Pre-Concept Stage

* Gathering knowledge on current industry trends
  + Identify holes
  + Predict future games
  + Evaluate valuable demographics
  + Predict future processing power
* Gathering knowledge on current team history
  + What have they worked on in the past.
  + What was successful and what was not.
  + What are team strengths
  + What are team weaknesses
  + Would you need to hire to fill those weaknesses?
  + Should this effect the game or is there an important enough trend and demographic that could be hit.
* What is the expectation set by stakeholders?
  + Timeline from pre-production to completion
  + Expected team size
  + Amount of risk stakeholders are willing to accept (probably high cause its games)
  + Do you need to ramp up the team size to meet expectations?
* What ips are available, how relevant will they be given your timeline?
* What are the marketing team’s strengths and weaknesses? Can you help lower CPI by not going too off the rails with your game?

Game Concept

* Identify core monetization and gameplay loop
  + How much risk is associated with gameplay
  + How much risk is associated with monetization
  + What social features are relevant
  + What IPs are relevant to the design or what design is relevant to an IP
* Identify important functionality and relevant KPIs
  + How quickly can you get players to load the game? (always important)
  + How content heavy is your proposal?
  + How much technical risk are you creating?
  + What games are similar, what KPIs (that you know of) that could help indicate future success?
* What tech do you have for the concept stage?
  + Will you build the game on the same tech?
  + Gear your game concept towards proving out core functionality as quickly as possible.
  + What tech do you need to finish your game? Is it available? Do you have the team to make it in house? Is that an expectation from stakeholders?
* What game do you plan on building the tech on?
  + Can you achieve your kpis with this tech?
  + Is there expert knowledge of the tech you want to use in house?
  + Do you need to hire to use the desired tech?
  + Do you have buy in from your engineering team?
* What kind of visuals are important to the game?
  + VFX needs?
  + Character needs?
  + Environment needs?
  + Stylistic analysis of similar games?
  + Is there a genre gap for your game type? Does it make sense to use that genre?
* UI/UX
  + How do you match the tone of the ui to the gameplay and visuals?
  + Paper/wireframe ux flow
  + Relevant existing game UX analysis
  + Can you test some components of UX flow using the concept tech?

Prepping for Production

* Buy off from stakeholders
  + Ensure you’ve established a channel of communication with stakeholders
  + What are their concerns?
  + Can you alleviate these concerns in the concept phase?
  + What needs to be shown to ensure that stakeholders and product team are on the same page.
  + Establish guidelines for how involved with stakeholders will be in the project. Is it clear that once production is started you can’t make a massive direction shift on a C-Level employee’s whim?
* Establish deliverable cadences
  + What is the expectation for new builds?
  + How far behind should art be?
  + What is needed from UX at each stage or production?
  + When do you show stakeholders updates?
  + How much planning is required for each deliverable?
  + How much risk are you adding to your timelines?
* Establish Cross Discipline Communication
  + How does UX deliver flow and wireframes to code? Who is ensuring the UI code is built in a sustainable way?
  + How much grey boxing is done before art is needed?
  + Who is setting image standards?
  + Who is establishing image naming conventions and folder structure? How does this make each disciplines life harder or easier? Work on a mutually beneficial solution.
  + How early and often are you meeting with marketing?
  + How far ahead of art is tech?
* When do you get QA involved?
* How are you tracking progress?
  + Gated by code deliverables?
  + Using agile/scrum or something else?
  + What kind of t-shirt sizing makes sense?
  + How front loaded are you technical risk factors?
  + How does that effect first deliverable?
  + How does design track progress?
  + How much design iteration is allowed?
  + How are you assessing your core loops are accomplishing their goals?
  + When do you start implementing automation to make it easier to assess core loops goals?
  + How does art track progress?
  + When do you establish expected timelines for various assets?
  + How far behind is art going to be behind tech? How do you ensure they aren’t being put through the ringer just before shipping?
  + How much risk and unknowns are you adding to your timelines?
* Are you using a licensed IP?
  + What help are you getting?
  + What kind of buy off is needed from the IP?
  + What is the communication channel look like between dev team and IP team?

