

## Micro-Project 2 Analysis: Communication Design

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When tasked to create effective communication design I set out to challenge myself to achieve a clean, well communicated game with minimal explaining words, or in-your-face tutorial hints. I want the players learning to be driven by their curiosity and desire to explore the screen. The players curiosity coupled with good communication design to help guide them in a subtle way, will leave them feeling like they learned on their own. I wanted to explore the techniques of good communication design and test my ability to explain my game to a player without explicitly telling them how to play. I set out to try control the players attention and where they focus based on what I think they should look at throughout the game. Using tools such as UI, feedback design, and well communicated visuals to create a good UX which guides the user through the game. I will consider the communication design of the project a success when multiple play testers can play and interact with the game, and have the game interact back with them in the manor they thought it would.

When designing the UI for a game it is important to know who your users will most likely be. Since my game is a strategy-based card game, my player based would most likely be people who play similar games. With this knowledge, I did research into other strategy-based card games. I looked at *Hearthstone*, *Keyforge*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, and *Magic: The Gathering*. I looked at how these games lay out their UI and what information they found valuable to display on their cards. I found commonalities throughout and I assumed certain knowledge from the players, such as a basic understanding of how HP works, what different classes (such as healer or soldier) cards might indicate and the flow of a turn-based game.

The game is static, as it lacks animations, this means that I can control the players attention and focus with moving objects. Our eyes are drawn towards flashing contrasting colours and moving objects. In the starting state of the game the draw button is the only move the player can make. Therefore, I need to shift the users' attention to it. The draw button starts off flashing bright yellow. The movement and colour grab the users' focus and guides them to the draw button, this acts as a non-verbal tutorial. After the first round, once the draw button has been clicked, it stops flashing. Then a card appears in their hand, this now intrigues the first-time player. We have taught the player an important aspect of the game without telling them to do anything. The players own desire to explore objects on the screen is how they learn.

The card field, shown in figure 1 below, has been set up to indicate how many cards a player can hold in their hand. This is done by having 5 card sized outlines on the player and enemy's side of the field. This visual is similar to the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* layout. For informed and non-informed card game players, these card placement outlines coupled with the cards going to the placements from left to right on clicking the draw button, helps indicate that this is the players hand, and the max size of the hand is 5.

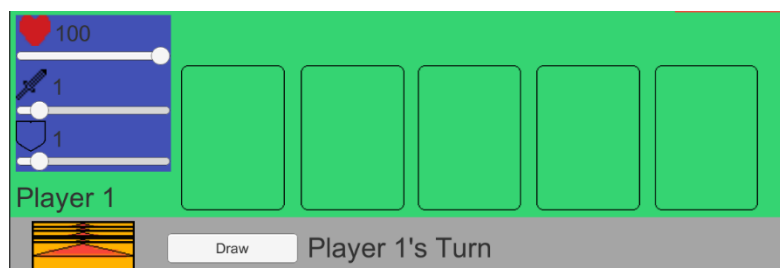


Figure 1 Players' card mat with Player HUD

Designing the cards is essential to achieve good communication design within my game. The cards are the most important game object since they are the most interacted with as well as hold the most information. Deciding the most important information to display on the cards was tough. Since cards in

my game affect both the player and your opponent, I had to display 7 pieces on information. To help the cards not feel cluttered, iconography was used instead of text. These icons: sword, shield, and heart, are very commonly seen in card games. To further increase the readability of the cards, the values are only shown if they are not equal to zero, as well as the use of a plus and minus symbol before each value. The iconography is also used in the players HUD.

To make the card type easier for players to see, in the centre I added a coloured band and a card type text, that indicates the nature of the card, this can be seen in figure 2, to the right. The card type gives the player an idea of what the nature of the cards' stats will be. These type names are designed to be intuitive for a card game player audience, such as healer and brawler; where the green banded healer card focuses on HP regeneration and the red banded brawler card tells the player that this card is attack focused.

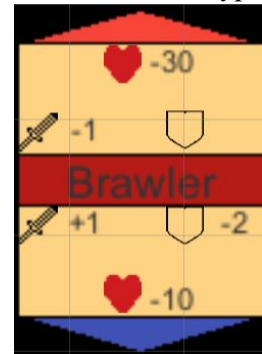


Figure 2 Iconography and UI design of a card

This mechanism of the card affecting both the player and the opponent is not intuitive. To help suggest to players this mechanism. The cards have arrows pointing to the top and bottom that are colour coded to the opponent and player HUD colours, respectively. This solution is somewhat elegant and subtle, it is non-invasive design but helps communicate to the player how cards will affect them and their opponent.

To balance making information easy to find and having a non-invasive, simple UI design, the information describing and explaining cards and game objects is hidden until you hover over certain objects, this can be seen in figure 3 below. When hovering over a card in your hand, it scales up and gives information on the card type in the bottom right corner. When the mouse goes off the object the card returns to normal size and the information is hidden. This offers good feedback to players when they are looking through their hand. It also helps provide a clean and non-invasive/non-persistent UI that does not get in the way of the player. This UI mechanism also applies to the player HUD. Hovering over the player HUD will explain how the attack and defence modifiers work.

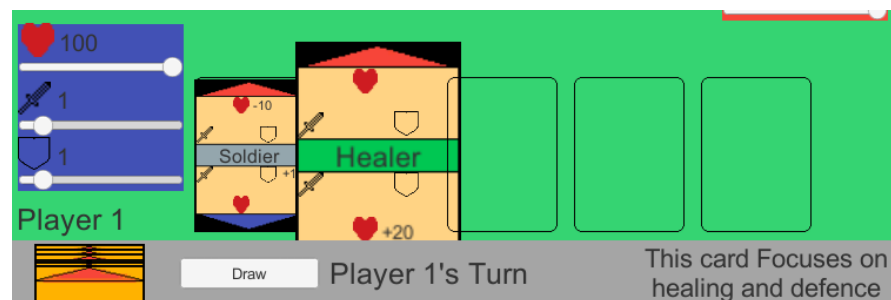


Figure 3 Mouse Hover UI mechanism and info box

To make a game that can communicate well with its players, the game must have a good combination of UI and feedback design to produce a good UX. I have learnt a lot about designing a game with player communication in mind and understanding the players journey through a game.

Theoretically my games' communication is successful. The user journey is highly curated to help guide a player through the game. This has been achieved with minimal tutorial like actions. I think the user journey is an enjoyable experience as it has enough guidance to help the player but enough freedom to allow them to think and engage. Mixing standard card game UI as well as creating my own.

Adding more layers of feedback design such as sound, animations and other visual cues would heighten and reinforce the ideas I am trying to communicate.

The downfall of my communication design is a lack of play testing. I did not collect enough user data to confidently say that play testers can play and interact with the game, and have the game interact back with them in the manor they thought it would.