Example Design Document

# From Chapter 14 of Game Design Workshop, 2nd Edition by Tracy Fullerton

The following outline is an example of how you might organize your design document. We have noted under each section the types of information it should contain. Keep in mind that our goal here is not to give you a standard format that will work for every game, but rather to provide you with ideas for the types of sections you might want to include. Your game and its design should dictate the format you use for your own document, not this outline.

1. **Design History**  
   A design document is a continuously changing reference tool. Most of your teammates won’t have time to read the whole document over and over again every time that a new version is released, so it is good to alert them to any significant modifications or updates that you have made. As you can see, each version will have its own section where you list the major changes made in that iteration. If you use a wiki, this section will be replaced by the editing history feature of the software. This makes it simple and effortless to track changes to the document and to backtrack changes if it becomes necessary.
   1. Version 1.0
   2. Version 2.0
      1. Version 2.1
      2. Version 2.2
   3. Version 3.0
2. **Vision statement**  
   This is where you state your vision for the game. It is typically about 500 words long. Try to capture the essence of your game and convey this to the reader in as compelling and accurate a way as possible.
   1. **Game logline**  
      In one sentence, describe your game.
   2. **Gameplay synopsis**  
      Describe how your game plays and what the user experiences. Try to keep it concise—no more than a couple of pages. You might want to reference some or all of the following topics:

Uniqueness:  
What makes your game unique?

Mechanics:  
How does the game function? What is the core play mechanic?

Setting:  
What is the setting for your game: the Wild West, the moon, medieval times?

Look and feel:  
Give a summary of the look and feel of the game.

