# COMP09095 Level Design

# Week 03 Lecture – Workflow and Planning Part02

# Pre-Production Workflow Steps

1. Generate ideas
2. Setting, location, theme
3. Project goals
4. Level features
5. Photo/video reference and research
6. Project planning
7. **Story**
8. **Objectives, obstacles and set pieces**
9. **Focal point**
10. **Visual development**
11. **Top-down gameplay**
12. **Playtesting strategy**

Last week

This week

# Story

- As a level designer you are telling the story of the environment
- When creating a level for an existing game the game's storyline has already been established
- If it's a stand-alone game environment you don't need a fully-developed game storyline – concentrate on the environment storyline
- **Explicit** storytelling – tell them, e.g. cinematics, game events, dialogue
- **Implicit** storytelling – show them, e.g. environment, props, atmosphere
- **Some questions:**
    - How did the player arrive in the environment?
    - What happened prior to the player arriving in the
    - environment?
    - What were the set of events that brought the player there?
    - How will the player navigate through the environment?

# Story

**Two types of environment stories**
- Story of the environment
- Story of the characters within that environment

**Questions for the level designer**
- What is the overall story of your level?
- How did the player arrive in the environment?
- What were the events that brought the player there?
- Why is the character here?
- What purpose or what goal are they to achieve?
- What happened to the environment prior to the player arriving here?
- How will you show what happened to the environment?
- How will you tell the story of the environment to the player?

# Story

## HOW?

The "How" may not always be apparent and you may not always have to show every single event that happened. But **you** still need to know everything about your environment and the character, even if it is not going to be shown to the player – creates depth to the story/level

e.g. for a level set in a prison, How did the player get there? Was he/she a prisoner? If yes, what was he/she in there for? What crime did he/she commit? If not, then is this an abandoned prison that the player has to get through? What was the player doing right before he/she arrived at the prison environment? Why is he/she near the prison to begin with?

# Story

## WHY?

Why is the character here? What purpose or what goal are they to achieve?

"Why" question is very closely tied to the "How" question.

Why is the player here? You know how the player got to the environment but why are they here? Is it to fulfill an objective? Is it to collect something? Escape? Run away? Hide? Or to explore the location?

The "Why" helps to develop a relationship between the environment and the character

# Story

## WHAT?

What happened to the environment prior to the player arriving here?

We answered, how did the player get here and why are they in this environment. These two questions focused on the character. Now we shift focus to the environment.

Create a background story of the environment.  This helps create accuracy through props, detail and atmosphere.

# Story

## SHOW, DON'T TELL!

Make a list of how you will show what happened in the environment through design, prop placement, texture creation, lighting, mood, enemy placement, or friendly AI

Every prop placement in the environment should be telling a story to the player

The background story will tell you if prop placement, textures, lighting etc. are appropriate to this environment or not

# Objectives, obstacles and set pieces

**OBJECTIVES** are the goals for the player to achieve

**OBSTACLES** are opposition for the player to overcome

Obstacles usually follow objectives. Most objectives in games have some sort of obstacles for the player. These could be puzzles or enemy AI battles

e.g. Objective could be to reach a castle on top of the mountain. Obstacles to complete this objective could be to fight 10 AI enemies. Enemy AI is the opposition/obstacle that stands in the way.

# Objectives, obstacles and set pieces

**SET PIECES** are events that happen in the environment.  Set pieces are also known as scripted events

Scripted events fall under two categories:
- *Direct*: direct from player's action or participation.  Player does something, scripted event happens.
- *Indirect*: events that happen by themselves in the environment. Timed or cycle scripted events. (Traffic, night/day etc)

# Objectives, obstacles and set pieces

**OBJECTIVE LEADS TO OBSTACLE LEADS TO SCRIPTED EVENTS/SET PIECES**

1. Define the objectives for your map
2. Define obstacles to overcome
3. Define set pieces (scripted events) that will support the game's story, environment's story and the objectives

# Focal point

**Every game environment needs a focal point**. Focal point is your map's location identity. It is how the player remembers the environment. It is the reference point of player's orientation and world position. It is the landmark of your game environment

Look through the reference images collected earlier to help you decide on a focal point

**Questions to help choosing the focal point:**
- What would make your environment stand out?
- How will the player remember the environment?
- What would help the players orient themselves in the environment?
- What would make your location interesting aesthetically, visually and/or architecturally?
- Does the focal point support the story of the game and the environment?

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

# Focal point

Can have multiple focal points with a linear progression; it helps to reinforce the player's direction to the location. Helping the player from one location to another.

**Questions:**
- Will you have one focal point or multiple?
- How will the players reference/orient themselves in your environment?
- How will they know where they are within a second upon spawning? What will help them know where they are?
- How will they move from one location to another?
- What would make your environment stand out? Look at your reference/research and all the previous steps that you have done.
- How will the player remember the environment?
- What focal point would make your location interesting aesthetically, visually and architecturally?
- Does the focal point support the story of the game and the environment?

# Visual development

**VISUAL DEVELOPMENT** is the art direction that defines the visual style, lighting, and colour palette of the environment

**STYLE** is the visual quality and visual definition of your environment, your level design.  It is the visuals of your map

Some examples of games that have visual defining style: Bioshock series, L.A. Noire, Crysis, World of Warcraft, Portal 1 and 2, Left 4 Dead 1-2, GTA 4-5, Gears of War series, Limbo, Mario series and TF2 etc etc

Team Fortress 2

Bioshock

# Visual development

**Questions on visual style:**

- What style will your environment be? How will it be different visually?
- Will it be through modeled objects and over-stylised environment? Will it be Realistic? Exaggerated? Stylised? Cartoonish?
- What is the colour palette you will use? The colours of your environment?
- How will you show this in your environment?

