

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 six topics. Each card is colored in their respective topic: Pre-Production (Pink) / Interval-Production (Blue) / Meditative-Production (Green) / Post-Game (Purple) / Post-Production (Orange) / Others (Gray)



3. Each topic contains quest cards and their respective toolcards. A quest card gives you a task to fulfill. The tool cards presents methods, rules or questions which you can answer to accomplish said task. Quest 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 Quest 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.

Special Thanks to Larissa Wild for the Illustrations.

This toolkit was created at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK).

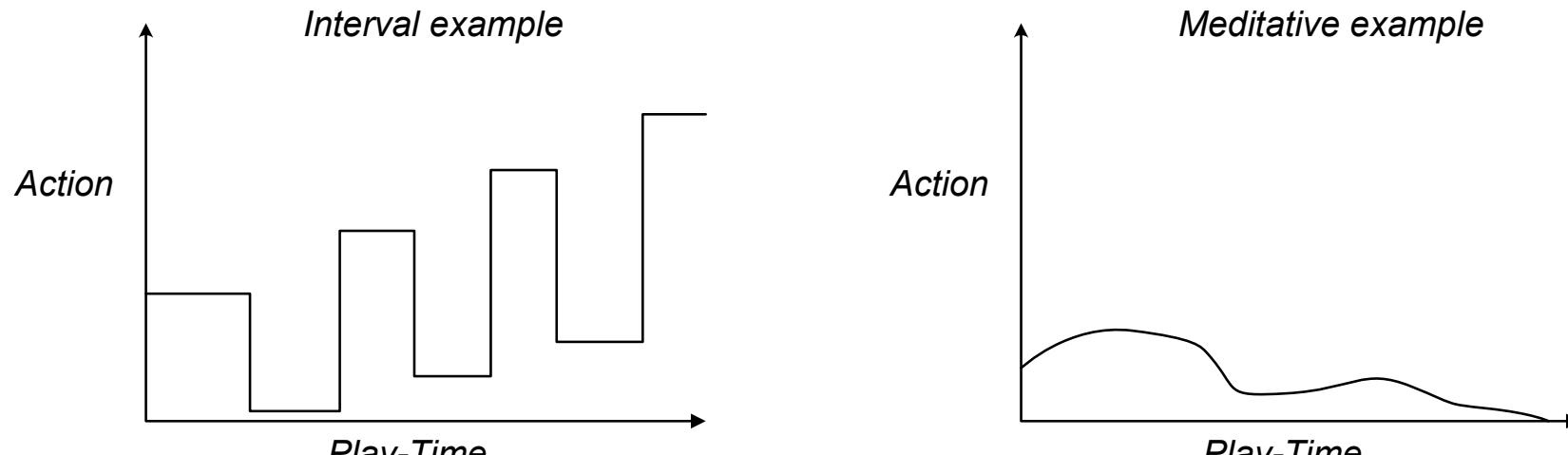
Z

hdK

Zürcher Hochschule der Künste
Zurich University of the Arts

MANUAL 2 OF 3

The topics "Meditative" and "Interval" are the core of this set. I defined these terms as a result of my research of different games. Here you can see two graphs which represent in an abstract way the interaction between 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, since the player gets better at playing your game.

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 usually give the players 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 a relaxing experience throughout the whole game.

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).

Games can also contain **both** curve types. This is the case 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 one curve type but offers the players side games which have the opposite curve structure (i.e. main game interval-curve: collect all badges by fighting with your monsters against other NPC's. side game meditative-curve: 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 wahtever you want)

Although the curves can have different shapes, they are 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 - Turn based placing of figures

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. A paper-prototype is the game idea using only paper, dice and pen. Paper-prototypes are used to see if a game mechanic works.

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.



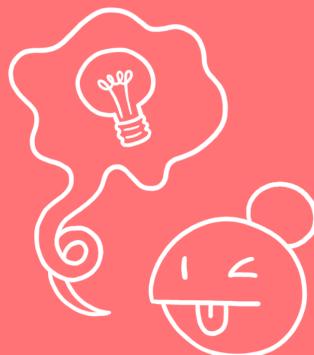
PRE-PRODUCTION

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

„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.

