Game Design 1

Defining Game Design + Game Designers, Magic Circle, Immersion, Meaningful Choice, Agency, Brainstorming, Mind-Mapping

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What is Game Design?

- In the broadest sense, Game design refers to the idea(s) behind a game.
- Expanded, Game design is **the process of being creative through concepting and bringing to life video games** via gameplay, rules, interfaces, environments, stories, and characters.

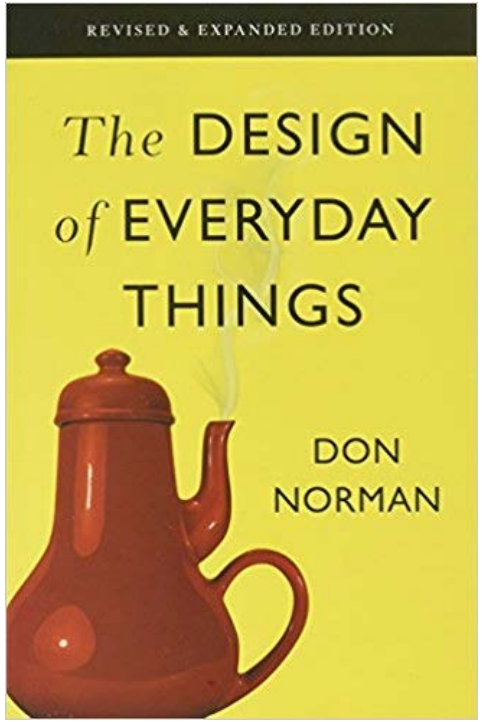
What is a Game Designer?

Similar(ish) role to the director in a film (however there may be a team of designers).

Game designers (while gamers) know games, but also **have knowledge outside of games**. Ideas and innovation is often pulled from sources outside of games.

What is a Game Designer?

Game designers need to know about design, or in other words, why things function the way they do. This is not just limited to games!



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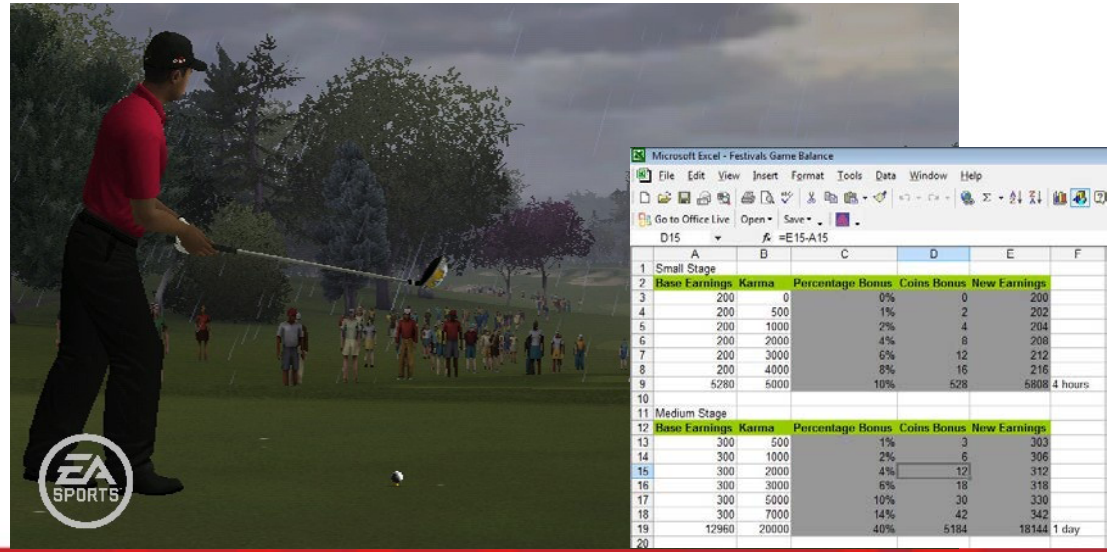
What is a Game Designer?

Myth: Game designers are 100 percent creative and not analytical.

Game designers use spreadsheets and basic math to balance and place assets within the game in a logical manner.



