PLAYTEST PORTFOLIO

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THE GOLDEN SAUSAGE
CARD GAME

The Golden Sausage: An MDA Playtesting Portfolio

This portfolio documents my ongoing playtesting and analysis of The Golden Sausage, an emerging tabletop card game. Across the semester, I will play the game at least once a week, changing who I play with and how the game is played to explore how different situations influence the player experience. This follows the approach outlined in my initial project pitch.

My analysis will be guided by the Mechanics-Dynamics-Aesthetics (MDA) framework developed by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004). Mechanics refer to the rules and systems of the game, dynamics are the behaviours that emerge through play, and aesthetics are the experiences and emotions produced for players.

Each week, I will complete a structured playtest log recording the players and context, playtest focus, MDA observations, key findings and photographic evidence. Findings from one playtest may also inform what I pay attention to or test in the following session.

Rather than simply deciding whether The Golden Sausage is “fun”, this process will allow me to investigate what happens during gameplay, why it happens, and how particular mechanics shape the player experience.

By documenting this process over time, I aim to identify recurring patterns, strengths and areas for potential development, creating a portfolio of constructive observations that can ultimately be shared with the game's creator.

WEEK 3 - INITIAL PLAYTEST	
DATE: 12.08.2026	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	6 players. Played in class as my first playtest for the project. I realised afterwards that the game is designed for a maximum of 5 players!
PLAYTEST FOCUS	Initial exploration/baseline. As this was my first playtest, I was mainly observing how people responded to the game, what they understood easily and what stood out during play.
MECHANICS	Playing with 6 players instead of the recommended maximum of 5 meant we moved through the cards very quickly. This made me think that if playing with a larger group again, using teams could be worth testing. I also noticed that some card instructions could be slightly clearer. For example, Evil Fairy could specify “arrange the top 5 cards”, while Mind Reader could clarify whether a Yeah/Nah card can be used against it. It says it in the instructions, but worth being on the card.
DYNAMICS	Different players approached the cards differently. People who were new to the game seemed to like using Dice Cream, which may be because its function was easy to understand. Noah (a peer) also quickly compared the game to Exploding Kittens. Because he was familiar with that type of card game, he seemed to recognise the general formula and understand how to approach the game more quickly.
AESTHETICS	One interesting observation happened before we even started playing. Some people seemed slightly nervous that the game might be complicated, but seeing “7+” on the box made it feel more approachable. Once we started, being able to read the cards and understand many of their functions also seemed to make the game less intimidating for new players.
MDA CONNECTION	One connection I noticed was clear was instructions written on cards → players can work out what to do themselves → the game feels easier and more approachable.
KEY FINDINGS	My first playtest made me realise that accessibility is influenced by more than whether the rules are technically simple. Things like the age recommendation, previous experience with similar games and how clearly individual cards are written can all affect how confident a new player feels. I also learnt that the recommended player number matters, as adding only one extra player noticeably changed how quickly we moved through the deck.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	I want to keep watching how different types of players learn the game and whether particular cards have a bigger influence on gameplay than others. I also want to pay more attention to moments where players need clarification rather than assuming that because I understand a card, a new player will too.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *First playtest, in class with other uni students studying BCM 215*

WEEK 4 - FAMILY PLAYTEST	
DATE: 15.08.2026	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	5 players. Played with my partners family, including Brad's grandma, who we taught how to play. We played individually rather than in teams.
PLAYTEST FOCUS	After my first playtest, I wanted to continue observing how different players understand and interact with the game. Playing with family gave me a different group from my Week 3 class playtest and also gave me the opportunity to observe someone being taught the game for the first time.
MECHANICS	We played with the recommended maximum of 5 players and did not use teams. The mechanic that stood out most to me this week was the Mind Reader card. I noticed that when this card is played, it can change what is happening in the game very quickly. (Brad's mum won the game because of this card)
DYNAMICS	Teaching Brad's grandma was interesting because it gave me another opportunity to observe how someone completely new to the game learns it. I also started noticing that not all cards have the same impact on the direction of play. When Mind Reader appeared, the gameplay could shift quickly, which changed what players were doing or expecting to happen next.
AESTHETICS	Having a mechanic that can suddenly change the game created a sense of unpredictability. Rather than the game progressing in exactly the way players might expect, a single card could disrupt what was happening. I found this interesting because it suggests that some of the enjoyment may come from not being completely in control of what happens next.
MDA CONNECTION	Mind Reader mechanic → suddenly changes the direction of play → creates unpredictability and surprise for players. This was useful for me because I started to see MDA happening more clearly in practice. The wording/function of one card is the mechanic, but its importance is really in the behaviour and experience it produces when people actually use it.
KEY FINDINGS	Week 4 made me start thinking about how much influence individual cards have over the overall experience of the game. Mind Reader stood out because its effect was noticeable immediately. This makes me interested in whether there are other cards that consistently create strong reactions or changes in gameplay, and whether those moments contribute to what makes The Golden Sausage engaging.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	In my next playtest, I want to pay closer attention to specific cards and the reactions they create. Rather than only recording whether players understand a card, I want to notice what happens immediately after it is played: Does it change someone's strategy? Create laughter? Frustration? Surprise? Does it change who appears to be winning?