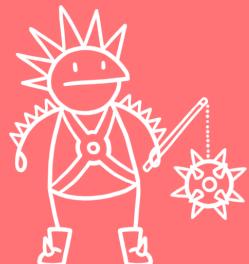


PRE-PRODUCTION

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 elements are really 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 mini mechanics which players have to solve before playing with the core mechanic of your game.

PRE-PRODUCTION

MULTIPLAYER

Creating a multiplayer game can be challenging.

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

PRE-PRODUCTION

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



PRE-PRODUCTION

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



PRE-PRODUCTION

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



PRE-PRODUCTION

PRE-PRODUCTION

PRE-PRODUCTION

PRE-PRODUCTION

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

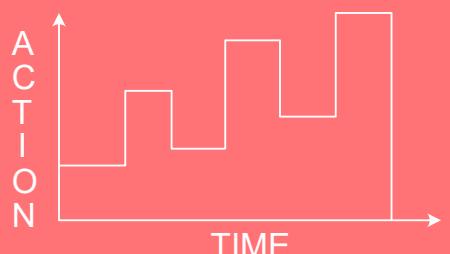
Take pen & paper and draw a Time / Action coordinate.

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.

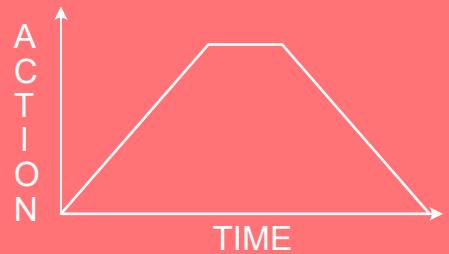
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PRE-PRODUCTION

INTERVAL - 01



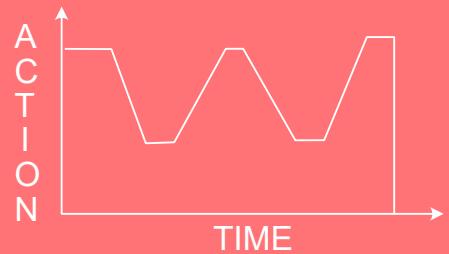
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PRE-PRODUCTION

INTERVAL - 02



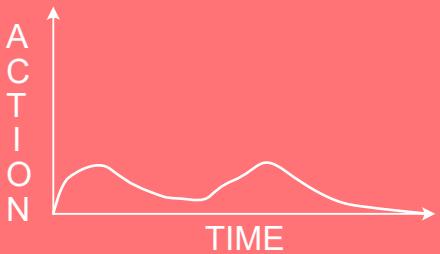
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
PRE-PRODUCTION

INTERVAL - 03



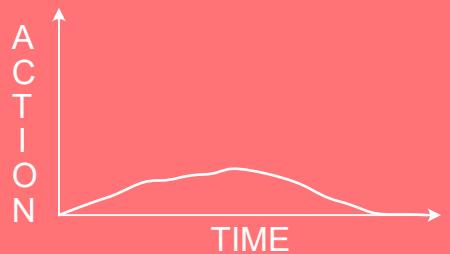
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE - 01



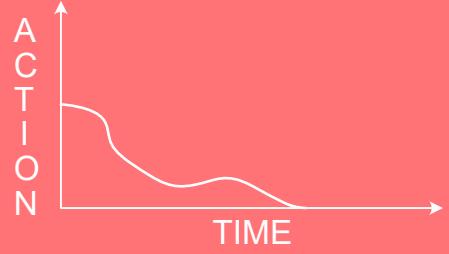
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE - 02



○ ○ ○ ○ ○
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE - 03



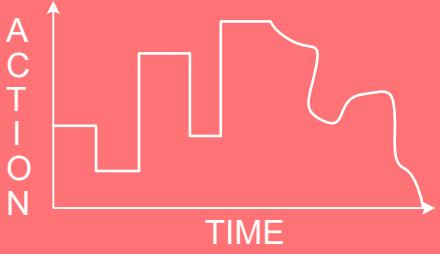
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
PRE-PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE +
INTERVAL
01



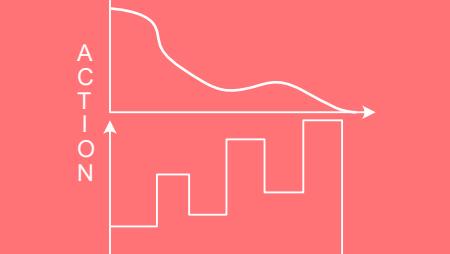
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
PRE-PRODUCTION

