



# Game Design 4: Playtesting and Iteration

*Watching players, reading the data, and deciding what to fix*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

CLASS \_\_\_\_\_

## Testing With Real Players

A **playtest** is a session where real players try your game while you watch and collect information. Each playtest needs a **playtest goal**: one specific question you want answered, such as "Can new players find the exit of level 2 without help?"

**Observing** means watching what testers do. **Asking** means interviews or surveys afterward. Players often say one thing and do another, so what you observe is usually the stronger evidence. In a **think-aloud** test, the tester says their thoughts out loud while playing ("I think this lever opens the gate...").

**Don't lead the tester.** Do not explain, give hints, or ask **leading questions** that suggest an answer ("That jump was fun, right?"). Ask **neutral questions** instead ("What were you thinking just then?"). If you help, you learn nothing about whether the game works without you.

**Quantitative** feedback is numbers: completion rates, deaths, times. **Qualitative** feedback is words and observations: quotes, sighs, confusion. Numbers show *where* a problem is; words explain *why*.

**Iteration** is the cycle of test, analyze, change, test again. **Prioritize** fixes by **impact** (how much it helps, and how many players) and **effort** (how long it takes). Record every change in a **change log**: what changed, the evidence for it, and how you will know it worked.

## 1 Numbers or Words?

Circle **Quantitative** or **Qualitative** for each piece of feedback.

| Feedback                                                 | Type (circle one)          |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. Average time to finish level 1: 3 minutes 40 seconds. | Quantitative / Qualitative |
| b. A tester said the boss music made her nervous.        | Quantitative / Qualitative |
| c. 7 of 12 testers never opened the map.                 | Quantitative / Qualitative |
| d. A tester frowned and sighed at the door puzzle.       | Quantitative / Qualitative |

## 2 Leading or Neutral?

You are running a think-aloud playtest. Circle the type of each question.

| Question to the tester                     | Type (circle one) |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| a. "That jump was fun, right?"             | Leading / Neutral |
| b. "What were you trying to do just then?" | Leading / Neutral |
| c. "Did the confusing menu slow you down?" | Leading / Neutral |

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d. Rewrite one of the leading questions above as a neutral question.

e. A tester has been stuck at a locked door for two minutes and asks you, "How do I open this?" Should you tell them? Explain what you would do instead, and why.

**3 Find the Problem Spot**

20 new players tested level 2 (CP = checkpoint). **Completion rate = finished / started x 100%.**

| Section      | Started | Finished | Total deaths | Avg. time (s) |
|--------------|---------|----------|--------------|---------------|
| Start to CP1 | 20      | 20       | 6            | 45            |
| CP1 to CP2   | 20      | 19       | 9            | 60            |
| CP2 to CP3   | 19      | 11       | 58           | 210           |
| CP3 to Exit  | 11      | 10       | 7            | 50            |

a. Which section is the problem spot? Give **two** numbers from the table as evidence.

b. Completion rate for that section (nearest %):

d. In that section, how many deaths were there per player who started it (one decimal place)? How does that compare with CP1 to CP2?

c. Percent of all 20 testers who finished the level:

e. Testers also said these things. Which quote best explains the numbers, and what do you think the cause of the problem is?

| Tester    | Quote                                                                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tester 9  | "I kept jumping at that big wall until I gave up. I didn't know you could grab ledges." |
| Tester 15 | "The first room was kind of slow."                                                      |

**Game Design 4: Playtesting and Iteration** (page 3)**4 Prioritize the Fixes**

**Rule:** do high-impact fixes first; if two fixes tie on impact, do the lower-effort one first.

| Fix                                                                    | Impact | Effort |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| A. Add a safe practice room just after CP2 that teaches ledge grabbing | High   | Medium |
| B. Repaint all of the background art in level 2                        | Low    | High   |
| C. Make grabbable ledges glow so players notice them                   | High   | Low    |
| D. Fix a spelling mistake in the credits                               | Low    | Low    |

a. Write the four fixes in the order the team should do them.

**Order (letters):** \_\_\_\_\_

b. Fix B would make the level look better. Using **impact** and **effort**, explain why it comes last.

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**5 Write a Playtest Plan**

The team makes fix C and plans the next playtest of level 2.

**Playtest goal (one question):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Testers (who, and how many):** \_\_\_\_\_

**What you will observe or measure:** \_\_\_\_\_

**One neutral question to ask after:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How you will avoid leading testers:** \_\_\_\_\_

**6 Write a Change Log Entry**

Write the change log entry for fix C, using evidence from Question 3.

**Version:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What changed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Evidence (why):** \_\_\_\_\_

**How we will know it worked:** \_\_\_\_\_