

Game Design Document Template

This game design document is intended to be a “living” document, constantly evolving, changing, and being updated as the development of the game progresses.

Game Title & Vision Statement (What is the game called? What is the game at its core? Why is this game worth making? The “north-star” of this game. All design decisions should lead towards achieving this vision.)

---*Game Title Example: “Embers of Hope”*

---*Vision Statement Example: “A cozy survival game about rebuilding after loss – where progress is slow, beautiful, and personal”*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

Development Status Snapshot (What has been done so far? What still needs to be done/ is in progress? What are the major hurdles that are blocking the path right now?)

 Done	 In Progress	 Hurdles

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

Core Concepts (What are the non-negotiable ideas and values that drive the design of this game? 2-3 sentences max)

---*Example: “Exploration-driven narrative with light puzzles and emotional choices.”*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

Pillars (What are the core design priorities? They support the vision statement and uphold it. 3-5 short bullet points. Rules that resolve design debates.)

---*Example: “Every run must feel unpredictable and unique”*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Who is the Player?** (What is the player's fantasy, identity, and emotional journey in the game? What kind of character does the player inhabit?)

---*Identity Example: "The player is Kai, an amateur photographer exploring ancient ruins on her summer break. She's clever, curious, and desperate to restore her family's legacy."*

---*Fantasy Example: "The player feels like a renegade chef, fighting food-themed monsters with absurd culinary weapons"*

---*Emotional Journey Example: "In early levels the player feels curious and lost. By mid-game they feel resourceful and challenged. By the end they feel mastery and accomplishment"*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Key Moments to Design For** (Intro, Struggle, Triumph, Surprise. What are the core emotional and gameplay milestones the game needs to deliver? Moments that players will remember, talk about and look forward to.)

---*Opening Hook Example: "A flaming motorcycle crashes through the window. You wake up in the wreckage holding a humming lantern." What does the player see, feel and do right away?*

---*First Triumph Example: "Solving a strange mechanical door puzzle opens a hidden garden. Peaceful musical swells and leads to a rare moment of calm." When and how does the player first feel powerful and smart? What leads to the first rewarding moment?*

---*Twist/Shift Example: "The player masters stealth but is forced to make a moral choice with grave consequences." A big plot twist or new mechanic is unlocked. How does this shift the tone/stakes?*

---*Climax Example: "The villain is your former mentor, corrupted by the very system you were trying to dismantle. You can fight, flee, or join them." What is the emotionally charged moment? Who/what is at stake and how is it communicated to the player?*

---*Resolution Example: "After defeating the final boss, the player sits silently on a cliff edge. A soft music loop plays. The credits begin." How does the game stick the landing? What feeling does the player walk away with?*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Controls & Player Verbs** (Define the mechanical vocab of the game. All the actions the player can take and how they are performed. The feedback provided by these actions.)

---*Core Verbs Example: "Move, Jump, Dash, Interact, Attack, Upgrade, Loot"*

---Control Mapping Example (PC): "W/A/S/D - Move, Space - Jump, Left click- Attack etc."

---Feel and Feedback Example: "Jump is springy and quick, with particle burst and soft whoosh. Attacks are snappy with a hit-pause and enemy flash."

Action	PC Keyboard	Controller	Feel & Feedback
Attack	Left click	Button west	Snappy with hit-pause and enemy flash
Jump	Space	Button south	Springy and quick with particle burst and soft whoosh.

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

❖ Gameplay Systems & Mechanics Overview (What are the core game systems, how do they work together? What makes the game tick beyond surface-level actions? Each system should include what it is, how it works, and why it matters to the player?)

---Core Gameplay System Example:

- **"Combat: Real-time swordplay with stamina and timed parries"**
- **"Crafting: Mix elemental components to form unique attacks"**
- **"Progression: XP based leveling with branching skill unlocks"**

---Key Mechanics Examples:

- **"Dodge roll with 1-second invincibility"**
- **"Energy meter powers special attacks"**

---System Interactions Examples:

- **"Runes affect not just damage but also character personality (Fire = aggressive, Ice = stoic)"**

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

⌚ Art Style Guide (Use Reference Images / Wireframes Here. What does the game look like? What is taking inspiration from?)

