

CTIN404 Usability Testing for Games

Summary Report (By Jannie Wang)

A. Overview

Name of Game: White Noise

Test Moderator: Name Jannie Wang Ph # 213-248-9862 Email janniewa@usc.edu

Test Moderator Partner: Name Lizzy Brunn Ph # (720) 256-4966 Email lbrunn@usc.edu

Game Designer1 : Name Ashley Cates Ph # Email acates@usc.edu

Game Designer2: Name Natalie Hopkin Ph # Email hopkin@usc.edu

B. Introduction

Game Description:

White Noise is a psychological horror experience that immerses players in a retro TV interface to unravel a dark, personal narrative. Through actions such as channel flipping, volume adjustments, and playback controls, players piece together disturbing story fragments while encountering unexpected gameplay effects that challenge conventional expectations.

Game Inspiration:

Combines familiar, nostalgic technology (retro TV) with a subversive, dark narrative twist.

Designer Intent:

Mood:

Aim for a tense, unsettling atmosphere where players are emotionally engaged because of the overwhelming darkness.

Aesthetic Mismatch:

Use familiar technology in an unfamiliar, eerie context to heighten cognitive dissonance and player immersion.

Expected Target Audience:

- GENDER: Male/Female/Nonbinary
- GAMER LEVEL Casual or Hardcore
- LOCATION: National/International audience
- AGE: 16+
- GAMES PLAYED: Resident Evil 1-3, Silent Hill, Amnesia, Bioshock, Slenderman, The Walking Dead
- FAVORITE GENRES: RPG, Horror, Puzzle
- LEVEL OF GAMEPLAY: Ramps from fairly easy to progressively more difficult

State of the Game:

Planned Testing Controllers: PC

Actual Used Testing Controllers: PC

C. Procedure

Testing Date: Saturday, March 1st, 2025

Testing Location: Usability Lab, Game Innovation Lab

Users Tested: 3

Planned Time of Testing: 5:00pm - 6:30pm

Actual Time of Testing: 5:00pm - 6:10pm

Who Was There: Jannie Wang Test Moderator 5:00pm - 6:10pm

Roles: Jannie Wang

- Ran testing
- Took notes on users
- Provided feedback and status reports to designers

Attempted Procedure: Briefing 5 minutes

Gameplay 15 minutes

Debriefing 5 Minutes

Actual Procedure: Briefing 5 minutes

Gameplay 7-15 minutes

Debriefing 5 Minutes

User Summary:

The playtest group consisted of one female and two males. Among them, two were identified as casual gamers, while one was a hardcore gamer. Their academic backgrounds were diverse, with majors in Communication, Computer Science, and Environmental Science. Additionally, all participants had prior experience playing on PC platforms or using retro TV interfaces.

D. Goals

Overall Goals:

User Goals + Objectives
Explore and piece together the dark narrative through channel surfing.

• <i>Heuristic Adhered To: Goals (D1–D3)</i> – The game clearly presents overarching and short-term narrative objectives.
Utilize the TV remote interface intuitively for navigation and playback. • <i>Heuristic Adhered To: Usability & Game Mechanics (B3 & G1)</i> – Controls are intuitive, and navigation is consistent.
Experience a gradual buildup of unease and suspense through gameplay pacing. • <i>Heuristic Adhered To: Enduring Play (A4–A5)</i> – The pacing is designed to sustain interest and avoid repetitive tasks.
Adjust audiovisual elements (volume, playback speed) to enhance immersion. • <i>Heuristic Adhered To: Immersion (D1)</i> – Visceral audio-visual cues deepen the unsettling atmosphere.

+ Goal Met

- Goal Not Met

Goals Met

- **Experience a gradual buildup of unease and suspense through gameplay pacing**
Heuristic Adhered To: Enduring Play (A4–A5) – The pacing is designed to sustain interest and avoid repetitive tasks.

Why?

