to play

Gameplay

How To Use

1



Developer 1



Developer 2

Identify and play leading games

- Identify the leading games in the genre which is being developed.
- Two (or more) members of the dev team play each game.

2



Developer 1



Developer 2

Evaluate each game

- Each developer independently rates each game using the game score template.
- Justifications for each game component score should be provided.

3



Developers' game evaluations

=

A table showing the agreed game evaluation. It has columns for 'Game Name', 'Genre', 'Overall Rating', and 'Justification'. The table contains several rows of data with colored cells (red, yellow, green) representing scores. The overall rating is 1.5 / 20.

Game Name	Genre	Overall Rating	Justification
Game 1	Action	1.5	Too repetitive and boring
Game 2	Adventure	2.0	Great graphics and sound
Game 3	Strategy	1.0	Hard to learn to play
Game 4	Simulation	1.5	Realistic
Game 5	Strategy	1.5	Fun and challenging

Agreed game evaluation

Compare and agree

- Developers meet and discuss each games' ratings.
- The rating for each game component is agreed upon.
- The overall game score is agreed upon.
- Repeat for all games, best practices should now have been identified.

EXAMPLE

Name of Game: _____ Name

Rate each component (put a tick in the appropriate box)

Usability

Introduction

The game explains enough info to get started

Controls

The controls are appropriate for the target audience

UI

The visual interface is easily understood

Feedback

The player is given clear feedback at all times

Goals

It's always clear what the player has to do.

Gameplay

Pace

The speed of interaction is appropriate for the game

Focus

All mechanics / features are essential to gameplay

Replay

There are compelling reasons to replay the game

Social

The player can share elements of the game

Fun

Overall, the game is enjoyable to play.

 = 0 points  = 1 point  = 2 points

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree



Final score

13 / 20

Justification

No instructions until the game starts

Acceptable

Font is quite difficult to read

Acceptable

Hidden in 'how to play'

Quite slow

Acceptable

2 characters, more questions

Can send to a friend

Not engaging or challenging

Outcome

Once the leading games have been evaluated, an understanding of the **best practices** in each of the 10 game components should have been identified.

Using these best practices to inform your own game design should help ensure that the new game is **at least as good** as the current leaders.

Design

Designing for the Target Audience

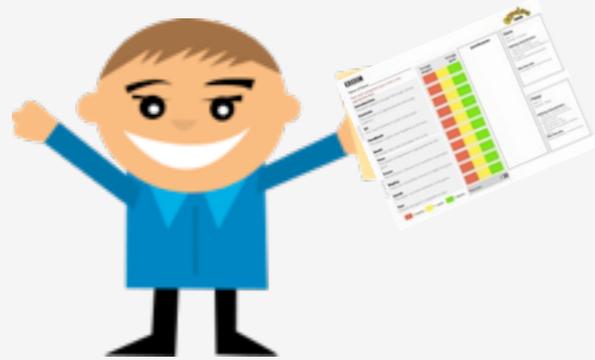
Personas are descriptions of the **target audience** including their **motivations** for playing games and their **abilities** at that age.

By evaluating each of the 10 game components from the **viewpoint of the persona**, the developers own opinion should be removed.

Additionally, personas help to **agree** among the team who the game is for.

How To Use

1



Developer 1



Persona 1



Persona 2

Evaluate game for each persona

- Rate your design from the viewpoint of the first persona.
- Rate your design from the viewpoint of the second persona.

2



Developer 2



Persona 1



Persona 2

Evaluate game for each persona

- Rate your design from the viewpoint of the first persona.
- Rate your design from the viewpoint of the second persona.

3



Developers' game evaluations

=



Agreed game evaluation

Compare and agree

- Developers meet and discuss each personas' ratings.
- The rating for each persona is agreed upon.
- Ensure the design is suitable for all personas, if not, agree action to be taken.

Name of Game: _____ *Game name*

Rate each component (put a tick in the appropriate box)

Introduction

The game explains enough info to get started

Controls

The controls are appropriate for the target audience

UI

The visual interface is easily understood

Feedback

The player is given clear feedback at all times

Goals

It's always clear what the player has to do.

