

Good Practices

Words of advice to keep in mind

- Consider your audience's perspective.
 - Instructions and tutorials are important. You know your game well, but what seems easy to you, may be very difficult to a brand new player.
- Mechanics come first, so prototype early.
 - If the prototype is not fun, then the finished game won't be fun.
- Collect data.
 - Data helps drive and reinforce design decisions. Perform testing and gather as much feedback as you can.
- Brainstorm together and write down everything.
 - Some ideas are bad, but they can lead to good ones. Don't ever be afraid to shout out an idea.
- Consistent Visual/Audio Language
 - A game with well defined rules will help the player make sense of the world you created. If you make everything dangerous red, then don't make something helpful red too.
- Identify the game's core experience
 - If you have a clear understanding of the basic essence of the game, a feeling you want the player to have, that will help you create a cohesive game. When weighing different design choices, typically you want to go with the choice that best supports the core.
- Team communication
 - Change is inevitable. The final game will probably be different from the initial idea. Make sure everyone is on the same page.
 - Learn how to give and take feedback with teammates. Give constructive criticism and be open to new perspectives. Not everyone will be a fan of all your ideas, and that is ok.

- Polish
 - Make sure to schedule time to go back and add in some final touches. Little things can make a big difference.
Juicy - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fy0aCDmgnxg>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJdEqssNZ-U>
- Overestimate the time requirements.
 - Developers tend to underestimate development time. Unforeseeable issues may arise. As you work more you will get a better sense of scheduling.
- Figure out monetization at the start.
 - The early you integrate micro-transactions the better they will fit in with the gameplay.
 - Figuring out your budget and revenue goals is important for any project (paid or free-to-play)
- Be Flexible.
 - Game development is an iterative process. Things change and sometimes work you have done will get thrown away. We can get attached to our work but parts may need to be changed or cut for the betterment of the game.
- KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid)
 - As you work on a game, you will become more accustomed to the project, and the initial allure can fade. You may find a desire to add more new fresh ideas. This is referred to as Overscope. This can be unnecessary and even overcomplicate the game. You eventually need to stop adding, start polishing, and then release it into the wild.

Games don't have to be "fun", but should provide a quality, worthwhile experience.

To Do

Start Now

Expand your knowledge and tastes by playing a lot of board games and video games, even ones you think you won't like. There are a lot of free and cheap games out there.

Dissect games. Figure out what is good, bad and why.

Watch gameplay and critic videos. *See Links at the end of the document.*

Read game reviews. *See Links at the end of the document.*

Read books or listen to talks on Game Design. *See Links at the end of the document.*

Make your own board games, card games, levels in games (Mario Maker, Little Big Planet, Battleblock Theater, Halo 4)

KEEP IT SIMPLE!!! You will learn more by creating several smaller scope games rather than trying to tackle a giant project right away and never finish it. We all have ideas for huge awesome games, but you have to work your way there. As you make more and more games, you learn and improve. Eventually, your early work will look pretty bad, but that is a good thing since it means you are getting better.

Download free software.

- <http://www.yoyogames.com/studio> - game engine
- <http://unity3d.com/get-unity> - game engine
- <http://www.gimp.org/downloads/> - drawing software
- <https://www.blender.org/> - 3D modeling

Follow beginner tutorials. Take your time and take notes. There are a lot of shortcuts (hotkeys) for all software programs. If you use hotkeys, you will work much faster.

Learn a bit about everything. This way you can find out your strengths and weaknesses. You don't have to be a pro at everything but by having some knowledge of each role, you can communicate more easily with team members. This will also give you a better understanding of how demanding, and time consuming, tasks can be.

Start a club in or out of school. Create together and share feedback with each other.

Development Cycle

Pre-Production, Production, Post Production, Launch, Post Launch

Pre-Production

Prototype, Documentation

Prototype

A rough, basic, barebones game. This is meant to test out the main game mechanics of the game. It should just have very basic visuals. We want to make sure the gameplay is fun, without artwork creating any bias to our opinions. If the prototype is not enjoyable, then odds are the game will not be, no matter how pretty it looks.

Concept Doc

A written description to help explain the game to others.

