



CURIOSITY^{IN} GAMES



TO SEEK OUT NEW KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES FOR ITS OWN SAKE, AND EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY, IS TO DISPLAY CURIOSITY.

Curiosity is our desire to know just for the sake of knowing. It motivates us to explore our world (or an alien one!) and it also helps us learn. When we're curious, we pay closer attention, think about information more deeply and remember it better. Fear of the unknown, uncertainty, or ambiguity can hold people back from following their curiosity. So the ability to manage fear is one skill that makes practicing healthy curiosity easier. Games might provide opportunities to be curious when they encourage players to solve mysteries, navigate worlds with unexpected rules, experiment to create new things, try on different social roles and identities, and explore intriguing open worlds (both purely fantastical and similar to our own). How would your game spark players' curiosity to keep them engaged, or show them that curiosity pays off?

ELEMENTS TO ADD

- + Reward players for exploration.
- + Allow players to try different approaches that each work toward player progression.
- + Give the player the ability to self-direct their own course in the game.
- + Include optional or variable goals.
- + Provide useful discoveries that can happen organically to keep players curious about the world.
- + Encourage players to solve puzzles or mysteries mechanically or narratively.
- + Allow players to combine elements or actions to see what happens.
- + Vary stress levels from a minimum level that promotes curiosity to a moderate amount that offers players practice pursuing their goals while managing a small amount of stress.

ELEMENTS TO LEAVE OUT

- Avoid lack of diversity in surroundings and characters; sameness builds player expectations that nothing will change.
- Be mindful of rote learning and memorization: this can be boring for players.
- Don't punish players for trying new things: this can discourage them for curiosity.
- Insufficient reward or change can bore players.

CONSIDER THIS

There are different categories of "known information" and "unknown information" that can help people determine what activities they need to undertake, in order to learn the information they need.

KNOWN UNKNOWNNS are things you know you don't know, which require experimentation.

KNOWN KNOWNS are things you know you know, which require planning.

UNKNOWN KNOWNS are things you don't know you know, which require internal epiphanies.

UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS are things you don't know you don't know, which require discovery and exploration.

COMMON PITFALLS

SMALL SOLUTIONS

Curiosity is more than solving a puzzle or mystery; it's the desire to understand through exploration and experimentation. How will your game promote and reward this, without relying on a collection mechanic?

OVERUSE OF CHECKLISTS

There's a difference between having a pre-set story or list of things that your player needs to discover through gameplay, in order to progress, versus creating a space where your player can create their own stories and experiences. The first is more a situation where the designer holds all authorship and guides the player down a specific path, whereas the second is more a situation of shared authorship where the player co-authors the experience using tools provided by the designer. The former is not automatically devoid of encouraging curiosity, but the latter is more likely to encourage curiosity.

GAME GENRES & TYPES



Puzzle



Sandbox



Hidden Object



Open World



Mystery



Social Simulation

SPECIFIC MECHANICAL REFERENCES

In *Spore*, players can experiment with different creature attributes to see how a creature functions in the world, allowing them to evolve a creature that helps them play the way they want to.

In *Her Story*, players must investigate a situation using video clips, and it's through this investigation that a narrative emerges.

In the *Nancy Drew* series, players must solve mysteries by identifying and investigating clues.

In *Monument Valley*, *Zelda* games and *Myst*, there are puzzles for players to solve which are mostly solvable through trial and error.

In *Little Alchemy* and in the crafting system of *Skyrim*, the recipes are secret, so players create usable items by combining different ingredients, encouraging them to experiment with different combinations.

In *80 Days*, players can take whatever route around the world they would like to, and different interesting things happen depending on what they choose. Players can re-play to experience different routes and adventures.

In *Skyrim*, *Minecraft*, and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, the open world allows players to explore and find unexpected situations, locations and adventures.

Minecraft and *Abzu* allow players to be self-directed by their curiosity for their own gameplay experience.

Kerbal Space Program encourages experimentation in order to meet goals and solve problems using real-world rocket science!

Zork and other old-school text adventure games require players to type in different word combinations in order to progress through the game.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CURIOSITY

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