Pace

The speed of interaction is appropriate for the game

Focus

All mechanics / features are essential to gameplay

Replay

There are compelling reasons to replay the game

Social

The player can share elements of the game

Fun

Overall, the game is enjoyable to play.

	Strongly disagree		Strongly agree
S		X	
P		X	
		X	X
		X	
		X	X
	X	X	
		X	X
		X	
		X	X
		X	X
Final Score		11	/ 20
Final Score		14	/ 20

= 0 points = 1 point = 2points

Justification

Some controls hidden
Some controls hidden

CTRL key awkward
Acceptable

Confusing icons
Confusing icons

Language complexity
Acceptable

Acceptable
Acceptable

Too fast
May have difficulty

Acceptable
Acceptable

5 levels
5 levels

High scores
High scores

Pace may limit fun
Acceptable

Sara
Age: 3
Gender: Female

Defining characteristics

- 50 word vocabulary.
- Difficulty controlling cursor.
- Child may play without support of the parent.
- Audio instructions preferable.

Why they play
To engage more with the brand.

Peter
Age: 6
Gender: Male

Defining characteristics

- Difficulty controlling cursor.
- Keyboard control is with one finger at a time.
- Can count to 100.
- Not yet able to read.
- Starting to play games without parent.

Why they play
Brand, gameplay, success at play.

Usability

Gameplay

Playtesting

Uncovering the Player Experience

Once the game is at a playable stage, it is best to get feedback on the gameplay experience from **real users**.

Interviewing players is important as it helps to uncover their **motivations and rationale** for their gameplay behaviour.

Once identified, developers can **assess the severity** of these concerns, and decide how they should be addressed.

How To Use

1



Participant

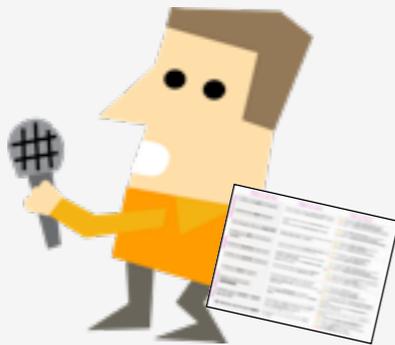
Playtesting

- Participant plays the video game on their own.

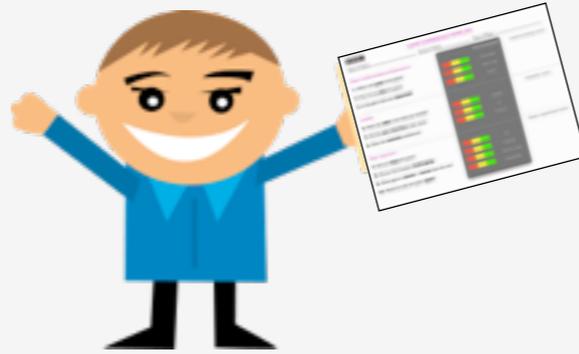
2



Participant



Interviewer

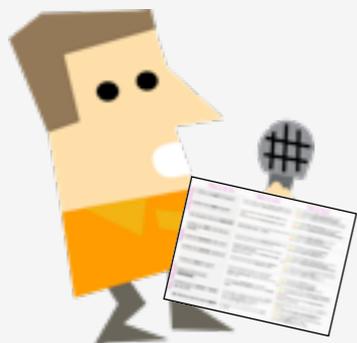


Marker

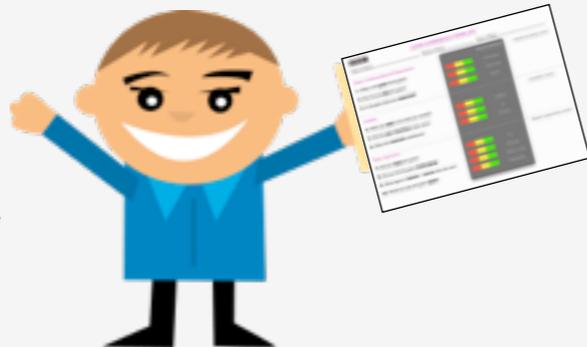
Interviewing

- Interviewer asks the 10 questions in the order as outlined on the Player Interview Guidance sheet.
- Adjust language depending on age of participant
- Marker is in separate room (ideally), rating each response on the Game Experience Evaluation Template.

