

The background is a dark blue-grey color. Scattered throughout are several 3D rectangular bars. Each bar has a cyan top face, a yellow front face, and a red side face. They are oriented at various angles, some pointing towards the top-left, some towards the bottom-right, and some horizontally. There are approximately 15 such bars of varying sizes and orientations.

# Production Skills for Game Jams

Connor Hillen @ChillenLD

**LameJam**

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[www.lamejam.com](http://www.lamejam.com)

# Today

- What is production?
- Planning your projects
- Communication, Meeting Effectively

A whiteboard with many colorful sticky notes pinned to it, set against a dark background. The sticky notes are in various colors including blue, green, yellow, orange, and purple. Some are rectangular, some are square, and some are folded. They are scattered across the whiteboard, some overlapping. The whiteboard is mounted on a wall with two circular objects, possibly speakers or lights, on either side. In the foreground, there are some potted plants and a desk.

# Production:

The work that isn't the  
game dev



# Producer Roles

A simplification - there's sub fields!

- **Organize** the game features
- **Schedule** the work
- **Resolve** blockades
- **Advocate** the game
- **Communicate** across the team

In small teams...

- Literally everything besides making the game [citation needed]



Get the **best people**  
working at **their best**

# So what's it Look Like?



In a **game jam** context?

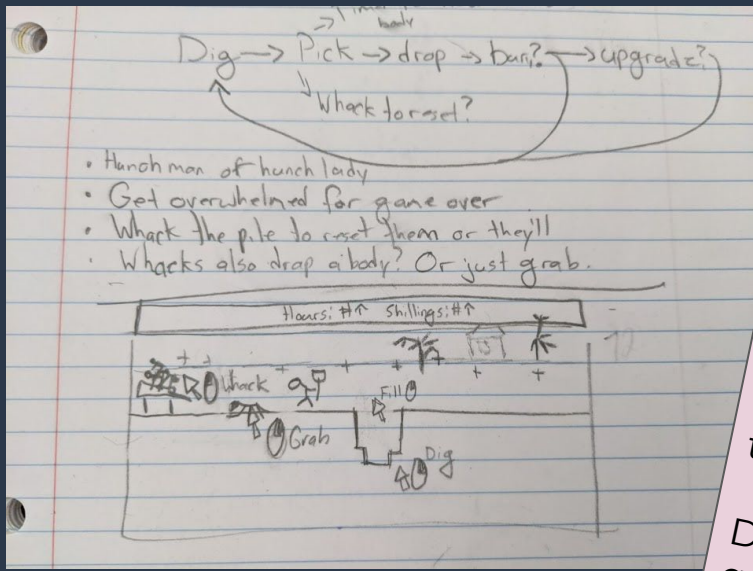
Let's start with **basics** &  
**Talk specifics** later!



**Early Stage:**

Producer as **jam planner**





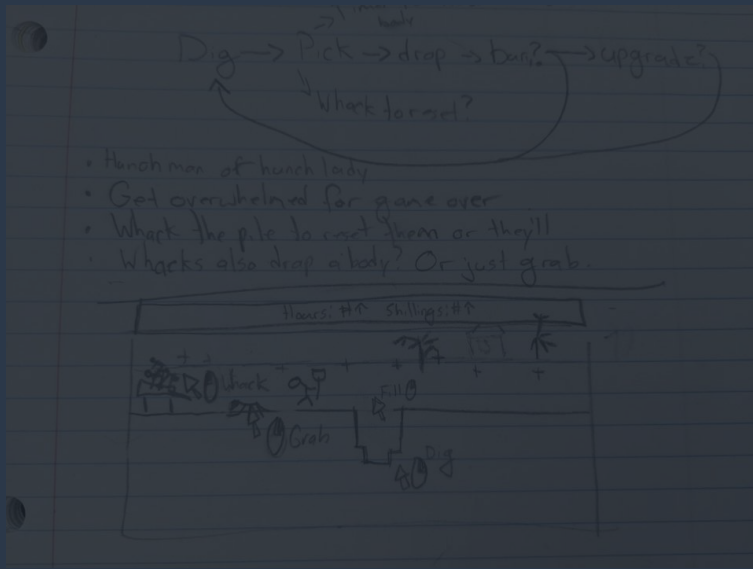
**Brainstorm, Sketch, Focus**

**VERY IMPORTANT!!!**

Make sure the team has the same idea in mind.