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

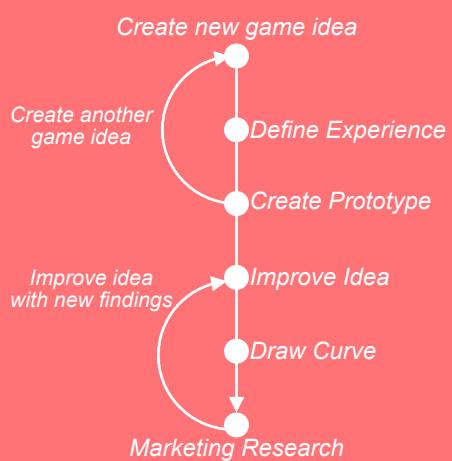
- I / We have a game idea
- I / We defined the experience of your game
- I / We have a working prototype
- I / We determined whether the game has an interval a meditative or a combination of both curves.
- I / We made some marketing research about the audience and similar games

The following card represents the approach.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

PRE-PRODUCTION

PLAN



◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

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

PRE-PRODUCTION

PRE-PRODUCTION

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PRE-PRODUCTION

PRE-PRODUCTION

2 GAME STATES

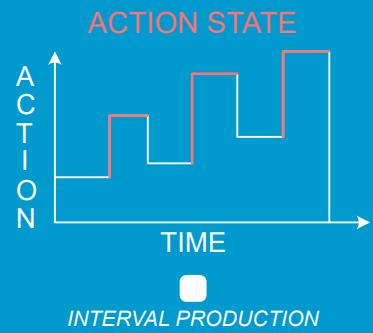
Games with an interval curve name two states: Action and Relaxation

Read all following cards to understand these states.

INTERVAL PRODUCTION

Action state

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



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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.

INTERVAL PRODUCTION

Possible methods to increase the action

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

INTERVAL PRODUCTION

Relaxation state

The players know they are 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.



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

The relaxation state is the state 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 save space, a moment to explore and enjoy.

INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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/spaces

INTERVAL PRODUCTION

Game Devs have to alternate and balance between these two states to intensify the game experience. Find in your references the two states to get inspired.

Interval curves can look differently for each game but they usually all intensify during the course of a game.

INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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.



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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.



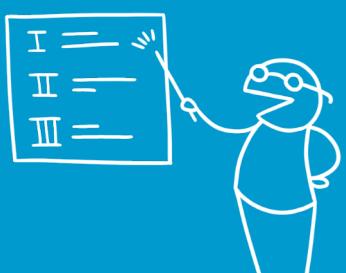
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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.



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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



INTERVAL PRODUCTION

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



INTERVAL 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.

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

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

(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)
- Wanted experience (Relaxes)
- Color palette (Green / Blue)
- Mechanics (Pl. learns jumping)
- Rewards / Punishment
- Enemies (Boss enemy 02)

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

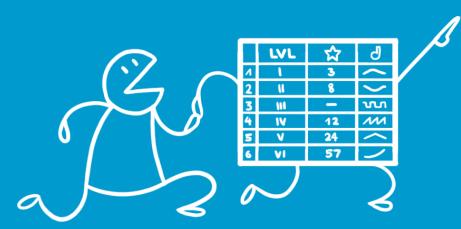
(2)

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)

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

(3)

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



♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

ITERATE

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

Replace the boxes in your prototype, create sound, story and visuals for your game, balance your time-action curve and playtest it again.

★★★★★
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

CHECKLIST

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

★★★★★
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

NEXT STEP

If you have a game with both curve types, continue with the "MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION" set
otherwise
take the "POST-PRODUCTION" set.

★★★★★
INTERVAL PRODUCTION

EXCLUDE

Games with a meditative Experience have some commonalities.

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

★★★★★
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Aggressive enemies.



★★★★★
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Time pressure.



★★★★★
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Lack of information in form of:

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

★★★★★
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

No rewards and/or excessive punishment.



★★★★★
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Unsuitable genres like:

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

★★★★★
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Toxic community.



★★★★★
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Elements which trigger continuous negative emotions such as:

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

★★★★★
MEDITATIVE 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.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Friendly color palettes and shapes



○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Relaxing soundscape



○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Positive story



○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

High degree of control over the gameplay.



