

MANUAL 1 OF 3

This card set is designed to guide game developers through the development process of a game. It contains methods, rules, tasks and questions which inspire you to create games with a joyful and relaxing experience for the players.

Please read the manual to understand the terminology and the overall idea of this set.

- 1. The main idea of this set is to provide game developers with a guide which helps them through the development process.*
- 2. This set contains five topics. Each card is colored in their respective topic: Pre-Production (Pink) / Interval (Blue) / Meditative (Green) / Post-Production (Orange) / Others (Gray)*



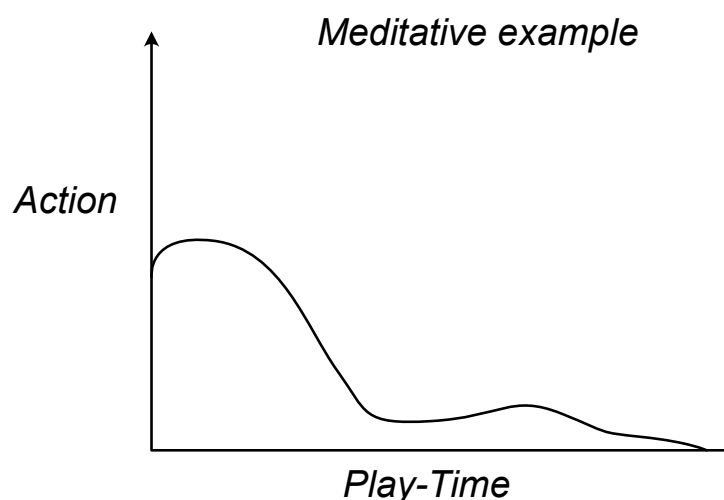
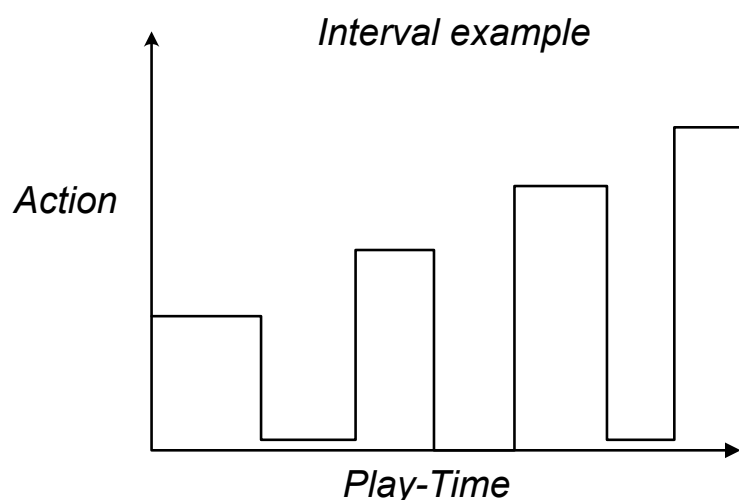
- 3. Each topic contains task cards and their respective tool cards. A task card gives you a task to fulfill. The tool cards presents methods, rules or questions which you can answer to accomplish said task. Task cards have a title which are underlined. Both are marked with the equal amount of the same symbols on the bottom. As a rule you can: use all the tool cards to fulfill a task, shuffle the tool card and pick a number or choose which tool you want to use to fulfill the respective task. Some task cards will explicitly demand you to use all the tool cards.*



- 4. The cards are numbered with symbols in the bottom. The amount of symbols indicate the progression of the process. Feel free to skip cards which you think are not helpful.*
- 5. In addition to this card set you need: pen & paper, your computer, dice (or a dice-app).*
- 6. This set was carefully created to help other game developers. Every feedback helps the community: mail@malben.ch*
- 7. After reading the manual start with the first card of the "PRE-PRODUCTION" topic called "GAME IDEA". Prepare pen and paper.*

MANUAL II

The two topics "Meditative" and "Interval" are the core of this set. I defined these terms as a result from my researches of different games. I'm talking here about a curve which represent in an abstract way the interaction of players and games (or more specifically a level of a game) through time.