- The game's pacing effectively builds tension over time, keeping players engaged by steadily increasing suspense and avoiding monotonous gameplay loops.
 - **Adjust audiovisual elements (volume, playback speed) to enhance immersion**
Heuristic Adhered To: Immersion (D1) – Visceral audio-visual cues deepen the unsettling atmosphere.
Why?
 - When players adjust settings such as volume or playback speed, they trigger noticeable shifts in audio and visual feedback, which in turn heightens the overall immersive, unsettling experience.
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Goals Not Met

- **Utilize the TV remote interface intuitively for navigation and playback**
Heuristic Adhered To: Usability & Game Mechanics (B3 & G1) – Controls are intuitive, and navigation is consistent.
Why?
 - Although the interface is designed to be straightforward, players encountered issues with the volume button. Many initially thought the volume button did nothing and failed to notice the red visual feedback it generated.
 - This indicates that the feedback cues are too subtle, and players need clearer guidance or a more pronounced visual signal to fully understand the control scheme.
- **Explore and Piece Together the Dark Narrative Through Channel Surfing**
Heuristic Adhered To: Goals (D1–D3) – The game clearly presents overarching and short-term narrative objectives.

Why?

- Although the game is designed for players to uncover hidden narrative fragments by flipping channels, feedback indicates that narrative clarity remains ambiguous. While some players did uncover certain clues, the overall backstory and how the fragments interconnect were not clearly conveyed. This ambiguity leads to confusion, causing players to focus more on puzzle-solving rather than engaging deeply with the narrative.

E. Results

Overall Summary of Findings

The playtest for White Noise revealed a number of strengths and areas for improvement. The game's pacing was effective in building suspense gradually, allowing for a natural escalation of tension that kept players invested without becoming monotonous. The audiovisual adjustments, when noticed, provided visceral feedback that deepened the unsettling atmosphere and contributed significantly to the immersion.

However, there were critical issues that need to be addressed. Despite the intuitive design of some elements, the TV remote interface, particularly the volume control, did not meet player expectations. Many participants initially believed the volume button was non-functional, and the red visual feedback was too subtle to notice, which disrupted the intended cause-effect relationship between player actions and narrative progression. Furthermore, narrative clarity was flagged as ambiguous by some players, as evidenced by lower ratings for the backstory, indicating that the narrative cues might require clearer exposition to foster deeper emotional engagement. Addressing these concerns through improved tutorials, more pronounced feedback cues, and enhanced narrative delivery will be essential in refining the overall player experience and ensuring the game's immersive potential is fully realized.

What Worked Well:

1. Gradual Buildup of Tension

- **Heuristic Adhered To: Enduring Play (A4–A5)** – The pacing is designed to sustain interest and avoid repetitive tasks.
- **What Happened:** All players experienced a steady increase in unease and tension as the game progressed, with ratings indicating a strong buildup of suspense (4–5/5).
- **Why:** The controlled pacing allows for a natural escalation of tension, keeping players engaged and on edge without overwhelming them, which effectively maintains interest throughout the gameplay.

2. Strong Atmospheric Presentation

- **Heuristic Adhered To: Immersion (D1)** – Visceral audio-visual cues deepen the unsettling atmosphere.
- **What Happened:** Players consistently highlighted the well-executed horror atmosphere as a standout feature of the game, noting its effectiveness in creating a sense of suspense and unease throughout the experience.
- **Why:** The game's atmospheric design, including visual cues and sound effects, immediately immerses players in a dark, suspenseful world. This strong presentation helps players feel connected to the narrative, reinforcing the overall thematic intent and maintaining engagement.

What Needed Work:

Issue 1: Ambiguous Narrative Clarity

- **Heuristic Violated: Game Story Encourages Immersion (A1)** - Game story encourages the player to get engaged with the plot and the characters involved.
- **What Happened:** Two out of three players rated the narrative clarity as 3/5, indicating that the backstory was not sufficiently clear.
- **Why:** When the backstory and narrative cues are ambiguous, players may focus more on puzzle-solving and miss deeper emotional engagement with the story.
- **Suggestions:** Incorporate additional cues—such as visual storytelling elements, in-game dialogue, or environmental details—to clearly convey the backstory and strengthen the emotional connection.