Elements of a Concept Doc:

- X Statement (tagline) - Put people into a frame of mind or a mood.
- Platform - console, pc, mobile, VR, etc.
- Genre - category and theme
- Camera (Screen Mock Up)
- High Concept - Give a brief backstory, motivation, plot, references
- Target Audience - Who are you making the game for? Age Range, Fans of __, etc.
- Pillars / Core - meat and potatoes
- Goals (Long Term, Mid, Short)
- Controls
- Main Character(s) - Who or what will the player control? Describe the character, look, personality, motivations.
- Key Features - List and describe the main elements of your game (enemies, power ups, abilities, peripherals, vehicles, weapons, puzzles, customization)
- Visual Style - What will your game look like? Here you can provide references and artwork.

- Monetization - Explain how will the game earn revenue (Price, DLC Add Ons, Micro Transactions)
- Competitive Analysis - Figure out how your game will stand out from other games. Identify games that are similar to yours, and explain how your game will compare and contrast.

Design Doc

A more comprehensive concept doc. This can also include the full story, backstory, technical pipelines, lists of all visual and sound assets, hierarchy of features, marketing strategies, and a lot more planning.

Production

Alpha, Marketing, Beta

Alpha - Feature Complete

- The game is playable. The main gameplay features of the game are working as intended, but there is still a lot of polish and assets that still need to be added.

Testing Begins

- Even though there are known issues, you can still learn from testing. The earlier you can find out if other people enjoy the game, even if it's still a bit undercooked, the better.

Marketing Begins

- There are different marketing strategies for each game. Typically you will start to hear about them between Alpha and Beta.

Beta - Content Complete

- Nothing more needs to be adding to the game. The game is only being touched to fix bugs.

Post-Production

Porting, Localization, Final Testing, Marketing Push

Porting

- Now you can optimize and make sure your game is working on all platforms that you plan to release on.

Localization

- Translating and adjusting your game for different regions.

Final Testing

- This is the last time to find and fix bugs. If you release a game with major game ending issues (Type A bugs), you will earn some bad press.

Marketing Push

- Marketing is crucial. There are a lot of games out there and you need to show potential players that your game exists. I relate it to a birthday party. You can have the best cake in the world, but nobody is going to come unless you invite them.

Launch

Game is released. Have a party!

Post Launch

Analytics, Updates, Community Management, Continual Marketing

Analytics

- Gather data. This can be sales numbers, player progression, etc. You can find out how often players play per day, how far they get and more.

Updates

- Upload updates for players to download. These updates can improve performance of the game, fix bugs, or add new content.

Community Management

- Communicate with the players and listen to their feedback.

Marketing Cont.

- Have sales and other promotions to help spread the word of you game and any updates to it.

BOOKS

Books can still serve a purpose.

A Theory of Fun for Game Design
Universal Principles of Design
Fundamentals of Game Design
Rules of Play
Game Feel
Game Mechanics: Advanced Game Design
Animator's Survival Kit

VIDEO LINKS

WARNING Some of the following links may lead to videos with some bad words.

Developer Presentations:

Daniel Cook: Game Design Theory I Wish I had Known When I Started

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwPe3OHR04c>

Nintendo, Miyamoto and Tezuka

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cvfq1Hqds0s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRGRJR UWafY>

Game Developer Conference Vault (a lot of talks here to watch)

<http://www.gdcvault.com/>

Developer Interviews:

2 Player Productions

<https://www.youtube.com/user/2PlayerProductions>

Idle Thumbs

<https://www.idlethumbs.net/shows>

*Idle Thumbs - weekly video game podcast

*Three Moves Ahead - strategy game podcast

*Tone Control and Designer Notes - Developer Interviews

Side Mission Briefing Podcast

<http://www.gametrailers.com/side-mission/briefing?pageNumber=20>

Critics:

TotalBiscuit Youtube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TotalHalibut>

Extra Credits

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ExtraCreditz>

Gamespot (The Point series)

<http://www.gamespot.com/shows/the-point/>

Giant Bomb

<http://www.giantbomb.com/>

Development Diaries:

DoubleFine (Language)

<http://www.twitch.tv/doublefine/profile>

Slick Entertainment

<http://www.twitch.tv/slickentertainmentinc/profile>

Game News:

<http://www.gamasutra.com/>

<https://www.idlethumbs.net/idlethumbs>

<http://www.giantbomb.com/podcasts/>

Play Games

<http://store.steampowered.com/>

<http://www.gog.com/>

<https://www.humblebundle.com/> Pay What You Want . . . don't be too cheap

<http://www.kongregate.com/> FREE web games

