

# Toppop

## Playtesting Report



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# 1 Introduction

With a running alpha release, it was time to get our game tested by people other than just us. We invited a few of our fellow students, friends and family members to play at our playtesting session, which took place in the public space on the CAB G floor. This also motivated some other people, whom none of us knew personally, to try out our game. In the end, we counted about 10 people over the complete 4 hours of play time.

## 2 Setup

We prepared two laptops with the game running and an Xbox360 controller connected. We also printed out the control schemes, which are also available in-game. We did not explain anything to the testers, but rather let them figure out everything on their own. After some time, we asked one after the other a set of questions and discussed a bit about possible improvements. To get a nice ambiance we offered some beverages and of course some popcorn.



Figure 1: Foto from our playtesting session.



Figure 2: Foto from our playtesting session.

### 3 Feedback

The feedback was generally positive. We will not list all replies to the different questions but summarize it for the different aspects. Some of the problems/suggestions/improvements mentioned below were already fixed/changed/added at the time of this writing (more details in section 4

#### 3.1 General

In general the playtesters liked the visual appearance of our game and the game mechanics. The physics puzzles were challenging, which on one hand was fun but on the other hand also led to some frustration when retrying the hard levels over and over again.

#### 3.2 Gameplay

One thing concerning gameplay that seemed to give some problems, was that the way you control the popcorn and how this translates to the different bouncing behaviours, was not clear to everybody at the beginning. From most games you are used to controlling the left and right movement of the character, while in our game you control its rotation which in turn leads to a movement through friction.

For example, in one level with air vents you have to roll on the "ceiling". Rotating to the right (clock wise) in this case translates into a movement to the left, which was confusing for some people as they expected the popcorn to move in the same direction as

the button they pressed (left when pressing LT and right when pressing RT). To make it clearer we should probably give more extensive explanations in form of a tutorial about this behaviour.

Although we had several tutorial levels that introduced the different platform types and elements, for some it seemed that it would be better if there were additional explanations in the form of text and/or images.

The same goes for the popping mechanism: It was not always immediately clear, how the popping translates into a jump. Again more extensive tutorials with explanations would probably be helpful. For example some expected the popcorn to jump vertically and also to do this at any point, not only when touching a surface. But after some clarification it seemed that our idea of popping into normal direction and only if you touch a surface made sense to the playtesters, but should be explained, again through some tutorials.

### **3.3 Difficulty**

Generally they liked the difficulties of the levels, but for now some medium hard levels are missing. We have easy levels (tutorials) and hard levels, but not really something inbetween yet.

### **3.4 Editor**

The editor seemed to be rather complex as there are now much more possibilities than when playing. Again, tutorials on how to use each tool and what it does are necessary. But after the players got acquainted with the controls, they really liked it and created some cool levels. The possibility to create levels adds an additional fun factor. We also got some suggestions on how to make the level editor easier and more intuitive: by displaying an overview of the tool belt and which tool is currently active, so you see in which direction you have to cycle to select the right tool. And the drawing pointer should also be improved for some cases to clarify what exactly it does (e.g. the moving platform path pointer and switch connection pointer).

### **3.5 Sound**

Most testers found the music and sound effects good, but for hard levels, where you have to try many times, it could get a bit annoying. There should be a possibility to turn off the sound effects. It was suggested that we introduce a larger variety of sound effects for bouncing on different platforms and activating switches and air vents. Having a larger variety for the background music would also be beneficial.

### **3.6 Graphics**

Our 2.5D graphics was described as cute and polished which is really nice to hear. The only problems with the graphics were that the green pipes blended too much into the

background and therefore some testers completely missed some of the pipes in the levels. For this reason, we should think about different colours for the background or foreground pipes, which was already discussed before playtesting. Sometimes it was said that the font is hard to read depending on things displayed behind it.

Since the animations for the switches and air vents were not yet included in the playtesting version, there were no visual cues as to whether they were active or not, which also led to some confusion. Furthermore, it was also suggested to make it possible to rotate switches to activate them from different sides.