3



Interviewer



Marker

Evaluation and action

- Interviewer and Marker discuss player responses.
- Any potential issues are identified, evidence should be sought to support any opinions (e.g. video recordings of playtests).
- Refine game design to address key issues.

PLAYER INTERVIEW GUIDANCE

Topics to cover

What to ask first

How to Score

Understanding

1. What is the **goal** of the game?

- Does the player understand **how to win**? If there is no 'win', perhaps ask **what do you do** in the game.

Green if the player **fully understand** the goals
Yellow if there is **some misunderstanding**
Red if there is a **fundamental misunderstanding**.

2. How do you **play** the game?

- Does the player understand **all the rules** of the game?
- Do they understand **all the features** available?

Green if they **fully understand** all rules / features
Yellow if there is **some misunderstanding**
Red if there is a **fundamental misunderstanding**.

3. Is the game what you **expected**?

- Does the game match what the player expects from this **brand, game title, or genre**?

Green if the game **fully matches** expectations
Yellow if there is **some mismatch**
Red if there is a **fundamental mismatch**.

Usability

4. Were you **able** to do what you wanted?

- Was there anything which **stopped the player** from playing the game the way they wanted to?

Green if the player could **do everything**,
Yellow if they had **some difficulties**
Red if they had **game-stopping** issues.

5. Did the **interface** make sense?

- Are there any parts of the interface which the player **doesn't understand**?
- Ask the player to describe the **purpose of each part** of the interface.

Green if the player **fully understands** the interface
Yellow if there is **some misunderstanding**
Red if there is a **fundamental misunderstanding**.

6. Were the **controls** satisfactory?

- Do the controls match what the player **expects**?
- Did they find any features **difficult to use**?

Green if the controls were **completely satisfactory**
Yellow if there were **some issues**
Red if the player had **game-stopping** issues.

Player Experience

7. Did you **enjoy** the game?

- Ask if they enjoyed the game as an open-ended question, enjoyment comes from many places.
- **Follow up with 'why'**, and see what's first on the player's mind.

Green if the player **enjoyed** the game
Yellow if the experience was **average**
Red if the player **strongly disliked** the game.

8. Did you find the game **challenging**?

- Was the game **challenging** for the player?
- Did the **difficulty balance** progress at a **suitable pace**?

Green if the difficulty balance **maintained challenge**
Yellow if the difficulty balance caused **some** boredom or frustration
Red if the difficulty balance caused **long periods** of boredom or frustration.

9. Which game is **better / worse** than this one?

- Ask the player to mention one game which is **better**, and one which is **worse** than this game. Aim is to obtain a **relative rank** for the game.
- Ask the player **why** in each case.

Green if the player ranks this game similar to **leaders** in the genre
Yellow if they rank the game among **average** titles
Red if rank is among **lower performing** games

10. Would you play this game **again**?

- Ask the player if they would play this game **again**.
- Ask **why**.

Green if they are **positive** about replaying the game
Yellow if they **might** want to replay
Red if they **would not** want to replay

EXAMPLE

Name of Game: Game name

Version of Game: Tested Jan 2013

Name of Player: Sarah (10)

Player's Understanding and Expectations

1. What is the **goal** of the game?

2. How do you **play** the game?

3. Is the game what you **expected**?

Area of assessment



Game goals



Game rules



Brand

Understanding notes

- + Player understands goal is to get the farthest distance
- Isn't sure about points and upgrades
- Isn't sure why Tracy is being shot from a cannon

Usability

4. Were you **able** to do what you wanted?

5. Did the **user interface** make sense?

6. Were the **controls** satisfactory?



Usability



UI



Controls

Usability notes

- + Player was able to use all game features
- + Player understood all UI elements
- + Player found game easy to play

Player experience

7. Did you **enjoy** the game?

8. Did you find the game **challenging**?

9. Which game is **better / worse** than this one?

10. Would you play this game **again**?



Fun



Challenge



Relative rating



Replayability

Gameplay notes

- + Player enjoyed upgrades and humour
- Game offered little challenge
- + Her favourite Beaker game
- + Would play again, more upgrades to explore