Issue 2: Insufficient Tutorial and Onboarding for Interface Controls

- **Heuristic Violated:**
 - **Documentation – Tutorial (A1)** – The player does not need to read extensive text or documentation to play.
 - **Navigation (H3)** – Upon turning on the game, the player has enough information to get started to play.
- **What Happened:** One player noted confusion in differentiating between channel navigation and playback controls, and two players expressed a need for additional guidance or tutorials during gameplay.
- **Why:** Without clear, context-sensitive instructions, players may experience an unnecessary cognitive burden. This not only slows down the learning process but also risks frustrating players who may not intuitively understand the control mechanics.
- **Suggestions:**
 - **Step-by-Step Tutorials:** Integrate a concise, interactive tutorial that demonstrates how to use the remote controls effectively.
 - **Context-Sensitive In-Game Help:** Provide visual cues or brief on-screen instructions that explain the functions of channel flipping, volume adjustments, and playback controls when they are first encountered.

Issue 3: Ambiguous Feedback from Control Actions

- **Heuristic Violated: Game Feedback (C1)** – The game provides feedback and reacts in a consistent, immediate, and challenging way to the player’s actions.
- **What Happened:**
 - Players initially thought that the volume button did not perform any function.
 - They also had difficulty noticing the red lines generated by the volume action, leading to confusion about its effect.
- **Why:** Clear, immediate feedback is essential for establishing a reliable connection between player actions and their outcomes. When feedback is subtle or overlooked, it undermines the player's sense of control and can disrupt immersion.
- **Suggestions:**
 - **Enhanced Audio-Visual Cues:** Make the red lines more prominent by increasing their visibility or combining them with a distinct sound effect.

Overall Suggestions:

- **Engagement & Atmosphere:** The game is engaging and effectively builds a suspenseful, eerie atmosphere. Players are drawn in by both the interactive mechanics and the emotional impact of the narrative.
- **Narrative & Clarity:** While the narrative evokes strong emotional responses, there is room for improvement in how clearly the backstory is communicated. Clarifying the narrative could help balance the puzzle elements with the storytelling.
- **Interface & Controls:** The retro TV interface is innovative and generally intuitive, though there is initial confusion for some players—particularly around distinguishing between channel and playback functions. Enhancing tutorials or in-game guidance could ease this issue.
- **Unexpected Outcomes:** The game’s design of triggering unexpected narrative cues through controls (e.g., volume button, playback interactions) was noted positively, as it deepens the immersion and unsettling feeling, but must be balanced so it doesn’t hinder gameplay comprehension.

- Player Suggestions: Additional narrative clarity, improved tutorials for the remote control, and more integration of secondary elements (like visual props) were identified as key areas for enhancement.

E. Survey

Survey:

<https://forms.gle/yBct2W2cCRZRU1bT7>

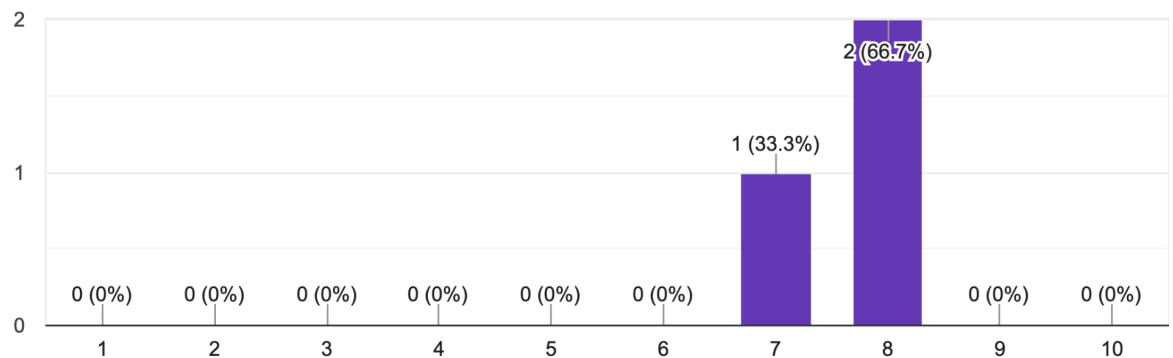
Raw results:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UacYYd3EOsuewGxdCkyev6yq7CYgv0xILUL19TI09FU/edit?usp=sharing>