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

Audio Style Guide (Music, Soundscapes, UI SFX. Describe the audio, as well as link to any references or completed audio pieces.)

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

World Structure & Progression (Levels, Zones, Maps, etc. Map out the architecture of the game world. How does player progress unfold through space, story, and challenge?)

---World Structure Example: "The game follows a hub-and-spoke model with five themed zones (Desert, Forest, City, Lab, Core) branching from a central home base that can be revisited (Metroidvania style). Zones are unlocked linearly through story progression. Each zone is locked behind key abilities found in other zones, encouraging backtracking." (Common formats: Linear levels, Open world, Hub-and-Spokes, Zone-based/Metroidvania, Node map/ World map, Procedurally Generated)

---Progression Example: "Players gain access to new zones by defeating bosses or uncovering lore fragments. Hidden exits lead to challenge areas." (Common progression systems: Level unlocks (defeat boss, find key), skill-gated exploration (get double jump to reach new zone), quest driven (NPCs open new paths), time/loop based (areas change across cycles), score-based (complete levels under certain conditions to unlock alt-routes))

---Pacing and Difficulty Example: "Each realm contains 3 levels of increasing complexity. Zone 4 is intentionally calmer, with a puzzle focus, acting as a break before the final act." (Describe the ramp of challenge, content density, or tone. Where does the game peak? What areas are meant to feel eerie, safe, tense, exciting etc? Are there difficulty spikes or cooldown zones?)

---Replayability Example: "After the first clear, alternate routes and secret endings are unlocked. Zones may contain new enemy types and puzzles depending on which upgrades the player has acquired." (Can players go back to previous areas? If so, what changes (enemies, secrets, story outcomes), is there fast travel, are areas randomized or persistent?)

 Zone	 Theme	 Main Mechanic	 New Enemies	 Unlock Requirement
1	Desert	Basic Movement	Grunts	Intro Level
2	Forest	Wall Climbing	Leapers	Defeat mini boss

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Goals, Challenges, & Rewards** (Missions, Puzzles, Combat, etc. What do players strive for, what stands in their way, and how are they rewarded? How are players motivated? How do goals create loops of tension and reward? Do short-term victories feed into longer-term goals?)

--- *Goals Example:*

- *Short-term: "Survive each room and collect loot"*
 - *Mid-term: "Rescue allies and upgrade your primary weapon"*
 - *Long-term: "Escape the dungeons and defeat the main villain"*
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--- *Challenges Example: "Combat against evolving enemy types. Navigating puzzle-filled, trap-heavy ruins. Choosing between safe routes and risk-reward treasure paths."*
(Challenge categories: Combat, puzzle-solving, platforming, resource management, social/narrative, exploration/ discovery)

--- *Rewards Example: (Reward types: Tangible (XP, loot, upgrades), Narrative (story progression, character backstory), Cosmetic (Skins, vanity items), Emotional (Mastery, surprise, narrative closure))*

- *Immediate: "Coins, health pickups, satisfying VFX"*
 - *Mid-term: "Upgrade points and new powers"*
 - *Long-term: "Permanent buffs, story reveals, visual hub evolution"*
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Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Narrative Structure & Dialogue** (Include Mood, Themes, Choices. How does the story unfold and how does the player interact with it?)

---*Narrative Structure Example: "Loop based modular narrative. Players unlock key memory shards in any order. Each piece builds towards the final confrontation."* (Common Structures: Linear, Branching, Modular, Loop based, Emergent)

---*Major Story Beats Example: (Could also make use of a simple 3-act structure or Hero's Journey)*

1. *Awakening in the forest*
2. *Reunion with love interest (twisted and corrupted version)*
3. *Discovery of the Eternal Flame's price*

4. *Betrayal by best friend*

5. *Choice to save the world or break the cycle and build a new one*

--- Themes & Mood Example:

- *Themes: "Corruption, love vs duty, fate vs choice"*
 - *Mood: "Epic and tragic with moments of light comedy"*
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--- Dialogue Systems Example: *"Branching dialogue trees with persistent memory flags. Choices affect alliances and unlock passive buffs. Players can adopt a 'Persona' that shapes their tone"*

