

# Chance and Skill: Finding the Balance

## Game Design

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# Consider the Target Audience

## *Who is the player?*

- This is an important question, often the first one that a designer asks.
- Different players have different levels of tolerance for chance and skill.

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- **Children are playing a game to have fun.**
- That means that **they hope to win** and want to *have a chance of beating anyone* they're playing with, *especially their parents.*
- Beating anyone requires *a lot of luck.*

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- *However, to make a game that is **simple and compelling** is quite complicated.*
- Children younger than five **may not yet possess the mental skills necessary to make strategic decisions or to keep track of resources** in a game.
- Often, these games also allow children to **disconnect from turn to turn** so that each turn is about *immediacy*, not *permanence and strategy*.

## Consider the Target Audience | Children

- *Many adults assume it's easy to design a game for children.*
- *However, to make a game that is **simple and compelling** is quite complicated.*
- Does that mean that **children can only play games that are purely luck based?**
- **No**, if they are playing against each other where *they are relatively evenly matched*.
- The **level of skill** involved must go hand in hand with the degree of complexity.

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- *The greater the amount of luck in the game, the greater the potential difference between the players' skill levels while still allowing for a good game.*
- Even a small random element can *take some of the sting out of losing*.

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- A greater range of *luck is tolerated* but there still *needs to be enough interesting decisions.*
- Especially decisions that *affect other players*, which leads to **social play.**
- Again, **the greater the luck in a game, the more even the playing field.**

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- Others do have **some luck**, but the *skill elements outweigh the luck*.

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- **Some elements of skill with interesting decisions**, to keep the adults entertained and engaged.

# Playtesting for Luck/Skill Balance

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Some **warning signals** when observing playtesters:

**The players are bored.**

- There is **too much luck** in the game, or have **too low frequency** of interesting decisions.
- **To fix this:** *convert* some random elements to player decisions, or else *shorten* the length of the game.

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Some **warning signals** when observing playtesters:

The players are bored on all *but* their turn.

- Odds are **your game** isn't as immersive as it could be.
- **To fix this:** Find a way for players to *engage with other players through gameplay*, or else *make turns shorter*.

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Some **warning signals** when observing playtesters:

**The players never become engaged, or seem confused about what to do.**

- The game is **too complicated**, or that there are **too many decisions**, or there is **too much information** for the players to process.
- **To fix this:** *Remove some decisions*, automating them or making them random, or *reduce the complexity* of the rules in general.

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Some **warning signals** when observing playtesters:

**One player beats all of the other players by a wide margin.**

- This suggests the game has **too many skill elements**.
- **To fix this:** *Add some randomness* to the game, or *add mechanics* that make it easier for players who are behind to catch up.

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- This means that adding an **extremely difficult twitch element** to a game can actually *widen the gap between beginner and expert*.

# Combining Luck and Skill

*Games may have elements of chance, twitch skill, or strategic skill, but **one always has the strongest influence on the game's outcome.***

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- Some players **feel** that winning or losing is always in their power, since they have free choice, and this adds a compelling element to an otherwise dull game.

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- However, **heavier strategy** can be disruptive and can *remove the player from the flow of the game*.
- **Twitch games are an adrenaline rush**, and stopping the action so the player can *strategize breaks the immersion in the gameplay*.

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- **Too much luck can take the thrill out of winning**, if a player feels that he only won because of random events.
- **The acceptable amount of luck** to add *depends on the target audience*.
- **Competitive gamers** will generally tolerate only a small amount of luck, while **social and family gamers** can accept larger amounts.

