

AGDAs 2024

Judging Criteria



AUSTRALIAN
GAME
DEVELOPER
AWARDS

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Excellence in Art

For outstanding achievement in the field of art through taking the medium to a new and interesting style, unique creations, and/or through breath-taking visuals.

Core Considerations:

Immersive Visuals	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Does the style match the theme?	Is the art polished? Does it feel complete?	Are there any innovative techniques employed in the artistic direction?
Do all the elements of the visual component of the game fit together?	Do all the moving parts fit together and work properly? (E.g., consistency in rigging, animation.)	Is the style fresh and unique?
Does the environment suit the game?	Is there impressive 'juice' to the style? Does the art go above and beyond?	Is there a new medium being used for the art style?
Did you experience any immersive moments brought on by the visuals? Was there a 'wow!' moment?	Did the UI match the quality of the rest of the art? Did it convey information well?	If the art didn't have consistency in style, was there an innovative/art reason for this? Did it work?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
Are important visual elements large and high contrast, by default or through in game options?	
Does the game avoid relying on colour alone to communicate/differentiate anything, by default or through options?	

Excellence in Gameplay

For outstanding achievement in the field of gameplay through high quality design, engaging and innovative gameplay.

Core Considerations:

Intuitive Mechanics	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Does the game clearly explain its mechanics?	Can you move through the level smoothly? (E.g., was there any screen tearing or bugs?)	Are any innovative techniques used in the gameplay?
Are the controls intuitive/comfortable?	Do physics work as expected/consistently?	Is there any new technology present in the gameplay?
Are the controls suitable for the type of gameplay?	Do you get adequate feedback when you complete an action in game?	Did the game take you by surprise?
How intuitive is the user interface?	How long did it capture your attention?	If the mechanics were not intuitive, was there an innovative/design reason for this? Did it work?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?

Excellence in Narrative

For outstanding achievement in the field of narrative design, innovation, and creative intrigue with the game narrative.

Core Considerations:

Ludo Narrative Consistency	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Is there a consistent story arc?	Does the story unfold in a coherent way?	Is the story new and engaging?
Does the game environment and design suit the story being told?	Do the characters have distinct personalities/functions?	Is the story delivered in a unique way?
Is there consistency between the story and the gameplay?	Is the dialogue believable/relevant?	If the story didn't have ludo narrative consistency, was there an innovative/design reason for this? Did it work?
Does the story feel believable within the in-game world?	Does the dialogue adequately drive the story?	Is the story doing something unique for the genre it's in?
Did you find yourself immersed in the narrative?	Does it have adequate content warnings for heavy storylines? Does it provide care afterwards?	Was the story memorable for you? Did it surprise you?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
Are replays or summaries of the narrative available?	Do characters with diverse attributes feature fully in the game?
Is text-based narrative presented in clear, easy to read font and formatting (contrast, sentence case, spacing etc)?	Does the game contain elements of advocacy for, or exploration of issues faced by underrepresented groups?

Excellence in Sound Design

For outstanding achievement in the field of sound design, audio engineering and voice acting.

Core Considerations:

Holistic Consistency	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Does the sound design respond appropriately to its environment? (E.g., does a forest environment have forest sounds? And if not, is it deliberate and effective?)	Are sounds consistent across the game (E.g., clicking a button in the UI is the same across the whole game.)	Is the sound design new and interesting? (i.e. have unconventional objects/instruments been used to create foley/UI sonic identities?)
Is the sound design directly tied to gameplay? (E.g., call and response, hit points, sonic feedback.)	Does the sound design compliment other elements of the game?	Are there any innovative techniques or SFX employed in the audio?
Is the sound design consistent across languages? Can the meaning be understood universally without explanation?	Do sound cues provide adequate player feedback?	Is the audio varying and engaging?
Did you find yourself immersed in the sound design?	Do the sounds help drive and motivate gameplay?	Is the voice acting directed in a new or interesting way? (If applicable)

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
Are important audio cues shown through other mediums? (E.g., visual cues, captions.)	Is there diversity within the Voice Acting cast? (If applicable)
Are there appropriate warnings for triggering sounds/music? (E.g., loud, distressing, violent, scary.) Are these skippable?	
Can players adjust the audio balance to their needs, through multiple volume sliders?	

Excellence in Music

For outstanding achievement in the field of music, composition, and musical tone.

Core Considerations:

Holistic Consistency	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Is the music thematically consistent with changes in narrative and tone of the game?	Does the music respond suitably to gameplay and narrative arcs/changes.	Is the music varying and engaging? Is the sound active (dynamic) rather than passive (static)?
Is the music directly tied to gameplay (E.g., rhythm games, games where music is a part of the core gameplay loop)?	Does the music effectively use a variety of techniques, instrumentation, and tone to enhance the game?	Is the music composed using unconventional instruments or non-musical objects (completely new and invented instruments)?
Do transitions in the music respond seamlessly with transitions in the game? (E.g., abrupt only when thematically appropriate?)	Can player input actively impact the music in order to enhance immersion?	Are there any innovative techniques employed in the music? (E.g., unusual rhythms, melodies, different character themes that work with or against each other, music speed relating to game play etc.)
Was the music immersive and emotionally evocative?	Is the music balanced appropriately against sound design and voice acting?	Does the way the sound moves between L & R speaker create unique interest and intrigue to gameplay

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
Are important audio cues shown through other mediums? (E.g., visual cues, captions.)	Does the game respectfully use culturally significant music/audio?
Are there appropriate warnings for triggering sounds/music? (E.g., loud, distressing, violent, scary.) Are these skippable?	
Can players adjust the audio balance to their needs, through multiple volume sliders?	