Games which contain an **interval**-curve have an alternate order between action (i.e. more enemies, difficult puzzles, drama in a story line, music tenses up, "aggressive" visuals etc.) and relaxation (i.e. player walks around knowing nothing is going to happen, save points, story changes to a friendly mood, music is friendlier, visuals communicate that the player is safe etc.). Usually the curve rises with each challenge in your game higher, since the player masters your game better.

Examples of games with an **interval** curve are: Journey (Jumping and maneuvering character through levels are tension, storytelling and end of a level are relaxation) Dark Souls (Bonfires are safe spaces where the players relax, enemies and maneuvering character through levels are tension), Fortnite (Shooting and defending creates tension in players, exploring and collecting is relaxing).

Games which contain a **meditative** curve give the players usually full control over the game, avoid time pressure, don't include "aggressive" enemies, are open ended, focus often on exploring and creating etc. The players have through the whole game a relaxing experience.

Examples of games with a **meditative** curve are: Universe Sandbox (you can create and destroy whatever you want whenever you want), Sims (You can create and choose your life), Everything (you can be everything, and don't have time pressure).

Some games can also contain **both** curve types. It appears if the game presents a main challenge (collect a certain amount of money until day X) and let's the players manage how they want to achieve that (farming, fishing, fighting, interact with other NPC's). It can also appear if a game has the overall curve structure of a main curve but offers the players side games which have the opposite curve structure (main game interval: collect all badges by fighting with your monsters against other NPC's. side game meditative: take care of the monsters by petting and feeding them whenever you want).

Examples of games which contain **both** curve types: Stardew Valley (each day can be played in a meditative or a interval way) Pokémon (fight other trainers, you can take care of your pokémon), Minecraft (defeat the game by building, fighting and mining or create whatever you want)

Although the curves can have different shapes, they're usually distinguishable.

MANUAL 3 OF 3

Find here some terms and definitions

Game Mechanic

Is the core of your gameplay. It's what is left when all of the visuals, story and sound are stripped away. It is usually what the player must do to progress the game. I will list some games and their core mechanics:

Final Fantasy - Fighting

Call of Duty - Shooting

Civilization - Choosing the right strategy

Chess - Placing the figures accordingly

Minecraft - Crafting

Some games have multiple mechanics:

Pokémon - core mechanic: fighting - side mechanics: petting, puzzle, beauty contests

Catherine - core mechanic: solving puzzles - side mechanics: dialogue

Papers please - core mechanic: examine documents - side mechanics: taking care of family

Prototype

A prototype is a playable concept of your game. It's like a first sketch of a car which is going to be redrawn, build as a model and constructed until you have the finished product. The prototypes in this case are all the sketches and models until the you have the finished car. All sketches, paper models and digital versions of your game are prototypes.

Interval

"A space between objects, points, or units, especially when making uniform amounts of separation." (Wordnik, 16.04.2020)

Interval in this set means the interrelation between high to low amount of interaction between players and game.

Game experience

"I define "game experience" as the mental and therefore subjective experience that is created by a particular game." (Games and Rules)

This can be anything: Traveling in a bus with your friends, racing with your office chair against others, answering spam mails, waking up at 1 p.m. on a sunny Sunday afternoon etc.

Moodboard

"A mood board is a type of visual presentation or a collage consisting of images, text, and samples of objects in a composition. It can be based upon a set topic or can be any material chosen at random. A mood board can be used to convey a general idea or feeling about a particular topic." (Wikipedia, 16.04.2020)

Iteration

Iteration is the loop of your process.

GAME IDEA

Start by brainstorming multiple game ideas.

Following cards contain methods for generating ideas.

Pick 1 card.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Combine 2 or 3 games with different mechanics.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Take any game and change its setting, gameplay or story.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Find a game mechanic by combining two or more non-related professions with each other.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Think of a problem that some people have in their lives and create a fun or silly solution to it.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Get inspired by visuals, books, music, other games, news, history, culture, religion, science, food, hobbies etc.