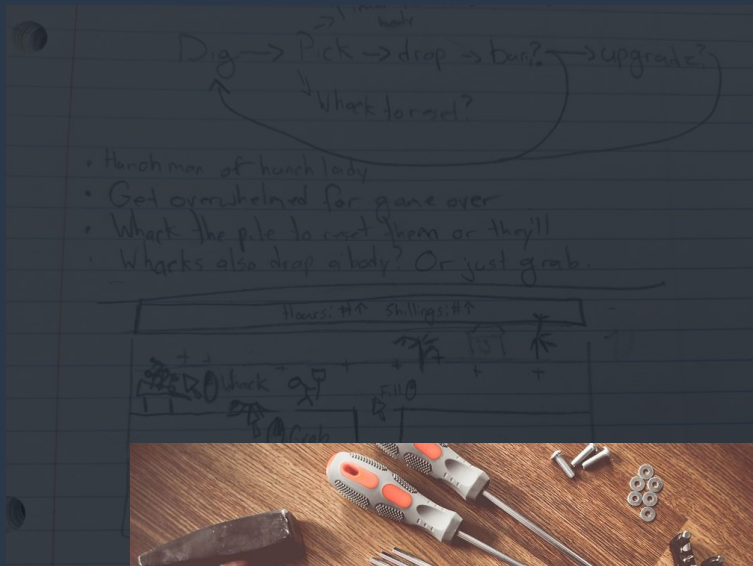
Don't assume. Ask questions.

Write it down. Try it out.



## Feature breakdown, Planning, Scheduling





**Setup shared resources!**  
(Github, Google Drive, Discord, Task Boards)

A dark-colored laptop is shown from a slightly elevated front angle. The screen is filled with a dense, overlapping collage of numerous colorful sticky notes in various shades including blue, green, yellow, red, and purple. The notes are of different sizes and are layered on top of each other, creating a textured, busy appearance. The laptop's keyboard and trackpad are visible below the screen.

# Mid Jam:

Producer as **coach**



**Keep the team healthy!**



**Cut big, unneeded features**



**Keep the team talking**

Keep the **designers** realistic.  
Keep the **team** on track.  
Get **important work** done first.



**End Jam:**

Producer as **quality check**

# Build a Checklist

- ✓ Playtest the game
- ✓ Game can be built and played
- ✓ Marketing (descriptions, screenshots, credits, GIFs)
- ✓ Submission requirements reviewed
- ✓ Submission prepared, submitted



# All in All...

The producer will...

1. Setup the plan and coordinate tools and tasks with the team
2. Keep the team talking, healthy, and adjust the plan to meet deadlines
3. Get everything prepared to submit and share the game

# Let's Talk Tools

Digital Tools & Agile Soft Skills

# Agile Project Management

A philosophy of flexibility  
and communication

# Agile Principles

Simplified for games

1. Talking is better than strict formal processes
2. A functioning game is more fun than a thoroughly planned one
3. Work *with* people instead of against them
4. Change when it will improve things

From here, **all kinds of tools** were  
built to **promote** these principles

# Backlog

The feature listing

- A list of features that you want in your game
- **Prioritized** (roughly) by:
  - **Needs:** Things necessary for the game to function
  - **Risks:** Things that *could* be really fun, but *could* be really hard
  - **Value:** Things most fun to the player
  - **Niceties:** Things you really want


# Story

Or, a feature.  
Also referred to as a  
“Backlog” item

- A vague notion of a feature you want in the game
- Says, “As a player, I want to be able to do XYZ”
- Everyone on the team can understand and chat about it
- Before signing off on it, bullet point anything important to call it “done”

About how tough is it,  
versus other stories?

T-Shirt Sizes (xs, s, m, l,  
xl, xxl)



[U] As a player, I want  
to draw cards for a  
starting hand and play  
a starting hand, in  
order to complete a few  
tasks in the centre row.

- \* Draw a starting hand  
from 10 cards
- \* End turn button to  
progress to next turn
- \* Clear  
visualization/gesture of  
targeting cards

Story => Acceptance Criteria

## Backlog!

[5] As a player, I want to draw cards from a starting hand  
and play a starting hand, in order to complete a few tasks.

