



Advice for Playtesting

Testing a toy concept or model is your team's opportunity to get feedback from real users. It will be exciting for you to see children playing with a concept that you invented. Have fun! The knowledge you gain from these experiences will ultimately shape the course of your product, and help your team generate ideas on ways to improve your designs.

Who should participate?

Ideally, at least two people from your team will attend when you playtest: one to explain the idea to the user, and one to record what the user says and does, either by taking notes or (if you have permission) video or photos. More people from your team is better so everyone can experience the user feedback firsthand, although some users, especially children, may be intimidated by a bunch of people staring at them.

What items do we need for playtesting?

Bring a tangible representation of your design concept to present to the user. This may be a sketch or a poster, a storyboard, or a physical model. If you want to capture 'artifacts' (e.g. photos or video), and plan to take notes, make sure you have the necessary supplies.

How can we prepare to get the most out of playtesting?

In your daily life, particularly when sharing your toy ideas with classmates and friends, practice being highly observant of their verbal and nonverbal reactions, suggestions, and questions. This will allow you to "rehearse" treating seemingly informal interactions as valuable sources of information about your concept. Before playtesting, get together as a team and prioritize your needs – think about the design decisions you will need to make moving forward, and what kind of feedback would inform these decisions.

How might we communicate effectively during playtesting?

When you meet your user(s), smile and introduce yourselves. You may want to crouch down so that your eyes are on the same level. Ask your user's name and their age or grade, and ask them about their "grown-up" (if accompanied). Give them a concise introduction to your design – this could be your 45-second idea pitch, or a part of it. Explain that you are showing them an idea for a toy that you are still designing and that their honest feedback will help make the idea even better! Be careful not to bias your users (e.g., Don't say: "This is cool, isn't it?"). Many times, users want to please you and will not be as candid as they could be. Ask open-ended questions with neutral language (e.g., "How do you play tag with your friends?")

You may only have a few precious minutes, so it's important to be very brief. You want to be sure there's time to observe the user interacting with your model, and hear the user's thoughts about your concept.

What should we be looking for during playtesting?

If you have a physical prototype, give it to them and let them play with it. Oftentimes, you can skip the above introduction altogether if your prototype is reasonably self-explanatory. Silently observe how they interact with the model, and consider the following:

- Do they seem to have the right mental model of what it's supposed to do?

- Do they seem to have fun? What are the cues that tell you that?
- What are their difficulties (if any) using it?
- If they seem like they really don't understand how to use it, gently explain/guide them.

A user may have a lot to say, or may say little. In either case, your job is to listen carefully, observe, and record. If a user is really engaged with the concept, you might follow up and ask if they have any suggestions.

Be gracious, and thank the user for their time.

What can we do after playtesting?

As a team, it will be important to discuss what you heard from users, sharing any artifacts from the experience (e.g video or photos, if you captured any), along with your notes. Reflect on the details and the overall trends of the feedback and your observations.

If you find out that users really liked your toy or that parents or teachers would buy it, try to dig deeper:

- What about the concept or a design detail did the users like (a sound? a texture? type of toy?). What about the toy concept makes a parent think s/he would buy it for a child (e.g. "My daughter likes outdoor water toys, and your idea is unusual" or "My kids like working together more than competing.").
- No feedback is still a kind of data. Think about what it means if users have no response to questions about the toy concept. Does it signal a lack of interest? A problem with the question? Is the toy idea confusing in general? Is the toy idea and the user's age not a good fit?
- Remember, different users may give different feedback on the same design concept. This is human nature. It's up to your team (with the advice of your instructor and mentor(s)) to listen carefully at what users say to get at the key underlying aspects of a design you should focus on as you move forward.