

## -DESIGNING THE GAME: QUESTIONS AND BRAINSTORMING-

Focus on creating a vertical slice for the first (*five*) minutes

- ↳ A **vertical slice** is a portion of a game which acts as a proof of concept for stakeholders before they agree to fund the rest. It is not the same thing as a prototype in that it is expected to look of final quality and play like the final game. (What Games Are, 2019)

*Who is Our Player and How Do They Like to Engage?*

- 53% of mobile gamers are female
  - ↳ 31% play in bed, 16% on bus/train (short bursts)
- Females like to collaborate and their usual game choices are dominated by collaborative mechanic (join, share, help, gift, greet, exchange, trade)
  - ↳ Networking constraint, could be solved by helping/collaborating with NPCs as opposed to other players
  - ↳ Demographic also enjoys expressive elements (choose, customise, layout, design, dress up, show-off)
  - ↳ Potential social engagement verbs for our game: build, decorate, customise, choose, purchase (express)
    - ↳ Potential others: collect (explore), compare (compete), share, help (collaborate)

expressive  
collaborators

*What positive emotion is at the core of what we are trying to design for and how will we elicit that (dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin and endorphins are responsible for happiness)*

- ↳ anticipation + awe and wonder/surprise
  - ↳ awe: evoked when you witness something grand, spectacular or breathtaking, sense of overwhelming appreciation
  - ↳ surprise: a sense of delight when someone brings you unexpected happiness or a situation goes better than you had hoped
- ↳ could be elicited by having pictures of seed and not explaining what they are/what they grow into
  - ↳ dopamine: end of quest reward for example, quick hit of pleasure
  - ↳ oxytocin: essential for bonding, cooperative gameplay releases oxytocin and increases generosity
  - ↳ endorphine: positive gameplay gives players natural "high", especially after overcoming a difficult boss battle

self-expression via  
choosing what to plant  
and how to lay objects  
out

think about these  
when  
brainstorming  
ideas

- ↳ serotonin: more complex, can give negative effects if not connected to the other three chemicals, if not used correctly it can make players sad and depressed

### *Engagement Loop and Player Lifecycle*

#### ↳ 7 components of gamification

- ↳ **Goals** - give users a sense of purpose, and accomplishment. Grading should be accumulative rather than reductive. Scores should not go down, only up (unless you are truly trying to punish player).
- ↳ **Rules** - repetitive, continuous limitations give users structure. Make sure that rules are clear and players know what needs to be done and how it needs to be done.  
“Once players realise what they need to do, it becomes their game.” ~Shigeru Miyamoto.
- ↳ **Rewards** - reward users for their time and effort through badges, points, leaderboards, etc. Players like to be rewarded for what they do, otherwise what is the point of something that doesn't pay off? Introducing early win states increases player motivation, and makes them feel that they are doing well.
- ↳ **Motivation** - give users a reason to act through intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (e.g. curiosity or praise, respectively).
  - ↳ **Intrinsic Motivation** - this is when we act without any obvious external rewards. We simply enjoy an activity or see it as an opportunity to explore, learn and actualize our potentials (curiosity).
  - ↳ **Extrinsic Motivation** - this is usually defined as our tendency to engage in activities in order to gain some type of known, external reward (praise).
- ↳ **Feedback** - show users their progress through progress bars, levels, animations, etc.
- ↳ **Freedom of choice** - users enjoy systems they've opted into more than those they're forced to participate in.
- ↳ **Freedom to fail** - give users the opportunity to try again when they fail.

#### ↳ 3 fundamental user onboarding lessons from Nintendo

- ↳ ① Teach the game by playing the game (show don't tell)
  - ↳ Learning by doing, i.e. immediate practicing, provides a 75% retention rate for learning as oppose to reading or audiovisual which provides <20% retention rate
  - ↳ don't drop users into an empty dashboard, you need to onboard the users so that they learn how to use your product and become experts
  - ↳ know which core features you want users to be fluent in and present these upfront
  - ↳ ramp up complexity progressively, a progressive increase in difficulty that corresponds with progressive increase in complexity if a common game mechanic
- ↳ ② Design for the naive user
  - ↳ user testing is important; gain personal insight about your user and test your designs by having them carry out tasks without intervening (important to reach out to people who are not experienced with your game/product)

- ↳ ③ Inspire users to progress
  - ↳ the “need to complete” is one of the most important psychological drivers of game engagement
  - ↳ Russian psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik found that while uncompleted tasks stick in a person’s memory, completed tasks are more easily forgotten, so when you pursue a task but leave it unfinished, your brain will keep bugging you about it until it’s done
    - ↳ could give the player quests that require them to grow an object, will encourage them to come back to the game to complete the task which will instantly be replaced when they receive a new incomplete task
  - ↳ **add progress indicators to your onboarding process**; this plays into 4 of the 7 components of gamification by giving users a sense of purpose, defining the rules of progress, providing visual feedback, and motivating users to act through intrinsic motivation
  - ↳ **remind users of an incomplete task on multiple channels**; in-app make the progress bar and add unfinished steps, send notifications to re-engage users who have been idle for a while
  - ↳ **weave incomplete tasks throughout your entire user journey**; many apps use mission-based approaches and ongoing progress meters to perpetually inspire re-engagement
- ↳ Onboarding is about teaching users the rules and tools to play the game, and starts as soon as the user downloads/signs up to your game
  - ↳ Creating an identity
    - ↳ video games make you who you are, they reflect your ideas and your behaviours
    - ↳ most games allow players to create a profile, character and choose your own way to do things, giving a great sense of freedom as you can do whatever you want in the specific world
    - ↳ this is a great onboarding strategy, as it gives users the possibility to create an identity and, in many cases, a character affects the user psychologically
  - ↳ Glowing choice
    - ↳ the use of glowing choices can be used to display hints to the user about what to do next
    - ↳ players can be forced to click a glowing choice by limiting their options and greying features out, but it is often more empowering to get the user decide what they wish to do
    - ↳ another option is to allow the player to explore by not forcing them to click the glowing choice, but it will remain until the user does click on it - eventually the player will click it and will be ready for the next step
  - ↳ Introduce early win-states
    - ↳ small achievements need to be rewarded frequently at the beginning as these will build player’s confidence

- ↳ it is important to introduce as many of these opportunities as possible as conquering minor challenges can be very satisfying for new players
- ↳ harder challenges need to be introduced gradually as the game progresses past the onboarding phase
- ↳ Create a hands-on onboarding experience
  - ↳ **think about how you are going to teach users how to use a particular feature** as you design it, making it as intuitive as possible should always be your goal
  - ↳ be aware of **possible user frustrations** and anticipate **potential user errors** when crafting your tutorial
  - ↳ **progressively teach the user new things**, by building on previous experiences and knowledge, paying attention to the order and context of each piece of information
  - ↳ **empty state screens** are a great moment to teach users the **goal of the screen and invite them to complete and action** - they should always explain why they are empty and invite the user to do something about it
  - ↳ watch your users go through your onboarding process, see if their expectations are being met, or if they are getting frustrated and when
  - ↳ as you release new features, you need to teach your users how to use them, the best time to do this is when it is valuable to the player

Sketch out an engagement loop for each stage of your player lifecycle

- ↳ what would it look like?
- ↳ what would be interesting to them?

What is the players core goal?

- ↳ what are their sub-goals?
- ↳ what is the player working towards from moment-to-moment, month to month?

How is the content gated?

## Sources

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