Workshop 1: Introduction to Game Design

Understanding Games, Players, and Design Elements

2025-08-25

> 💡 **Slide Notes or Announcements**
>
> None

> ℹ **Alternative Formats**
>
> - **Slides**
> - **Outline**
> - **PDF**

Let's get started!

Today's Journey

- What makes a game?
- Understanding players
- Game elements & mechanics
- Hands-on analysis

Prompt: "Who here plays games? What's your favorite?"

Workshop Roadmap

1. **Part 1:** What is a Game? 🎮
   - Definitions, platforms, and genres
   - What makes games enjoyable?
2. **Part 2:** Game Elements Deep Dive 🎯
   - Narrative, objectives, mechanics
   - Game aesthetics and design
3. **Part 3:** Analysis & Creation 🚀
   - Game analysis activity
   - Your first design ideas

Part 1: What is a Game?

🤔 Quick Poll

In 30 seconds, write down:

"A game is..."

Common themes:
- **Rules** and constraints
- **Goals** to achieve
- **Challenges** to overcome
- **Choices** that matter
- **Feedback** on actions

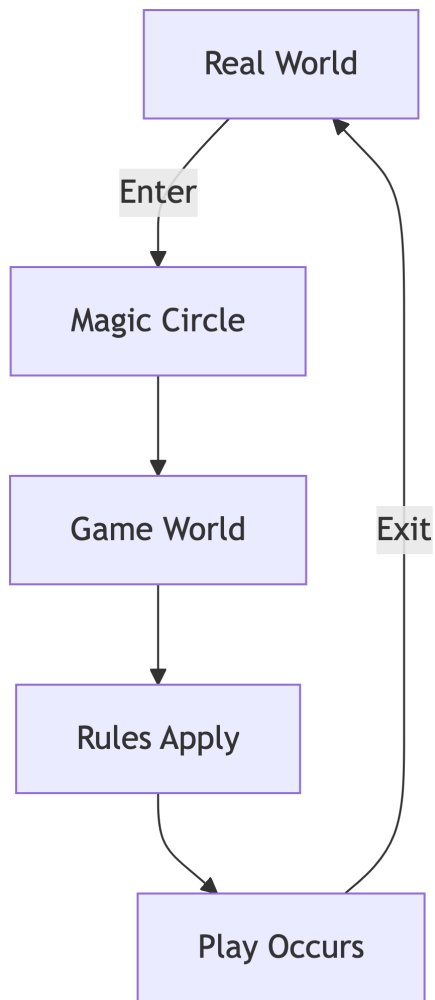---

The Magic Circle

Games Create Special Spaces
- **Separate from real life**
- **Different rules apply**
- **Voluntary participation**
- **Meaningful actions**

> 💡 Tip
>
> Think of it like stepping into another world with its own logic!

```mermaid
Real World
    │ Enter
    ▼
Magic Circle
    │
    ▼
Game World
    │
    ▼
Rules Apply
    │
    ▼
Play Occurs
    │ Exit
    ▲
Real World
```

Where Do We Play?

🎮 **Console**
PlayStation, Xbox, Switch

💻 **PC**
Steam, Epic, GOG

📱 **Mobile**
iOS, Android

🌐 **Web**
Browser-based

🥽 **VR/AR**
Meta Quest, PSVR

🕹️ **Arcade**
Classic & Modern

Discussion: How does platform affect game design?

Who Makes Games?

- **AAA Studios** - Large teams (100-1000+ people)
- **Indie Developers** - Small teams (1-20 people)

- **Solo Developers** - One person armies!
- **Students** - That's you! 🌟

Every game starts with an idea and passion!

