

Usability Critique Accessibility Evaluation

Introduction

I am choosing the Discovery Tour for *Assassin's Creed: Origins*. As someone who has played the majority of *Assassin's Creed* video games, I never attempted the Discovery Tours, but it's an interesting concept. Essentially, historians work on these games to establish some level of historical accuracy, especially in the architecture and layout of the cities and countries involved. In the Discovery Tours, enemies and danger are removed so players can explore the varied environments without additional stress. In the Discovery Tour of *Assassin's Creed: Origins*, the player can explore the setting of Ancient Egypt in a sort of museum exhibit, learning about the different buildings, monuments, areas, and even people. I selected it because I've always loved these games and have always loved history (I have even gotten history exam questions right based on the early games...), and it's my dream to be able to combine history with instructional design, so I want to explore this.

Evaluation

Auditory

As mentioned in "Designing for Disability: Evaluating the State of Accessibility Design in Video Games," auditory factors are some of the most problematic areas in video games (Brown & Anderson, 2021). While games have been steadily improving, especially with subtitles, there is a long way to go. I would say my score for this section is **accessible, but flawed**.

The sound itself is quite adjustable, including the music volume, sound FX volume, and dialogue. Each one has an adjustable scale, so they can be moved separately from each other, which I think is quite smart. Subtitles are usually the biggest issue in the auditory realm, with the preference being that they are appropriately large, show two lines at a time and reveal a normal, plain font. For the most part, the Discovery Tour of *Assassin's Creed: Origins* does match these needs. The only dialogue and narration offered is when the player enters one of the "museum zones," a column of yellow light that signals a relevant area. The narrator will offer usually a couple paragraphs of information on some historical topic, the screen panning out so the player can see exactly what region the narrator is referring to. The subtitles are large, white with a black background, offering between 1-3 sentences on the screen. Unfortunately, the text size cannot be adjusted, so while I thought the subtitles were appropriately large, others might not. There were also no subtitles offered for any ambient dialogue, although they were all spoken in something perhaps intended to

resemble Ancient Egyptian, thus only existing to add to the flavor of the environment rather than providing salient information.

Unfortunately, the audio and subtitles cannot be paused unless the player clicks the menu screen, so if the player misses any relevant information, they will have to restart the interaction. There is an option to access a corner icon that shares the written dialogue on another screen, but unfortunately, this UI text is quite small and difficult to read. I'll address this in the next section, however. Also, the voice offered is male or female, but very robotic and monotone, so there is not much human engagement to entertain the player.

My recommendations here are to give the player the option to change the font size, and to also offer the player a chance to pause or rewind the subtitles versus having to start the interaction over. I would also recommend a more dynamic voice—if not a voice actor, perhaps something like ElevenLabs.

Visual

My score for this section is **needs minor-to-moderate improvements**. Like above, there are some adjustments to visual dynamics that can be made in the player menu. For example, screen brightness can be shifted on a sliding scale, and there is an HDR toggle switch that supposedly allows for a more vivid visual acuity (with minor slider scales involving maximum luminance and how white the whites look).

Unfortunately, while colorblind modes can be helpful for colorblind players to better parse what's happening on the screen, this game does not offer it. However, a positive aspect is within the game's offered map. In previous *Assassin's Creed* games, icons in the maps were mostly distinguished by color, which could be difficult to differentiate. In this Discovery Tour, however, landmasses are yellow while museum tour icons are blue, making them very visible and less likely to cause issues for colorblind players. However, once the tours are played through, the icons become golden, causing them to blend in with the background, which is tricky to see.

For the most part, it is easy for the player to find the different museum tours. There are bright yellow icons on screen that then expand into a full tour when the player arrives to the correct area and agrees to join the tour. From then on, bright yellow lines connect different interaction regions, with each interaction being represented by a yellow column. In my opinion, this looks quite sleek and is perfect for the player to follow. There is some difficulty when the player finishes a tour and is in-between tours, since it is harder to find new tours because the yellow "new tour" icons on the screen are small and the player must otherwise rely on the map or "Tours" section in the player menu to find new tours if they don't want to run around aimlessly. In general, though, it's very nice how in each tour stop the screen will pan out to the subject of that interaction's topic, showing off the beautiful graphics and how they relate to the real history of the region.

The most problematic aspect is by far the UI text. Even in the main player menus, the font is small and white, with no audio screenreader possible. In the tour stop areas, there are “Legendary Site” images that appear in the lower left corner with a “More Information” offer—clicking it opens up a new screen with all the narration dialogue written in one place. This text, however, is again very small and white, making it difficult to read. It is also not adjustable.

