Progressive Disclosure Design Worksheet

Your AI Feature

Feature Name:

What it does in one sentence:

Target user:

Step 1: Identify the Layers

Progressive disclosure means showing simple first, revealing complexity only when needed. Map your feature's complexity layers:

Layer	What User Sees	When They See More
Layer 1 (First Impression) Example: "Generate summary" button		User clicks button
Layer 2 (Basic Controls) Example: "Length: Short/Medium/Long"		User clicks "Advanced"
Layer 3 (Advanced Options) Example: "Tone, format, keywords"		User enables "Expert mode"

Step 2: What Must Be Visible Immediately?

Check all that apply to your feature's Layer 1:

☐ **Primary action** (the main thing users do)

☐ **Status indicator** (is AI working, done, failed?)

- [ ] **Output preview** (show results immediately)
- [ ] **Undo/edit** (let users fix mistakes quickly)
- [ ] **Confidence signal** (is AI sure or guessing?)

What's in your Layer 1:

Step 3: What Can Wait Until Asked?

Layer 2 (Show when user wants more control):

- [ ] Fine-tuning controls
- [ ] Alternative outputs
- [ ] Explanation of how AI works
- [ ] Advanced settings

Your Layer 2 items:

Layer 3 (Show only for power users):

- [ ] Technical parameters
- [ ] API/integration options
- [ ] Debugging info
- [ ] Experimental features

Your Layer 3 items:

Progressive Disclosure Design Worksheet

Step 4: Sketch Your Layers

Layer 1 (Default View):

Sketch or describe your Layer 1 interface here

What triggers Layer 2?

- [ ] "Advanced options" link
- [ ] "Show more" button
- [ ] Settings icon
- [ ] Other: _____

Layer 2 (After User Expands):

Sketch or describe your Layer 2 interface here

Step 5: Test with the 5-Second Rule

Show Layer 1 to a teammate for 5 seconds, then hide it. Ask them:

1. "What does this feature do?"

2. "What would you click first?"

3. "Do you feel confident or overwhelmed?"

Result:

- ☐ ✓ **PASS:** They understood and felt confident
- ☐ ✗ **FAIL:** They were confused or overwhelmed → Simplify Layer 1

Step 6: Common Mistakes Checklist

Avoid these progressive disclosure anti-patterns:

- ☐ ✗ **Hiding critical info** (Don't hide things users need immediately)
- ☐ ✗ **Too many layers** (3 layers max—more creates "treasure hunt" UX)
- ☐ ✗ **Inconsistent triggers** (Use same pattern: "Show more" or "Advanced")
- ☐ ✗ **No defaults** (Layer 1 must work without ANY configuration)
- ☐ ✗ **Hidden affordances** (Users must SEE that more options exist)

Step 7: Success Metrics

How will you know progressive disclosure is working?

Your target metrics:

• Layer 1 completion rate: _____%

• Time to first action: _____ seconds

• Users who need Layer 2: _____%

Next Steps

- ☐ Get feedback from 3 target users on Layer 1 wireframe
- ☐ Confirm Layer 1 has smart defaults (works without configuration)
- ☐ Document what triggers each layer (write it in your spec)

> **Example: AI Writing Assistant**
>
> **Layer 1:** "Generate draft" button + Tone dropdown → Instant value for 90% of users
>
> **Layer 2:** Length slider, keywords → One click to "Advanced" for 8% of users

Layer 3: Temperature, model selection → "Expert mode" for 2% of technical users