PLAYTEST PORTFOLIO

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THE GOLDEN SAUSAGE
CARD GAME

The Golden Sausage: An MDA Playtesting Portfolio
Statement of intent

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!

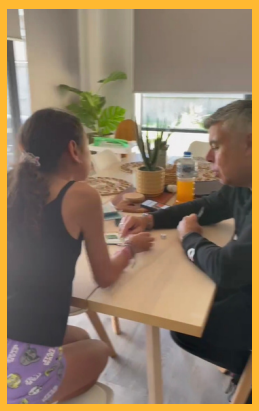
WEEK 09 - FAMILY GAMEPLAY / OBSERVING FROM A DISTANCE	
DATE: 27.09.26	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	This week was a little different as well! My maid of honour, Melika, asked me to bring The Golden Sausage along to my hens weekend. I packed the game, but with everything happening over the weekend, we unfortunately never got around to playing it. I also gave my mum a copy I had purchased from Joel at the Kiama Market the previous week, to give to my dad as a belated Father's Day present.
PLAYTEST FOCUS	Although I didn't complete an actual playtest, I reflected on how the game has started to become part of my social life. It is a game that family and friends ask us to bring along to gatherings.
MECHANICS	No gameplay took place this week, so there weren't any new mechanical observations.
DYNAMICS	I found it interesting that Melika specifically requested I bring the game. It showed that the game had made an impression beyond my own involvement.
AESTHETICS	The game has become something I associate with social gatherings, competition and having fun with friends and family.
MDA CONNECTION	This week highlighted the aesthetics of the game, even without playing, the fact that someone requested it for a social occasion suggested that previous experiences had been memorable.
KEY FINDINGS	My involvement is starting to shift from organising playtests to sharing the game with people in my everyday life. My family had previously played it on a camping trip, where things got quite competitive, and my 10-year-old sister had been asking for a copy ever since.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	Now that my family has their own copy, I'm interested in seeing how they engage with the game independently, without me being there to explain or facilitate it.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *The Golden Sausage purchased at Kiama Market and gifted to my dad for Father's Day. The game was also packed for my hens weekend, although we didn't get the opportunity to play.*

WEEK 10 - FAMILY PLAYTEST / REMOTE OBSERVATION	
DATE: 05.10.2026	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	My family lives in Melbourne, so I haven't been able to play with them in person for a while. A few months ago, Brad and I introduced them to The Golden Sausage during a family camping trip in Lakes Entrance, where we taught them how to play. Things got pretty competitive, and my 10-year-old sister enjoyed it so much that she wanted her own copy! Since receiving the game as a belated Father's Day gift, my dad and sister have been playing together at home. My mum sent me a video of them playing, which gave me the opportunity to observe their gameplay from a distance. (See screenshots below)
PLAYTEST FOCUS	This week I was interested in observing how my family played independently, particularly as it had been a few months since we originally taught them the game.
MECHANICS	Something that stood out in the video was my dad and sister referring back to the cards to clarify the rules. Although they had played before, they still needed to check how certain cards worked.
DYNAMICS	My dad and sister were playfully bickering about the rules, which was quite funny to watch! It reminded me of our original camping trip, where the game also brought out everyone's competitive side.
AESTHETICS	The playful arguments and competition added to the entertainment. It was interesting seeing similar family dynamics emerge even when Brad and I weren't there playing with them.
MDA CONNECTION	This observation highlighted how mechanics influence dynamics. Uncertainty around the rules led to discussion and playful disagreements between players. It also reinforced the importance of clear card instructions, particularly when younger players are involved.
KEY FINDINGS	I found it interesting observing the game without being an active participant. Previously, Brad and I had been the ones explaining the rules, whereas this time I could see how my family worked things out themselves. It was also nice to see that the game had made enough of an impression for my sister to still want to play months after being introduced to it.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	I'd like to return to playing the game myself, in a relaxed setting for my final week.
ASSESSMENT 2 FEEDBACK:	Receiving positive feedback was really reassuring, particularly the comments about my thoughtful research, strong connections between theory and real gameplay observations, and how the project had developed across assessments. It gave me confidence that I was on the right track.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *Screenshots from a video my mum sent of my dad and 10-year-old sister playing The Golden Sausage at home in Melbourne. The video captures them referring to the cards and playfully debating the rules as they work through the game together.*

INTERESTING OBSERVATION THIS WEEK: Watching my family play independently showed me how important clear card instructions are, especially when players return to a game after not playing for a few months. It's easier looking on the cards than going through the paper rules (if it can be avoided).