Excellence in Accessibility

For outstanding achievement in the field of accessibility, in impact, inclusion and a reminder that gaming is for all.

Core Considerations:

Impact	Inclusivity	Innovation
How generally under-served are the audiences that have been considered?	How broad is the range of accessibility considerations and range of audiences considered?	Is the process ground-breaking?
How generally under-served is the genre?	What efforts were made to include feedback from disabled gamers in the design process?	Is there a particular feature / consideration that is ground-breaking?
How much has been achieved relative to the game's scope?	Is the game accessible to the audience it's for/representing? (E.g., a game about blindness being fully playable by blind gamers.)	Is the game engaging and interesting?
Did the game take you by surprise? Was there a 'wow!' moment? Was it inspiring?	Is disability represented in the game, represented appropriately, and respectfully depicted?	How well does the game handle accessibility fundamentals? (Controller Remapping, Colour Blindness mode, Subtitles, Text Size, Screen Reader, Camera Control Adjuster)

Excellence in Mobile

For outstanding achievement in the field of mobile games for engaging, innovative and immersive use of the technology and genre.

Core Considerations:

Intuitive Mechanics	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Is there an option to play landscape and portrait mode?	How long is the core gameplay loop? Is it satisfying?	Does the game push the boundaries of a traditional mobile game experience?
Are there gesture controls? Do they feel satisfying and intuitive?	Are the mobile elements critical to the core gameplay loop? Could this game function without being a mobile game?	Are there interesting ways around technical limitations? (E.g., keeping the players contained to a small area, simple artstyle, etc.)
Are there multiple control options? (E.g., ability to change long presses to a single touch press, turn off motion controls.)	How is the art style portrayed? How does it function on smaller screens?	Are any innovative techniques used in the gameplay?
Does the game's control scheme fit well within the UI? (E.g., do they conflict or fit well together?)	Does it make good use of the platform's unique features?	Did the game take you by surprise?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
How simple are the controls? (simple = taps; moderate = one finger gestures, swiping; demanding = multi-touch gestures or gyro.)	
Are visual elements (especially text) easy to distinguish on small screens and in direct sunlight?	
Are interactive elements and virtual controls large and well-spaced?	
Can the game be played with one hand?	

Excellence in Mixed Reality

For outstanding achievement in the field of AR, VR and XR for engaging, innovative and immersive use of the technology and genre.

Core Considerations:

Seamless Immersion	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Are the AR/VR gameplay tools easy to understand and use?	Are the AR/VR Gameplay elements critical to the core gameplay loop? Could this game function without AR/VR?	Is the uniqueness of a 360-degree environment utilised to immerse the player in the game's world?
Are spatial audio techniques used to match the 360-degree environment?	Does it make good use of the platform's unique features?	Are any innovative techniques used in the gameplay?
Are the controls suitable for the type of technology?	Can you move through the level smoothly? (E.g., was there any screen tearing or bugs?)	Is there any new technology present in the gameplay?
How intuitive is the user interface?	Does physics work as expected/consistently?	Did the game take you by surprise?
		If the mechanics were not intuitive, was there an innovative/design reason for this? Did it work?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
Are there considerations or options for comfort/simulation sickness? (E.g., motion-free locomotion, high framerate, no blur/shake/bob effects.)	
Does the game cater to a range of body types and configurations? (E.g., seated, stationary, varying heights, one handed.)	
Does the game offer a choice between input methods? (E.g., motion controllers, regular controllers, head movement/gaze.)	

Excellence in Impact

For outstanding achievement in the creation of games that are designed to educate and promote behaviour and/or attitude change.

Core Considerations:

Holistic Consistency	High Quality Design	Creative Innovation
Does the game represent the serious matter appropriately and respectfully?	Does the game effectively educate its audience and/or change an attitude or behaviour?	Does the game approach serious discussion or education in a unique way?
Does the gameplay match the tone of the matter?	Does the design show the care regarding the subject matter?	Is the game approaching a new topic/area?
Is the game looking to teach something? Does this match the tone of the gameplay and story?	Is there a program in place to measure behaviour change? (E.g., is there a way to measure the results of player retention or change in behaviour?)	Does the game use new technologies or innovative tech to inform its audience and/or change an attitude or behaviour?
Did you find yourself immersed in the theme or subject matter the game centres around?	For serious or upsetting matters, are there player check-ins, aftercare, and consent checks? If there are serious matters, are there adequate content warnings? Are there options to bypass material if needed?	Does the story seek to educate about underserved or underrepresented minorities – minorities you haven't seen in games before.
	Did the game manage to keep you consistently engaged?	Did the game take you by surprise?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
If the game is for/representing a disabled audience, is it accessible to that audience? (E.g., is a game about blindness fully playable by blind gamers.)	