○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

The option to save whenever the player wants.



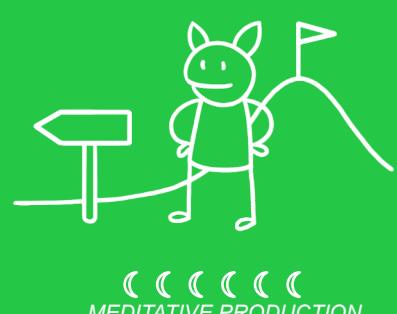
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Big and open play fields



○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

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



○ ○ ○ ○ ○
MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

CURVE

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

Draw a time-action curve of your gameplay.

Pick 2 cards and answer the questions.



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

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



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

Did you or your target audience create a "flowy" experience on their own?



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

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



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

How would you/does your target audience draw the time-action curve?



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

What in your game did cause stress for your play testers?



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

ITERATE

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

Replace the box prototypes, create sound, story and visuals for your game, reduce stress factors and playtest it again.



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

CHECKLIST

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



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

NEXT STEP

If you have a game with both curve types, continue to the "INTERVAL PRODUCTION" set
otherwise
take the "POST-PRODUCTION" set.



MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

MEDITATIVE PRODUCTION

LEAVING THE GAME

Try to relax the players after a play session.

Following cards contain methods to this topic.

Pick 1 card.

POST-GAME

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



Let the players leave with a positive feeling of achievement.



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



POST-GAME

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-GAME

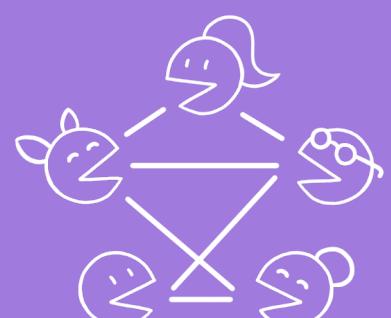
Try to implement a relaxing method or an experience in your game which players can use in real life (For instance the in game character overcomes stressful situation by breathing calmly)

POST-GAME

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

POST-GAME

Create a welcoming community in which players may discuss their game experience.



POST-GAME

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-GAME

Give the players a summary of their progress.



POST-GAME

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



POST-GAME

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



POST-GAME

THE ENDING

Some players feel sad at the end of your game. Especially if you have good written story with great characters.

Following cards contain tips on how to help the players through this time.

Pick 1 card

POST-GAME

Create an "Endless mode".

POST-GAME

Tease the players at the end of the game if you're planing to make a second part.

POST-GAME

Give the players full control over taking the leave. Don't force the ending on them if they're not ready.

POST-GAME

RELEASE

It's time to release your game!

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

POST-PRODUCTION

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



POST-PRODUCTION

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 critique serious to become better as a developer.



POST-PRODUCTION

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



POST-PRODUCTION

Choose the releasedate carefully. You don't want to release your game at the same time as triple-A studios

OO
POST-PRODUCTION

CONGRATULATIONS

You made it!

Answer the last question on the next card.

▲▲▲
POST-PRODUCTION

Restart?

▲▲▲
POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION

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.

OTHERS

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.

OTHERS

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

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.

OTHERS

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

OTHERS

Creating successful games is a fragile process which requires luck.

OTHERS

Try to stay relaxed during the production of the game.

OTHERS

The best way to become a better game developer is to create as many games as possible and to analyze the process.

OTHERS

TEAMS

The following cards contain general methods, tips or advice for team building, organization and teams.

Read all cards.

OO
TEAMS

It's good practice to find a team before brainstorming your first ideas. Everyone who feels involved is more motivated.

OO
TEAMS

It can be hard convincing people to work on an already existing game idea or prototype but you can decide better what people you need for the project.

OO
TEAMS

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 same main goal of your project.

OO
TEAMS

Keep the size of your team as small as possible and as big as necessary. It can be difficult to manage a big team.

OO
TEAMS

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.

OO
TEAMS

Make as early as possible contracts regarding the rights and payment.

OO
TEAMS

Say "Sorry" and "Thanks" once in a while. Usually everybody tries to avoid mistakes and wants to be appreciated for their work.

OO
TEAMS