PRE-PRODUCTION

EXPERIENCE

Write down keywords to all the things the player should experience in your game.

Complete the sentences of at least 2 of the following cards



PRE-PRODUCTION

„The players should experience....“



PRE-PRODUCTION

After the game the players should say „This game was...“



PRE-PRODUCTION

Find the intended experience through exclusion „The players should NOT experience...“



PRE-PRODUCTION

Find references in books, movies or other games with a similar experience. "This game is similar to..."



PRE-PRODUCTION

PROTOTYPE

Time to create your prototype.

Get a pen, paper, dice and try to create your game on an abstract level.

Play your prototype multiple times. Following cards contain ideas on how to improve the mechanic.

Pick 3 cards



PRE-PRODUCTION

Get some inspiration from other games with similar mechanics.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Adjust and/or create rules that enhance your ideal game experience.

Try to change one rule at a time to see the difference.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Playtest as early and often as you can with other people. Ideally with your target audience.

Note their feedback.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Move on to a different prototype with another idea if you find yourself stuck and then later go back through all your ideas.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Make a multiplayer game out of your idea if your game is for single players and vice versa to find some new mechanics.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Make the punishment in your prototype as extreme as possible to figure out what element truly contain fun.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Write 20 random settings on a paper.

Roll a D20 die.

Pick this setting for your prototype and adjust the rules to fit the experience of this setting.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Create side mechanics to which have the purpose to fulfill the core mechanic of your game.



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PRE-PRODUCTION

IMPROVE IDEA

The next step is to focus on the essence of your idea. Answer all questions on the following cards to improve your prototype.



PRE-PRODUCTION

What is the core mechanic of the game?
(Jumping, Shooting, Interaction, Crafting...)



PRE-PRODUCTION

What is the core experience you want to communicate? Try to find only one word for it.



PRE-PRODUCTION

How does the experience fit the core mechanic? If it doesn't fit, ask yourself what changes you have to perform to get this symbiosis between: mechanic and wished experience.



PRE-PRODUCTION

Who is the target audience for this experience / game?



PRE-PRODUCTION

What is the best target device for this experience?



PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE VS. INTERVAL

Take pen & paper and draw a Time / Action coordinate.

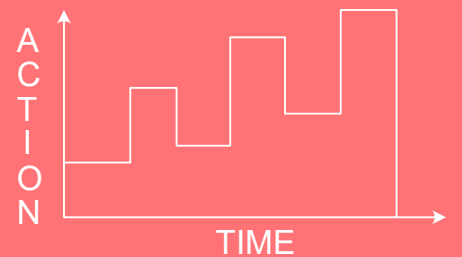
Now draw a curve which represents the gameplay of your prototype.

Following cards contain different types of curves. Find the most one similar to yours and note its property.