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *Brad's mum was cheering after she won the whole game using the mindreader card. We taught his grandma how to play too.*

WEEK 5 - PLAYER EXPERIENCE & STRATEGY	
DATE: 29.08.2026	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	2 players: Brad and myself. We played one quick round before bed. Brad regularly plays The Golden Sausage with Joel, the game's creator. Joel calls Brad a "card shark" because he is an experienced and highly strategic player.
PLAYTEST FOCUS	I focused on how player experience changes the game, particularly whether an experienced player can create more complexity from relatively simple mechanics.
MECHANICS	Brad used combinations such as the Evil Fairy, Portal and then Dice Cream to gain more cards. He also plans ahead, builds card combinations and keeps track of what I am holding, using cards like Search and Steal or Grass is Greener to disrupt my hand and improve his own chances of winning.
DYNAMICS	Brad thinks ahead and keeps track of what I have. He combines cards and sets up future moves rather than only reacting to the current turn.
AESTHETICS	Playing against a "card shark" made the game more challenging and competitive. I found myself trying to anticipate Brad's strategy rather than just focusing on my own cards.
MDA CONNECTION	Simple mechanics created more strategic dynamics in the hands of an experienced player, resulting in a more competitive aesthetic experience.
KEY FINDINGS	The game can be easy to learn while still allowing experienced players to develop more advanced strategies. Complexity can emerge from how players use the cards, rather than complicated rules. This is not just a game for kids.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	We have tried the Bluebottle expansion card but not the other expansion cards. In a later week, I want to test whether these add another level of strategy and complexity.
ASSESSMENT 1 FEEDBACK:	My A1 feedback suggested considering the design limitations of a game aimed at children, as it may not have the same complexity as a game designed specifically for adults. This week I looked at how I could question its limitations. While the core game is accessible to children, I observed that experienced adult players can create much more strategic gameplay. Brad's approach showed that simple rules do not necessarily mean a simple play experience. I want to investigate this further by testing the expansion pack cards and considering whether they allow the game to increase in complexity while keeping the core game accessible to younger players.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *Two-player playtest with Brad, observing how an experienced "card shark" uses strategy and forward planning.*

WEEK 6 - NEW PLAYER & VISUAL CARD DESIGN - FATHER'S DAY GAME	
DATE: 06.09.2026	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	4 players: Brad, his dad, his brother Paul and myself. We played at Brad's parents house on Father's Day and actually gifted his dad The Golden Sausage. Brad's niece Rosie, who is 4, also joined in with Brad at different points. Paul (Brad's brother) had never played the game before.
PLAYTEST FOCUS	I focused on how a new player learns and navigates the game, particularly how easy it is to identify and understand the cards. I also observed how Rosie is beginning to understand parts of the game through watching and being included, even though she is too young to read the cards.
MECHANICS	We played the first round as singles so Brad could teach Paul how the game worked. For the second round we did teams and I was in a team with Paul. Brad teamed up with his dad after writing in his Father's Day card that he would give him all of his sausages so their team could win (CHEATER). Rosie was also included in simple mechanics with Brad, such as rolling the dice, choosing cards and doing rock, paper, scissors when required.
DYNAMICS	Playing singles first gave Paul a chance to understand the game before moving into a team. The team round then created more interaction and cooperation between players. Rosie was also interesting to observe because she genuinely felt like she was playing the game with us. When Brad asked her to roll the dice, pick a card or join in with rock, paper, scissors, she was actively involved. The game has now been played around her a few times, she is also starting to anticipate and understand some of these interactions.
AESTHETICS	For Paul, the main frustration was being unable to quickly see what cards he had when they were fanned out in his hand. Rosie had a very different experience. Even though she cannot read, she was excited to be included and seemed to view herself as one of the players. She is also starting to recognise some cards from their pictures. This suggests that repeated exposure, visual recognition and simple opportunities to participate can create a sense of involvement even before a child can fully understand the game.
MDA CONNECTION	This playtest showed two different ways players can learn the mechanics. Paul was learning through explanation and actively playing his own hand, while Rosie was learning through watching, repetition and small interactions with the mechanics. For Rosie, simple mechanics such as rolling the dice and rock, paper, scissors were things she could physically participate in and understand. This created a sense of inclusion and enjoyment even though she was not independently playing the full game.
KEY FINDINGS	Paul suggested adding a small image or symbol in the top corner of each card to represent its action. He compared this to a normal deck of playing cards, where the number and suit remain visible when the cards are fanned out. With The Golden Sausage, he had to pull cards out or look through them individually to see what actions he had available. A corner symbol would let players scan their hand without separating the cards. Rosie's experience also highlighted the importance of visual and interactive elements. She cannot read the cards, but repeated exposure means she is starting to recognise pictures and understand some mechanics from watching and participating. Most importantly, she feels like she is actually playing, rather than simply watching.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	I am interested to see whether Rosie begins to recognise more cards or mechanics through repeated exposure, and whether other first-time players experience the same difficulty Paul had when looking through a fanned hand of cards.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *Father's Day playtest (a new player and a young player)*