Charts and Results

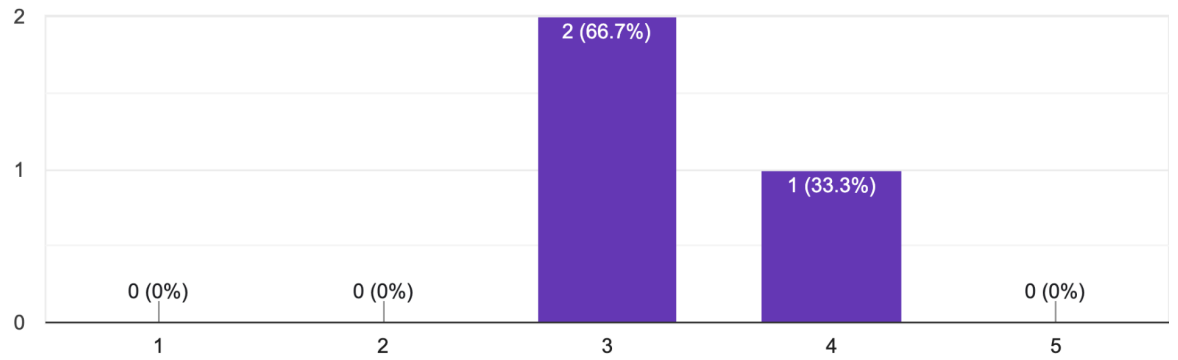
On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaging was your overall experience with "White Noise"?

3 responses



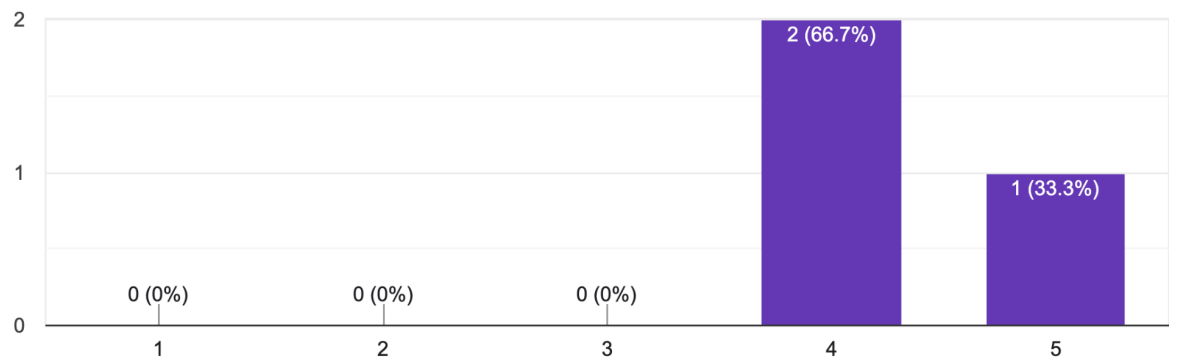
How clear was the overall narrative?