	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Small Stage					
2	Base Earnings	Karma	Percentage Bonus	Coins Bonus	New Earnings	
3	200	0	0%	0	200	
4	200	500	1%	2	202	
5	200	1000	2%	4	204	
6	200	2000	4%	8	208	
7	200	3000	6%	12	212	
8	200	4000	8%	16	216	
9	5280	5000	10%	528	5808	4 hours
10						
11	Medium Stage					
12	Base Earnings	Karma	Percentage Bonus	Coins Bonus	New Earnings	
13	300	500	1%	3	303	
14	300	1000	2%	6	306	
15	300	2000	4%	12	312	
16	300	3000	6%	18	318	
17	300	5000	10%	30	330	
18	300	7000	14%	42	342	
19	12960	20000	40%	5184	18144	1 day
20						

What is a Game Designer?

The Game design process is usually shared between a number of designers and overseen by a Lead Designer.

During development, the Game Designer(s) make adjustments to game specifications to respond to technical constraints which have been identified by the development team.

What is a Game Designer?

They also train **QA Testing** to play the game, making sure that they understand what is expected of the finished product and meet regularly with them throughout the development process to ensure everything is functioning properly.

The Design(er) process

1. After doing the **preliminary research**, the Game Designer puts together the concept document (pitch document), used to convince other members of the team that the game or more commonly, feature is worth taking forward into production.

2. In pre-production, if the concept is approved, a small team of artists and programmers work with the Game Designer/Game Design team to build a prototype of the feature.

The Design(er) process

3. The concept document for the feature (or the game in its entirety), is further expanded upon into what is known as the GDD (Game Design Document). This is a massive document detailing every tiny aspect of the game. This should work as a reference for the entire team. Every possible answer to their questions should be addressed here and ready in pre-production.

The Design(er) process

4. The GDD grows with the life cycle of the project.

- In the prototype or first iteration stage, the GDD could, and typically should, be very small and to the point.
- As the game grows in complexity, so does the GDD, as it should cover all aspects of the game.

It is the designer(s) responsibility to ensure the GDD is always up to date. (often this is overlooked and the GDD becomes almost useless – keep it up to date!)

What job titles can a Game designer have?

- Junior game designer
- Content designer
- Level designer
- Game designer
- User interface designer
- Combat designer
- Lead designer
- Creative director
- ***Writer***
- ***Scriptwriter***

Core Game Design Concepts: The Magic Circle

The Magic Circle is a fictitious place accepted as real and of higher importance while being experienced than that of the real world.

This happens by:

- seclusion
- delving into the story and/or character(s)
- online social relationships

The Magic Circle: believability

The only way to truly fall into the Magic Circle is **for the characters/story or game play/environments to function in a believable manner**. Without this, players never engage or are constantly pulled out of the experience by viewing something jarring that doesn't belong.

The Magic Circle: senses

Curiosity is central to ensuring users enter and continue to exist within the Magic Circle of your game.

To engage a user, us as designers, **work around stimulating the senses**.

The **more senses involved, the more opportunity for deeper immersion** and in hand, deeper experiences into the Magic Circle.

The Magic Circle: senses con't

It is suggested that in order to truly be immersed in anything, **at least two of the senses need to be engaged**. **Smell** and **taste** are currently not possible in gaming, so touch, sight and hearing need to be engaged as best possible.

Touch is the big challenge for VR!

The Magic Circle: importance

- It allows us to **escape reality**
- It allows us to **be creative**
- It **accepts us** for our unique self
- It **inspires change**

Magic Circle: implementation

- Engaging Music
- Compelling Visuals
- Elements that add a sense of Curiosity
- Elements that add a sense of Wonder

Magic Circle: implementation

- Don’t constantly hit the user over the head with opportunity to engage with the Magic Circle.
  - **Be Subtle.**
- Don’t over stimulate the user, or contradict yourself.
  - **Attention to detail.**

Immersion

- A **Requirement** for The Magic Circle
- Term is overused (and often misunderstood) In game design circles
- People usually mean:

1. "*A fascination or intense mental effort that absorbs the complete attention of the game player.*"
2. "A *game environment that is so believable that it psychologically and emotionally draws the user into the fictional world*."

