

Online Study Taster

Creative Media & Game Technologies

Theory – module Game Design

Game design is the art of combining aesthetics and design to create an entertaining, interactive experience for educational, experimental or entertainment purposes. Understanding the process designers go through when creating their games is very important. Take a look at this "post mortem" of the video game Into the Breach:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_I07lq_2XM

As you've probably noticed, the designers went through many different iterations, constantly trying new things, to see what works. This is the kind of mindset you should have as well. Don't cling to your preferences too much, as they change constantly, but instead go for what improves the game.

You're not the player, but the designer

Take the free survey on your "Gamer Motivation Profile" on this page:

- <https://apps.quantificfoundry.com/surveys/start/gamerprofile/>

As you can see, the results you end up with might be very different from the results others have. Every person is different and likes different things. As a game designer you create an experience for someone else. Keep them in mind at all times. Who are the people who will play my game?

Failing Faster

Take a look at this four minute video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDjrOaoHz9s>

Fail Faster is the ultimate game designers' credo. You learn most by failing. So let's create things as soon as possible, to fail and then improve. Sometimes ideas will sound great, but just don't work in practise. If you can, go for quick wins. Small additions which you can easily test and improve. Instead of working tirelessly on a massive feature that ends up not working at all.

Game Elements

Game elements are bones and organs that make up the game. Every factual piece of information. It's the playing pieces or controls, visuals and style, resources players fight over, rules players have to adhere to, the physical board or playing field, the types of players the game is meant for, how many players can play at the same time, etc.

All these impact each other. Changing a rule might mean one of the resources is now worth more. Changing the visuals might mean your target audience won't like it as much. Changing the amount of players might mean some of your rules don't apply anymore.

Take a look at the following link, but don't worry if you can't remember all the theory. It's quite a lot:

- <https://medium.com/creative-culture-my/game-elements-components-mechanics-and-dynamics-what-are-they-80c0e64d6164>

Feedback Loops

Feedback Loops are an integral part of any game. This video from GMTK describes pretty well what they are:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4kbJObhcHw>

In short, feedback loops reward and punish based on previous gameplay. If you are doing well in Mario Kart, the game will punish you by giving you the worst weapons. If you're not doing well, and are in last place, you will get the best weapons available, such as the Blue Shell! This causes the two players to be on a more equal footing again.

Positive Feedback Loops enhance things. If you're winning, you're getting more stuff. If you're losing, things are taken away. Negative Feedback Loops balance things. If you're winning, the game takes something away. If you're losing, the game gives you something.

Mindmapping

A mindmap is usually used during brainstorm sessions, when thinking up as many ideas as possible. Keep in mind, this is about quantity, NOT quality. Anything goes. There are different forms, but one of the most prominent ones has you writing down the core subject matter in the center, and branching off it with different words and sentences. All these can interact with each other as well. One idea might somehow influence another, and create a whole new idea. We highly recommend doing any brainstorming and concepting on a piece of paper. Digital tools such as Photoshop always take away some of the speed and randomness of writing on paper.

Prototyping

Doing, rather than talking and thinking. Sure, you can discuss things all you want; about how balance would affect rule X or Y. Or how card A should maybe be made stronger. But you won't know if that's actually the case until you're playing it.

Just like what the minipawn example in the video, the first few prototypes don't have to look good. They don't even have to play well! Sometimes it can be a good idea to set up a version you know won't be that much fun, just to see if certain ideas work or not. Grab paper, playing pieces, and set up whatever's on your mind as fast as you can. Instead of intricate character designs, your main character is now a stick figure with a little sword. Instead of buildings it's square cards that say "Townhouse" and "Farm". The details will come later.

Testing

Testing impacts everything you do. Do not take things personally. Sure, they hate certain systems of the game, or completely break things you had thought were impossible. Doesn't matter. By listening to their feedback you will end up with a better product in the end. This is the life of a designer. Endless tweaking til you find the right path.

You need to look for people who are willing to test your game. What kind of people did you create it for? Kids? Adults? Maybe even more specific than that? What about people who look sports, or people who like war movies? What about specifically people who want to learn the Spanish language? Or specifically people who live near the sea? Sounds weird, but it could be that any of these categories might impact your game design. Like with the survey you did earlier, these people have likes and dislikes. Being aware of these is important. At first though, it's probably best to simply look for people around you, just to see what someone other than you thinks of this creation of yours.

There are a few ways you can set up your test. You've probably set up your game, gave them all the playing pieces they need, and have them play a few rounds or a full game. But you don't have to. Sometimes you might want to test the rules themselves, giving them a hand-out you wrote, explaining how the game works. Or maybe you want to set up your game as if they're in the 4th round already, with them already having taken certain moves. This works especially well when wanting to see what certain strategies do, or how people can get out of unlucky situations. Be sure to tell them about your intentions though. Explain to your testers what is expected of them, and what you'll be doing with the information.

As for your role: You could be sitting next to them, telling them what to do. Or you could be quiet, simply taking notes of whatever's being said. You could set up a little form that they can fill in after the test, or do a little interview about certain aspects of the game. In some cases designers leave the room entirely, only coming back when the game is finished. You being there has an influence on the game itself. You personally knowing them influences things as well. Family or friends might not want to hurt your feelings.

Good luck!