Game Enjoyment Spectrum
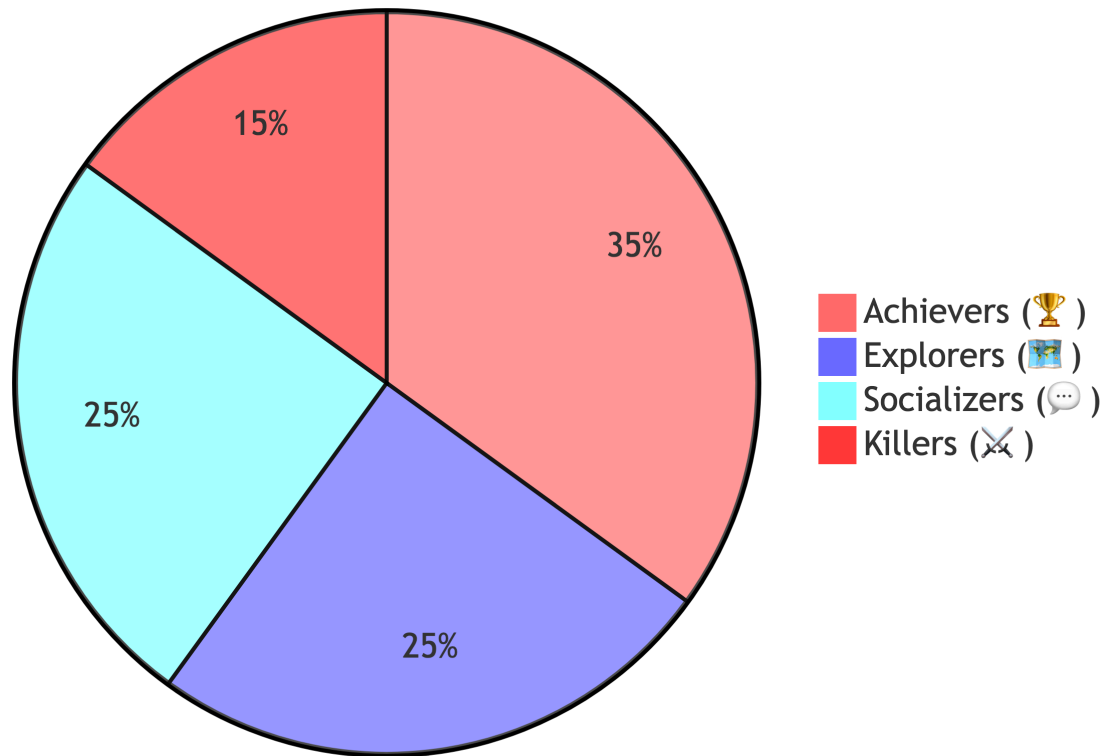
Left Side = Makes Games Fun 😊

- Fair challenge
- Clear objectives
- Satisfying feedback
- Player agency
- Good pacing

Right Side = Makes Games Frustrating 😫

- Unfair difficulty
- Confusing goals
- Poor controls
- No meaningful choices
- Bad UI/UX

Understanding Players: Bartle Types

Player Motivations

- **Achievers:** Want to accomplish goals
- **Explorers:** Want to discover everything
- **Socializers:** Want to interact with others
- **Killers:** Want to compete and dominate

Game Genres

Genres = Gameplay, NOT Story!