Immersion

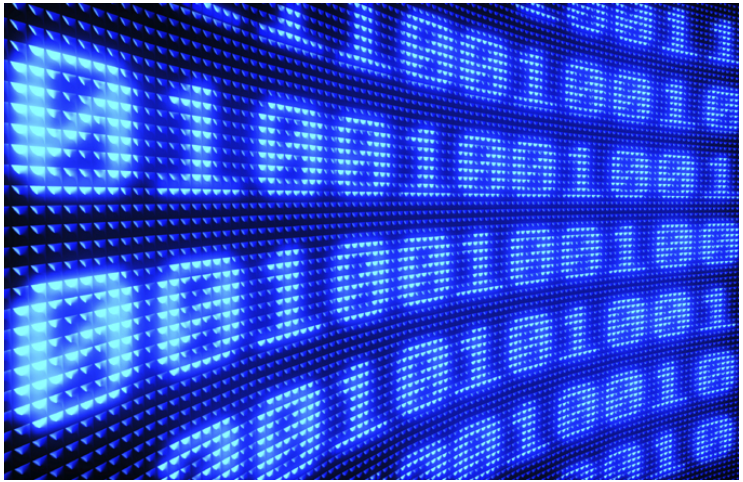
While it is useful to understand the definition of immersion, the goal of the game designer is to produce the result.

- **How can we *immerse* a player in a game?**

- The key lies in the common concept between the two definitions. Both forms of immersion serve to spark mental activity.
  - **They *engage* the brain.**

Immersion - Patterns

The question then, becomes one of discovering how to spark mental activity.



Immersion - Patterns

- to engage the brain of the player (to *immerse* them), we should establish a repeated cycle of exposing them to patterns, providing them with the ability to connect those patterns, and then providing a reward for correct results.
- In short, a game should allow a player to **Observe**, **Speculate**, and receive **Validation** as often and in as many ways as possible.

Immersion - Patterns

This very simple cycle can be employed in a wide variety of ways.

Immersion - Patterns

Immersion - Patterns

The Observe Speculate Validate cycle can also be fulfilled in more aesthetic ways.

Immersion

- The brain is constantly observing, associating, speculating, and validating.
  - As game developers we need to be aware of this.
- When everything is consistent, it *makes sense*, it immerses our brains in a continuous cycle of pattern recognition and processing.
- Since this is what we are built to do, we tend to respond positively to it and get lost in the experience (The Magic Circle).

Discussion

What do you find most rewarding in playing games?
Why does it motivate you?

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Motivation and Rewards

What makes a player do what they do?

Players engage in video games to access one or more of the following psychological states:

- **Competition:** the experience of defeating others
- **Challenge:** the experience of success following effort
- **Diversion:** to escape an experience of stress
- **Fantasy:** to experience unrealistic stimuli
- **Social interaction:** to have a social experience
- **Arousal:** to experience positive emotions

Motivation and Rewards

Motivation is accounted for by how well the game satisfies our three basic psychological needs:

- **Autonomy** – the extent to which the game provides **flexibility** over movement and strategies, **choice** over task and goals, and rewards that provide **feedback**.
- **Competence** – the extent to which tasks provide ongoing challenges and opportunities for feedback.
- **Relatedness** – the extent to which the game provides interactions between players (patterns).

Meaningful Choice in Games

What defines a Meaningful Choice in Games?

- Choices that make players look deep inside themselves.
- Choices that they remember as deeply emotional experiences.

But how do you do it? How do you make a choice in a game truly meaningful?

Meaningful Choice in Games

Meaningful choice requires four components:

- **Awareness -** player must be somewhat aware they are making a choice (perceive options)
- **Gameplay Consequences –**choice must have consequences that are gameplay and aesthetically oriented
- **Reminders –**player must be reminded of the choice they made after they made it
- **Permanence -** player cannot go back and undo their choice after exploring the consequences

Meaningful Choice in Games

Component 1: Awareness

- If the player isn't aware they are making a choice between two or more options, then it isn't meaningful.
- Exactly how much awareness you give the player is up to you.
- The level of awareness of a meaningful choice can vary, so long as the player knows they are making an explicit choice.

Meaningful Choice in Games

Component 2: Gameplay Consequences

Gameplay consequences don’t just change visuals of the game, they actually change the behavior and actions of the player. The best meaningful choices have **both aesthetic AND gameplay consequences**.

Changing the experience of the game, the behavior of the player, is typically more meaningful than just playing the same game with surface art style changes.

Meaningful Choice in Games

Component 3: Reminders

- If your previous choices don’t affect your present world, then you won’t feel anything.
- By sprinkling reminders through the game of what choices the player made previously, the choices they make take on more and more weight.
- If you made your choice and then went on without even remembering it, you would never later feel regret or pride. You’d just feel nothing.

Meaningful Choice in Games

Component 4: Permanence

The reason that choices in real life are so filled with emotion, with sadness, with purpose, is because they are permanent.

