

What's Wrong with the RITE Method?

A critique of a common method used in video game usability research

Many video game usability practitioners employ a method to test usability within video games, called the 'RITE' method, short for *Rapid Iterative Testing and Evaluation* (RITE). Pioneered at *Microsoft Games Studios* and *Microsoft Research*, the RITE method has been adopted by many usability research organizations besides the teams at *Microsoft*.

While the RITE method has some advantages, such as the 'rapid iterative' ability to suggest changes to designers and test them in successive passes, it may fall short when looking for usability issues that lie beneath the surface.

The RITE method has its benefits: for instance, the 'rapid iterative' research design allows usability researchers to detect problems and inform the game design team. This is a nice fit with highly communicative 'agile' development processes: allowing usability errors to be corrected and retested in successive iterations. As cyclical (iterative) rounds of testing go on, the number of usability problems originally detected typically goes down with each iteration.

However, one should consider the quality of the usability problems being found by the RITE method. Does a rapid and iterative approach dive deep enough into the user experience to find problems that are not otherwise being found by existing quality assurance teams?

Those unfamiliar with usability research can often confuse it with quality assurance testing, which is not the case. In a recent conversation with Jakob Nielsen, he described an analogy that explains usability and user-experience research for designers:

"usability research is to design, as quality assurance is to testing"

When hiring a usability research team, game companies should expect more than basic usability

testing. While basic usability testing is very important, these findings are aimed at problems that lie closer to the surface, such as issues dealing with the user interface. While these issues are important to find, they probably can be found through traditional quality assurance or game testing teams.

While *Situated Research* is interested in finding basic usability issues, we are equally interested in finding issues that lie deep beneath the surface. We feel these deeply-rooted issues may not be suitably addressed by the RITE method, for its 'rapid iterative' approach fails to conduct an open-ended, in-depth analysis. Uncovering patterns in player motivation, which ultimately form much of players' opinions of a game, can provide high-value findings for game companies aiming to improve a game and its future sales. A mixed quantitative-qualitative approach can identify irregular problems that may have a more serious impact on gameplay, in addition to frequently occurring problems that might be identified by the RITE method.

Patterns in player motivation require a research method that dives deeper than traditional usability testing, and should incorporate theory blending research from fields such as human communication, behavioral psychology, and human-computer interaction. *Situated Research* maximizes a game company's ROI by examining both the individual and social plane to find deeply-rooted issues that point to the core of the player's experience. Going beyond traditional usability heuristics, which test the usability of specific portions of an interface, is necessary to find those deeply-rooted design issues that can go undetected by traditional quality assurance teams.

About Situated Research

Situated Research is a usability research firm located in the Chicago suburbs that provides usability testing to companies worldwide.

Situated Research conducts webinars on usability that can provide insight to your design team. Visit our website at www.situatedresearch.com for more information or to register for a free webinar.