Game Progression, Achievements and Level Design

Game Design 1

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Design Principles of Progression

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Design Principles of Progression

What is the definition of progression in games?

The player's act of moving forward within the game.

Design Principles of Progression

Progression exists in video games to **prevent the player from feeling like their time is wasted playing.**

Design Principles of Progression

Progression can occur in one of two ways in games

1. **Player Progression:** The player's skill level improving and learning how to play the game.
2. **Game Progression:** Moving along the story of the game, or levelling up, beating level 1 moving on to level 2, or unlocking a new skill.

Avoid players rage quitting your game

Game saves, codes or passwords or unlocking earned achievements are functions built into games to keep players from having to start over and lose a sense of progression.

Game Progression

Motivating a player to keep playing a game can be tough, especially if they aren't able to beat a certain component of the game or just can't grasp a mechanic.

Dark Souls is brutal – why keep playing??

Game Progression

Having save states allows a player to learn through error. If a player dies or can't solve the puzzle, let them at least try and fail.

Game Progression

Play testing is critical to identify where players are frustrated or debating giving up.

When a player reaches the end of progression in a game and there is nothing more to defeat, **they will stop playing the game**.

Game Progression Example

Game Progression

The player should never feel like they are moving backwards.

- If a player loses a battle, they should never lose experience (XP), but rather gain at a lesser extent than winning.
- **Forward momentum at all times, simply vary the speed based on what the player achieves…**
- **…or doesn't in game.**

Types of Progression

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Level Progression (Story)

Level 1 ➡ Level 2

Chapter1 ➡ Chapter2

World 1 ➡ World 2

Level Progression (Character)

Obtaining XP or defeating certain gates/foes, levels up your characters skillset.

- It's important to have a lengthy cap to XP level progression, so the player doesn't get bored and quit the game after capping out attributes too early in gameplay.

Use Progression

- Using a weapon or attribute over and over again progresses and expands its capacity.
- Some games again, give you the option to select where your progression earned goes.

Purchase Progression

Through **cash purchase** or earning **in game currency** via playing, the player can upgrade their characters class, obtain new skills or buy temporal ‘boosts’ that will enhance the players ability to conquer difficult challenges.

Mechanics Progression

For complex games like Halo, mechanics progression needs to exist, so as to not confuse and frustrate the player at the start of the game. **Gradual introduction of more powerful and more complex mechanics needs to occur**.

Level Pacing Progression

As levels increase from early to later stages of the game, the duration should as well, as they are introducing more difficult mechanics and story.

This should make the user feel as if they are progressing in larger, more significant chunks of the overall percentage of the game the further they go.

Environmental Progression

As the player progresses within the game, the **levels should appear more ‘special’** visually.

Use more particle effects, shinier objects, larger or just more interesting objects. Early levels should be flat and basic objects, while later more detailed.

When to build Progression systems in the Production Cycle?

As designers, you should have a rough progression system, inclusive of all aspects of progression, with estimates on assets and pacing, in functional data sets **completed in early Production**.

The completed Progression system **should be finalized in design while still in the Production phase** of development nearing Post Production.

Achievements and what makes them effective?

- Gamers love achievements.
- They're fun, they add an extra layer of content, and they let you show off your gaming skills.
- Easy to implement.
  - Unfortunately, achievements are still often poorly implemented.
- **An achievement is simply a goal, and all games have goals.**

Types of Achievements - Challenge Achievements

- Challenge achievements are the traditional achievement.
- These are objectives that let the player test their skills, and give the hardcore gamer an additional layer of challenges to conquer.
- ‘Collect 10 of this item’, ‘Reach new prestige level in a shooter’, ‘Complete the full game without killing anyone’, etc.

Types of Achievements - Tutorial Achievements

- Tutorials typically suck.
- Once the player learns each main mechanic of the game, award them with an achievement.

Types of Achievements - Progress Achievements

- Progress achievements are the ‘you beat level 1’ achievements.
- In a linear games & most multiplayer shooters, the achievements are unavoidable and will be picked up by the player just by playing the game.

Types of Achievements - Fun achievements

- Used sparingly for humour in games.
- A good way to break up the seriousness of normal gameplay with an interesting little diversion.

Types of Achievements - Negative achievements

- Negative achievements frustrate players, as they essentially mock the player for doing something ‘bad’ or out of the norm for a skilled player.
- If players know that there are negative achievements in the game, they will try their hardest to avoid them.
- **Best practice:** Don’t use negative achievements.

Types of Achievements - Marketing achievements

- Heavily used in mobile and social games.
  - Have you liked this game on Facebook?
  - Played our other games?
  - Watched our videos for free in game currency?