- We can’t live our lives over again.

And yet, in games where you can reset, you have no problem blowing up buildings or attacking innocent bystanders with no hesitation.

Agency

Agency in video games refers to …

- The player's ability to control and manipulate the game.
- Not controlling controller inputs, but rather the player's actions that have consequences in and on the game world.

Agency

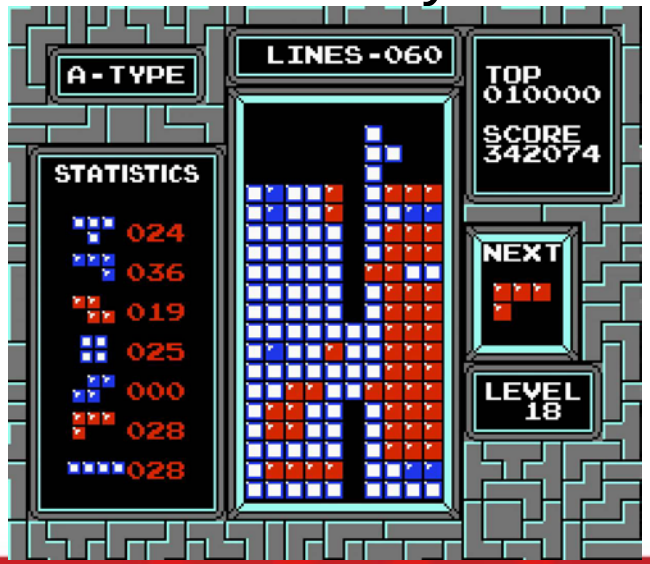
There’s a cliché that narrative games are about power fantasies. But perhaps the satisfaction comes from having a sense of control that real life doesn’t afford us.

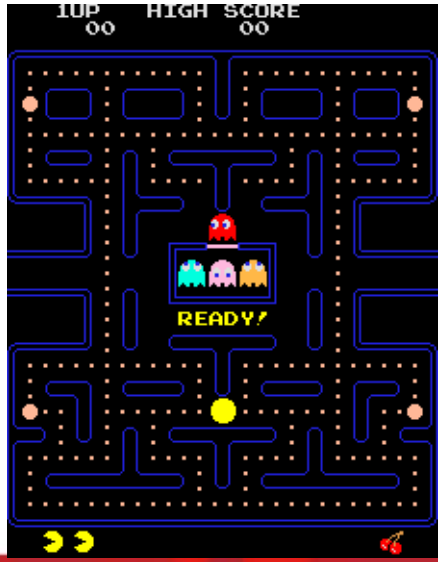
We tend to massively over-estimate the agency we have in our own lives.

Agency

Agency

In games, most of the time, we have the ability to move an avatar and that movement is truly connected to choice and skill.





Brainstorm/Organize effectively

Brainstorming is an essential part of the preliminary game design process.

- The goal is **quantity**, not quality, of ideas.
- **Avoid evaluating** the ideas during the process (that comes later)
- The real keys to a successful brainstorming session are: **positive emotions, laughter, ridiculous ideas, and absolutely no criticism of any kind.**

Tools for Brainstorming

1. Whiteboard
2. Post-It notes
3. Mind-mapping tools
4. A sketchbook
5. Photoshop
6. Pen and paper

Brainstorming

- An effective brainstorming session will last anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes.
  - 30 minutes is ideal.
- The best number of participants for a brainstorming session is between four and seven people.

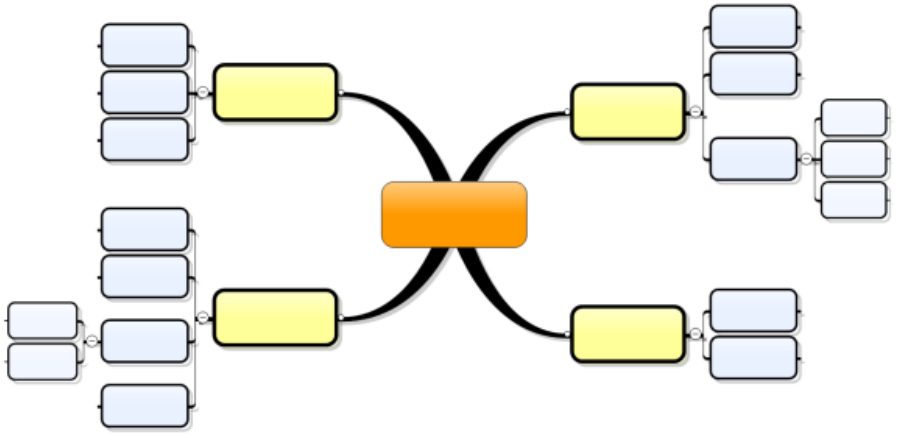
Brainstorming – Where to Start?

