

Assignment: Game Prototypes

Objectives

- To develop a critical, iterative prototyping practice that engages a range of prototyping tools;
- To conceptualize and design a formal and topical range of games in response to a given prompt;
- To engage with play-testing early in game design process, and develop a plan for improvement according to the tests' results;
- To formally communicate the ideas, structures, and concepts of a game while it is in development

Description

As Salen and Zimmerman describe in *Rules of Play*, “A game design education cannot consist of a purely theoretical approach to games. This is true of any design field: designers learn best through the process of design, by directly experiencing the things they make. Therefore, a large part of their training as students of game design must involve the creation of games” (Salen and Zimmerman, 11). In response to this educational necessity, this class asks students to produce 5 game prototypes, one every 2 weeks over a 10 week period, that both respond to a specific topical prompt, and that explore a range of formal/generic game types. At the end of the semester, one of these prototypes will be developed into a fully functional (if, perhaps modest) game using Unity.

Each prototype must, at minimum, include an articulation of the core elements that, according to Salen and Zimmerman, constitute a game. These elements are:

- A clearly defined “artificial conflict” which the player engages in;
- Clearly defined rules which structure and constrain play;
- An explicit, discernible, and quantifiable outcome or goal to play;

Further requirements, and prototype-specific requirements listed below.

Requirements

Tools: Students may prototype with whatever tools they choose, however, **at least one** of the prototypes must be done with low-fidelity, non-digital materials. Otherwise, prototyping tools available to students include (but are certainly not limited to):

- Unity
- Twine
- Game Maker Studio
- Unreal
- Scratch

Types: Just as we will play a number of game types, so too will students produce a number of game types. The following table outlines the required game types, provides a definition of that type, and offers examples that we will play in class and that may be used as models.

Students must produce at least one:	Definition	Examples
Serious Game (likely most effective for prototypes 3, 4, or 5)	A game that is designed with a primary purpose other than pure entertainment.	<i>Choice: Texas</i> <i>Mainichi</i> <i>The Coming Out Simulator</i> <i>Never Alone</i> <i>Fate of the World</i> <i>Superbug</i>
Platformer	A game that involves guiding a character / avatar to jump between suspended platforms and/or other obstacles to traverse the environment	<i>Braid</i> <i>Never Alone</i>
Atmospheric Game	A game that focuses on developing an intense, feeling-heavy world and atmosphere; often slow/exploratory game-play.	<i>Gone Home</i> <i>Dear Esther</i> <i>The Path</i>
Text-Based Game	A game that is played through and realized through text	<i>80 Days</i> <i>The Coming Out Simulator</i>
Simulator	A game that aims to copy or simulate activities from real life, often (though not always) for training or educational purposes	<i>The Coming Out Simulator</i> <i>Superbug</i> <i>Alto's Adventures</i>

Topical Prompts: The following table provides prompts and due dates for the five prototypes that students will produce over the course of the semester. In addition to the questions listed in each prompt, each prototype should aim to promote what Salen and Zimmerman call “meaningful play.” To this end each prototype and design process should consider the following:

- How will you ensure that failure is provoked to encourage continued play, rather than to discourage play?
- How will you introduce complexity into your gamic system?
- How will you communicate the rules, actions, choices, and goals of game play to your player?
- What kinds of signs, symbols, tropes, or other modes of metaphoricity will you use to build meaning?
- How will your sonic, visual, haptic, and interactive design work together to create a complete game system, that operates ethically and meaningfully whether open and closed?

Prototype Number	Due Date (11:59 pm)	Prompt
1	Sept 8	<p>Casual, Mobile Game: Using <i>Two Dots</i>, <i>Alto's Adventures</i>, <i>Braid</i> and any other casual games you are familiar with (eg: <i>Angry Birds</i>, <i>Bejeweled</i>, <i>Candy Crush</i>, <i>Fruit Ninja</i>, <i>Snake</i>, <i>Pong</i>, <i>Centipede</i>, etc.) as a guide, design a simple game system to be played casually on a mobile device. The focus here should be on producing a clean, minimal, game that is built around simple rules and clear goals that become increasingly complex to produce meaningful play for the casual gamer. You might think of the casual game as one that is “easy to learn, but hard to master.” As you design your casual game consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will you include in-app purchases? • How will you use the haptic limitation of the touch-screen device to allow for interesting and complex game play? • How will you maintain interest for the “casual” player? <p>In addition to these games, you may find Salen and Zimmerman’s introductory writings on pong (and other classic arcade games), and Chapters 14 and 15 helpful.</p>

Prototype Number	Due Date (11:59 pm)	Prompt
2	Sept 29	<p>Storytelling Game: Using <i>80 Days</i>, <i>Dear Esther</i>, <i>The Path</i>, and any other narrative-focused games that you are familiar with as a guide, design a game that primarily explores the capacity for video games to tell stories. You may use this as an opportunity to revisit a familiar story (as in <i>80 Days</i> and <i>The Path</i>), or you may tell your own, original story (as in <i>Dear Esther</i>). As you design your storytelling game, be particularly attentive to the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through what communicative mode will you convey the story to your players? • How will interaction and play within the narrative system affect the outcome of the story? • How will you convey setting, characters, and diegetic (vs. non-diegetic) time? • How will your game respond to Ian Bogost’s assertion that video games are better without narrative? <p>In addition to the texts read in this unit on the syllabus, you may find reviews of narrative-driven games, or other posts on <i>What a Terrible Fate</i> helpful.</p>
3	Oct 13	<p>Gender/Sexuality Game: Using <i>Gone Home</i>, <i>Choice:Texas</i>, <i>The Coming Out Simulator</i>, <i>Mainichi</i>, and any other games you are familiar with that address issues of gender or sexuality as a guide, design a game that is explicitly focused on issues related to gender or sexuality. Like <i>Gone Home</i>, <i>Mainichi</i>, or <i>The Coming Out Simulator</i>, you may use this opportunity to tell a story about, or simulate issues specific to, queerness; like <i>Choice:Texas</i>, you may choose to produce a serious game that addresses an issue related to gendered inequality; or, you may take inspiration from <i>Braid</i> and Anita Sarkissian’s discussion of gendered video games tropes, to re-imagine a classically gendered game/trope. As you design your gender/sexuality game, be particularly attentive to the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you ensure that your game does not inadvertently reproduce sexist, homophobic, or transphobic sentiments? • How will you ensure that your game ethically deals with issues that you, yourself, may never have dealt with? • What kind of research will you need to do to accurately and ethically deal with gender and sexuality in your game? <p>In addition to the texts read and watched in class, you may find inspiration in other games at Games for Change (http://www.gamesforchange.org/play/), and in the “Further Reading on Gender/Sexuality” folder on T-Square.</p>

