

IP Proposal

by Paige Hodgson

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BA Computer Games Design

Independent Project Project Proposal ACCA6020

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Project Title:

How does the difference between stylism and realism in 3D design influence players' immersion and emotional engagement?

Identifying the problem:

In recent years, the gaming industry has expanded rapidly, with new releases emerging from both AAA studios and small independent teams. This growth has highlighted a clear divide between stylised and realistic approaches to 3D visual design, each shaping how players experience immersion and emotional engagement. For example, '*Red Dead Redemption 2*' [1] achieves a high level of realism through detailed environments and life like visuals, though this level of accuracy often demands a lot of time and resources.

In contrast, '*Fortnite*'s [2] stylised art direction offers greater creative flexibility, lower production costs, and broader device compatibility. Some players argue that cartoon visuals lessen the sense of immersion within games, while others believe excessive realism can distract from the emotional impact. Parting a balance between two extremes, '*Baldur's Gate 3*' [3] demonstrates how a semi-realistic style can maintain visual appeal without sacrificing immersion according to game reviewers with *IGN* "incredible attention to detail also extends to the area design and writing". [4]

Aims and objectives:

The primary aim of this project is to highlight the ongoing challenge of finding the ideal balance between visual stylism and realism in 3D game design, researching how each affects the player's immersion and/ or emotional engagement towards its content. Within the creative aspect of the project, the action to create concepts via *Adobe Photoshop* [5] to further the understanding of varying degrees of visual design techniques is imperative for progression.

SMART Objectives:

1. Model a 3D asset pack, considering visual elements to showcase within *Unreal Engine*. [6]
2. Measure player engagement and immersion through research surveys.
3. Design and create an interior 3D asset pack using the given time frame, making use of *Unreal Engine*'s [6] visuals and lighting to present.
4. Review player immersion and engagement in varying environments with alternating visual approaches from realism to stylism. The development of a player survey will

further expand upon the general understanding of what players are looking for in modern gaming.

5. Complete each section of the project, includes primary and secondary research, concept designs, feedback, documentation and development. Use the allocated time to assess progression and note impactful data on immersion and engagement.

Why this project is worth it:

While the word 'Realism' carries a broad meaning, it involves varying interpretations from different people and is subjective within this research. The term 'realism' and 'Stylism' is used in relation to a game's 3D visuals, and it is important to establish different viewpoints within the subject matter to better understand the gaming industry and its consumer's needs going forward for the successful production within modern gaming.

Project success criteria:

Asses the link between the player and engagement towards interior environments. Make use through surveys to produce qualitative data in the form of primary research and gather feedback to help towards implementing final ideas, as well as conclusions with secondary research.

Deliverables:

1. Player Immersion study: A written report including analysis of interior designs, styles and themes. Linking the connection between both visual approaches to 3D style.
2. Interior design concepts: Grouped pieces of designs, sketches and photo bashes within editing software to establish ideas on potential groundwork.
3. Survey Piece: A set of collected data through the form of a survey to separate and distinguish useful ideas into a coherent plan.
4. 3D Asset pack: A collective assortment of interior digital models combined with textures, and materials. Modelled with *Maya* [7], then displayed and presented within *Unreal Engine*. [6]

How the project relates to the written work:

The project is in relation to the written piece as it requires research and analysis to further progression within the subject matter. Various concept pieces would benefit from the use of the research. Various design choices would be beneficial with the use of relevant research and written studies to back up any acquired data.

Ethical concerns within the project:

When performing surveys, ensure all participants are of appropriate age, preventing exposure to content or questions deemed inappropriate to younger audiences.

What has already surfaced within this subject area:

Stylistic Customisation to semi-realism



[Image 1: In-Game Screenshot Minecraft interior design]

Players utilise the free creative reign over games such as *Minecraft* [8] to build various external and internal designs within the respective limitations of the games' visual art style. For years however, fans have sought out texture packs that alter the original designs and textures of in-game assets to incorporate high fidelity towards a semi-hype realistic approach in textures. Various articles debate the validity and 'realism' of various public fan made creations. "Get ready for shadows, reflections, and textures so convincing your real life will start to look blocky in comparison." [9]

Interior Design and Customisation into real life



[Image 2: In-Game Screenshot The Sims4]

A written report by Charles Paulk, talking about *Signifying Play: The Sims and the Sociology of Interior Design* [10] mention the link and surge in younger audiences (most notably teens) showing a growing interest in decorating their personal spaces. This showcases the increase in modern day gaming and its potential influence on creative influence and output to the real world. “Coincidentally or not, the years since The Sims' release have seen a radical democratization of interior design.” [10]

Emotional immersion through gaming



[Image3: In-Game screenshot Grand Theft Auto V: Online]

The influence of immersion in a player can be subdivided into six different variables: Narrative, Gameplay, Video, Audio, Social Relations and Artificial Intelligence. Each of these elements are primarily needed functions of a digital game, and it is possible to delve into each of them separately when it comes to linking a visual impact with an emotional one.

Topic familiarity:

Environment design and interior concepts are always taken into consideration throughout the course of 3D modelling and creation.

Brief Literature review:

"The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses" by Jesse Schell (CRC Press, 2008) [11]

-A view of game design mechanics, aesthetics, experience, including how art contributes to the subject.