Know Your Audience

- Identify your target audience
- Identify your Genre
- Identify current trends in your audience
- Look at social impacts (what's trending)
- Ask yourself if your message can work for this audience
- **Write for your audience not for yourself!!!**

Brainstorming – Techniques

1. **Mind Mapping**
2. Teleporting Storming
3. Figuring Storming
4. Mind the Gap
5. Changing Your Attributes
6. Superstorming
7. Medici Effect Storming
8. Blind Writing
9. Reverse Storming



Descriptions here

Brainstorming – Techniques

- No matter what technique works for you, **it's always beneficial to experiment**. You might find that there are several techniques that help. Otherwise, who knows what you might be missing?
- No matter how hard it is to put it into practice, **it is imperative that you always assume an idea is worth writing down**. Even if it is a bad idea, it can spark other good ideas from it.

Brainstorming – Meeting

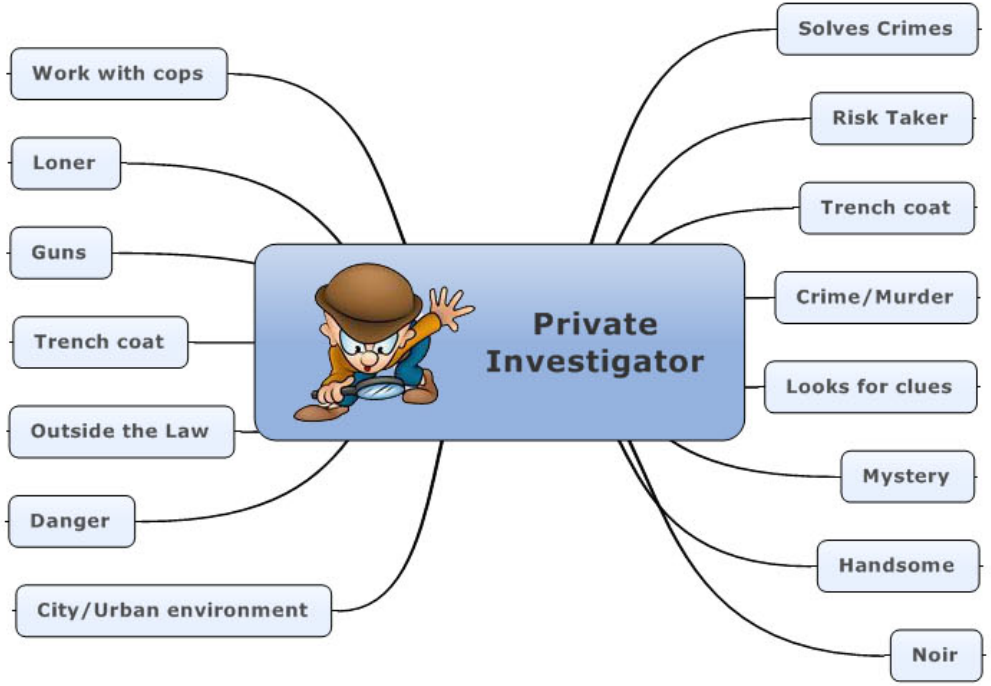
- **Assign A Group Leader For Free-Flowing, Creative Ideas**
- There should also be a recorder at each session.
- Get people thinking by asking them to brainstorm on their own
- Make sure everyone is heard
- Encourage participants to develop each others' ideas
- **Don't spend too long on one idea**
- Be creative - no idea is a bad one

What Is Mind Mapping?

- In academic circles, it's called '**Visual Thinking**'.
- Simply put, we **draw out different kinds of associations on paper**. By using our *eyes* in the process, we bring a typically unused part of the brain to examine the problem.
- The **Mind Mapping technique allows us to see *many* different *kinds* of associations**.
- And as we are forced to look at the subject matter from differing points of view, **we actually bring *many* different parts of the brain into the effort**.