3 responses



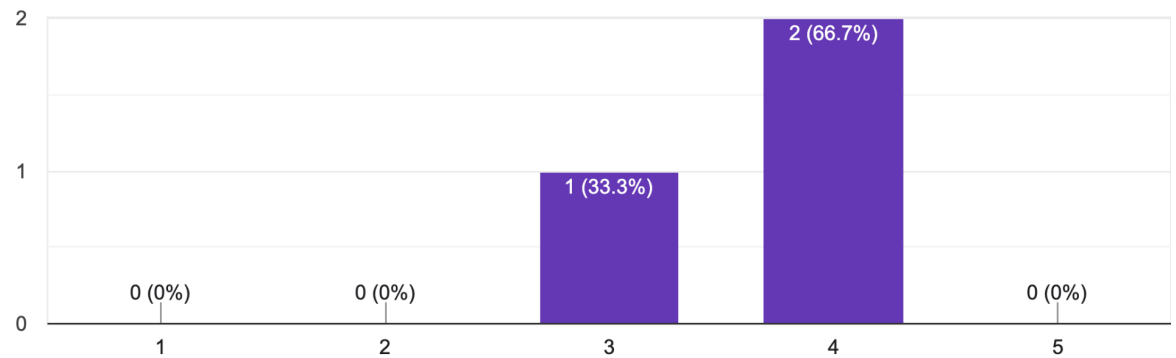
How effectively did the narrative evoke emotions (e.g., suspense, unease)?

3 responses



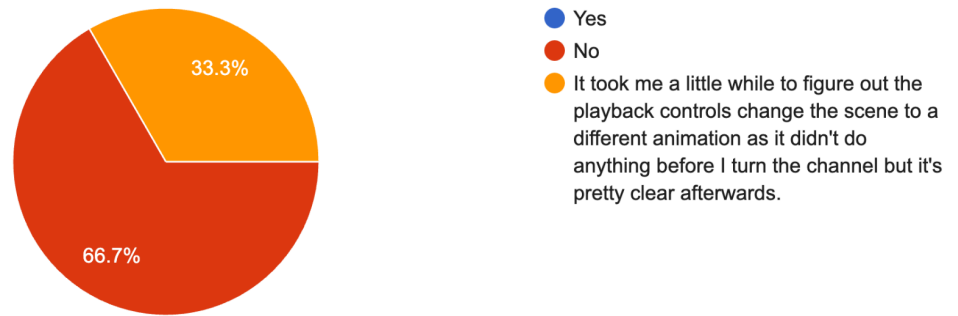
How intuitive did you find the TV remote interface (channel flipping, volume adjustments, etc.)?

3 responses

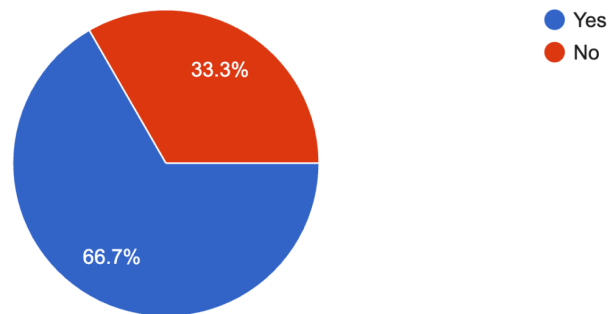


Did you experience any difficulty differentiating between channel navigation and playback controls?

3 responses



Did you feel that you needed additional guidance or tutorials during gameplay?
3 responses



Survey Breakdown by Question

1. Overall Engagement

Question: On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaging was your overall experience with “White Noise”?

Responses:

- Two players rated the game 8
- One player rated the game 7

Analysis:

- The engagement scores (8, 8, 7) indicate a generally positive reception.
 - The average score of approximately 7.7 suggests that players found the game immersive and intriguing.
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2. Narrative Clarity

Question: How clear was the overall narrative? (Scale: 1-5)

Responses:

- Two players rated the narrative clarity as 3

- One player rated it as 4

Analysis:

- With an average rating of around 3.3, players found the narrative moderately clear.
 - Feedback indicates that while the narrative framework is present, there may be ambiguity in how the backstory is presented, prompting a need for clearer exposition or additional context to help players better understand the overarching story.
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3. Emotional Impact of the Narrative

Question: How effectively did the narrative evoke emotions (e.g., suspense, unease)? (Scale: 1-5)

Responses:

- Two players rated the emotional impact as 4
- One player rated it as 5

Analysis:

- An average score of approximately 4.3 reflects that the game's narrative successfully evoked strong emotions such as suspense and unease.
 - This result highlights the effectiveness of the horror elements and the game's ability to engage players on an emotional level, even if the narrative clarity could be enhanced.
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4. Interface Intuitiveness

