IRB for User Studies with Games and Video

An institutional review board (IRB) is a committee reviewing research with human subjects to ensure it is ethical, protecting the rights and welfare for the participants. If we ever want to publish the results (even in a tech report, MQP or thesis), there must be IRB oversight.

The submission process is all online via the InfoEd portal. A Google search for “IRB WPI” will get you to the right page.

For the application, go to the WPI IRB exemption for a checklist: https://tinyurl.com/u9a32zm. Fill out that page, providing information on attachments, as necessary. Then bring it back to me. We will discuss and refine before submitting.

For game-related research, you do not need to get certification via the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course.

You will submit an “Request for Exemption” form (most game-related and video-related studies are low-risk and get looked over by the IRB but are deemed exempt). Exempt research still requires IRB review and approval, but is exempt from other requirements, such as annual renewal and, in some cases, informed consent.

Note, if the IRB determines your project is not-exempt, you may be required to obtain and submit additional documentation (e.g., CITI certification). That’s ok - just provide what is asked for.

Make sure to make me the PI on the application. And include all team members on the application.

Provide the study design: what is the research purpose, what is the game, some screen shots or a sample of how it’s played. Indicate how the participants will be introduced to the game/app.

Briefly describe how many participants you expect and who they are.

Attach the survey (Qualtrics or Google Forms, saved as a pdf).

There is an “informed consent template” that can be useful for starting your content at: https://tinyurl.com/tt2fhh1. The template has more than you need - you can typically get yours down to 1-2 paragraphs or at most 1 page. A brief introduction and purpose with a sentence or two on what the users will do. e.g. “You will play a game on this computer”, or “You will download this game”. And “testing will take 10 minutes after which you will fill out a survey that asks about your experience. Make sure to say what will be done with the data. You will remain anonymous. Be explicit that users will be informed that participation is voluntary and users can quit at any time. Add, if you have questions you can contact us at xxx@wpi.edu.”

Nearly all demographics and “experience” questions answered via a survey should be voluntary, not required. The only exceptions would be if the research hypothesis needs it, otherwise the user should be able to leave it blank.

In your materials, if using a game, describe the nature of the game (what the player is doing). If using a commercial game, provide the ERSA rating. If you are using an “M” rated game, indicate that the participants will be informed of this up front (and why it has that rating). Again, a screen shot can be helpful for the IRB review, as can a link to the game publisher’s page.

If you want even more details, ask me for the irb.pptx Powerpoint deck which has a walk-through of the submission process and Web site. Note, the deck is geared towards IQPs, but much of it is relevant to our studies.