Action
- Platformers
- Shooters
- Fighting

Strategy
- Real-time (RTS)
- Turn-based
- Tower Defense

Adventure
- Point & Click
- Action-Adventure
- Survival

Puzzle
- Match-3
- Physics
- Logic

RPG
- JRPG
- Action RPG
- Tactical RPG

Simulation
- Life Sim
- Management
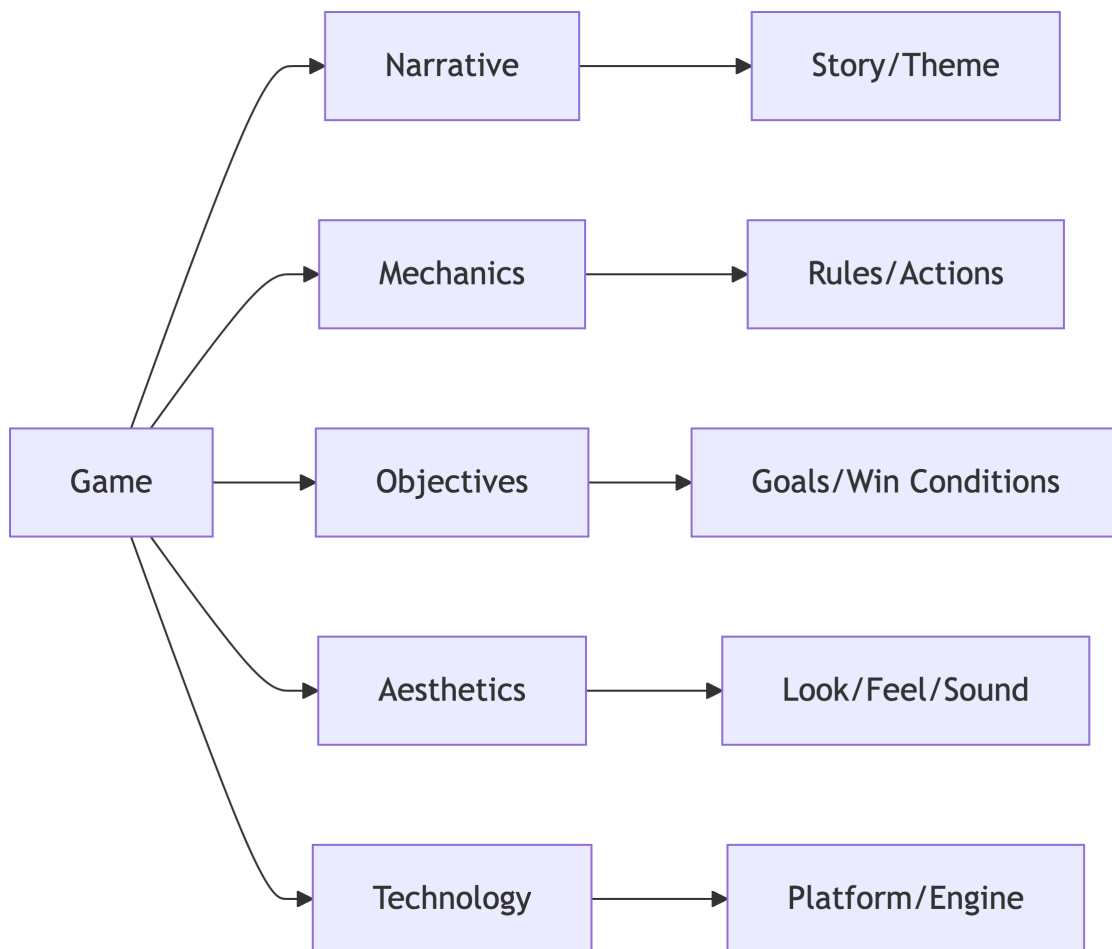- Sports

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🎯 Activity Break: Genre Mashup!

Pair up and combine two genres:

1. Pick two random genres
2. Describe your hybrid game in 2 minutes
3. Share with the class!

Example: Puzzle + Racing = *"Speed Sudoku Rally - Solve puzzles to unlock boost!"*

Part 2: Game Elements

The Anatomy of a Game

```
                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
                    │  Narrative   │───────▶│ Story/Theme  │
                    └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
                    │  Mechanics   │───────▶│ Rules/Actions│
                    └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘

   ┌──────────┐     ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
   │   Game   │────▶│  Objectives  │───────▶│  Goals/Win Conditions│
   └──────────┘     └──────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
                    │  Aesthetics  │───────▶│  Look/Feel/Sound │
                    └──────────────┘        └──────────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
                    │  Technology  │───────▶│  Platform/Engine │
                    └──────────────┘        └──────────────────┘
```

Narrative: Stories in Games

Linear Narrative

- Fixed story path
- Predetermined outcomes
- Focus on storytelling

Examples: The Last of Us, Uncharted

Branching Narrative

- Player choices matter
- Multiple endings
- Replay value

Examples: Mass Effect, Detroit

Environmental Narrative

Tell stories through the world itself!

Game Objectives

The Player's North Star ⭐

1. **Short-term:** Immediate goals (collect coin, defeat enemy)
2. **Medium-term:** Level or mission goals (reach checkpoint)
3. **Long-term:** Overall game goal (save the world!)