# Visual development

You may need to go back to searching on the web for the following to help you:

- Traditional paintings
- Concept art
- Videogame screenshots
- Movies
- Art of books for games and movies

Collect as much of the similar visual style of work as you can. Pay attention to:
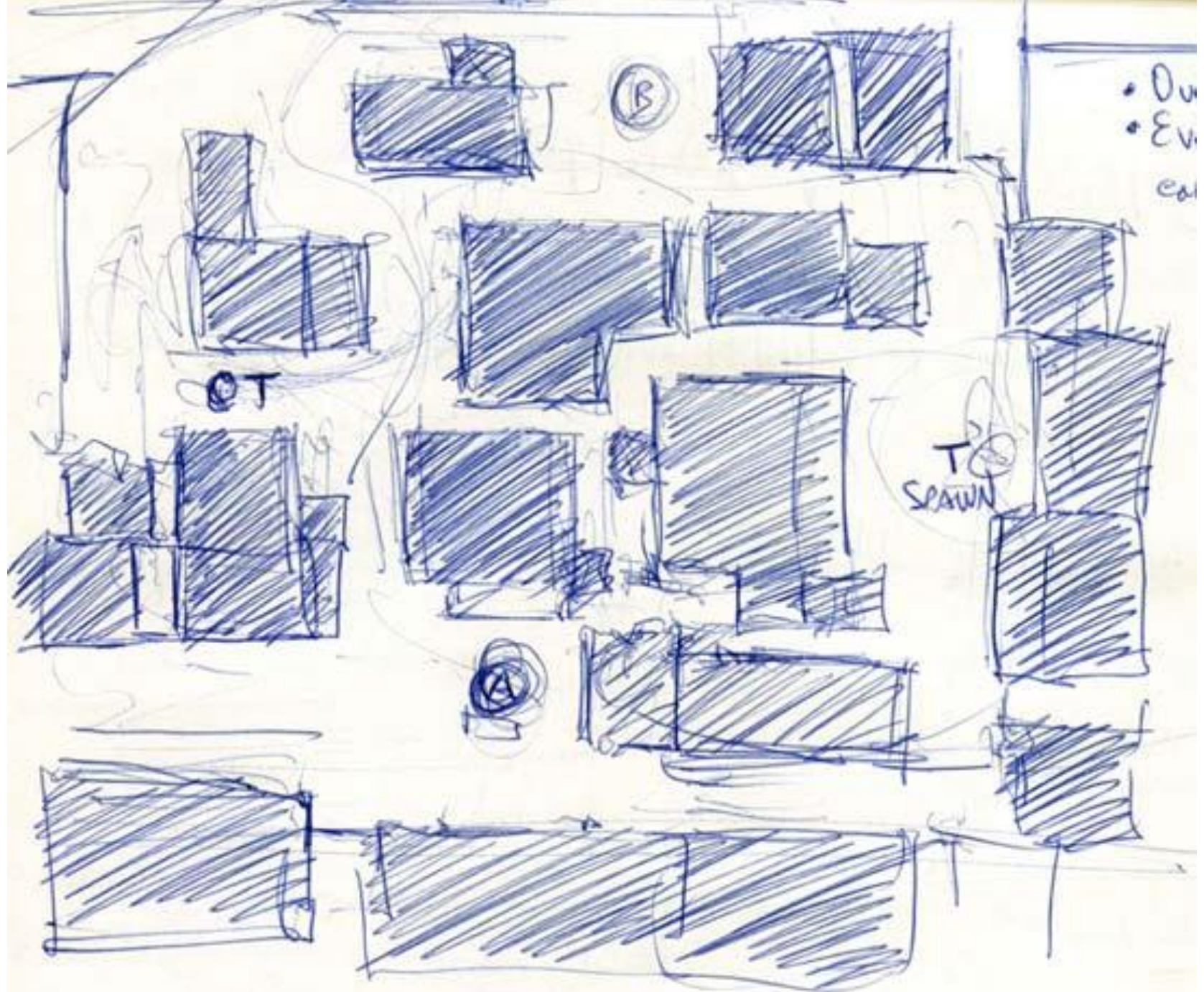
- Lighting
- Colours
- Stylisation of the world
- Atmosphere and feel
- Architecture

# Top-down gameplay

It is **essential** to create a top down view of the environment before opening up a level editor

A top down sketch will give you an overview of playable space. Weapon placement, items, player pathways and spacing of the environment can all be visualised

# Top-down gameplay

**Questions/Issues to consider**:

- Player starts
- Pathways and direction
- Alternate routes
- Playable areas and non-entry areas
- Placement of buildings, objects, and landscape
- Focal points/Important locations
- Entry/Exit points
- Choke points or various confrontation/battle areas
- AI enemies
- Scripted events
- Audio
- Storyline plot points
- Cinematics
- Spacing and spatial relationships of locations, objects and events

# Playtesting

**PLAYTEST EARLY- PLAYTEST OFTEN!**

Issues of design, balance, skill, strategy, flow and pacing will need **many iterations** and testing

- Make early and frequent playtesting an integral part of the project plan for your level
- Block in content to your map in stages
- Begin to integrate AI, scripting and gameplay.
- Test every feature as you add it
- Get others to playtest your map along the way
- Carefully document every issue, and how it was resolved