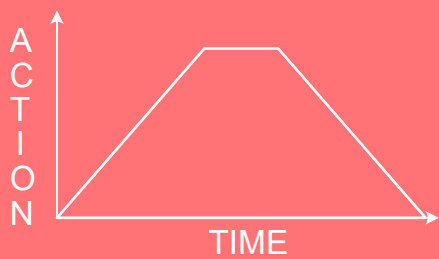
PRE-PRODUCTION

INTERVAL - 01



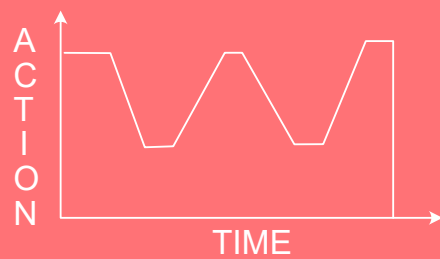
PRE-PRODUCTION

INTERVAL - 02



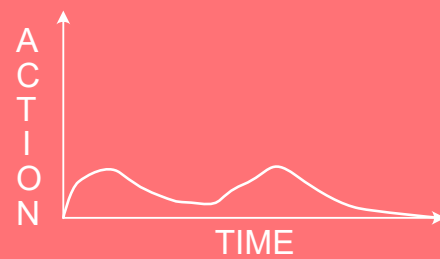
PRE-PRODUCTION

INTERVAL - 03



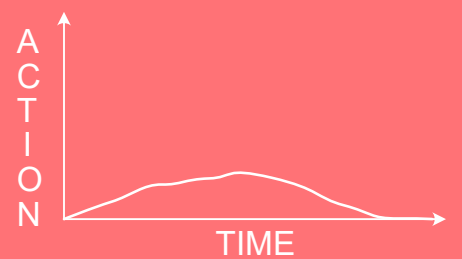
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE - 01



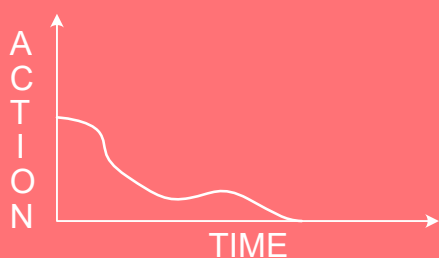
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE - 02



PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE - 03



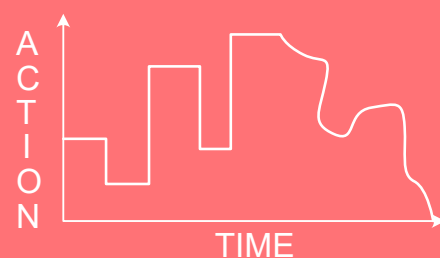
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE
+
INTERVAL
01



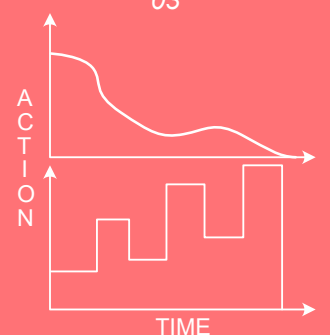
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE
+
INTERVAL
02



PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE
+
INTERVAL
03



PRE-PRODUCTION

KNOW YOUR CLIENTS

It's time to make some marketing research.

The purpose of the research is to get to know your target audience, get inspired by other games and to find the right strategy to present your game.

The following cards present some general advice to this topic. Use all cards.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Create a spreadsheet of all similar games you can find. Note things like, genre, download statistics, console, curve-type, price, user commentary, web presence, color palette and other things which are important for your game.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Meet your target audience, and talk with them about your game. Get inspired by their ideas and input.

Playtest with them your prototype.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Refine your prototype with the new-found Information.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Roll a D20 die.

Note X selling points of your game where X is the amount of your die.

Choose the most popular unique selling point.

PRE-PRODUCTION

CHECKLIST

☐ I / We have a game idea

☐ I / We defined the experience of your game

☐ I / We have a working prototype

☐ I / We determined whether the game has an interval a meditative or a combination of both curves.

☐ I / We made some marketing research about the audience and similar games

The following card represents the approach.

PRE-PRODUCTION

PLAN

Create new game idea

Define Experience

Create Prototype

Improve Idea

Draw Curve

Marketing Research

Create another game idea

Improve idea with new findings

PRE-PRODUCTION

NEXT STEP

Continue with the next set of cards based on your Time-Action curve.

If you have a game with an interval curve, use the interval card set, otherwise use the meditative card set.

If your game has both curves, use both sets.

PRE-PRODUCTION

PRE-PRODUCTION

PRE-PRODUCTION

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PRE-PRODUCTION

2 GAME STATES

There are two states in a game with an interval curve. Action & Relaxation.

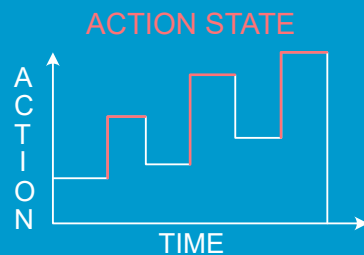
Read all following cards to understand these states.



