

## **Group Members: William Walker, Nabeel Ali, Chandler Godfrey**

### **Goals and Inspiration**

Before we started work on this part of the project, we reflected on the feedback we received from the previous project. When we demonstrated the paper prototype to the substitute professor in class, she marked a couple of points where our design was lacking in user control. Specifically, we needed to have a way for the user to leave a match and we needed to give the player's access to the options while in-game. These were small but critical interactions that we had overlooked when designing the prototype and the writing the task for the Wizard of Oz test. We also noted that our prototype was marked as only being slightly above the wireframe level of fidelity. From comments in our video and from testers, we felt that the problem laid in the minimalistic approach we took to visual design. In this iteration, we sought to address these issues and heighten the quality of our prototype.

When we began conceptualizing this iteration of our prototype, we wanted to focus on the visual aspects of the design. While our paper prototype provided users with enough content visually to accomplish the tasks we created for them, the visual design did not highlight the type of experience that we want users to have when playing our game. It came across as unpolished, cheap, and barely above the level of wireframes. With this iteration, we wanted to add a layer of polish to make the game feel complete and professional.

One of the main ways we did this was by introducing color and visual branding. Because *Apples to Apples* is a game that is designed to be enjoyed by players of all ages, including children, the original designers incorporated color—red and green—into the fabric of the gameplay. We wanted to bring these elements into the design, giving the entire game a uniform sense of branding.

We also wanted to add visual effects to make the game feel less static. We took inspiration from other computer-based card games and saw that in many, after a user completes an action, there is an animation to visualize the effect or process of the action. We wanted to use this technique to make the prototype feel more dynamic, and to keep the player engaged. Another technique we noticed other games employ was using animations and effects to highlight what actions are available to the player. We thought that implementing this technique would be important to our design because in our previous iteration we struggled with how we would instruct new players on how to use our design. Rather than implement intrusive tips, we decided that using animation to highlight these actions was a better idea.

Another aspect we wanted to improve was the way we formatted and presented information and editorial content. We felt that our previous prototype did not properly utilize the landscape format of a computer screen. Instead, we bunched information on the sides of the screen, leaving large areas blank. We felt that this contributed to the unpolished feeling of our design. We sought to improve this by centralizing the content, making it easier for users to identify information and process it while also making the game appear less empty.

For this project, we wanted to add a new feature to the prototype. We decided to create an online store. We noticed that many of the other online card games featured a store, offering cosmetic items and other gameplay upgrades. We chose to implement a 'Cheater Card' that will influence gameplay. The reason we did this was to fully prototype how a user can interact with the store, and how purchases can affect gameplay.



This panel from the side show shows the added online store. (Last option on the menu list).



This slide represents the options players have to purchase from the online store. In the video we have used the “cheater” card to assist in gameplay.

## Instructions

When the game begins, the user will be notified that the game is ready by a notification at the bottom of the screen. It will say “Press any button to play!”. Users will click the screen and be brought to the home page.

The home page consists of six buttons. Host Game will allow the user to set up a game, selecting options for number of players and communication methods. Find Game will quickly match users with a host who has set up their own game. Options allows players to make changes to the game environment. Leaderboard will show player rankings based on number of wins. Friends brings up the friends tab, which will display what friends the user has, and which ones are online. The ‘Store’ button will take the user to the online store. Press ‘Options’.

The Options page displays the different methods of controlling the environment that we've decided were important. Color Options give controls to players who have RGB colorblindness, or other conditions that may make the game inaccessible. Animation Options provides the ability to disable animations. We decided on this option to help make the game accessible to players who may have epilepsy, or another condition that flashing animations may aggravate. AI Difficulty allows players to control the difficulty level of AI bots should they decide to play a solo game. Press the 'X' button in the top right to exit.

Next, click the 'Store' button. The store has different items, expansions, and cards available to purchase. The user selects the 'Cheater Card'. The Purchase page appears. The item the user selected will be displayed, along with the price. When the user is ready, they press the 'Purchase' button. The cheater card is added to their inventory. Then they can press the 'X' in the top right to return to the Home page.