Question: How intuitive did you find the TV remote interface (channel flipping, volume adjustments, etc.)? (Scale: 1-5)

Responses:

- One player rated it as 3
- Two players rated it as 4

Analysis:

- With an average rating of roughly 3.7, the interface was generally well-received but did have room for improvement.
 - One player's lower rating of 3 was accompanied by comments about initial confusion, suggesting that while most players found the controls mostly intuitive, some had difficulty at first, particularly distinguishing between channel navigation and playback controls.
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5. Differentiation Between Navigation and Playback

Question: Did you experience any difficulty differentiating between channel navigation and playback controls?

Responses:

- Two players answered no
- One player mentioned:
"It took me a little while to figure out that the playback controls change the scene to a different animation as it didn't do anything before I turned the channel, but it's pretty clear afterwards."

Analysis:

- The majority did not encounter significant issues; however, the single response indicates that there is a learning curve.
 - The feedback suggests that initial confusion may be mitigated by improved or additional guidance, especially for first-time users.
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6. Unexpected Outcomes from Actions

Question: Did you feel surprised by any unexpected outcomes from your actions (e.g., channel flips leading to unforeseen narrative cues)? If yes, please give an example.

Responses:

- Response 1: "I did not realize that the volume button would trigger the frames."
- Response 2: "Yes, it was a little but not too much surprising, like when clicking the playback buttons flips leading to unforeseen narrative cues, it's also more of an uneasiness feeling."
- Response 3: "Yes, especially that red highlight when I volume up."

Analysis:

- All players noted that there were surprising elements in the game.
 - The unexpected interactions—whether it be the volume button triggering frame changes, playback controls leading to narrative cues, or visual effects like the red highlight—contributed to the game's eerie atmosphere.
 - These elements reinforce the game's theme of subverting player expectations, though balancing surprise with clarity remains important.
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7. Need for Additional Guidance or Tutorials

Question: Did you feel that you needed additional guidance or tutorials during gameplay?

Responses:

- Two players said yes
- One player said no

Analysis:

- The mixed response here (with a majority suggesting additional guidance) indicates that some players struggled to fully understand all gameplay mechanics without extra instruction.
 - Enhancing the tutorial or providing clearer in-game cues could improve the overall experience, particularly for those new to the unconventional interface.
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8. Positive Aspects of the Game

Question: What did you enjoy most about “White Noise”?

Responses:

- Response 1: "It's quite intuitive to connect the three channels with the three digits in the password."
- Response 2: "I guess it's very simple and quick, and its atmosphere as a suspense/horror game is really well done."
- Response 3: "Horror atmosphere."

Analysis:

- Players appreciated the creative integration of game mechanics (like linking channels with a password) and the overall horror atmosphere.
 - The simplicity and rapid pace of the game were highlighted as strengths, suggesting that the core design effectively supports an engaging and immersive experience.
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9. Suggestions for Improvement

Question: What aspects of the game would you improve, and why?

Responses:

- Response 1: "Not sure yet."
- Response 2: "I think a clearer narrative of the backstory? I finished the game mostly focusing on the puzzle-solving aspects but not really know much about the narrative. The picture on the table could potentially do more (also if making it to a longer game)."
- Response 3: "Probably the remote control tutorials? I found some counterintuitive."

Analysis:

- Narrative Clarity: One player explicitly mentioned the need for a clearer backstory. Enhancing narrative exposition could help players connect more deeply with the experience beyond just puzzle-solving.

- Interface Guidance: Another response pointed to the need for better tutorials, especially regarding the remote controls and how certain actions affect the game.
- Additional Elements: There is a suggestion to further develop secondary elements (like the picture on the table) to add depth, particularly if the game is extended in length.

C. Youtube Links from Player Testing:

<https://youtu.be/wNafKF1cZ30>

<https://youtu.be/-qcfty52m1g>

<https://youtu.be/v5a1m7olt2o>