Thus, while I do commend how clear it is for players to follow museum tours and decipher icons on the map, the UI font is *much* too small, with no adjustable size (or color) or screenreaders available. I think this needs to be a major change in the future.

Motor

This is possibly the most problematic area, ahead of visual—it **needs major improvements**. Often, the best things games can do for motor disabilities is to allow a player to remap the keys on the controller (Brown & Anderson, 2021). This game allows for a “Default” and an “Alternate” setting, with the controls all swapped around, but the game chooses where they go, not the player. The player can adjust X-axis and Y-axis controls (changing whether toggling a joystick a certain way moves the screen up or down, or left or right), but that might not be terribly helpful in comparison with the remapping. Another design flaw is that there is no ability to alter “button mashing” (when the game forces you to hold down a button or press it repeatedly), although for the most part that’s not relevant in the Discovery Tour itself. One last flaw I noticed is that, when there are minor options to switch gameplay, it’s often labeled as “Normal” and “Alternate.” I wonder instead of saying “Normal,” where the assumption is that anything but that is *abnormal*, all those settings could be “Default” and “Alternate.”

Difficulty

This is the section that I deem **most accessible**. There is virtually no difficulty in this Discovery Tour, as the premise of the game is that you can explore all the fun environments and learn about them without encountering enemies. Also, parkouring/acrobatics are what makes *Assassin’s Creed* games so iconic, and not only can the player do so in the Discovery Tour, but they can climb very tall heights and jump without taking any irritating fall damage.

Otherwise, for difficulty, it’s quite easy to follow the museum tours, so this game is a relaxing experience intended for learning and fun. Unfortunately, there is no tutorial offered on how to move the player around, but with such a low stakes environment, there is ample room to learn this on one’s own without any stakes or pressure.

Reflection

I chose accessibility as my lens for evaluation because it hits close to home. I exist in both medical and social models of disability, diagnosed within the last couple years with ADHD and Autism (also POTS for more of a physical disability). Previously, I would engage with different media and experience a sort of disconnect, feeling like I wasn't quite included in the audience but not knowing why. It made me feel like there was something wrong with me. Now that I know my brain works differently, and media can be made more accessible to achieve better experiences for *everyone* (in Universal Design), I want to be able to help this process.

I think this accessibility lens absolutely contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of this product. The whole purpose of the Discovery Tour is to offer education in a fun, interesting way, allowing the game designers to showcase all the research they did in creating this setting. This is such a labor of love that it became clear to me quickly that this team would welcome improvements for accessibility, since they very obviously want everyone to be able to enjoy this experience along with them. In fact, there was one museum tour that discussed education of young Alexandrians, and they represented this with a group of young boys and girls, acknowledging that it was not historically accurate that girls would be participating but declaring they preferred to include this for more inclusive gameplay. With an accessibility lens, I got to appreciate how much the developers clearly cared about inviting everybody into the world they made, but I was also able to critique the issues they evidently did not anticipate. This is such an enormous open-world game, with hundreds of different museum tours, that I can understand why not everything was addressed, but I am confident that by improving accessibility in games like this, both designers and players alike can into even more enjoyable gaming experiences.

Interestingly, one challenge I encountered is that I have been playing regular *Assassin's Creed* games for years now, ever since I was a preteen. I am extremely familiar with the gameplay, controls, acrobatics, and settings. Since it's become so "muscle memory" to me, I often didn't think about any necessary accommodations (besides subtitles, which I rely on due to my own auditory processing issues). Because of this, I really had to separate from my own background to examine this Discovery Tour objectively, thinking about what it would be like to play as someone who *doesn't* instinctively know how to play and might not have learned to "ignore" the game flaws, as I have. In doing so, this was a wonderful exercise in empathy. I also have never played a Discovery Tour myself, so I was somewhat new to this experience, and I think the combination of newness and familiarity was interesting to maneuver.

I am quite excited to be able to do an accessibility evaluation, because in *both* places where I work, a university and a medical school, we are in dire need of reworking accessibility into our courses. We are often so pressed for time that these things slip beneath the cracks, but now that I got to practice this evaluation with such a fun, interesting game, I am even more enthusiastic to transfer these skills into new educational settings.

Citations

Brown, M., & Anderson, S. L. (2020). Designing for disability: Evaluating the state of Accessibility Design in Video Games. *Games and Culture*, 16(6), 702–718.
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