CSCI 1106
Lecture 6
Play Testing
The Greatest Game on Earth

• You have just created greatest game on earth!
  – Came up with an idea
  – Designed the game and game play
  – Implemented the game
  – Polished the game with cool graphics
  – Tested the game by playing it yourself
  – Have a business model ready to go

• You’re done right?
How Do You Know?

- Do users
  - Understand your game?
  - Enjoy playing your game?
  - Play the game as you expect them to play it?
  - Know the rules of the game?
  - Retain interest in the game?
  - Find the game challenging?

- Does the game have
  - Bugs or design flaws you are not aware of?
  - Confusing properties or behaviours?
  - An easy to follow story-line?

- Can the game be improved?

Playtesting is one way to answer some of these questions
What is Playtesting?

• Playtesting is a game development method for
  – Identifying problems with the game
  – Understanding how players perceive the game
  – Getting feedback about the game
  – Improving the playability and enjoyment of the game

• Playtesting involves
  – Players:
    • Users who typically have never played the game before
    • Recruited by developers to play games
  – Observers:
    • Members of the development team
    • Observe the players as they play games and take notes
An Overview of Playtesting
Goals of Playtesting

- **Identify issues that affect game play**
  - **Bugs**
    - Does the game behave correctly?
  - **Playability**
    - Player motion and mechanics
    - Laws of physics and environment
    - Controls
    - Speed of the game
  - **Understandability**
    - Game objectives
    - Tactics and strategies
    - Player information and statistics
Goals of Playtesting II

• Understand how players perceive the game
  – Difficulty
  – Pace
  – Immersion
  – Interest (story line)
  – Genre

• Get feedback about the game

• Identify possible improvements
  – Extensions
  – Modifications
  – Spin-offs
  – Features
Playtesting is NOT a User Study

Playtesting

- Focuses on a single concrete product (a game)
- Used to discover issues in the product (game)
- Passive
  - Player plays the game
  - Observer observes the play
  - Occasionally ask W questions
- Cheap and fast
  - 20 to 60 minutes per player
  - Can be done often and repeated

User Studies

- Focuses on general user tasks
- Used to verify a hypothesis about user behaviour
- Active
  - Users are timed performing tasks and respond to queries
  - Investigators survey the users
- Expensive and slow
  - 1 to 10 hours per user
  - Too expensive to do often and repeat
Two Variants of Playtesting

**External**
- Hire players not involved with the game development to test the game
- More expensive because
  - Need to find players
  - Need to schedule players
  - Need to pay the players
  - Unknown constants
- Provides an objective view
  - Player not familiar with game

**Internal**
- Game developers are also game players
- Cheap
  - Developers are on site
  - Developers are already on payroll
  - Developers do not need time to familiarize themselves with the game
- Provides a continuous view
  - Developer knows about past issues
Before the Playtest

• Ensure the game is stable (does not crash)
• Recruit players
  – Should represent your target audience
  – May or may not be familiar with the game
  – Typically compensated for their time (not much)
  – Should have some experience with games
  – Select players of various experience
    • Novices, casual, experienced (gamers)
• Setup a standard “typical” game station
  – Typical hardware (console, display, controller, audio, etc)
  – Typical gaming environment (couch)
  – Will depend on type of game platform
The Playtest

• Welcome and **thank** the player
• Remind the player that
  – The game is being tested, not them
  – The player should just have fun!
  – The observer will remain silent during the game
  – The player can ask questions
• Ask the players to talk out loud as they play
• The observer
  – Must remains silent during play
  – Must takes notes of everything that happens
    • Good, bad, and ugly
  – May conduct an interview at the end of play
  – May record the session on video (not typically done)
• Thank the player again and ensure that you have contact information
The Observer Should Note

- General mood of the player
- Any comments or suggestions made by the player
- Any bugs that occur during play
- Any difficulties experienced by the player
  - Controls, UI, game mechanics
  - Game objectives, tactics, and strategies
- How easily the player learns the game
- How quickly does the player progress through the game
- How quickly does the game become too hard for the player
- Any aesthetical issues
- Any other feedback
Ignore Your Ego!

• You as the game developer may feel hurt or annoyed by some of the player’s comments
• Ignore your feelings
  – You are doing this to find issues with your game
• Be prepared to accept the slings and arrows
• Remember: you still have the opportunity to improve the game!
After the Playtest

• Keep track of all the players
  – You can invite them back for additional playtests
• Collect and organize your notes
• Categorize your observations
  – Bugs (high priority)
  – Playability Issues (high priority)
  – Understandability issues (high priority)
  – Suggestions (low/medium priority)
  – Other feedback (informational)
• Address the bugs and the issues
• Playtest the game
• Repeat until game is awesome
Learning the Lessons

• Playtesting is a cheap and fast way to learn how to improve your game
• The more you do it, the better you become at it
• Listen and observe, no matter what the player does
• Playtest often and repeatedly as you improve your game