WEEK 11 - FINAL REFLECTION / HOW MY INVOLVEMENT HAS EVOLVED	
DATE:	**Playtest Log**
PLAYERS / CONTEXT	As I approach the end of the semester, I've been reflecting on how my involvement with The Golden Sausage has changed over time. What started as structured university playtests has gradually become something I enjoy and share with friends and family outside of class. Brad and I have also enjoyed more casual games together, including playing at the beach and relaxing in the van.
PLAYTEST FOCUS	Rather than focusing on testing specific mechanics, this week was about reflecting on my experiences throughout the semester and how my understanding of the game has developed.
MECHANICS	Earlier in the semester, I was focused on learning the rules, understanding card combinations and identifying possible improvements. As I became more familiar with the game, I started paying more attention to how other people interpreted and interacted with the mechanics.
DYNAMICS	One thing I've noticed is how differently the game plays depending on the people and environment. Larger groups tend to bring out more competition and excitement, while playing with just Brad is usually in a more relaxed setting, although that doesn't mean the gameplay is always relaxed! Watching my dad and younger sister play also showed how players work through the rules together, sometimes with a bit of playful arguing along the way.
AESTHETICS	Throughout the semester, the biggest themes have been competition, humour and social connection. Whether playing with friends, family or just Brad, the game creates different experiences depending on the setting.
MDA CONNECTION	Using the MDA framework has helped me understand how mechanics influence player interactions and ultimately shape the experience. I've become more aware that the same game can create different dynamics and emotions depending on who is playing.
KEY FINDINGS	My biggest takeaway is how my involvement has shifted from actively playtesting to observing, sharing and genuinely enjoying the game. I've also really enjoyed following Joel's journey as a game creator, from testing early versions to seeing him promote the game at markets, receive media attention and develop new accessories. It's been rewarding to see the game grow and become something my own friends and family enjoy.
WHAT I WANT TO OBSERVE NEXT	Although my university project is coming to an end, I'd love to continue following The Golden Sausage and seeing how Joel develops it further.

PHOTO EVIDENCE (BELOW): *A few photos from the last few months*

What started as a university assignment has become something I genuinely enjoy sharing with others. I've gone from learning the mechanics and actively playtesting to observing how different people experience the game and watching it continue to grow. I hope this portfolio can be a valuable resource for Joel and other game designers/students.

Concluding Statement

Looking back at my original statement of intent, I feel I've achieved what I set out to do, although the project evolved in ways I hadn't anticipated. Using the MDA framework has helped me develop a much deeper understanding of The Golden Sausage, moving beyond simply deciding whether the game is fun to recognising how its mechanics, player interactions and different playing environments shape the overall experience.

Throughout the semester, my understanding of the game has grown with each playtest. I've learnt to recognise patterns I wouldn't have noticed before, particularly around accessibility, strategy, card clarity, competition and social connection. I've also come to appreciate how differently people can experience the same game and how those experiences can change over time.

One of the things I've enjoyed most about this project is being able to put theory into practice as I learn. Rather than just studying the MDA framework, I've been able to apply it to real gameplay, build on my observations each week and see my understanding develop along the way. It's made the learning process feel much more meaningful and relevant.

I've also really enjoyed following Joel's journey, and I'm proud of him for having a real go at bringing his idea to life. I hope sharing this portfolio with him provides some useful observations, constructive feedback and perhaps a few ideas for future development. What started as a university assignment has become something I've genuinely enjoyed being part of, and I'm excited to see where The Golden Sausage goes next.