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BA COMPUTER GAMES DESIGN

GAME THEORY & DESIGN

Playtesting



Playtesting

- Playtesting Overview
- Playtesters
- Recruiting Playtesters



high fantasy
for far future
job (gameplay) turn based?
normal job in
crazy ass world.
fixed position
- talking to
npc's



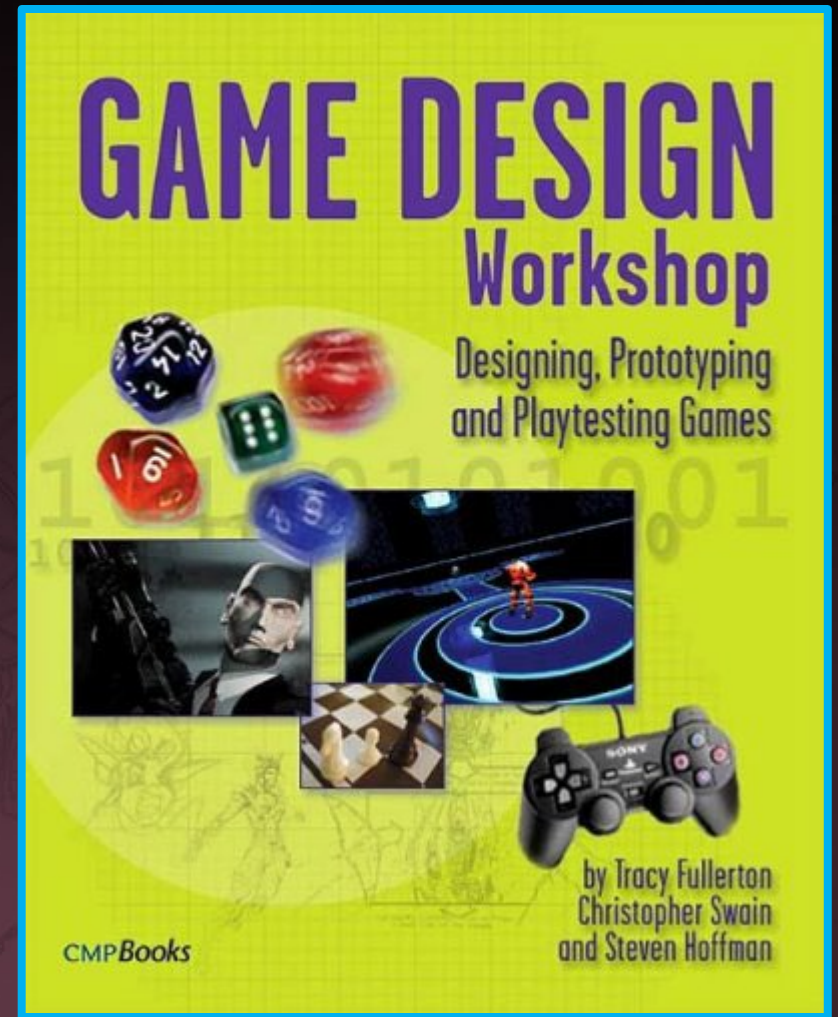


Further reading:

Playtesting

Tracy Fullerton, Christopher Swain & Steven Hoffman
Game Design Workshop

(Available in **Y Fforwm Library**, SA1)





Fullerton, Swain & Hoffman: Game Design Workshop

Playtesting Overview



Playtesting Overview

Playtesting is the **single most important** activity a designer engages in and ironically it's often the one designers understand the **least** about.

