

User testing is an essential aspect of game design.

Unlike other artistic disciplines, interaction is an essential component of game design, so we can't call our games finished until we test how people interact with them.

Games are meant to be played, so we need to understand what works and what doesn't to make sure our work is playable.

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What to test for

Getting good feedback from users depends on asking good questions.

Play testing vs bug testing

Bugs are problems with the game that are unintended by the developers. If the game crashes, or the controls stop working, or a collision doesn't work, those are bugs.



We need to distinguish between bugs and intended design choices that the player doesn't like or finds confusing. A jump that's too high is not a bug, it's a design choice.

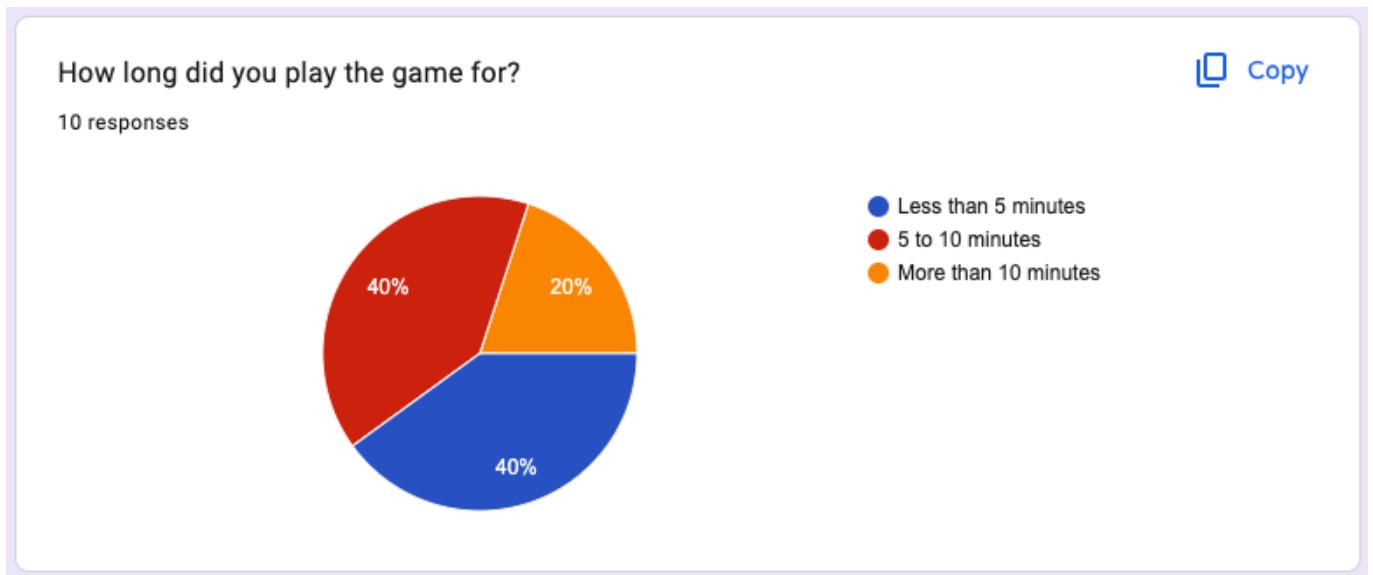
On-boarding

Does the player understand the basic controls and movement?

Does the player understand basic goals and game mechanics?

Play time

How long does the player play? Do they make it to the end? Do they give up? Why?

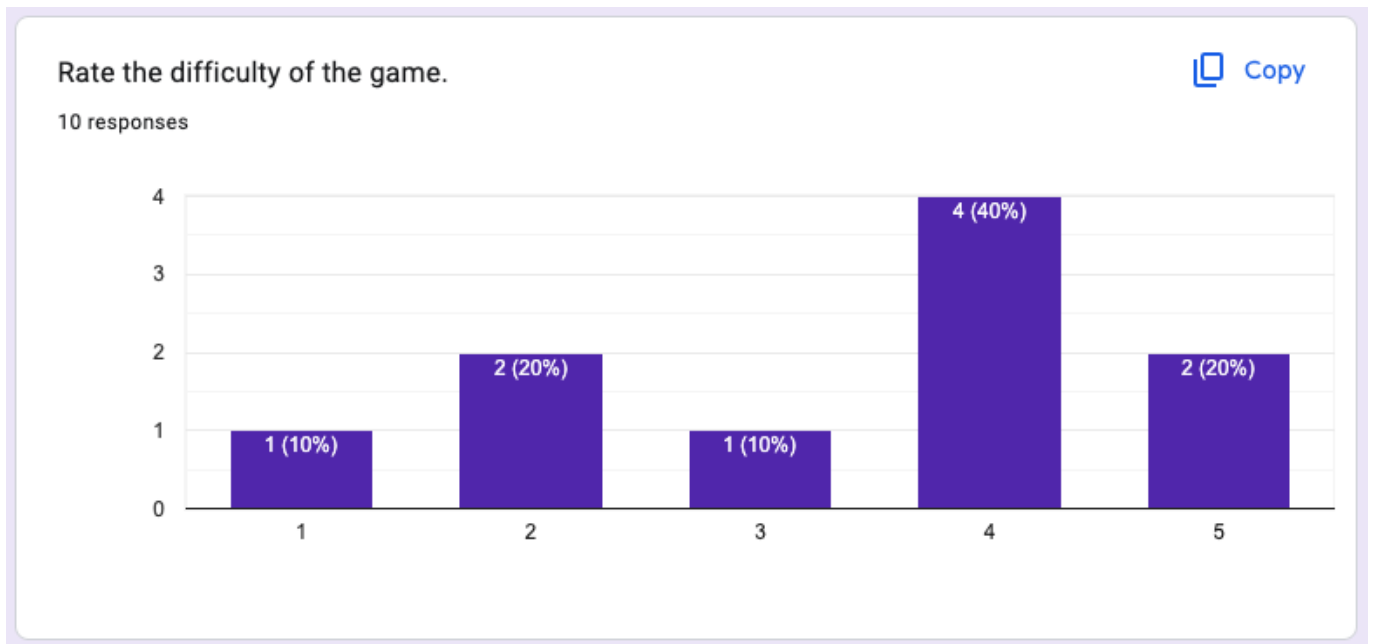


It's good to have a goal in terms of the game play length. A casual game might have a short play time, while a complex RPG could be played for dozens of hours.

Does the player's play time match the expectation? Why or why not?

Difficulty

Like play time, difficulty is going to vary among players. What we want to see is if our expectation of difficulty matches what players are reporting. If we expect the game to be easy, and it's rate high in difficulty, we may need to re-calibrate.



Principles of testing

Expect your users to have little or no familiarity with gaming.

Users have different levels of familiarity with gaming. Don't assume a user is bad at gaming or doesn't understand something — it's the game designer's job to make things clear.

That doesn't mean the game has to be easy. It has to be clear.

Seek both qualitative and quantitative feedback.

Quantitative feedback

Quantitative feedback is anything that uses numbers or scales. This is useful to see if there is general agreement among testers.

This is good for aspects of the games that can be quantified or rated.

Ask users to rate aspects of the game on a scale.

Qualitative feedback

Qualitative feedback involves verbal or written responses that go beyond a number or scale.

This is useful to give users more space to describe their thoughts and capture reaction that the designer may not have considered.

What was your experience of the game like?

10 responses

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It was really fun!

It was too hard :(

It was really easy :)

Start by choosing the elements of the game that are most important to its success. If the game relies heavily on narrative, ask the users to rate the narrative experience.