

Step 1 - Scan the market

1. Data scrape the store
 - a. Pull top-20 games in the genre by absolute revenue/installs, revenue/installs growth
2. Play & record
 - a. Each team member plays 3–4 reference titles and records a 30-minute session (video + notes)
3. Deep research
 - a. PO and GD should play and deconstruct 1-2 top games in the genre extensively, preferably with some in-apps to fully understand the core loop
4. Feature matrix
 - a. Build a shared sheet listing: core controls, FTUE length, meta layers, live-ops cadence, ad formats, main pay points
5. Benchmarks (?)
 - a. Grab public KPI ranges from GameRefinery trend reports (D1, D7, ARPDAU)

Tag every feature “Must-have / Nice-to-have / Optional”. Only the first column (prioritised) might go into the prototype.

Step 2 - Player’s voices

Learn what players love/ hate. Use Youtube, Reddit, and store reviews as inputs, log repeated pains and important points.

Step 3 - Outside context

Find a few GDC/ Naavik/ Game Makers/ Deconstructor of Fun articles on the genre, log and summarise learnings.

Step 4 - Hypothesis

Clearly state how we can win in this genre. It shouldn’t be groundbreakingly new, a small but necessary and clever improvement in the very core loop might be enough.

Step 5 - Prototype ideas

Each team member pitches 1-2 1-page concepts. Filter - fits Must-have features from the first step, reasonable effort to develop. Choose 1-2 for the next step.

Step 6 - Grey box prototype

Let’s take roguelike deckbuilder (like Balatro) as an example:

1. Identify the core verb (“play card, trigger combo”).

2. Prototype that verb in engine with grey boxes/ simple visuals only (use AI); simple UI, no meta.
3. Internal playtest: is the loop already sticky for 10 min? If not, iterate 1–2 more days before adding anything else.

What to watch inside any genre

Layer	Why it matters	Evaluation
Core moment-to-moment fun	Drives D0 retention	“10-min rule”: will a new player stay 10 min with grey boxes?
Progression & meta	Extends lifetime (D7/D30)	Map the first 60 min flow in competitor games; copy the pacing
Monetization triggers	Obvious	List the first 3 pay moments; do they appear before minute 30 (depends on genre)?
Live-ops cadence	Retains whales & boosts ARPDAU	Check how often reference games push events/sales (?)
Content cost per minute	Small-team sustainability	Estimate dev hours per playable minute

Learning inputs

1. Deconstructor of Fun for design patterns
2. GameRefinery feature-impact heat-maps & monthly analyst bulletins
3. SensorTower dashboards for revenue/download curves
4. GDC Vault & Google Play Academy talks on genre-specific UA and retention.
5. Podcasts: Naavik, GameMakers