> ! Important
>
> **Good objectives are:**
>
> - Clear and understandable
> - Achievable but challenging
> - Meaningful to the player

Player Options & Agency

What Can Players Do?

Core Actions

- Move
- Jump
- Attack
- Interact

Strategic Choices

- Build/Create
- Customize

- Dialogue options
- Resource management

  Key Principle: More meaningful choices = More engagement

Game Mechanics: The Rules

Mechanics Define Possibilities

Movement
- Walking/Running speed
- Jump height and distance
- Climbing abilities
- Swimming mechanics

Combat
- Attack patterns
- Damage calculation
- Health systems
- Special abilities

Economy
- Currency systems
- Resource gathering
- Trading mechanics
- Upgrade paths

Progression
- Experience points
- Skill trees
- Unlockables
- Difficulty scaling

Visual Design & Aesthetics

The Look and Feel
- **Art Style:** Realistic, Stylized, Pixel, Low-poly
- **Color Palette:** Mood and atmosphere
- **UI/UX Design:** How players interact
- **Animation:** Bringing life to the game
- **Particle Effects:** Polish and feedback

Audio: The Unsung Hero 🎵

Sound Elements

- **Music:** Sets emotional tone
- **SFX:** Feedback and immersion
- **Voice Acting:** Character depth
- **Ambient Sound:** World building

> 💡 Try This!
>
> Play your favorite game with sound OFF. Notice what's missing?

🎮 Live Demo: Deconstructing Candy Crush

Let's analyze together:

1. **Objective?** Clear levels, match candies
2. **Mechanics?** Swipe to match 3+
3. **Feedback?** Sounds, animations, scores
4. **Progression?** Levels, power-ups, challenges
5. **Monetization?** Lives, boosters, extra moves

Part 3: Game Analysis

Critical Analysis Framework

The 7 Questions Every Designer Should Ask:

1. Who is the **protagonist**?
2. Who is the **antagonist**?
3. What is the game **objective**?
4. What **obstacles** prevent achieving it?
5. When does the game get **easier**?
6. When does the game get **harder**?
7. How does the game make you **feel**?

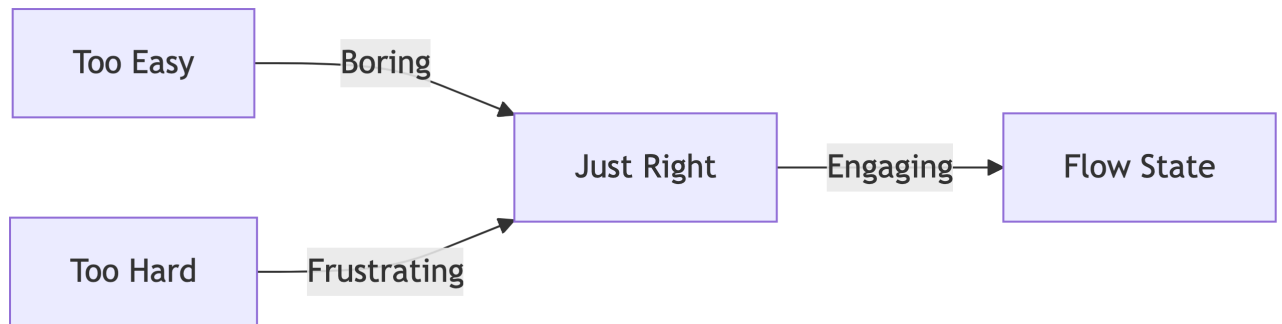## Workshop Activity: Game Analysis

Choose Your Game! (15 minutes)

1. **Select** a game you know well
2. **Answer** the 7 critical questions
3. **Identify** 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses
4. **Share** with a partner
5. **Present** one interesting finding to class

> **i Note**
>
> Use the worksheet provided or create your own notes!