From the Home Page, press 'Friends'. The Friends tab will appear. This tab displays which friends the player has, and which of these friends are online. Press the 'X' in the top right to close the tab. The user may press the 'Find Game' option to jump into gameplay, but instead, press 'Host Game'.

The Host Game screen will appear. Checkboxes to indicate the minimum and maximum amount of players are available, but are preset to 4. The Communicate Via drop down allows players to choose the method of communication that will be used in gameplay. Click the 'Communicate Via' drop down. The drop down will appear, and players will have the option between Voice and Text. Voice chat is not prototyped in this iteration, so the user will select 'Text'. The drop down will disappear. Players will have the option to either 'Find Players' or 'Invite Friends'. Press 'Invite Friends'. The Friends tab will appear again. Players can invite their online friends to join the game they are hosting. Press 'Invite' next to Will's name. A notification will appear, showing that Will has been invited. Click the 'X' to close the tab. Now, the user will press 'Find Players' to fill the remaining two spots. (Players who chose 'Find Game' on the Home page are selected to join games that are being hosted in this way.)

The user will be brought to the Lobby Page. While the game loads, a random player will be selected to be the judge. Once the game has loaded, the judge will be announced, and the user can click 'Start the Game'.

The Main Game screen will be displayed. There is a table in the center of the screen, with each of the players seated around it. In the final game, player profiles will be able to be viewed by pressing their avatar. Pressing the 'X' at the top right of the screen will allow players to exit back to the main menu. To continue the game, players will click 'Click Here to Deal the Cards'.

The cards will be dealt, with the player's hand displayed at the bottom. The green card will appear on the table, with word that's being played for appearing at the top of the screen. Players will try to choose a card from their hand that best matches the Game Card. In this round, the player does not have any card that match the game card. Because they purchased an item in the store, they press 'Cheater Card' in the top left. A new card, 'Puppies', is added to their hand. The player selects 'Puppies' (simulating drag and drop) from their hand and places it on the table. The user will select 'End Your Turn' to move to the next screen.

Once the other players have made their selections and ended their turns, the judge will select the card they feel best matches the game card. The results will be displayed, announcing who the winner is and what card won. All players will have to click 'Next Game' for the new round to start. Before doing that, click the avatar above Chandler's name. His player profile will appear. Click 'Message'. A text entry will appear. Click the text box to simulate typing a message. Click 'Send'. A notification will

appear, telling the user that their message has been sent. After that, the player is ready to begin a new game by clicking 'Next Game!'

### Content fidelity matrix

Student(s): Nabeel Ali, Chandler Godfrey, William Walker

Web App or Mobile App Considered: Apples to Apples application

Content	Very Low Fidelity	Low Fidelity	Medium Fidelity	High Fidelity	Very High Fidelity
Information Design				X	
Interaction Design				X	
Visual Design & Branding			X		
Editorial Content				X	

Briefly explain your CF Matrix assignments.

#### Information Design:

Our interactive PowerPoint is described as high fidelity in information design because of the organization of all the elements in the PowerPoint. Each option on the home page is spaced out evenly and visible for the user to explore. We try to keep a consistent flow throughout the game making it easy for the user to follow. We used whitespace and boxes to provide the labeling for the options and gameplay help making it understandable and visually appealing for the user.

#### Interaction Design:

Our interactive PowerPoint is perceived as high fidelity in interaction design because of the ways the user can interact with the game as well as other users/friends. We allow the user to interact with the game through checking leaderboards, inviting friends, sending invites, customizing options for the game, as well as hosting and finding games. We allow the users to complete their task during the game by allowing the user to pick their card as well view other profiles of users within the game.

### **Visual Design & Branding:**

Our interactive PowerPoint is perceived as medium fidelity in visual design because we only show a basic color design and show the graphical elements in one way. Our interactive PowerPoint is based around one color but provide a consistent layout for each screen. We show simple white font with a red background throughout the different screens but not much more in detail. We provide some graphical elements/visual imagery by showing icons on user profiles.