MEDITATIVE

Action state

The players experience action, the play in the game increases intensity, music pushes the players faster, core game mechanic is activated, story gets dramatic, players tense their bodies and minds.



MEDITATIVE

The action state is a state where players get activated through game mechanic, story, sound, visuals etc.

The action curve in an action state should progressively increase, and stay at its peak for a certain amount of time before it decreases again.

The skill level of the players has to be in proportion to the challenge of the game to create an enjoyable game experience.



MEDITATIVE

Possible methods to increase the action

- Place more enemies / hazards
- Set a timer
- Give the players a handicap
- Build up the drama with sound / visuals / story...
- Combination of the options above.



MEDITATIVE

Relaxation state

The players know they're safe, the color palette and sounds are calming, the story reduces drama and action, the core game mechanic reduces or changes, players experience relaxation and have time to take a break.



MEDITATIVE

The relaxation state is the condition in which players have a moment to rest because of a change to the pace of the story, sound, visuals etc. It's contrary to the action state.

The relaxation state can offer either a break from the action state and / or give the players the opportunity to prepare for the next action state.

Let the players decide when they want to enter the next action state.

The relaxation state should offer: time to reflect on their experience, a timeless and punishment free safe space, a moment to explore and enjoy.



MEDITATIVE

Possible methods to increase relaxation

- Play relaxing music
- Build humor in your story
- Change the color palette to friendly colors
- Let the players have a break from the main mechanic
- Open and big rooms



MEDITATIVE

Game Devs have to alternate and balance between these two states to intensify the game experience. Players relax through each relaxation state more.

Interval curves can look differently for each game but they usually all intensify through the whole game.



MEDITATIVE

MOODBOARDS

Create mood boards of your game.

Catch the essence of the experience in a couple of pictures.

The following cards contain some advice for the mood boards.

Pick at least 1 card.



MEDITATIVE

Create 3 mood board types: The first one for the overall look and feel, the second one shows the game in an action state, the third mood board shows the game in a relaxing state.



MEDITATIVE

Focus on 2-5 main color types for your game. Assign those colors to the action and relaxation state.



MEDITATIVE

Note rules which you respect throughout the design process such as shapes, light, camera view etc.



MEDITATIVE

DIGITAL PROTOTYPE

If you're creating a digital game, make a simple box prototype of your current game idea.

Following cards contain suggestions on this topic.

Use all cards.



MEDITATIVE

Create your first prototype with simple shapes and sprites in simple colors as placeholders. Your first goal is to have a playable prototype as quick as possible.



MEDITATIVE

Don't worry if your code is not optimized at the moment, you can improve it later on.



MEDITATIVE

If the project is big, break it down in sections to get faster results.



MEDITATIVE

BEAT CHART

Create a beat chart of your game.

A beat chart is a document which includes all the information about the things that happen in one level.

Following cards contain instructions to create a beat chart. Use all cards.



1.

Create a chart with the important topics of your game such as:

- State (action / relaxation)
- Level (Level-02)
- Events in the level (AI talks to Pl.)
- What happens story-wise
- In-game time (At morning)
- Estimated playtime (20min)
- Music (Track X)
- Wished experience (Relaxes)
- Color palette (Green / Blue)
- Mechanics (Pl. learns jumping)
- Rewards / Punishment
- Enemies (Boss enemy 02)



2.

Fill this chart with information of your game and try to create a balance between action and relaxation state. Offer the players the same amount of time for both states. (i.e. Action State ≈ 10min Relaxation State Action State ≈ 8min)



3.

The beat chart is your guide. It helps you to keep track of the game progress and to make better decisions.



ITERATE

Continue your prototype and iterate as often as possible to achive your optimal game experience.

Replace the box prototypes, create sound, story and visuals for your game, balance your time action curve and playtest it again.



CHECKLIST

- ☐ I / We created Moodboards for the different states
- ☐ I / We created a digital prototype
- ☐ I / We created a beat chart



NEXT STEP

If you have a game with both curve types, continue to the "Meditative" set

otherwise

Take the "Post-Production" set.