Achievements

- Achievements should enhance a player's experience, not force them into decisions or limit their options.
- Players should feel like acquiring an achievement is a reward, not something that's been handed to them out of sympathy.
- Most importantly, know when to use achievements and when to not.

Debate

If an achievement is unavoidable, can it really be called an achievement?

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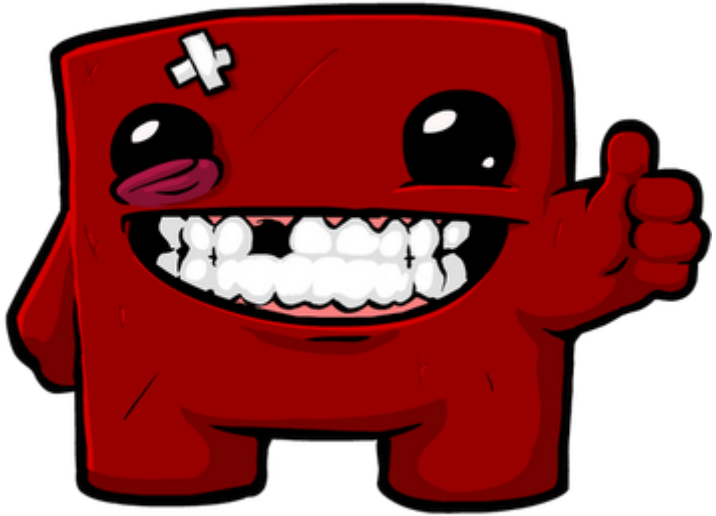
Level Design

Discipline of creating video game levels – locales, stages, or missions

Level design is an artistic AND technical process

Super Meat Boy Level Design

Edmund McMillen on Level Design



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A Level Design Process*

- Step 1: Understanding Constraints
- Step 2: Brainstorming and Structure
- Step 3: Roughouts
- Step 4: Final Level Map
- Step 5: Implementation

*lots of variants across industry, but basics are the same

1: Understanding Constraints

***What are the goals of the level*?**

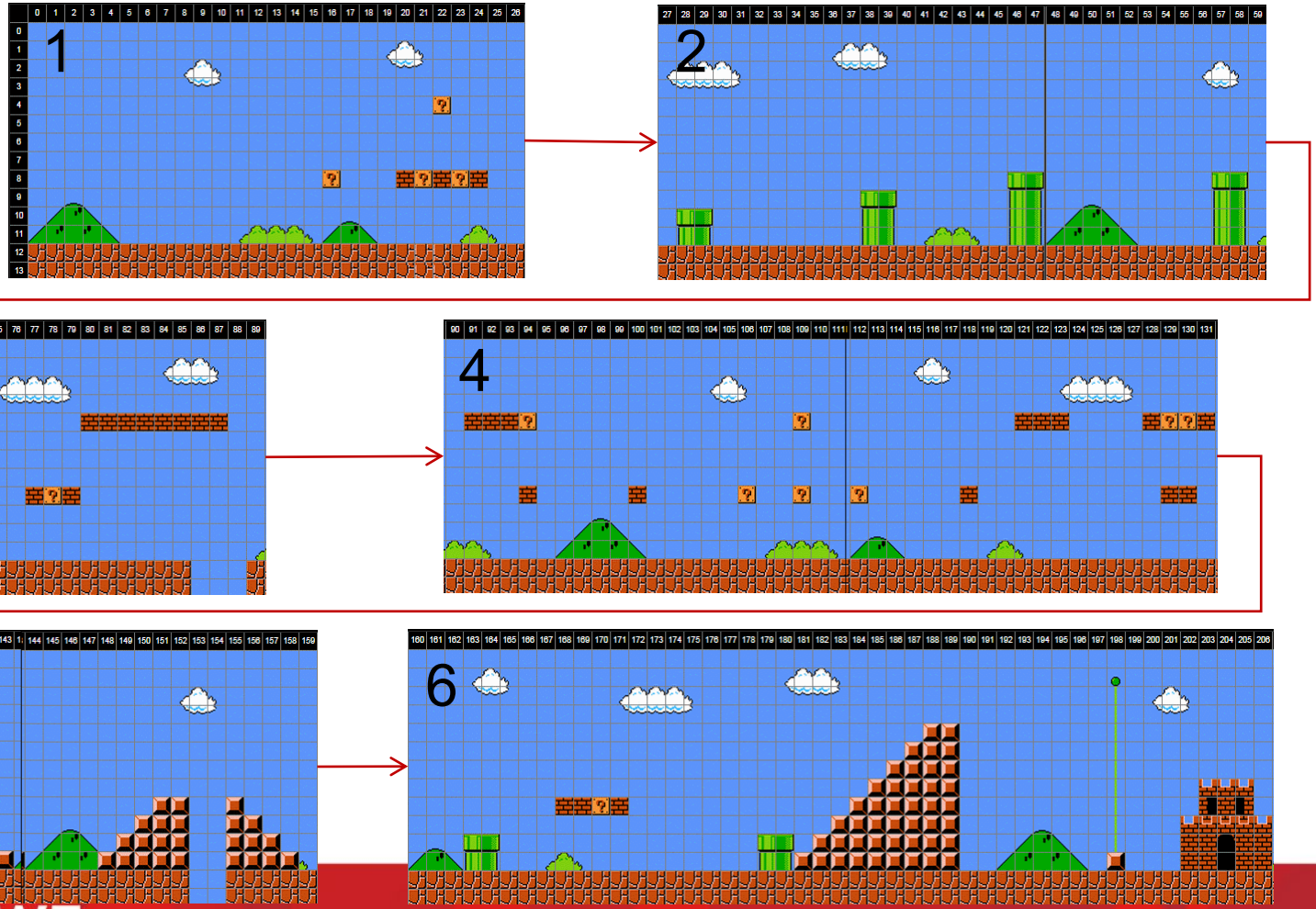
- Requirements of Level Story/Theme/Plot
- Set Pieces (major level locations)
- Metrics (constraints on player/enemies)
- Does it reflect story/setting/franchise?
- How does this fit the level progression?
- Macro Game Design Requirements (Macro Design Doc specifies puzzles/enemies/rewards for each level)