Game Balance: The Goldilocks Zone

```
┌──────────────┐
│   Too Easy   │──Boring──┐
└──────────────┘          ↓
                    ┌──────────────┐            ┌──────────────┐
                    │  Just Right  │──Engaging──▶│  Flow State  │
                    └──────────────┘            └──────────────┘
┌──────────────┐          ↑
│   Too Hard   │─Frustrating┘
└──────────────┘
```

Finding Flow
- **Challenge** matches **Skill**
- **Clear** goals and feedback
- **Sense** of control
- **Deep** concentration
- **Time** seems to disappear

Player Experience Journey

💡 Design Challenge: Quick Modification

Improve Candy Crush in 5 Minutes!

1. **Identify** one element to change
2. **Explain** why it needs improvement
3. **Propose** your modification
4. **Predict** player impact
5. **Share** your best idea!

Remember: Every design choice has trade-offs!

Creating Your Game Design Document

Start Your Journey! 📝
Document Sections

- Game Concept
- Target Audience
- Core Mechanics
- Visual Style
- Unique Features

Brainstorm Now!

Write 5 game ideas: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____

Types of Design Documents

Pitch Document

- 1-2 pages
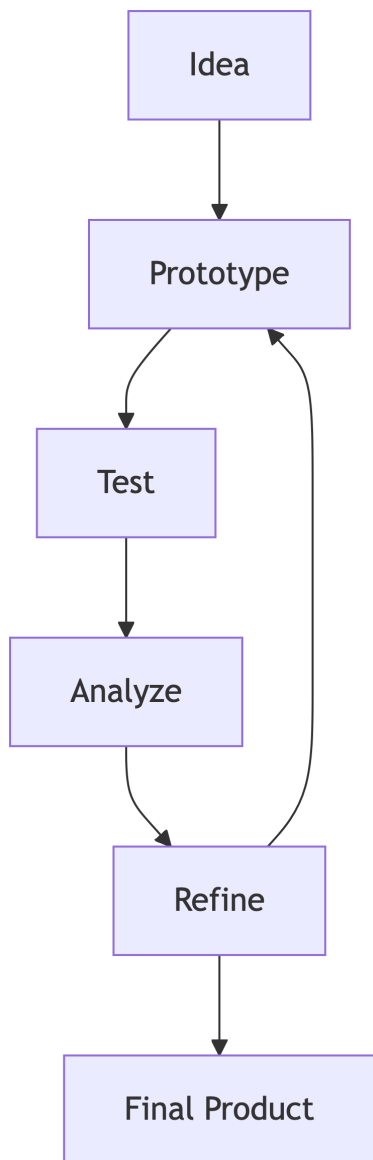- High concept
- Key features
- Target market

Game Design Doc

- 10-50 pages
- Detailed mechanics
- Level designs
- Technical requirements

One-Pager

- Visual summary
- Core loop
- Art style
- Unique selling points

The Iterative Design Process

```
┌─────────────┐
│     Idea    │
└─────────────┘
       │
       ▼
┌─────────────┐
│  Prototype  │ ◄───┐
└─────────────┘     │
       │            │
       ▼            │
┌─────────────┐     │
│     Test    │     │
└─────────────┘     │
       │            │
       ▼            │
┌─────────────┐     │
│   Analyze   │     │
└─────────────┘     │
       │            │
       ▼            │
┌─────────────┐     │
│    Refine   │ ────┘
└─────────────┘
       │
       ▼
┌─────────────┐
│ Final Product│
└─────────────┘
```

> **!** Remember
>
> No game is perfect on the first try! Iteration is the key to great design.

Project Management Basics

The Four Phases

1. Initiation 🚀
Define scope and goals

2. Planning 📋
Create timeline and assign tasks

3. Execution ⚙️
Build and iterate

4. Closure ✔️
Polish and release

Tools for Success

Communication
- Discord/Slack
- Regular meetings
- Clear documentation
- Feedback loops

Organization
- Trello/Asana
- Version control (Git)
- Asset management
- Time tracking

🎯 Final Activity: Pitch Your Game!