[3] As a player, I want to be able to play cards from my  
hand which will enter the discard pile at the end of turn.

[3] As a player, I want to hover over game elements to get a  
modal which provides additional detail about the element  
(cards, statuses)

[5] As a designer, I want to be able to quickly iterate on  
card designs and produce lots of cards rapidly.

Gets more vague as you  
get lower. It might be  
cut!



# Building the Backlog

1. Sketch out the game, make a paper prototype, roleplay playing the game
2. Work together to break it down into big features; big or small, just spitball
3. Read it, check your paper prototype, see if any big ideas are missing
4. Group ideas if it makes sense
5. Consider generic things! Menus, exporting to web, pausing

# Decomposing your Game

Building a backlog is really about seeing your game as its parts - a designer-heavy role.

- **Space:** Where is this game played? Where does the player move?
- **Goals:** What, in simple generic terms, is the player trying to achieve?
- **Obstacles:** What is preventing the player from reaching goals?
- **Actions:** What can the player do? What inputs get them there?
- **Rules:** What can and can not be done in the game?
- **Story:** What's the theme of the game? Does it help give context to the other parts of the game?
- **Technology:** What medium is the game played in?

As a producer, this is a basic design checklist to see if bases are covered.

# Estimating the Effort: Planning Poker

A lot of techniques just want you to **talk** to each other. Planning Poker is really easy, and really helps!

1. Everyone agrees on how tough one story is, arbitrarily (that one is a Small; agreed?)
2. Write in your next story
3. Everyone gets a hand of cards
  - a. Often 0, ½, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13+
  - b. Or t-shirt, XS, S, M, L, XL, ???
  - c. Fewer options are better for jams and new teams
4. Play a card in secret with how tough you Think it is, **relative to other stories**
5. Chat about why you disagree, try again!



**Don't waste much time.**

The point **isn't accuracy**, it's figuring out **why you disagree** to get on the **same page**.

Over time, you'll ask and answer questions which become **acceptance criteria**.

# Jam Planning Poker

- Try it out!
- Dedicate a very small amount of time. **10-30 minutes** *maximum*
- Producer will be in charge of timing and moving things along
- Try FirePoker online: <https://firepoker.io/>
- Focus less on getting the same estimate and more on clarifying the story as a group. Getting the same estimate just means no more discussion likely needed.

# Stories != Tasks

Once everyone understands the **features**,  
**Each role** can break them into **tasks** to do

## Story

*[5] As a player, I want to draw cards into a starting hand and play a starting hand, in order to complete a few tasks.*

## Tasks TODO

*[1 hour, programming]*

*Update deck drawing behaviour to support drawing arbitrary number of cards*

*[4 hour, animator]*

*Work out perspective & smoothly animate cards going from one zone to another*

*[6 hour, designer]*

*Draft starting data for 15 cards to test card action behaviours*

# These are part of a “Scrum Board”



Anything you like, but typically:

**Backlog -> TODO Tasks -> In-Progress -> Testing/Needs Review -> Done**



Jam Backlog ☆ 📄 📁

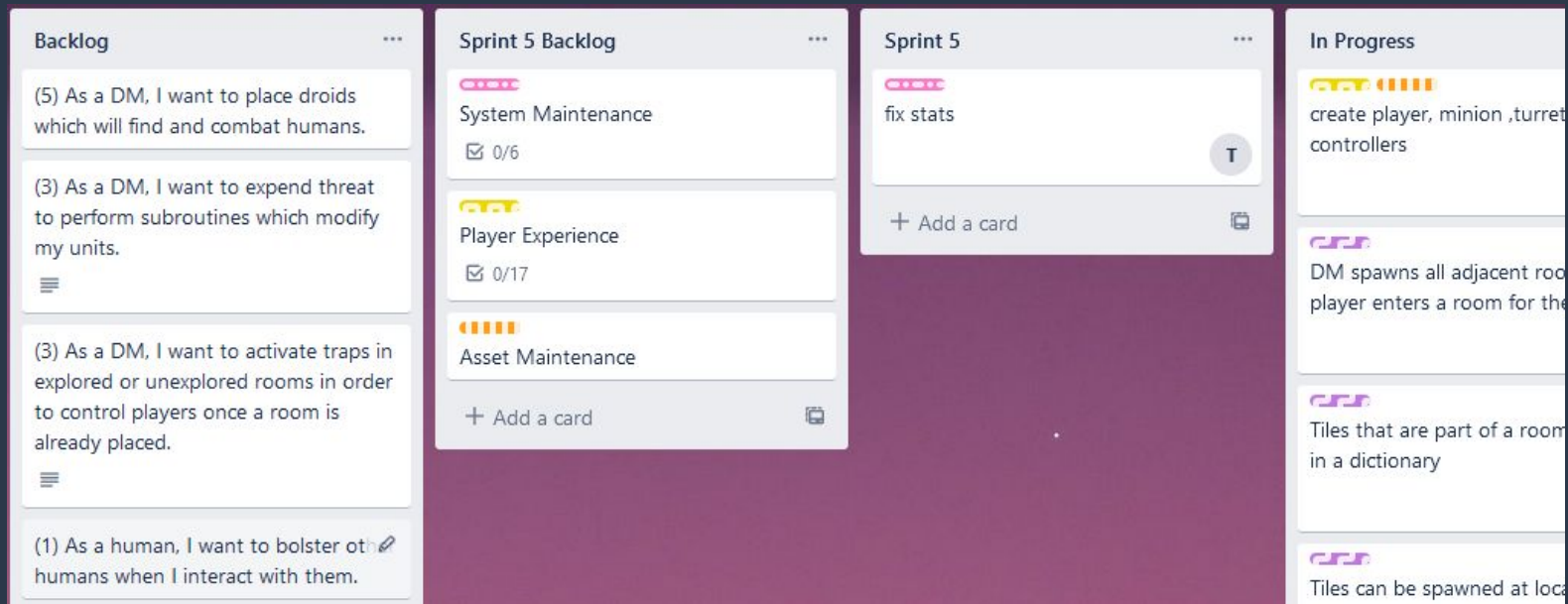
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|    | A      | B  | C                   | D | E   | F         | G            | H      | I        |
|----|--------|--|---------------------|---|---|-----------|--------------|--------|----------|
| 1  | Effort | Story  | Acceptance Criteria |   | Task Name                                     | How long? | In progress? | Who?   | Details? |
| 2  |        | As a player, I want to be able to move and climb.            |                     |   | Make player sprite                            | 15        | D            | Connor |          |
| 3  |        |  |                     |   | Setup demo level to test climbing/gravity     | 15        | Y            | Connor |          |
| 4  |        |  |                     |   | Add input handlers and connect kinematic boc  | 30        |              | Connor |          |
| 5  |        |  |                     |   | Climb up when against a wall w/o body, slowly | 15        |              | Conor  |          |
| 6  |        |  |                     |   | Make climbing/walking animations and connec   | 30        |              | Connor |          |
| 7  |        |  |                     |   | Make, add movement SFX                        | 30        |              | Connor |          |
| 8  |        | As a player, I want to be able to dig graves.                |                     |   |   |           |              |        |          |
| 9  |        | As a player, I want zombies to show up in hoards.            |                     |   |   |           |              |        |          |
| 10 |        | As a player, I want to attack zombies.                       |                     |   |   |           |              |        |          |
| 11 |        | As a player, I want to pick up and drop unconscious zombies. |                     |   |   |           |              |        |          |
| 12 |        | As a player, I want to collect and spend money on upgrades   |                     |   |   |           |              |        |          |