### **Editorial Content:**

Our interactive PowerPoint is perceived as high fidelity in editorial content because of the information that is shown and how it is presented. We wanted to present our writing in a way that it makes welcoming for the user as well as easy to understand. We focused our editorial content around our information design by making sure we followed the layout that we wanted and providing accurate information to the user.

### **PowerPoint Critique**

While making the interactive PowerPoint somethings we found to be easy and also challenging. The initial start (making the slides) we found easy, the overall design path and simplicity of the game made it easy to whip up. PowerPoint is setup to display everything for ease of use making the shapes and text boxes not hard to manufacture.

Applying all of the hyperlinks was a bit of a challenge because to make a simple drop-down box it took a duplicate slide with a minor adjustment to make everything simulate an actual interphase. Once the hyperlinks were enabled we had to worry about the slides being symmetrical to the other shapes on previous slides. The next step in the PowerPoint was transitions to add some depth to the game. Applying the slide transitions was fairly easy to simulate, the judge laying the cards down on the table, drag and drop etc. Accomplishing all of these steps we had to make sure the user didn't get lost and was easily able to transition to the next interphase. For this reason, we added text overlay that had a blinking effect so the user had an eye catcher to guide them to the next step. Overall the production of the PowerPoint was medium on difficulty. We accomplished a lot in terms of highly interactive content for the user.

## Self-Critique

With this iteration of the prototype, we were able to improve on many aspects of our design to make the game feel more complete and polished. The first was by adding color and effects to the game. This elevated the prototype from being a slightly interactive wireframe to a more accurate representation of what the final product will resemble. We stuck to our idea of minimalism, and we feel we accomplished that goal with this design. The effects of the game are not intrusive, and we feel that while they add to the overall goal of the game feeling polished and professional, they do not distract users from core gameplay mechanics.

Another aspect of the design that we improved upon was our use of space and layout of editorial content. Specifically, we re-arranged several items in the options, host game, and lobby screens to take advantage of the landscape layout of a computer screen. This allows a user to be able to take in information easier, and the screens now reflect their intention more accurately. We also feel that the redesign will reduce the amount of time players will spend on these screens, allowing them to get to the gameplay as fast as possible. We feel we achieved this goal without sacrificing content or control over the game, which was an important feature to us when we set out on this project.

Although our prototype is in a more polished and higher fidelity state, there are still some design elements that are problematic and need addressing. The most obvious of these is the interaction design. In its current state, our prototype does not offer the full range of actions (drag-and-drop objects, text entry for messaging) that we plan on including in the final product. In future prototyping, we need to highlight these interactions to give users a sense of the full experience of playing the game. While visually all there, the simplicity of the gameplay means that as designers we cannot rely on visual branding and effects to make our game fun and complete feeling. The simplicity in fact puts a lot of pressure on us to make the gameplay feel fun, intuitive, and complete, and as of yet, we have not achieved this goal.

Another element that needs to be addressed is our use of color. While the red and green color scheme is in line with the visual branding of the original game, we feel that the colors can become monotonous and distracting after enough time spent playing the game. We need to address this, either by toning down the color palate or by incorporating different colors / white space into the design. However, we need to be careful when doing so, as adding too much color can take away from the branding of the game, and using too much white space in such a simple design can give the feeling of incompleteness or lack of professionalism.

The most important aspect that still needs addressing is inter-player interaction. Players communicating with each other is possibly the most important aspect of the game; playing for cards is in a lot of ways a tool that is used to create conversation and to encourage bonding. With our design, we have nailed down how we are going to do this, but we have yet to be able to implement a way by which a tester can try out this important feature. Without communication, the game can feel stale or incomplete, and at the very least a tester will not get the full experience that final users will.

In summary, we are pleased with the advancement of our prototype. Although there are some aspects that still need to be hammered out, we feel that we were able to incorporate the feedback from

the last project and improve upon the weak areas of the design. We feel that the game is at a much higher level now, and that we addressed the most important issues that needed fixing first.