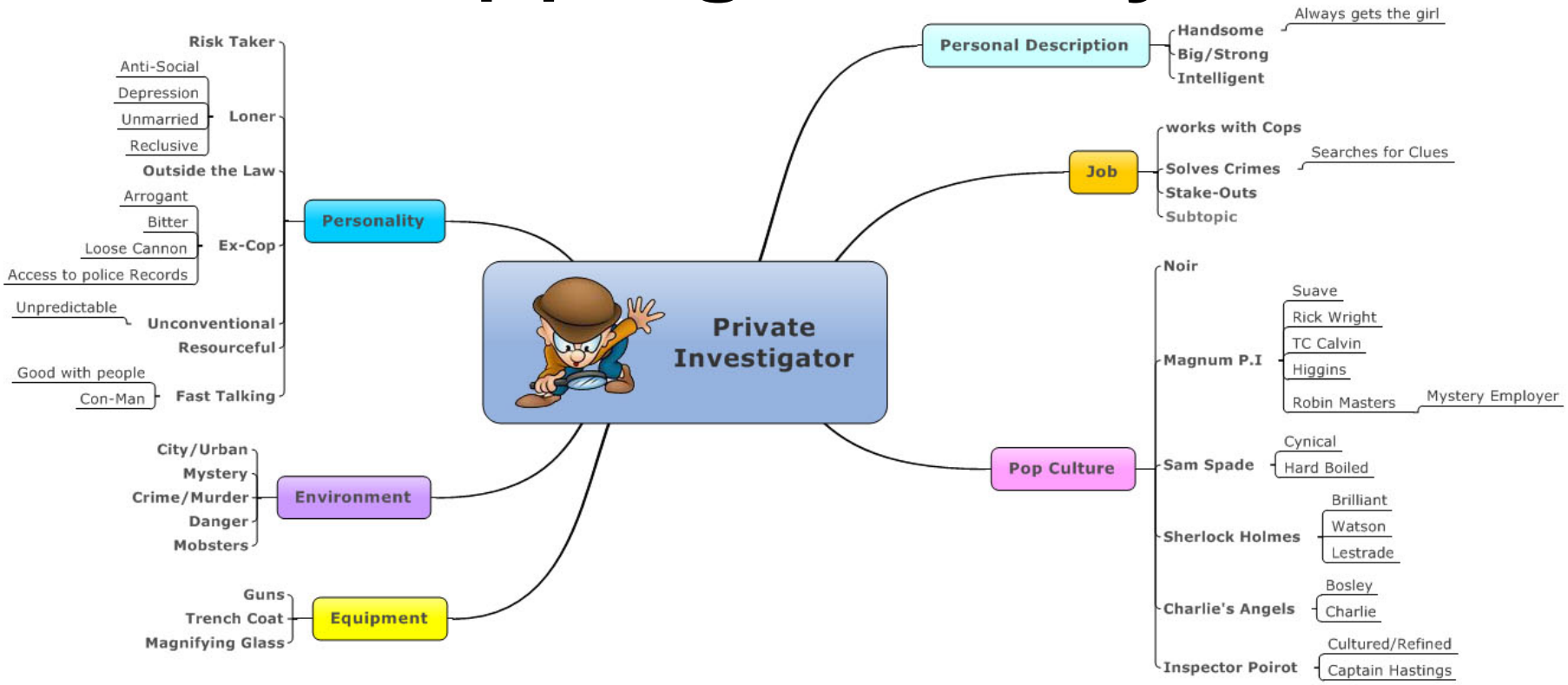
Mind Mapping Example: Topic

Mind Mapping Example: Primary Level



Mind Mapping Example: Secondary Level

Mind Mapping: Tertiary Level



How to brainstorm and organize effectively-

- MindMup (free, online)
  - https://www.mindmup.com/
- Coggle (free)
  - https://coggle.it/
- Bubble.us (free)
  - https://bubbl.us/

Activity

Mind Map

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Post Brainstorm

- **Subsequent meeting** for evaluation / analysis – make decisions on idea
- Find **References** to support the visual/gameplay style (movies, drawings, existing games, etc.)

References

- When gathering resources and references for a project, it is vital that you don’t underestimate their importance.
- References can be anything, from images, to videos, novels to essays, plays to life experiences.
- **Don’t limit yourself.**

References

- Be specific
- Don’t be satisfied with a small sample
- Explore outside of the specific bounds for inspiration
- Organize
- Use multiple sources

Assignment #1

Mind Map 5%

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