Excellence in Live Service

For outstanding achievement in the field of Games as a Service, recognising the importance of maintaining high quality design whilst working with your community and welcoming new players onboard to a living product.

Core Considerations:

Onboarding Process	Community Engagement	Quality Control
Is the onboarding and tutorial process smooth and intuitive?	Are there ongoing community events?	Would you consider the overall design high quality compared to similar games of the genre?
Is the learning curve fair?	Is the community engaged with the content?	Are there any current bugs or unbalanced additions to the game?
Is it friendly to low level players or new players?	Is there a significant community? Are there other players you can play with?	Are any innovative techniques used in the gameplay? Have the latest patches/DLC's build upon this?
Are there areas where new players can get comfortable with the game after the tutorial levels?	Is it easy to invite friends to join? (Through social media/account add-ins or otherwise.)	Did you want to come back and replay it?
Was the onboarding process engaging and immersive?	Is there a clear Code of Conduct, and reporting system when the Code is broken?	Are DLCs accessible to new players and/or is the base game still relevant?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
Have ongoing efforts been made to gather and/or implement feedback from disabled gamers?	Have ongoing updates shown a commitment to improving diversity and inclusion?
Have ongoing updates shown a commitment to improving accessibility?	

Excellence in Emerging

For outstanding achievement from emerging teams new to the industry who have created a game outstanding with a clear concept, that exceeded expectations for an emerging team.

Core Considerations:

Holistic Consistency	Clarity of Concept	Exceeded Expectations
Is there consistency between the story and the narrative conveyed through game play?	Is it clear what this game is about, even if not fully fleshed out? (E.g., within its story, gameplay, art, audio or representation?)	Does the game go above and beyond expectations for an emerging game?
Is there consistency between the art style and the game play?	Does the game convey its goals well? Are you aware what you're meant to be doing?	Is there significant 'polish' to the game?
Does the concept of this game match the audience and genre?	Are there clear win conditions? Does the game have a core gameplay loop? Is there an endpoint?	Are any innovative techniques used in this game?
Is the audio thematically tied to the game?	Is the game trying to subvert its genre?	Did the game take you by surprise?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?

Game of the Year

For an outstanding game that exceeds expectations across multiple categories and innovates in a way that makes for an unforgettable experience.

Core Considerations:

Overall Excellence	Impact	Innovation
Does the game show excellence in >3 categories listed above?	Has the game made a significant impact on the Australian Games industry?	Is the game a “first of its kind”?
Were you amazed by the game’s overall quality?	Will this game be remembered and played for years to come?	Does the game use new game technologies or design methodologies in a new and interesting way?
Did you find the game so engaging you continued to play it past the judging process?	Does it raise the profile of the Australian Games industry?	Will the methods and technologies used in this game be used in future games? (E.g, is it “trailblazing”.)
Did the game take you by surprise? Was there a ‘wow!’ moment?	Does this game add/invite new audiences?	Did the game subvert expectations, either in genre, technology, art, audio, story, accessibility, or representation?

Extra Considerations:

Accessibility	Representation
Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Accessibility?	Does it meet the Universal Considerations for Representation?
	Does this game have a uniquely Australian story or Australian way of telling a story?
	Does the game contain elements of advocacy for, or exploration of issues faced by underrepresented groups?

Universal Considerations:

This section details the accessibility and representation considerations which carry across all categories.

Accessibility

How well does the game handle accessibility fundamentals?

(Controller Remapping, Colour Blindness mode, Subtitles, Text Size, Screen Reader, Camera Control Adjuster)

Are the accessibility features easy to navigate and able to be adjusted at any time?

Can accessibility features be enabled prior to the game starting? (E.g., enable subtitles before the cutscenes, volume sliders before music, controller remapping options before gameplay, etc.)

Is it playable by people across a wide spectrum of ability, either by default or through options? (E.g., difficulty settings, assists.)

If dealing with heavy themes, are there appropriate content warnings? If so, Are there options to skip?

Are their options to check the current objectives/ win conditions? (if applicable)

Do the visuals avoid any kind of flickering or flashing?

Representation

Is there an Acknowledgement of Country?

Does the game have credits honouring its team?

Does the story have a diversity of cast? (E.g., POC, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, etc.)

Is the diversity highlighted throughout handled respectfully?

Does the game have respectful cultural significance?

If the game features Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and stories, does it do so with honour and respect?

Do you have the ability to edit the player characters, body and face shape, skin colour or accessibility aids? (If customisation is applicable)

Does the game include the use of gender-neutral or neo pronouns as well as he/him she/her? Are there options to change the player characters pronouns mid-game? (If customisation is applicable)