2: Brainstorming and Structure

With your constraints, time to plan:

- Brainstorm overall level from constraints
- Think of a level design as "different sections" (eg: areas or rooms), each with their own specific objective
  - Average level has "**7 sections**" in it (**Rule of Seven**) for pacing

Super Mario Bros 1-1, split into 6 distinct sections



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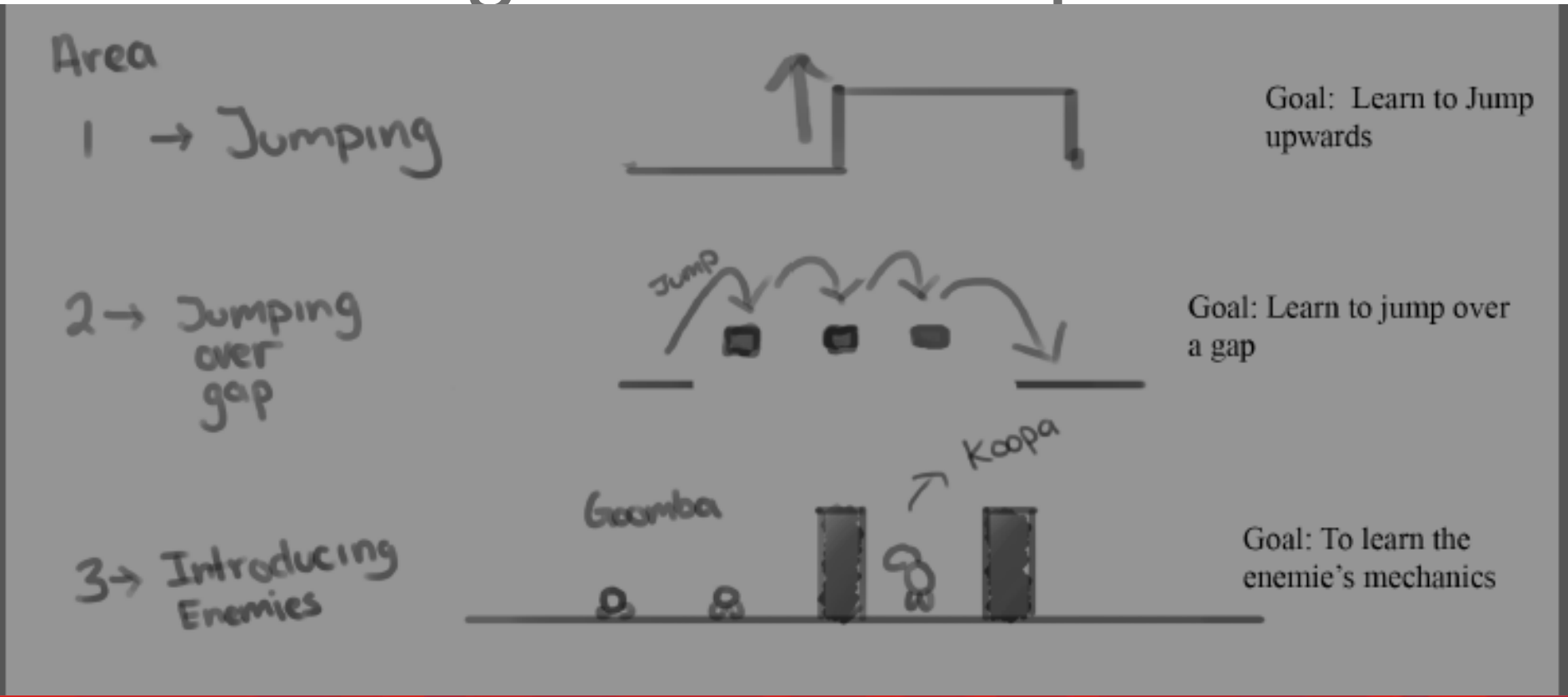
3: Roughouts