WEEK 07 - RELAXED ROUND IN THE CAMPERVAN	
DATE: 11.09.2026	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	2 players: Brad and myself. It was a busier week and I couldn't organise a larger group, so we played one casual round in the campervan as a way to relax and unwind. Worked mostly on the Progress Report.
PLAYTEST FOCUS	This week was less structured and focused on how the game works as a quick, casual two-player activity.
MECHANICS	We kept the 'Bluebottle' card from the expansion pack in (usually do this anyways).
DYNAMICS	Brad sometimes adjusts how strategically he plays depending on his mood and will occasionally go easier on me. Even so, either of us can still win or lose, so the outcome does not always feel predictable.
AESTHETICS	The game felt relaxed and Brad played 'easy' on me!
MDA CONNECTION	The existing mechanics can create different dynamics depending on how competitively players choose to play. In this session, they supported a more relaxed experience rather than highly competitive play.
KEY FINDINGS	The round did not go for too long, sometimes it can - today this worked in our favour as we just wanted to hang out. However, I would have liked to test it with more people this week to compare the experience (will do in comign weeks).
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	Return to a larger group and observe how the dynamics change with more players.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *Quick round in the campervan to relax, focused on Progress report this week.*

EXCITING THING FOR THIS WEEK: Game was featured in The Illawarra Murcury!

WEEK 08 - KIAMA MARKET / CREATOR OBSERVATION / MARKETING (CONNECTING TO MY MAJOR)	
DATE: 20.09.2026	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	This week was a little different. Brad and I visited Joel at the Kiama Market, where he had his first market stall for The Golden Sausage. This followed some exciting media attention, including being featured in the Illawarra Mercury and on local radio, which also promoted his appearance at the market.
PLAYTEST FOCUS	Rather than completing a normal playtest, I observed how Joel presented, promoted and explained the game to potential customers. It was interesting to see how people interacted with the game before purchasing it.
MECHANICS	Joel incorporated small games into the stall. Kids could verse him in rock, paper, scissors to win lollies, while customers could guess a number on a dice for the chance to buy The Golden Sausage for half price. Brad's mum had a go and actually guessed correctly, so she got a half-price game!
DYNAMICS	These activities made the stall feel interactive rather than just being a table selling a product. I liked watching Joel engage with potential customers and use elements associated with games, such as chance and competition, to attract people to the stall.
AESTHETICS	Joel had the game, playmat and other accessories on display, as well as a small Golden Sausage mascot. The stall showed how the visual identity of the game is starting to expand beyond the original card game.
MDA CONNECTION	What stood out was how some of the same ideas that make the game engaging, particularly chance, competition and fun, were also being used to market it. The dice challenge created anticipation and excitement before customers had even played the actual game.
KEY FINDINGS	I really like seeing Joel continue to develop the product. He displayed a new playmat that can be purchased separately and had created card stands, which he explained are particularly useful for younger players who may struggle to hold all their cards. He also had a Golden Sausage mascot that could potentially become part of a future expansion card, where players physically throw the sausage at another player, similar to games such as Throw Throw Burrito. From a marketing perspective, I also think Joel has done a good job of leveraging the recent media attention and making the most of the momentum around the game.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	I want to keep observing how The Golden Sausage develops beyond the original game, particularly new accessories, expansion ideas and how Joel responds to feedback from people interacting with the game in different environments.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *Visiting Joel at his first Kiama Market stall and observing how he promoted The Golden Sausage, interacted with potential customers and displayed new additions to the game.*

EXCITING THING FOR THIS WEEK: After being featured in the Illawarra Mercury and on local radio, Joel held his first market stall for The Golden Sausage!