--- Narrative Delivery Example: *"The narrative is delivered through conversations with NPCs who reveal keys part of the story and comic panels between levels." (Methods: Environmental storytelling, Cutscenes or comic panels, Dialogue with NPCs, Collectible Lore, Action-based narrative)*

--- Tone and Style Example: *"The narrative style is comedic like that of Douglas Adams whilst also poetic" (Could be Formal, casual, poetic, brutal, meta, snarky, minimalist, inspired by a specific author etc.)*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

>User Interface & UX Flow (Add Wireframes If Available. How does the player interact with the game visually and functionally. How does the player navigate?)

--- Components Example: *"The HUD includes a radial health indicator, stamina bar, rune slots and a dynamic enemy alert icon that pulses when spotted." (Components: HUD, Menus, Pop-ups and modals, Diegetic UI)*

--- UX Flow Example: *"In-game HUD -> Pause Menu -> Inventory -> Inspect Item -> Back to Game" (How the player moves between screens)*

--- Design Principles Example: *"Diegetic elements where possible (in-world maps, radio, HUD)" (Others may include: Minimal clutter, One-thumb playability, Intuitive iconography, feedback on actions etc.)*

--- Accessibility Considerations Example: *"Colorblind friendly modes, Subtitles, Control remapping etc."*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Content Lists (Characters, Items, Skills, Enemies. Every significant piece of game content/ asset. Organize by category and use tables or bullets.)**

--- **Characters: Include Name/ Title, Role, Locations, Abilities, Backstory summary, Dialogue file link or ID**

--- **Items & Equipment: Include Name, Type, Rarity/ Tier, Effect/ Purpose, Drop source or acquisition method**

--- **Skills & Abilities: Include Name, Category (active/passive/ultimate), Cooldown/ cost, Unlock method, Visual/ Sound cue notes**

--- **Enemies & Encounters: Include Name/ Class, Behaviour type (ranged, melee, trap etc), Special traits, Combat role/ difficulty, Spawn area/ context**

 Name	 Role	 Zone	 Unique Trait	 Notes
Kaelen	Ally	Hub City / Follows player	Can resurrect once per run	Dialogue changes based on loyalty
Lord Mirth	Boss	Zone 3 End	Summons illusions	Grants the player the Rune of Plenty

 Item Name	 Type	 Effect	 Rarity	 Source
Ember Blade	Weapon	Deals bonus fire damage	Rare	Dropped by fire monk
Old Locket	Key Item	Unlocks secret chamber	Unique (once-off)	Hidden room in Zone 2

 Skill Name	 Type	 Effect	 Unlock Condition
Phase blink	Active	Teleports a short distance	Defeat Zone 2 boss
Iron skin	Passive	Reduces damage by 20% when standing still	Skill tree node 3, requires 12 shards

 Enemy Name	 Type	 Behaviour	 Zone	 Special Trait
Leech Knight	Melee	Aggressive, will pursue player	Zone 1 - 4	Restores their HP when they land a hit on the player
Echo Wisp	Ambush	Invisible and lies in wait until player enters the region they are protecting	Zone 5	Explodes on death dealing AoE damage

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Localization Plans (Languages, Strings, Tools. How will the game be accessible to players across different languages and regions?)**

--- *Languages Example: EFIGS (English, French, Italian, German, Spanish), CJK (Chinese (Simplified), Japanese, Korean)*

- *Initial: English Only*
 - *Planned for launch: French, Italian, German, Spanish*
 - *Stretch goal: Simplified Chinese, Japanese, Korean*
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--- *Localization Scope Example: UI elements, Dialogue, Subtitles etc*

--- *Technical Strategy Example: "All translatable text is stored in a CSV file with string IDs and fallback English. The UI auto-scales for longer strings. Languages can be toggled in real-time from the settings menu."*

--- *Cultural Sensitivity or Adaptation Example: "One mission references real-world figures. In certain regions, this may be adapted or removed" (Content that may need adjustment: Religion, politics, superstition, humour, idioms, symbols and colour meanings)*

