



IMGD 1001 - The Game Development Process: Game Design Documents

by

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(with lots of input from Mark Claypool!)



Types of Game Design Docs

- Concept Document
 - Proposal Document
 - Technical Specification
 - Game Design Document
 - Level Designs
-

Concept Document

- Used to explore game idea in more detail
- Often used as a proposal within an organization
- Developed by designer or visionary
- A short sales pitch - 1-3 pages
- May have no art, or amateur art
- Many ideas never get farther than this

Concept Doc

- Must include:
 - Intro
 - Description
 - Key features
 - Genre, spin, flavor
 - Platform(s) / market data
- May also include:
 - Background / License info
 - Concept art

High Concept (1 of 2)

- The key sentence that describes your game
- MUST get the concept across concisely and quickly
- If you can't -- it may be too complicated to sell.

High Concept (2 of 2)

- Not so good:
 - "MindRover is a game in which players build and program robotic vehicles to compete in a variety of challenges including battles, races, puzzles, and sports."
- Better:
 - "MindRover is like *Battlebots* ... but with brains."
 - Still not good enough

Exercise: High Concept

- Pick one of these 4 games:
 - Burnout
 - Grand Theft Auto
 - Shadow of the Colossus
 - Dance Dance Revolution
- Write a high concept for it
- Form groups based on game choice
- Agree on one

Proposal Doc

- Used to get a deal
- Shown to publishers and 3rd parties
- Enough detail to show that the proposal is viable - 5-50 pages
- Sales oriented
- Big picture
- Polished!

Proposal

- Must include:
 - Revised concept
 - Market analysis
 - Technical analysis
 - Schedule
 - Budget
 - Risks
 - Cost and revenue projections
 - Pessimistic, likely, optimistic
 - Art

Technical Specification

- The 'How' of game design
- Contains the architectural vision; technology to be used
- Engineering detail
- Production detail
- Owned by tech director or chief engineer
- Can be exhaustive (and exhausting): 10-100 pages

Tech Spec

- Must include:
 - Tooling
 - Art / Music / Sound / Production pipeline
 - Technology detail:
 - Platform & portability issues
 - Networking or special tech
 - Server details
 - Software engineering info
 - Major design elements
 - Key areas of technical risk
 - Alternatives to risky or expensive sections

Game Design Doc

- Functional spec: The 'What' of the design
- Describes the player's experience and interactions in detail
 - Could be quite long -- several hundred pages -- but "enough" is the goal.
- Artistic feel
- Owned by the game designer
- A living document
- "The Bible"

Game Design Doc

- Must Haves
 - Game mechanics
 - User Interface
 - Visuals
 - Audio
 - Story (if any)
 - Level Specs

Very Useful links

- Chris Taylor's sample design doc, in HTML and .DOC format:
<http://www.fafhrdproductions.com/ctaylordesign.htm>
<http://www.jonathanjblair.net/ctaylordesigntemplate.zip>
- Tim Ryan's excellent two-part description of game design docs:
http://www.gamasutra.com/features/19991019/ryan_01.htm
http://www.gamasutra.com/features/19991217/ryan_01.htm