### **3.7 Menu**

The most problematic part was the navigation through the menus. The main menu can be controlled by either scrolling through the menu options or by moving the popcorn to the corresponding region on the screen. The lack of explanations on how this works was quite confusing. Also, the popcorn was moving when you went back to the main menu and at some point it rolled all over the screen and the game switched into another state (e.g. if you come back from playing to the main menu, the popcorn rolls to the left and eventually opens the editor). This was very confusing as the players had no idea what had happened.

After beating a level, you can replay or go back to the main menu. This led to a lot of clicks until you could play another level. It was suggested to have the options to go back to the level selector (and to have the last played selected) or to directly start the next level (for example the next tutorial level). Similarly for the editor it was suggested to have additional menu options to create new levels or load an existing one without going through the main menu.

So in general we should improve the navigation through the menus.

### **3.8 Improvements and suggestions**

Additional suggested improvements were mainly to add more elements like, hot objects that enforce popping or power-ups and enemies. Also, it would be nice if we could include a larger variety of levels, from easy to hard and to have levels that first need to be unlocked. This also prevents diving into very hard levels immediately which would only be frustrating. Other suggestions were multiplayer (coop and PvP), similarly to what we had in mind at the beginning, to add different popcorn skins for more variety and to add a "ghost" of the best run.

Thanks to playtesting we also found some minor bugs, that we might have missed otherwise.

### 3.9 Play matrix

The playtesters classified our game on the play matrix as shown in Figure 3.

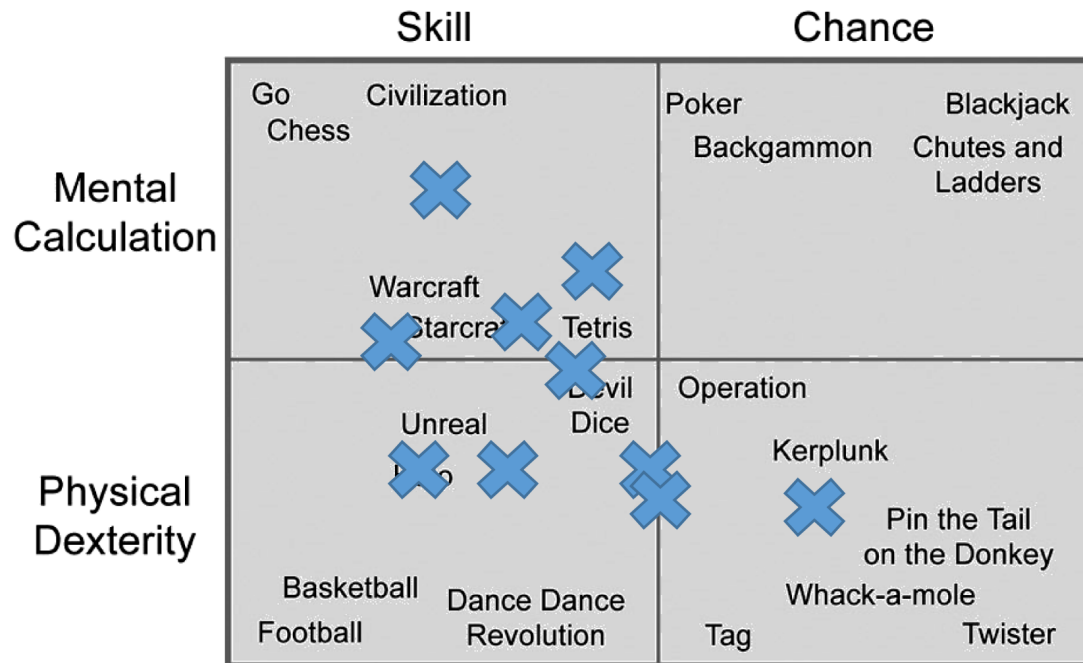


Figure 3: The play matrix and where the playtesters placed our game.

As we can see, playtesters found that there is some skill and also some thinking involved. This corresponds to what was our goal. Fortunately, it was not classified as random, which we were a bit afraid of. So in general the result is really positive.