Full production

* Establish shared vision
  + Create an easy to reference deck of information about the game
  + Give existing references for games that are similar.
  + Let the team help identify similar games.
  + Give a full presentation to the game, win their buy in.
  + Guide the team through identifying key features. Make them figure it out as a group to create a better understanding of the direction.
  + Do this all more than once.
  + Breakdown individual pieces of the game and it’s comparison games. Walk people through methodologies.
* What is your first milestone?
  + Who needs sign off?
  + What do they need to see?
* Get analytics tracking involved early.
  + What does the analytics pipeline look like?
  + Who is creating it?
  + Is analytics a shared resource or a team focused one?
  + Create good analytics tracking standards.
* What are the cadences of planning vs. delivering builds?
  + What is the engineering team comfortable with?
  + What is the art team comfortable with?
  + What is the design team comfortable with?
* Opening tutorial needs to be a part of the development process as early as possible.
  + Always allow room for another tutorial iteration
  + What information is necessary early on?
  + How do you roll out additional information in a way that does not scare players away?
  + How quickly should players progress to various stages of the game?
* Bringing on QA Team
  + Who is leading the QA team?
  + Need at least 1 but ideally more QA in house.
  + What tools does QA need?
  + What automation is necessary?
  + Keep QA in the loop in production meetings, don’t make them get blindsided. Allow QA time to prepare test cases in advance and work alongside devs to make sure they understand the features.
* What APIs do you need?
  + How expensive are they?
* What are your revenue streams?
  + Where do you place ads?
  + Where do you place sales?
  + Where do you place additional types of revenue streams?
  + Have you met with an attribution network? API assessment etc.
  + Need to ensure that iteration and tech requirements for integration is built into production timelines. These can vary widely in difficult to implement.
* Marketing
  + What assets does marketing need?
  + How early do they want to know and get excited about your product?
  + What are they key selling points?
  + A/B testing names, icons, banners
  + If marketing is saying nothing is working what is your contingency plan? This is depending heavily on how far into production you are.
* What automated testing are you using?
  + What are the requirements for unit tests?
  + What is the server and data load?
  + How are you going to load test in advance?
  + How are you assessing game loop length?
  + How are you assessing the effectiveness of compounding game loops?
  + How much time is built into production for automation?
* Future Milestones
  + Ensure that your ship soft launch timeline is being maintained.
  + Scale future milestones appropriately with the last one.
  + Create satisfying incremental internal milestones once greenlit.
  + Identify problems that are slowing down development and schedule fixing them.
  + Ensure that QA, Art, CS, UI/UX tools are all maintained and recognized as team needs.
  + What are marketing needs?
  + Get the tutorial in ASAP! Iterate, iterate iterate.
* Soft launch needs
  + Scale soft launch needs with development speed.
  + Ensure that marketing materials are properly tested.
  + Ensure that app store optimization is being evaluated early and often.
  + Have attribution and mediation layers already figured out and tested.
  + Evaluate spots for alternative monetization methods.
  + Get LTV goals and retention goals established and tracked.
  + Build out the entire data model to the best of team abilities, no losing data early because this was not thought out.
  + Ensure that the tutorial, loading, initial loading is tracked so that tech issues can be easily identified.
  + Set goals for download times, don’t be afraid to get creative to make these values a reality.
  + Establish expected spend on users, track ROA
  + What countries is the game being released to? Make sure everything is properly localized.
  + Does CS have what it needs to respond to issues?
  + When did people spend and on what?
* Additional Soft Launch Goals
  + What was the most deficient parts of the initial soft launch, what can be addressed?
  + Does it still make sense to finish the product? How far away from KPIs is too far?
  + Is there low hanging fruit that was missed for retention or monetization in the initial soft launch?
  + Can the second soft launch be done quickly or does it require major updates?
  + Was the analytics team able to create dashboards to answer all the important questions? What kind of aggregations need to be done?
  + What was learned about the economy? How far off were players from initial models?
  + How did servers perform? Are server costs going to sink the project from the get go?