Postmortems and Temperature-Taking

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CS 325: Introduction to Game Design

Postmortems, in general, are a retrospective analysis of a project. In the games industry, teams will often publicly share a postmortem analysis after the development of their game finishes. When I teach, I spend part of the last class as a postmortem for the class. I bring my thoughts about the course overall and questions for students. My goal is to learn what worked well and what could be improved. I try to be open and not defensive. I also give students a chance to "postmortem" their own experience in the course, such as what went right about their process and what could have been better.

This has always generated a lively discussion and given me ideas for improving my courses. Students understand that courses evolve. They are seeing one version of the course, improved (I hope) from the previous year, but never perfect. *Because I am constantly changing my courses, I also solicit feedback from students throughout the semester ("taking the temperature")*, even before the postmortem. Here are some questions I use to solicit feedback:

- What went well? What did you like? What felt tedious?
- What strategies did you use to be successful in the class?
- Do you like Phaser [the technology framework used in the class]?
- Was the grading fair?
- «Weekly assignments are do-able.» «I had trouble keeping up.»
- «I coded a lot in this class.» «I was able to get by barely coding.»
- «My prototypes did / did not get better as the class went on.»
- Should we do away with discussions, and class time should be just activities?
- «I never read the book.» «I always read the book.» «I sometimes read the book.» «I would have read the book if we hadn't gone over it in class.»
- Should we have extra credit? More games? A game journal? Should we make physical games again later in the semester? Are you planning to make a portfolio with your games?