1. **Audience, Platform, and Marketing**
   1. **Target audience**  
      Who will buy your game? Describe the demo- graphic you are targeting, including age, gender, and geographic locations.
   2. **Platform**  
      What platform or platforms will your game run on? Why did you choose these platforms?
   3. **System requirements**  
      System requirements might limit your audience, especially on the PC, where the hardware varies widely. Describe what is required to play the game and why those choices were made.
   4. **Top performers**  
      List other top-selling games in the same market. Provide sales figures, release dates, information on sequels and platforms, as well as brief descriptions of each title.
   5. **Feature comparison**  
      Compare your game to the competition. Why would a consumer purchase your game over the others?
2. **Gameplay**
   1. **Overview**  
      This is where you describe the core gameplay. This should tie directly into your physical or software prototype. Use your prototype as the model, and give an overview of how it functions.
   2. **Gameplay description**  
      Provide a detailed description of how the game functions.
   3. **Controls**  
      Map out the game procedures and controls. Use visual aids if possible, like control tables and flowcharts, along with detailed descriptions.
      1. **Interfaces**   
         Create wireframes, a type of functional visualization described on page 400, for every interface the artists will need to create. Each wireframe should include a description of how each interface feature functions. Make sure you detail out the various states for each interface.
      2. **Rules**  
         If you have created a prototype, describing the rules of your game will be much easier. You will need to define all the game objects, concepts, their behaviors, and how they relate to one another in this section.
      3. **Scoring/winning conditions**  
         Describe the scoring system and win conditions. These might be different for single player versus multiplayer or if you have several modes of competition.
   4. **Modes and other features**  
      If your game has different modes of play, such as single and multiplayer modes, or other features that will affect the implementation of the gameplay, you will need to describe them here.
   5. **Levels**  
      The designs for each level should be laid out here. The more detailed the better.
   6. **Flowchart**  
      Create a flowchart showing all the areas and screens that will need to be created.
   7. **Editor**  
      If your game will require the creation of a pro- prietary level editor, describe the necessary features of the editor and any details on its functionality.
      1. Features
      2. Details
3. **Game Characters**
   1. **Character design**  
      This is where you describe any game characters and their attributes.
   2. **Types**
      1. PCs (player characters)
      2. NPCs (nonplayer characters): If your   
         game involves character types, you will need to treat each one as an object, defining its properties and functionality.
         1. Monsters and enemies
         2. Friends and allies
         3. Neutral
         4. Other types
         5. Guidelines
         6. Traits
         7. Behavior
         8. AI
4. **Story**
   1. **Synopsis**  
      If your game includes a story, summarize it here. Keep it down to one or two paragraphs.
   2. **Complete story**  
      This is your chance to outline the entire story. Do so in a way that mirrors the gameplay. Do not just tell your story, but structure it so that it unfolds as the game progresses.
   3. **Backstory**  
      Describe any important elements of your story that do not tie directly into the gameplay. Much of this might not actually make it into the game, but it might be good to have it for reference.
   4. **Narrative devices**  
      Describe the various ways in which you plan to reveal the story. What are the devices you plan to use to tell the story?
   5. **Subplots**  
      Because games are not linear like books and movies, there might be numerous smaller stories interwoven into the main story. Describe each of these subplots and explain how they tie into the gameplay and the master plot.
      1. Subplot #1
      2. Subplot #2
5. **The Game World**   
   If your game involves the creation of a world, you need to go into detail on all aspects of that world.
   1. Overview
   2. Key locations
   3. Travel
   4. Mapping
   5. Scale
   6. Physical objects
   7. Weather conditions
   8. Day and night
   9. Time
   10. Physics
   11. Society/culture
6. **Media List**   
   List all of the media that will need to be produced. The specifics of your game will dictate what categories you need to include. Be detailed with this list, and create a file naming convention up front. This can avoid a lot of confusion later on.
   1. Interface assets
   2. Environments
   3. Characters
   4. Animation
   5. Music and sound effects
7. **Technical Spec**  
   As mentioned, the technical spec is not always included in the design document. Often it is a separate document prepared in conjunction with the design document. This spec is prepared by the technical lead on the project.
   1. **Technical analysis**
      1. **New technology**  
         Is there any new technology that you plan on developing for this game? If so, describe it in detail.
      2. **Major software development tasks**  
         Do you need to do a lot of software development for the game to work? Or are you simply going to license someone else’s engine or use a preexisting engine that you have created?
      3. **Risks**  
         What are the risks inherent in your strategy?
      4. **Alternatives**  
         Are there any alternatives that can lower the risks and the cost?
      5. **Estimated resources required**  
         Describe the resources you would need to develop the new technology and software needed for the game.
   2. **Development platform and tools**  
      Describe the development platform, as well as any software tools and hardware that are required to produce the game.
      1. Software
      2. Hardware
   3. **Delivery**  
      How do you plan to deliver this game? On DVD, over the Internet, on wireless devices? What is required to accomplish this?
      1. Required hardware and software
      2. Required materials
   4. Game engine
      1. **Technical Specs**  
         What are the specs of your game engine?
      2. **Design**  
         Describe the design of your game engine.
         1. Features
         2. Details
      3. **Collision detection**  
         If your game involves collision detection, how does it work?
         1. Features
         2. Details
   5. **Interface technical specs**  
      This is where you describe how your interface is designed from a technical perspective. What tools do you plan to use, and how will it function?
      1. Features
      2. Details
   6. **Controls’ technical specs**  
      This is where you describe how your controls work from a technical perspective. Are you planning on supporting any unusual input devices that would require specialized programming?
      1. Features
      2. Details
   7. **Lighting models**  
      Lighting can be a substantial part of a game. Describe how it works and the features that you require.
      1. Modes
         1. Features
         2. Details
      2. Models
      3. Light sources
   8. **Rendering system**   
      Rendering is a big part of games these days, and the more details you can provide, the better.
      1. Technical specs
      2. 2D/3D rendering
      3. Camera
         1. Operation
         2. Features
         3. Details
   9. **Internet/network spec**  
      If your game requires the use of the Internet, LANs, or wireless networks, you should make the specs clear.
   10. **System parameters**  
       We won’t go into detail on all the possible system parameters, but suffice to say that the design document should list them all and describe their functionality.
       1. Max players
       2. Servers
       3. Customization
       4. Connectivity
       5. Web sites
       6. Persistence
       7. Saving games
       8. Loading games
   11. **Other**  
       This section is for any other technical specifications that should be included, such as help menus, manuals, setup and installation routines, etc.
       1. Help
       2. Manual
       3. Setup

We want to emphasize that the previous outline is merely a list of suggested topics that might need to be addressed to communicate your design. Every game will have its own specific needs, and the organization of your design document should reflect these needs.

Under each of the sections in your design document, you need to answer all the questions that a team member might have. For example, the character designs section would include drawings and a description of each character in the game, while the levels section would include not only the intended gameplay for each level but explanations of any story elements that would be found in each level.