30-Second Elevator Pitch
1. **Name** your game
2. **Genre** and platform
3. **Core** mechanic (one sentence)
4. **Unique** selling point
5. **Target** audience

Format: "[Game name] is a [genre] game where players [core mechanic] in order to [objective]. It's unique because [USP]."

Key Takeaways

✔️ Games are **systems** with rules, goals, and feedback

✔️ Understanding **player types** helps design better experiences

✔️ Every element should support the **core experience**

✅ **Iteration** and testing make games better

✅ **You** can make games!

Resources & Next Steps

Learn More

- GDC Talks (YouTube)
- Gamasutra/Game Developer
- Extra Credits (YouTube)
- Unity Learn Platform

Practice

- Analyze 3 different games
- Start your design document
- Download Unity
- Join game jams!

Homework & Preparation

Before Next Class:

1. ✍️ Complete Game Analysis Worksheet
2. 🎮 Play and analyze one new game
3. 📝 Expand your 5 game ideas to paragraphs
4. 💻 Install Unity and create account
5. 📚 Read Chapter 1 of assigned textbook

> ⚠️ Warning
>
> Unity installation can take time - start early!

Questions & Discussion

What excited you most today?

What challenged you?

What game will you create?

Thank You!

Next workshop:

Unity Editor Basics!

🎮 Keep Playing, Keep Learning! 🎮

You are now game designers. You are encouraged to look at games differently.
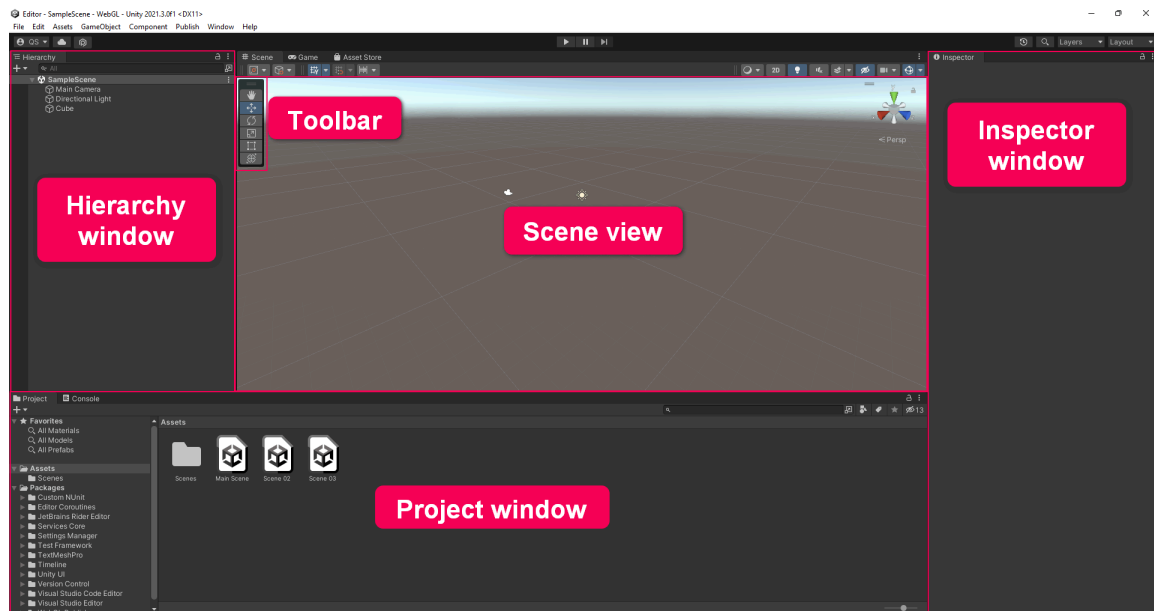

Bonus: Quick Unity Preview

Figure 1: Unity Editor Interface

Next workshop we'll explore:

- Scene view navigation
- GameObject manipulation
- Asset importing
- Play mode testing

Interactive Closing Poll

Rate your confidence (1-5):

🎯 Understanding what makes a game

🎨 Identifying game elements

📊 Analyzing game mechanics

💡 Creating game ideas

🚀 Ready to use Unity

We'll build this confidence together!