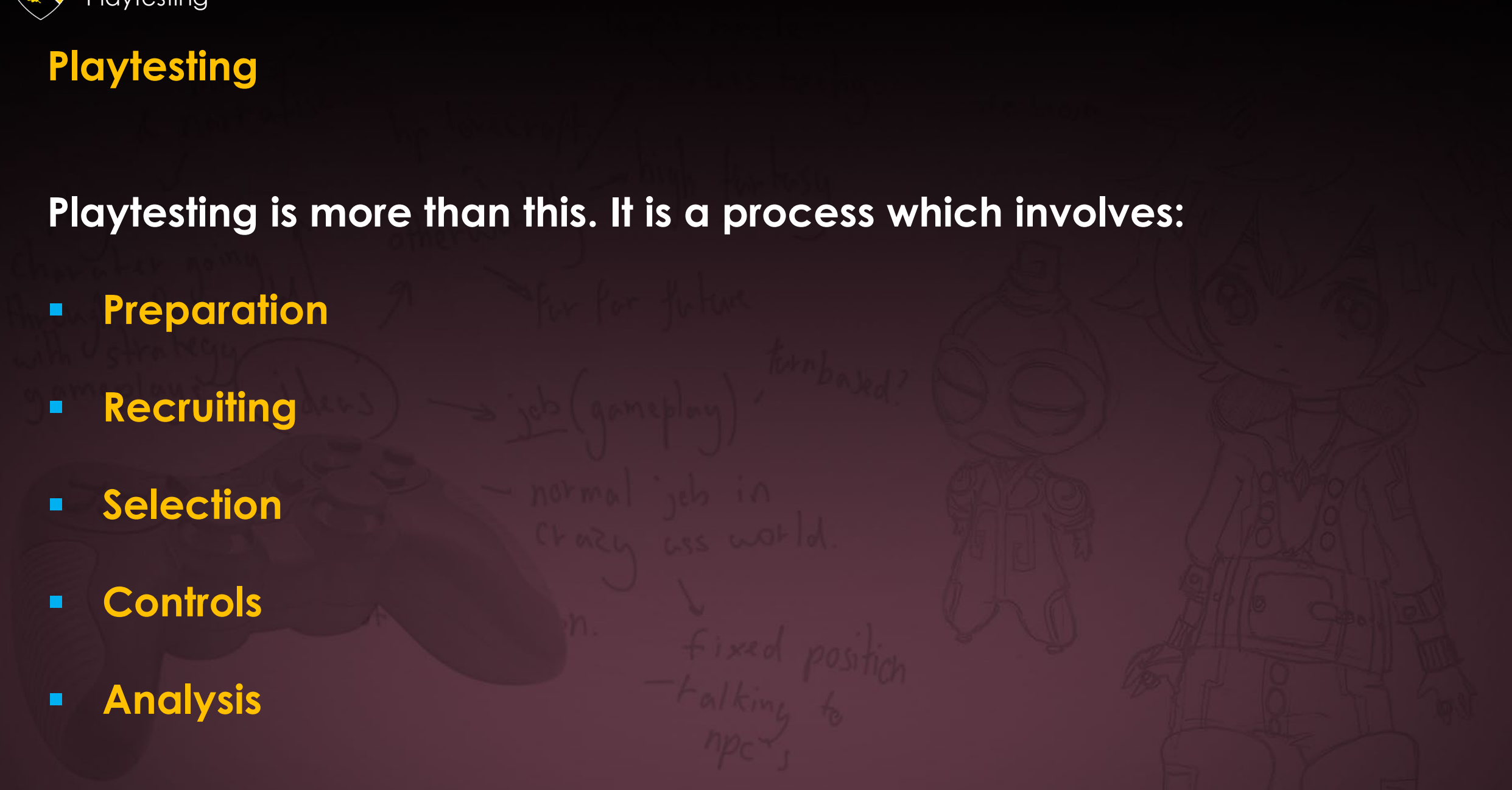
The common misconception is that playtesting is **simple** – just play the game and gather feedback.



Playtesting

Playtesting is more than this. It is a process which involves:

- Preparation
- Recruiting
- Selection
- Controls
- Analysis





Playtesting Overview: What is Playtesting

Playtesting is something the designer performs throughout the **entire design process** to gain an insight into how players **experience** the game.

There are a number of ways you can conduct playtesting. Some are informal and **qualitative**, others are more structured and **quantitative**.