MEDITATIVE

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MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE STATE

The meditative state is a state of constant relaxation. The game does not contain tension but lets the player create them.

Read the next card which shows the characteristics of those games.



POST-PRODUCTION

The characteristics of those games are:

- Giving the players full control over the gameplay.
- Allowing the players to create and / or explore at their own pace. (Sims, Stardew Valley, Everything)
- a calming atmosphere.
- They usually don't have a by Game Dev narrated time / action curve.



POST-PRODUCTION

MOODBOARDS

Create mood boards of your game.

Catch the essence of the experience in a couple of pictures.

Flip the card to find some advices on mood boards.

Pick at least 2 cards.



POST-PRODUCTION

Create a mood board for the overall look & feel of your game.



POST-PRODUCTION

Focus on 2-5 main color types for your game.



POST-PRODUCTION

Make note of the rules which you respect throughout the design process such as shapes, light, camera view etc.



POST-PRODUCTION

Create an early mood board for the sound.



POST-PRODUCTION

DIGITAL PROTOTYPE

If you're creating a digital game, make a simple box prototype of your current game idea.

The following cards contain suggestions on this topic.

Use all cards.



POST-PRODUCTION

Create your first prototype with simple shapes and sprites in simple colors as placeholders. The first goal is to have a playable prototype as quick as possible.



POST-PRODUCTION

Don't worry if your code is not optimized at the moment, you can improve it later on.



POST-PRODUCTION

If the project is big, break it down in sections to get faster results.



POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

BEAT CHART

Create a beat chart of your game.

A beat chart is a document which includes all the information about the things that happen in one level.

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POST-PRODUCTION

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- Level (Level-02)
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- What happens story-wise
- In-game time (At morning)
- Estimated playtime (20min)
- Music (Track X)
- Wished experience (Relaxes)
- Color palette (Green / Blue)
- Mechanics (Pl. learns jumping)
- Rewards / Punishment
- Enemies (Boss enemy 02)



POST-PRODUCTION

2.

Fill this chart with information of your game and try to create a balance between action and relaxation state. Offer the players the same amount of time for both states. (i.e. Action State ≈ 10min Relaxation State Action State ≈ 8min)



POST-PRODUCTION

3.

The beat chart is your guide. It helps you to keep track of the game progress and to make better decisions.



POST-PRODUCTION

EXCLUDE

Games with a meditative Experience have some commonalities.

Read all following cards to avoid stress factors in your game.

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

Aggressive enemies.

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

Time pressure.

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

Lack of information in form of:

- not enough light
- bad tutorial
- unclear story elements
- no feedback
- unreadable graphics
- untraceable sound

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

No rewards and/or excessive punishment.

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

Unsuitable genres like:

- Fast pace action shooter
- Horror
- Action
- Survival
- Fighting games
- Tower defense
- Party

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

Toxic community.

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

Elements which trigger continuous negative emotions such as:

- Fear
- Rage
- Grief
- Loathing
- Boredom
- Disgust
- Annoyance

★★★★★

POST-PRODUCTION

INCLUDE

Games with a meditative Experience have some commonalities.

Read the following cards to include stress reducing methods in your game.

Pick 3 cards.

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

Friendly color palettes and shapes

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

Relaxing soundscape

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

Positive story

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

High degree of control over their gameplay.

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

The option to save whenever the player wants.

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

Big and open play fields

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

Open endings. Let the players continue playing your game after they finished the main campaign.

⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋⌋

POST-PRODUCTION

CURVE

Once you have a functional prototype, coordinate the pace of action in your game.

Draw an time-action curve of your gameplay.

Pick 2 cards and answer the questions.



Do you or your target audience feel relaxed after playing the game?



Did you or did your target audience create a "flowy" experience by yourselves?



Did you or your target audience have full control over your game?



How would you / does your target audience draw this curve?



What in your game did cause stress for your playtesters?



MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE

ITERATE

Continue your prototype and iterate as often as possible to achive your optimal game experience.

Replace the box prototypes, create sound, story and visuals for your game, balance your time action curve and playtest it again.



CHECKLIST

- ☐ I / We created Moodboards
- ☐ I / We created a digital prototype
- ☐ I / We created a beat chart



NEXT STEP

If you have a game with both curve types, continue to the "INTERVAL PRODUCTION" set

otherwise

Take the "Post-Production" set.



MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE

LEAVING THE GAME

Try to relax the players after a play session.

Following cards contain methods to this topic.

Pick 1 card.



POST-PRODUCTION

Design saving and save spots in your game, as relaxing as possible.



POST-PRODUCTION

Let the players leave with a positive feeling of achievement.



POST-PRODUCTION

Communicate positively with the players or their character before they leave.



POST-PRODUCTION

AFTER THE GAME

Creating a relaxing experience after the game can be quite challenging.

Following cards contain methods to achieve this experience.

Pick 1 card.



POST-PRODUCTION

Try to implement a relaxing method or an experience in your game which players can use in real life (For instance the in game character overcomes stressful situation by breathing calmly)



POST-PRODUCTION

Provide your players with fun memories of your game which bring them joy after playing your game. (i.e. funny situations, cool actions, relaxing places)



POST-PRODUCTION

Create a welcoming community which player may exchange their game experience.



POST-PRODUCTION

BEFORE CONTINUING

After the game is before the game.

Following cards contain ideas on how to relax the players before they continue the game.

Pick 1 card



POST-PRODUCTION

Give the players a summary of their progress.



POST-PRODUCTION

Give your players a warm welcome and let them continue in a safe zone.



POST-PRODUCTION

Don't overwhelm them with informations immediately after starting the game.



POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

RELEASE

*It's time to release your
game!*

*Use all following cards to
get the last pieces of
advice.*

♥♥♥♥

POST-PRODUCTION

*Use all following cards to
get the last pieces of
advice.*



Choose a creative name for your game. Make sure to look up if the name is not already taken.



Create a sales pitch by using the intended experience of your game.

♥♥♥♥

POST-PRODUCTION



Be careful about releasing your game on multiple platforms. Multiple releases means higher maintenance for your community.

♥♥♥♥

POST-PRODUCTION



*Don't forget to provide
your community with a
bug-fixing service for
your game.*

*They will be thankful for
it.*

♥♥♥♥

POST-PRODUCTION



Some players will love your game, some will hate it with a burning passion. Try to develop a thick skin and take each critic serious to become better as a developer.



A while after releasing your game take some time off and analyze your process.



CONGRATULATIONS

You made it!

*Answer the last question
on the next card.*

★★★★★
POST-PRODUCTION

Answer the last question
on the next card.



Restart?

★★★★★
POST-PRODUCTION



OTHERS

The following cards contain general methods, tips or advice for the production of your game.

You can pick a card whenever you like.



*Don't be afraid to use references for your game.
Take a good look at the visual presentation, story, and rhythm of both relaxing and action interval examples.*



Choose your device carefully, some games suit certain devices better than others.



Everybody gets stuck once in a while during game production. Take a couple of steps back and focus on the main experience you want to create before you make any new decisions.



Write summaries of things which are working great during your production. This pool of knowledge will help you on your next game.



Try to work with people which share the same vision of your game. It is okay to have different opinions in executing them but it is important to focus on the main goal of your project.



Try to stay relaxed during the production of the game.



If you have a disagreement in your team regarding a design decision: try all options out in a smaller scale and playtest it with other people.



MULTIPLAYER

Creating a multiplayer game can be challenging.

Use all cards if you're creating a multiplayer game / section in your game.



Players can act unpredictable in games. This might disturb the experience you try to communicate. Find methods to keep the players in check.



Toxic players can destroy the overall joy of your game. Manage your community as early as possible to create a warm and welcoming culture.



Co-op games are more advantageous for friendly experiences than competitive games.



MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE

MEDITATIVE