Prototype Number	Due Date (11:59 pm)	Prompt
4	Oct 27	<p>Race/Ethnicity Game: Using <i>Mainichi</i>, <i>Lim</i>, <i>Chroma</i>, <i>Never Alone</i>, and other games you are familiar with that address or otherwise deal with issues of race and/or ethnicity as a guide, design a game that is explicitly concerned with issues of race and ethnicity. You may choose to follow <i>Mainichi</i>, simulating a day in the life of a raced person; you may choose to address this like <i>Chroma</i>, and produce a game where the character's race explicitly affects their abilities within the game; you may address this like <i>Lim</i>, and produce a simple, causal game that explores the violence inherent in difference and its erasure; or you may address this like <i>Never Alone</i>, and use the video game platform to tell stories and histories specific to a certain ethnic group. As you design your race/ethnicity game, be particularly attentive to the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you ensure that your game does not stereotype or otherwise inadvertently produce racist tropes/sentiments? • How will you ensure that your game ethically deals with issues that you, yourself may never have dealt with? • How will you address the “trap of representation”? • What kind of research will you need to do to accurately and ethically deal with race/ethnicity in your game? <p>In addition to the games and texts read in class, you may find the inspiration in other games at “Games for Change” (http://www.gamesforchange.org/play/), other games by Erik Loyer, and in the “Further Reading on Race/Ethnicity in Games” folder on T-Square.</p>
5	Nov 10	<p>Nation/Globe: Using <i>Papers, Please</i>, <i>Superbug</i>, <i>Fate of the World</i>, and any other games that address national or global issues that you are familiar with as a guide, design a game that somehow addresses or deals with national or global issues. These may be issues related to national borders (as in <i>Papers Please</i>), biomedical hazards (as in <i>Superbug</i>), or climate change (as in <i>Fate of the World</i>). Or, you may choose to take inspiration from historical or contemporary issues concerning national identity. As you design your game, be particularly attentive to the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of research will you have to do to accurately and ethically represent issues of national and/or global concern? • How will you ensure that your game does not reproduce nationalist, sexist, racist, or other sentiments that are often tied to national borders? • How will your game ethically and accurately represent issues that you may never have dealt with? <p>In addition to the games played and texts read in class, you made find inspiration at “Games for Change” (http://www.gamesforchange.org/play/), or in the “Further Readings on Nation/Globe in Games” folder on T-Square.</p>

Play-Testing: On the class-day before each prototype is due, students will conduct play-tests with each others' games. The goal during these play-testing sessions will be to get at least two testers on your game, and in turn, to test two of your peers' games. Students will come to class on this day having prepared appropriate questions and surveys to guide their peers in play-testing their game.

Designer's Statement: Each prototype will be turned in with an accompanying 500-word Designer's Statement. This statement should:

- Articulate how the game responds to the prompt;
- Describe specific design decisions that have been made, and how these decisions will promote meaningful play;
- Summarize the results of the play-test;
- Outline a plan for further development on the game, explicitly taking into account the results of the play-test

Assessment

Prototypes will be assessed according to the following 15-point rubric:

1 point: the prototype is turned in on time;

1 point: the prototype is turned in via the appropriate T-Square dropbox in a format described below

2 points: the prototype is play-tested twice (2);

2 points: the designer participates in two peer play-tests (2)

4 points: the prototype is accompanied by a designer's statement that:

- addresses the game's relationship to the prompt (1)
- addresses the results of the play-test (1)
- addresses specific design decisions in terms of their ability to affect meaningful play (1)
- provides a plan for further development that takes the play-test into account (1)

5 points: the prototype meaningfully and critically responds to the topical and typological prompts (described above), demonstrating a clear engagement with the game criticism and Salen and Zimmerman's design principles.

Submission Instructions

Prototypes should be submitted to your T-Square dropboxes as a zip folder containing the following:

1. The actual prototype and supporting files. If you've used a digital prototyping tool, please submit a **Mac-playable** prototype. If you've used a paper prototype, you may submit one of the following:
 - A PDF of screen-images, with appropriate textual commentary that describes play;
 - A recording of you or a peer "playing" your prototype, with appropriate verbal commentary. As with the vlogs, please submit this as a browser-viewable video;
2. Your Designer Statement, as a PDF
3. Any documents you have that supported your play-testing, such as:
 - Recordings of play-tests (browser-viewable);
 - Surveys or questionnaires;
 - Scripts or other prompts you used;
 - Charts / Data (if you produced them — this is not a requirement)

NOTE: Please attend to the naming paradigm you use for these documents in your folder.