Playtesting Overview: What is Playtesting

Qualitative data (Quality)

Opinions, viewpoints, feelings and thoughts articulated by test participants in their own words.

Examples: Interview responses, conversations, questionnaires with open answers

Quantitative data (Quantity)

Statistics, preset choices, numerical data or information that can be neatly categorised and represented on charts, graphs and tables.

Examples: Likert scales, multiple choice answers, rating systems, binary yes/no answers to questions



Playtesting Overview: What is Playtesting

The one thing **all** forms of playtesting have in common is the **end goal**:

**HOW TO GAIN *USEFUL* FEEDBACK FROM PLAYERS
IN ORDER TO IMPROVE YOUR GAME**



Playtesting Overview: What is Playtesting

Game design is **not** a form of one-way communication.

Listening to what playtesters say as they experience your game is **the best way to understand how the game is working.**

Once you learn to listen to your players, you can help your game to **grow.**



Playtesting Overview: What is Playtesting

Gauging **reactions**, **interpreting silent moments**, **studying feedback**, and matching those with **specific** game elements are the keys to becoming a professional designer.

As a game designer, it's up to you to evolve your game into more than you originally envisioned.

This is the art of game design.

(Fullerton, Swain, Hoffman 2004: 4)



Fullerton, Swain & Hoffman: Game Design Workshop

Playtesters



Playtesters

Playtesters are people who play your game and **provide feedback** on the experience so that you can move forward with a **fresh perspective**.

By watching other people play the game you can **learn** a great deal.





Playtesters

Many game designers **don't involve playtesters** in their process.

If they do bring in playtesters, it's at the end of production when it's **really too late to change** the essential elements of the design.

By divorcing their process from this essential feedback opportunity, they probably cost themselves more time, money and creative heartache.



Fullerton, Swain & Hoffman: Game Design Workshop

Recruiting Playtesters



Recruiting Playtesters

Fullerton, Swain and Hoffman suggest that there are **various stages** of playtesting, each involving **different groups** that can offer unique perspectives on the project.

- **Self-Testing**
- **Playtesting With Confidants**
- **Playtesting With People You Don't Know**
- **Playtesting With Your Target Audience**



Self-Testing





Recruiting Playtesters: Self Testing

In the early stages when you're creating your first prototype, the single best tester you have is **yourself**.

As you build a working version of your game you'll naturally **try it out repeatedly** to understand how it functions.



Recruiting Playtesters: Self Testing

Self-testing is most valuable in the **foundation stage** of a prototype when you are **experimenting** with fundamental concepts.

It is a large part of the process that enables you to come up with the **core mechanics** for the system.

It is also where you create solutions to **glaring problems** with the play experience.



Recruiting Playtesters: Self Testing

Your goal at this stage is to make the game work, even if it is just a **rough approximation** of the final product.

Fullerton, Swain and Hoffman suggest keeping a **playtesting journal** – a resource where you can **record all feedback** you get from yourself and other testers.



Playing With Confidants





Recruiting Playtesters: Playtesting with Confidants

As you progress and your game evolves, you will have to rely on **outside testers** to gain an accurate understanding of what it is you've created.

The next stage should involve testing with **people you know**.

These people will bring **fresh eyes** to the project and will uncover things you haven't considered.



Recruiting Playtesters: Playtesting with Confidants

Bear in mind that once the game is playable you must **move testing on** from just involving your confidants.

Testing with friends and family may feel like it works – and it does in the **early stages** – but this won't suffice once the game matures.



Recruiting Playtesters: Playtesting with Confidants

Your friends and family have a **personal relationship** with you and this obscures their objectivity – most of them will be **too harsh** or **too forgiving**.

They will never give you the **objective, broad criticism** that you require to take your design to the next level.



Playing With People You Don't Know





Recruiting Playtesters: Playtesting With People You Don't Know

It is only through the process of involving **total strangers** to playtest and allowing them to **criticize** your creation that you will gain the **fresh perspective** and insight you require to improve your design.

