Family edition

App Maker: Somebody Else Tries It

Ages 11-14 · about 45 minutes, in one sitting

Your child fixes a story app by watching someone else use it. You are the someone else.

What you need

- A computer or Chromebook with a current browser, and a mouse or trackpad.
- The lesson link: mytekdev.com/try/appmaker?lesson=somebody-else-tries-it&ref=fam-appmaker-4. No account, no email and nothing to install.

Before you start: try it once yourself

Open mytekdev.com/try/appmaker?lesson=somebody-else-tries-it&ref=fam-appmaker-4. A short guide opens over the app. The phone shows a dark screen: The Cave, a few lines of story, and two buttons, Go and Run home. Four cards sit under the phone: The Cave, Inside, Home and The crystal.

1. **The dead end.** Press Try it. Tap Go, then Take it. The last screen has a picture and words and no button. There is no way out. Press Keep designing.
2. **Fix it.** You are on The crystal. Click Button on the left. Type Start again in The words on it, and under Then go to pick The Cave.
3. **The labels.** On The Cave, the first button says Go. On Inside, the second says No. Neither says what it does. Better: Go into the cave, and Leave it there.
4. **The hint.** Click the Inside card. At the bottom is a faint line with a dashed outline: Hint: a loose crystal is safe to pick up. It starts hidden and nothing shows it. To make it work, add a button that says Hint, click + Show or hide a part, and choose show and that line.

> The moment that lands is the silence. A maker who is not allowed to help watches their family member hesitate over a button the maker thought was obvious.

The ideas, in plain words

The person who makes a program is its worst tester. They know which button to tap, so they never tap the wrong one. They know what each label means, so they never read it. They always take the path they built first, so they never reach the screen they forgot to finish. None of this is carelessness. It is what knowing a thing does.

A user test fixes this with a second person and three rules: do not help, do not explain, and write down what they do. What a tester says they think matters less than what they do. A tester who pauses for three seconds over a button has told the maker something, whether or not they say a word.

This app has three problems of three kinds. A dead end is a structure problem: the map of screens has a box with no arrow out. A label that does not say what a button does is a words problem. A hint that never shows is a logic problem: a part that starts hidden, and no button with a step to show it.

Testing again with the same person is what closes the loop. A fix that the maker thinks is clear is a guess until someone else uses it.

App Maker is not a text programming language. Children build each rule as a sentence and the app writes the code, which they can read and cannot edit. It has no loops and no lists, a button holds one But if, and numbers are the only kind of data an app remembers. What it does have is the real thing in small: events, a sequence of steps, variables and a conditional, in an app that runs.

Do it together

1. Open mytekdev.com/try/appmaker?lesson=somebody-else-tries-it&ref=fam-appmaker-4 together. A short guide opens over the app. Let your child press `Try it`, tap `Go`, then `Take it`.

   > **You'll know it worked when:** A screen with a picture and some words, and no button. There is no way out.

2. Press `Keep designing`. Click `Button` on the left, type Start again on it, and under `Then go to` pick `The Cave`.

   > **You'll know it worked when:** A small dark tag on the new button says The Cave.

3. Now trade places. You use the app and say aloud what you expect each button to do. Your child watches, does not help, and writes down what you do.

   > **If you get stuck:** If your child starts explaining, remind them: the app has to explain itself.
   >
   > **You'll know it worked when:** A short list: what you tapped, what you expected, what happened.

4. Trade back. Your child fixes two things from the list.

   > **You'll know it worked when:** For example, Go becomes Go into the cave, and No becomes Leave it there.

5. Try the app again and say what is better.

   > **You'll know it worked when:** Every button says what it does, and no screen is a dead end.

Talk about it

Ask these while you work together. A child who has understood it can answer them without help:

- Why did the maker of this app never find the dead end?
- What did your tester do that you did not expect?
- What did you want to say while you were watching? Why were you not allowed to?
- Which of your changes came from the test, and which did you just feel like making?
- How do you know your fix worked?

> The last question is the real test: a child who says "my family member tried it again and did not get stuck" has the whole loop.

For younger and older kids

Younger: For a younger child, fix the dead end together and stop there.

Older: For a teenager, make the hidden hint on the Inside screen appear with a Hint button.

Keep going

- Make the hint work: add a button that says Hint, and give it a step that shows the hidden line.
- Add a new screen to the story, then test it on a different family member.
- Write three things a tester should try in any app, and try them on a friend's.

Bring it into other subjects

- English: trade a set of written directions with a family member and follow them exactly. Where did the writer know something the reader did not?
- Art: redesign a sign in your school that people misread. Test it on three people before you call it finished.
- Science: a user test is an observation. What makes it a fair one? What would make it unfair?
- At home: watch a family member use an app they have never opened, and write down the first place they pause.

For your records

Ready to copy into an hour log, a portfolio or a transcript.

LESSON	App Maker: Somebody Else Tries It
SUBJECTS	Computer science, Technology
TIME	45 minutes

WHAT WE DID	Ran a user test on a small app: watched another person use it, recorded what they did and expected, changed the app in response and tested it again.
SKILLS PRACTICED	User testing; Using feedback; Clear labels

Activity sheet (optional)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Open the app: scan the QR code, or go to mytekdev.com/try/appmaker?lesson=somebody-else-tries-it

Essential question: Why does an app work for the person who made it and not for the person who uses it?

Warm-up: Have you ever been stuck in an app or a game with no idea what to tap? What did the maker forget?

_____

1. **Vocabulary.** User, user test, feedback, dead end, label: write each in your own words.

2. **The record.** While your family member uses the app, write for each thing they do: what they tapped, what they expected, and what happened. Do not help.

3. **My fixes.** Two things I changed, and what my tester did that made me change each.

4. **Again.** My tester tried it again. What was better? What was not?

1. Why did the maker of this app never find the dead end?

2. What is one thing you learned from watching that your tester would not have told you?

Quick check

Name: _____

1. In a user test, the maker should (A) explain each button before the tester taps it (B) watch, stay quiet, and write down what the tester does (C) use the app while the tester watches

2. The maker of an app is a poor tester of it because (A) makers are careless (B) the maker already knows what to tap, so they never get stuck (C) makers use faster computers

3. A button says OK. Write better words for a button that deletes a saved game.

Answers

QUESTION	ANSWER	WHY
1	B	Helping hides the problem the test was meant to find.
2	B	Knowing how it works is what stops the maker from seeing where it does not.
3	Delete this game	Accept any label that says what the button does. "Yes" and "OK" do not.

If your state or umbrella school asks, this lesson covers CSTA 2017 2-AP-15, CSTA 2017 2-AP-17, CSTA 2017 1B-AP-15.

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The app this lesson uses is free and runs in the browser, with nothing to install and no account needed. It is at mytekdev.com.

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