- In a Roughout, each level section needs:
  - a **written goal** for the player
  - **concept-drawing** of how it will work
- **It's important each section has a <u>contained goal</u>**
- Consider ramping intensity /progression

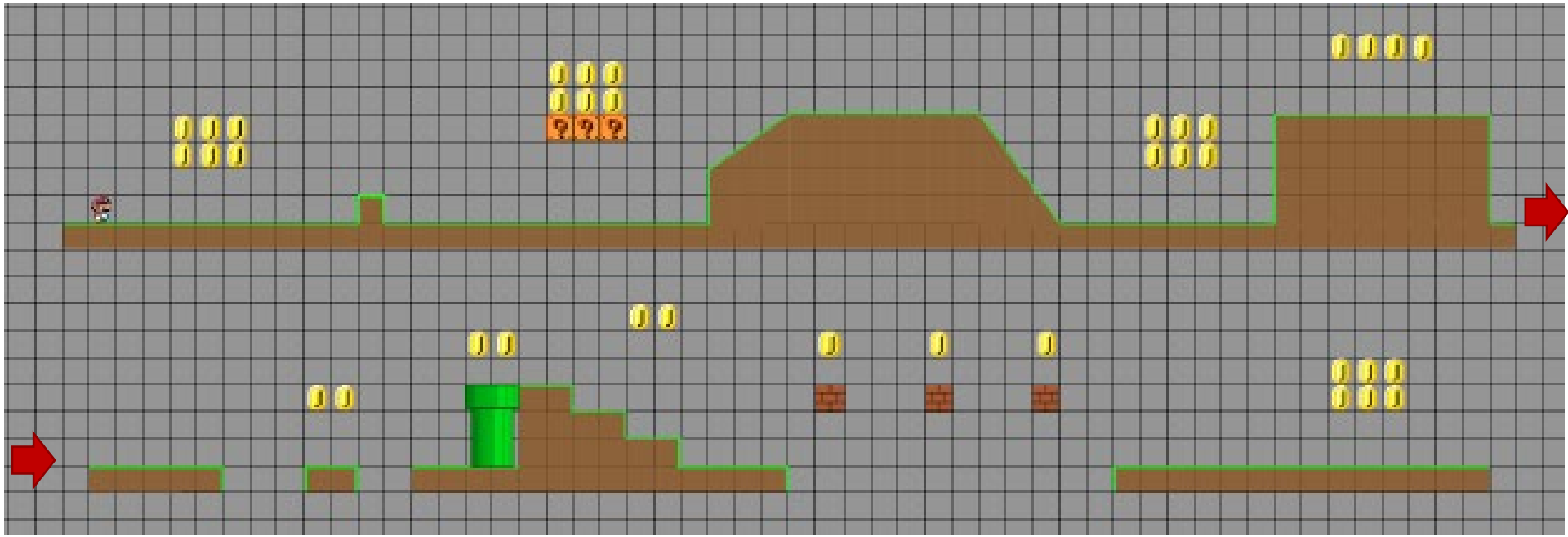
EG Roughouts for Super Mario



4: Final Level Map

- Take your level section concepts and develop them into a single level
- Essential you use a **grid** for accuracy / consistency
- Should be polished enough **someone else could make the level** from your map 1:1

(Part) of Final Level Map



Super Mario Bros 1-1 design

How SMB1-1 was designed, brought to you by Takashi Tezuka and **Shigeru Miyamoto**!

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Assignment #2

Level Design Concept Work (7.5%)

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