Outsiders have nothing to lose or gain by telling you **honestly** how they feel.



Recruiting Playtesters: Playtesting With People You Don't Know

If you choose them carefully and provide the right environment they can be as **articulate and dedicated** as your co-workers or confidants.

“There is no substitute for finding good playtesters.

Make them an extension of your team and the results will become apparent immediately.”

(Fullerton, Swain & Hoffman 2004: 199)



Finding the ideal Playtesters

What you should be looking for is a group of testers who are **articulate enough** to convey their opinions to you.

If they can't hold a conversation, they probably won't be much use.

It doesn't hurt to **ask a few questions** to help sort out which applicants are going to be useful and which are a waste of time.



Finding the ideal Playtesters

Questions can include:

- What are your hobbies?
- Why did you respond to the invitation to playtest?
- How often do you buy this type of game?

If the tester isn't a consumer of the type of game you are making, their feedback will be **less useful**.



Playing With Your Target Audience





Playtesting with your Target Audience

The ideal playtester is someone who represents your **target audience**.

These people will give you far more **relevant** feedback because they will have a gut instinct for what works.

They will also be able to compare your game to others and provide you with **additional market research**.



Playtesting with your Target Audience

Your pool of testers should represent the entire spectrum of consumers of your product.

If you are worried about someone stealing your ideas, have them sign a **Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)**.

Non-disclosure Agreement

This Nondisclosure Agreement ("Agreement") is made as of [date] by and between [Company Name Inc. ("Company")], and Person Name, of [Address] [City] [State] [Zip] [Country] [www.URL.com ("Confidant")].

RECITALS

WHEREAS, Company and Confidant are agreeing to the purpose of [business purpose] for the Company.

WHEREAS, Company is willing to disclose Confidential Information in accordance with the terms of Agreement for the sole purpose of the Business Purpose.

NOW, THEREFORE, for good and valuable consideration, the parties have agreed, and the mutual agreements set forth herein are acknowledged, and the mutual agreements set forth herein are as follows:

Confidential Information. As used in Agreement, Confidential Information means any information not readily available to the public, including but not limited to business information, design information, product design, research and development, experimental data, product design, research and development, formulae, materials, marketing agreements, formulae, materials, marketing agreements, and any intellectual property therein or related to a special, valuable and unique asset of Company.

Exclusions. Confidential Information does not include information that: a. Is now, or hereafter becomes, part of the public domain; b. Is known by the Confidant before receiving such Confidential Information; or c. Is known by the Confidant from a third party, without breach of any confidentiality obligation.

Obligations. Confidant agrees:

- To hold Confidential Information in strict confidence; and
- To not disclose such Confidential Information to any third party without the prior written consent of Company; and
- To use all reasonable precautions, consistent with the nature of the Confidential Information, to protect the Confidential Information from disclosure to any third party.



Playtesting with your Target Audience

DON'T BE PARANOID

The fact is that 99.9% of people have **no intention** of stealing your ideas and even if they did they wouldn't know what to do with your game once they had stolen it.

The **benefits** of using playtesters far outweigh the perils.

The risk of using testers is **negligible** when compared to what else can go wrong during a production!



Playtesting with your Target Audience

You'll want to use the **same testers** periodically throughout the production to gauge how they feel the game is progressing.

However, **don't become too dependent** on a handful of testers – keep fresh recruits streaming in throughout the process.





Playtesting with your Target Audience

Prototyping Stage	Playtest on Your Own	Playtest with Confidants	Playtest with Target Audience
1) Foundations	●		
2) Structure	●	●	
3) Formal Details			●
4) Refinement			●

Prototyping Stages and Types of Playtesters
(Fullerton, Swain, Hoffman 2004)



Any questions?



Bibliography

Fullerton, T. Swain, C. & Hoffman, S. (2004) *Game Design Workshop*.
CMP Books, USA.



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