## 4 Scheduled Changes

In this section we list the things we decided to change, based on the feedback described above. Some of these have already been completed at the time of this writing.

### 4.1 Gameplay

More extensive explanations through tutorial levels on how to control the popcorn (both rolling and popping). This could either be done with additional media such as text and images or by designing levels intelligently.

### 4.2 Difficulty

Create a larger variety in the difficulty of levels, especially medium hard levels.

### **4.3 Editor**

Possibility to rotate switches (done).

Display tool belt and to help navigating through the tools (done).

Improve certain tool pointers.

Adding tutorials or help info for each tool.

### **4.4 Sound**

Adding the possibility to turn off sound effects and music.

More sound effects for different interactions (like rolling/bouncing on different platforms, activating switches etc.).

### **4.5 Graphics**

Change the color of the pipe platform.

Adapt color scheme of the background image.

Improve the font to make it easier to read (done).

Add animations for the switches and air vents.

### **4.6 Menu**

Explanation about navigating through the main menu by rolling (pop up when first time rolling in the main menu).

Hide menu options when rolling.

Stop the movement of the popcorn when returning to the main menu (done).

Option to go back to the level selector after finishing a level (done).

Option to play the next level after finishing a level (done).

Option to create or load a level through the editor menu.

### **4.7 Improvements and suggestions**

Build more levels (larger variety).

Save the ghost of successful runs (done).

## **5 Appendix: All questions**

Here is the complete list of all questions we prepared.

### **Gaming Experience:**

How often do you play games?

Console, Computer or on mobile devices?

What kind of games to you play?

**General:**

What was your first impression?  
How did this change while you were playing?  
What did you like about the game?  
What did you not like about the game?  
Was there anything you found frustrating?  
Was it easy to learn the game?  
What is the goal of the game?

**Story:**

What is the story of the game? What is it about?  
What is the setting?

**Controls:**

Was it clear how to control the game?  
Now that you had a chance to play the game is there any information that would have been useful to you before starting?

**Difficulty:**

Are the levels too hard? Too easy? Just right?  
Are the levels too large? Too small? Just right?  
Are there enough objects? Too many? Too few?  
What objects would you remove/add/change?

**Gameplay:**

How is the speed of the game? Too fast? Too slow? Just right?  
Did you feel you could control the movement/rolling of the popcorn? Or was it just random?  
How is the bouncing of the corn kernel / popcorn?  
Was the bouncing as you expected?  
Was there unexpected behaviour?  
How does the popping feel? Is it controllable?  
Does it pop too fast? Too slow? Just right?  
Does it pop too much? Too little? Just right?  
What would be your favourite way to control the popping time and strength?

**Editor:**

How is the editor? Easy to use? Hard to use?  
Are there enough elements? Are there missing elements?  
Was there something you wanted to create but was not possible with the editor?

**Sound:**

How was the background music? Annoying? Funny? Well-fitted?  
How were the sound effects? Annoying? Funny?

Were the sound effects helpful? Or rather distracting?  
 Were there redundant sound effects?  
 Any ideas for sound effects? Where would sound effects be helpful?

### Graphics:

How do you like the graphics? Very bad? Ok? Very good?  
 Would you prefer only 2D graphics? Or do you like this 2.5D graphics?  
 Would it be better if it was full 3D (movement in 3D)?  
 Is the world too crowded? Too empty? Just right?

### Improvements:

What would you add to make the game more fun?  
 Is anything missing? What would you add to the game?  
 Was there anything about the interface you would change?  
 What elements could be improved? How?  
 If you could change just one thing, what would it be?

### Play Matrix:

Where would you put the game in this play matrix?

		Skill	Chance		
Mental Calculation		Go Chess	Civilization	Poker Backgammon	Blackjack Chutes and Ladders
			Warcraft Starcraft	Tetris	
Physical Dexterity			Unreal Halo	Devil Dice	Operation Kerplunk
		Basketball Football	Dance Revolution	Dance	Pin the Tail on the Donkey Whack-a-mole Tag Twister

Figure 4: The play matrix.