

The Structure of Games

- all games share a common structure, Go-Fish is different from Quake but they have some common elements
- What is Go-Fish? How do you play Go-Fish?
- What is Quake? How do you tell someone what Quake is?
- Demo Quake
- at first glance, these two games could not be more dissimilar. One is a turn based card game, and the other is a real-time 3D first-person shooter.
- If we ignore the differences, and look at the core gameplay than similarities emerge.

Players

- both games are designed for players
- Go-Fish requires three players that challenge each other
- Quake requires a lone-warrior that challenges himself on completing the levels
- definition of player: voluntary participant who both partakes in and consumes the entertainment
- players are active, they are invested in the game, they make decisions and are winners
- to be come a player you must voluntarily accept the rules and constraints of the game
- Golf: the goal is to place a small white ball into a whole 200 yards away
- common sense would suggest dropping the ball into the whole

- Golfers have accepted the rules of the game
- this attitude, this voluntary acceptance of the rules of the game, is part of the psychological and emotional state of the players that we as game designers need to consider as part of the playcentric process of game design.

Objectives

- both games lay out specific goals for the players
- what is the goal for Go Fish?
- to be the player who makes the most book of cards
- what is the goal for Quake?
- it is to stay alive and complete the level you are in
- games are unique because they have interactive objects
- films and books don't have this, they are passive activities
- in games, however, the objective/goal is a key element without which the experience loses much of its structure
- our need to work toward the objective is the measure of our involvement in the game.
- List some games and one objective in that game

Procedures

- the actions or methods of play allowed by the rules
- important distinction of the experiences we call games, they guide the player behavior, creating interactions that would probably never take place out the authority of the game.

- you don't always take the most efficient action, you don't ask all of the players in Go-Fish for a specific card all at once - you have to do it in turns.

Rules

- describes what the player can and cannot do.
- Examples: there are 8 types of weapons in Quake and Shells are for both types of shotguns, nails are only for the nail-gun and perforators
- some rules establish game objectives and mechanics, for example Golf, hitting the ball in the hole
- other rules limit player behavior and proscribe reactive events, for example: you are asked for your jack, do you give it up? What happens if you don't?
- Who will stop you from breaking the rules of the game? Your own sense of fair play? The other players? The underlying code of a digital game?
- the authority of rules stems from an implicit agreement by the players to submit themselves to the experience.
- if you don't follow the rules, then, in a very real way, you are not playing the game
- players follow rules because they are invested in their interest to play the game.

Resources

- certain objects have different in-game values
- example: high cards get more points in Go-Fish, power-ups in Quake

- these objects are valuable because they can help the player achieve their goal
- we, as designers, get to determine their scarcity, these are resources
- management of resources is a key part of many games, SimCity
- they can be used to further our aims or combined to make new products or items, or can be bought and sold

Conflict

- both games lay out specific objectives for their players and have certain rules and procedures that guide and limit behavior
- the relationship between the objectives of the players and the rules and procedures limiting and guiding behavior creates conflict
- players have to work to resolve conflict in their own ways
- compare the conflict in poker and the conflict in football

Boundaries

- magic circle
- Quake, digital boundary - can't physically walk outside of the level
- places which special rules, all are temporary worlds inside of our ordinary world

Outcome

- the outcome of the game is uncertain

- players choose how they end their experience in the game
- Example: in Quake the player can either Stay Alive (win) or Die (lose)
- this aspect uncertainty in outcome is important for our playcentric process because it is a key motivator for players
- if players anticipate the outcome of the game, they will stop playing
- games require uncertainty for their dramatic tension
- gamers invest in this uncertainty, so it is the designer's responsibility to craft a satisfying resolution to the game

Engaging the player

- all of these structure elements, we just discussed, lay a solid foundation of play interaction and activity
- games are forms of entertainment, hopefully positive ones, and players invest their time and effort into them.
- not all games and gamers are alike, but they all invest in the game and become active participants within the structure of the game.
- emotional connection to the game and experience is necessary to engage the player

Challenge

- experiences create conflict in the game that players have to resolve in their own favor
- this conflict challenges the players, creating tension as they work to resolve problems

- increasing the challenge can cause a rising sense of tension or, if the challenge is too great, then can cause frustration
- if the challenge is too easy, then players might feel as if they master the skill and move on to another game,
- finding the balance of challenge in a game is a key consideration for keeping the player engaged with the game.

Play

- free movement within a rigid structure
- WoW has a very rigid structure, but you, as the player, can move freely within those constrictions
- Designing for the type of play that will appeal to your players and also designing the freedom for a bit of free play with the more rigid structure are key considerations for engaging players in your game.

Premise

- creates engaging gameplay and increases player investment
- premise of Monopoly is to be a crazy rich landlord, buying and selling properties in an effort to become the richest player in the game.
- Premise of WoW is that the players are characters in a rich fantasy world filled with archetypal quests and adventures.
- the effect of creating a premise for your game is that it makes it easier for player to contextualize their in-game

choices and also encourages them to get involved in the game.

Character

- characters are elements in which dramatic stories are told
- they provide the player an opportunity to empathize with the situation and live vicariously through their efforts. Mass Effect, Gears of War, Halo, Fallout have strong characters

Story

- powerful tool to engage players
- does the story create the premise? or vice-versa?
- playtesting will help determine the balance

Sum of the Parts

- each of these elements relies on the other
- games are systems
- systems, by definition, are groups of interrelated elements that work together to form a complex whole.
- game designers need to be able to look at the system as a whole, but also the individual parts
- game designers are like auto mechanics, they know how the transmission works but also how it plugs into the car.

What is a Game?

- a closed, formal system
- engages players in structured conflict
- resolves its uncertainty in an unequal outcome