--- *Tools and Workflow Example: "Export translatable strings via script -> translate using a localization service -> import back into engine -> QA pass per language -> bugfix and polish" (Tools: Spreadsheet software, CSV to JSON export scripts, QA builds for LQA(Localization), Smartling, POEditor, Lokalise)*

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Technical Details (Engines, Tools, Dependencies, Code Notes. What technology is going to be used to build the game?)**

--- *Engine Framework Example:*

- *Engine: Unity 6000.0.42f1*
 - *Render Pipeline: HDRP*
 - *Languages: C#*
 - *Version Control: Git (GitHub / GitKraken)*
 - *Add-ons: Unity Input System, Cinemachine, Odin Inspector*
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--- Target Hardware and Platform Constraints Example:

- *PC, Android*
 - *Target Resolution: 1920x1080*
 - *Target FPS: 60*
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--- File Structure Example:

- *Assets/*
 - *Art/*
 - *Characters/*
 - *Environments/*
 - *Scripts/*
 - *Combat/*
 - *Player/*
 - *Managers/*
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--- Naming Conventions Example: "Scripts ->PlayerMovement.cs, EnemyAI.cs \ Prefabs -> p_Enemy_Shooter.prefab \ UI -> ui_InventoryPanel.prefab etc"

--- Data Format & Save System Example: "Format (JSON, XML, Scriptable Objects), Save System Type (checkpoint, autosave, manual), Persistent flags, player progress, metadata, encryption"

--- Performance and Optimization Considerations Example: "Object pooling, LOD systems, shader batching, texture compression, garbage collection"

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Testing, Debug Tools & Cheats** (What are the tools, shortcuts, and in-game systems used by the team to efficiently test, debug, and develop the game?)

--- Cheat Commands Example: "godmode -> toggle invincibility, complete_quest_4 -> completes a specific quest for testing narrative branches, teleport hub -> instantly teleports the player to the hub area, etc"

--- Debug UI Example: “Toggleable overlays show FPS, position, enemy counts | Quest flag tracker to show all narrative variables and their current state”

--- Testing Tools Example: “Button to unlock all runes for build testing | Spawn test enemies from any zone for balance review | Toggle UI visibility for screenshot capture”

--- Save Override Example: “F6 to save to slot A, F7 to load slot A | Dev-only JSON editor to toggle save flags or inventory”

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

💡 Wishlist Features & Crazy Ideas (What doesn't fit in the current plan, but is worth remembering and exploring in the future? Encourages innovation whilst also keeping the main design focused honouring the vision.)

--- Stretch Features Example: “Dynamic weather system that changes level mechanics (rain = slippery edges)”

--- Experimental Ideas Example: “Let the player die and continue as a ghost with new rules and mechanics”

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

❓ Open Questions & Design Debates (What is currently being considered by the design team? What isn't a part of the core game or MVP but is being considered? What are the pros and cons for each feature)

---Open Question Example: “Should we build in support for players to customize their outfits and armour? If so, should this have an impact on player skills? How will we tie this into the broader game progression in terms of getting new clothes/balancing with existing systems?”

Debate	✓ Pros	✗ Cons
Adding Multiplayer support	Builds a greater sense of community around the game	Costly and complex to implement

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

📝 Prototypes & Experiments (Link or Describe Them)

---Links to GitHub and Itch.io versions of the game and write ups about what was tested and learned from each prototype and experiment

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.

 **Task Breakdown or Feature Checklist (What are the features and tasks that are currently being worked on? What are these tasks broken-up into? Who is responsible for each task?)**

--- Task Categories Example: "Core systems, Player Mechanics, UI/UX, Art Assets, Narrative etc" (Organize by major areas of work)

 Feature	 Owner	 Status	 Notes
Player movement	Dev (Jaimee)	Done	Tuning jump height
Inventory UI	Dev (Alex)	In progress	Needs animation polish
Zone 1 Boss Battle	Design (Brendan)	Concept	First draft complete

Describe this section here. Use bullet points, examples, or sketches where possible.