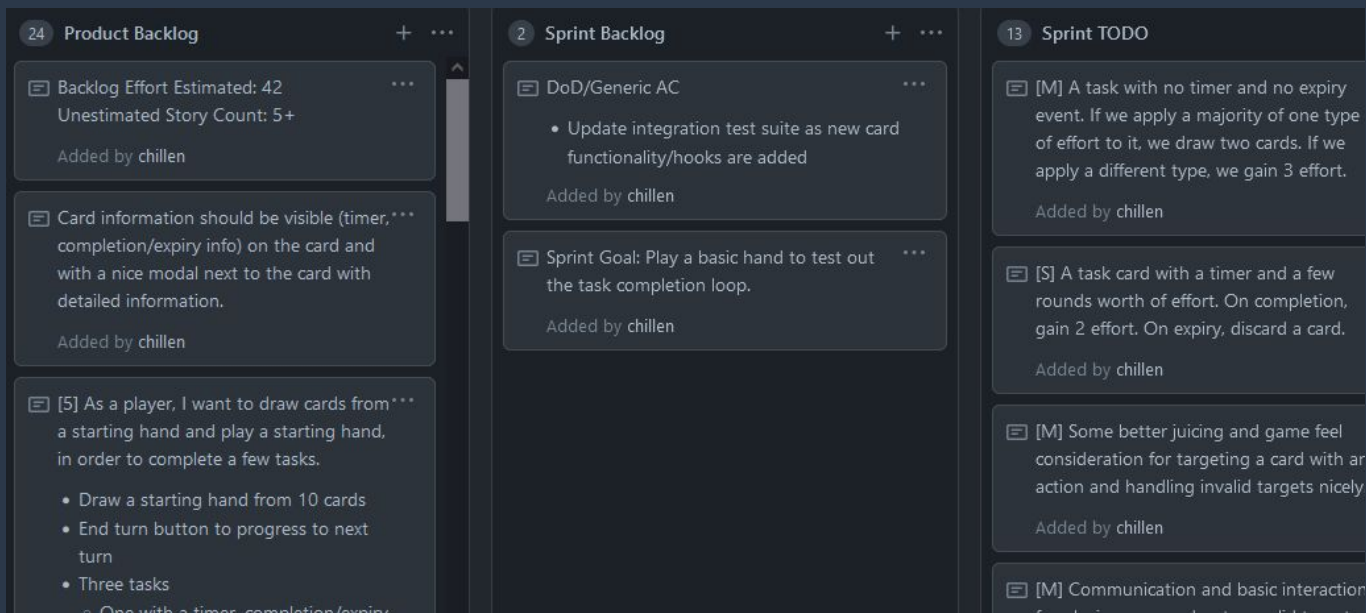
## Tools: Google Spreadsheet.

- + Easy to share, edit, setup. Probably already have a shared drive.
- Tough to look at.



## Tools: Trello

- + Easy to use, checklists, assigning to people, colourful labels
- Requires account for everyone



## Tools: Github Projects

- + Connects with code control, automates
- Requires account, not very robust, more programmer-oriented

I recommend **spreadsheets**

## Quick Tips!

- **Don't waste time** on planning “perfect” stories. Get everyone on the same page, **get making**. **Leave blanks**. You will *likely* cut things. Don't plan low-priority things until needed, **assume** cuts.
- **Be open, be friendly**. Don't shoot ideas down, just keep things on track.
- **Actions > Words**. It's often faster to **make and test** if something is good (then improve it) than to try and decide beforehand.
- **Do what works**. You don't need to be “proper”. Estimating effort and numbers are dumb? “PZ” “Regular” “Hard” “Dark Souls” is **valid**

It's a **jam.**

Find the **easiest way**, and **commit.**

# Meetings

Remember... **Communicate.**

Simplified for jams.

## Planning

- Build a backlog
  - Prioritize it
  - Rough estimates for how tough it is
- Break stories into tasks
  - Do it quickly!
  - Used to evaluate the scope of the project, keep on track

## Stand-Ups

- Each person answers three questions:
  - What have I been working on?
  - What am I going to be working on?
  - Is anything in my way?
- Normally, daily - in a jam? **Hourly+**.

## Retrospective

After the jam, talk together.

- What would I have done next time to improve it?
- What got in the way?
- What worked and we should keep doing?



# Quick Tips!

- **Limit meeting times.** If you don't get to something, push it till later. Decide how long you can afford to spend, and **don't go past**.
- **Have clear goals.** Know what you need to get out of the meeting, and focus on that. Casual chats can happen after, don't blend it with the meeting.
- **Communicate outside of meetings.** Meetings are short, goal-oriented, and solve a problem. They shouldn't be the only time everyone's talking.

**Between Meetings**  
Re-evaluate the plan.

Jams can be hard and discouraging.

**So Hype the Game!**  
**Celebrate wins!**  
**Show it off!**

# So get producing!

You can take on other roles, but remember your producer hat.

Keep **on track**, keep **realistic**, and keep **talking**.