"Stylized Art Style vs. Realism: The Art of Pixels in Games," by Volodymyr Liubchuk (VSQUAD Blog, 26 July 2025) [12]

-Technologies that developers use to achieve a stylised visuals within modern 3D games

“Level Design vs. Environment Design,” by Josh Bycer (SUPERJUMP, 16 Apr. 2018) [13]

-The differences when it comes to balancing worldbuilding between level design and environmental design

“Signifying Play: The Sims and the Sociology of Interior Design,” by Charles Paulk (Game Studies, vol. 6, no. 1, Dec. 2006) [10]

-How interior design can be influential and impactful on a player’s creative output

“Exploring 3D Art Styles for Games: A Guide to the Most Popular Types,” by RocketBrush Studio (RocketBrush Blog, Feb. 5, 2024) [14]

-Various examples of modern-day 3D games that heavily adapted their visual approach into a theme

“The Effects of Graphical Fidelity on Player Experience,” by Kathrin Gerling, Max Birk, Regan L. Mandryk and Andre Doucette. A Conference Paper (Oct. 14, 2013)

-Links visual appeal and practicality into gameplay

Bibliography:

[1] Red Dead Redemption 2, Rockstar Games, New York, NY, USA, 2018. [Video Game].

[2] Fortnite, Epic Games, Cary, NC, USA, 2017. [Video Game].

[3] Baldur’s Gate 3, Larian Studios, Ghent, Belgium, 2023. [Video Game].

[4] L. Hafer, “Baldur’s Gate 3 Review,” IGN, Aug. 21, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ign.com/articles/baldurs-gate-3-review> [Accessed: 19/10/2025]

[5] Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Inc., San Jose, CA, USA, 1990. [Software].

[6] Unreal Engine, Epic Games, Cary, NC, USA, 1998. [Software].

[7] Autodesk Maya, Autodesk Inc., San Rafael, CA, USA, 1998. [Software].

[8] Minecraft, Mojang Studios, Stockholm, Sweden, 2011. [Video Game].

[9] M. Griffin, “Minecraft Like Never Before: Most Realistic Resource Packs,” GTXGaming, Nov. 30, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.gtxgaming.co.uk/minecraft-like-never-before-most-realistic-resource-packs/> [Accessed 19/10/2025]

- [10] C. Paulk, "Signifying Play: The Sims and the Sociology of Interior Design," *Game Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, Dec. 2006. [Online]. Available: <https://www.gamestudies.org/0601/articles/paulk> [Accessed: 19/10/2025]
- [11] J. Schell, *The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses*, 3rd ed. Boca Raton, FL, USA: CRC Press, 2008.
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- [13] Bycer, J., "Level Design vs. Environment Design," *SUPERJUMP*, 16 Apr. 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://medium.com/super-jump/level-design-vs-environmental-design-b8d19992924e> [Accessed: 19/10/2025]
- [14] RocketBrush Studio Ltd., "Exploring 3D Art Styles for Games: A Guide to the Most Popular Types," *RocketBrush Blog*, Feb. 5, 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://rocketbrush.com/blog/exploring-3d-art-styles-for-games-a-guide-to-the-most-popular-types> [Accessed: 19/10/2025]
- [15] K. M. Gerling, M. Birk, R. L. Mandryk and A. Doucette, "The Effects of Graphical Fidelity on Player Experience," in *Proc. International Conference on Making Sense of Converging Media (AcademicMindTrek '13)*, Tampere, Finland, Oct. 1-4, 2013 [Online]. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262288972_The_Effects_of_Graphical_Fidelity_on_Player_Experience
[Accessed 18/10/2025]

IP Proposal

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

68/100

BA GAMES – PROJECT PROPOSAL – ACCA6020
INDEPENDENT PROJECT (5%)

Student – Paige
Hodgson
–
68%

Mark

Intro / A&O (500 words)		
Project title; Identification of a specific problem to be investigated; Well-defined aims and SMART objectives; Explaining why this project is worth doing; Discussion of what the project needs to do in order to be a success; Description any deliverables that will be produced at the end of the project Choice of project title is strong. It is investigative and directly addresses stylism vs. realism's impact on immersion/engagement, key to modern games. Problem identified with excellent examples (RDR2 [1] realism vs. Fortnite [2]	40	27

stylism; BG3 [3] balance via IGN [4]). Highlights industry divide, costs, and player debates – well-contextualized. Reasoning for project ties to subjective interpretations and industry needs (consumer preferences). Success criteria to be attained via surveys (qualitative/quantitative) – this is practical and the right path to take, well done. Deliverables have been outlined well with a good awareness for the software required to achieve success. Some of the SMART style objectives that were present in the document were quite vague and would lend themselves better to more practical explanations of each in relation to the proposed project. Add a potential success metric. E.G. "Success: ≥75% survey agreement on style-immersion link".		
Background to the Project (500 words)		
Description of how the work to be done by in the project relates to the work identified in the literature review; Discussion of any ethical issues raised by the project Identifying what has already been done within the field; Topic familiarity; Brief literature review using appropriate sources – 6-8 journal papers and book chapters	40	25

rather than just websites; Selection of relevant models & concepts Clear topic familiarity and justification for project given. A sound review of work already completed in the field have been given. Good examples (Minecraft [8] texture packs [9]; Sims [10] real-world influence; GTA V immersion variables). Research completed in literature review links to relevant models and concepts. Well done. Potentially some more sources from an academic grounding. Perhaps psychological journals relating to immersion? Always try to aim for books/journals first when it comes to references.		
Document Presentation		
Correct spelling, grammar and punctuation; Flow of narrative/fluency; Coherence; Word processed ; Correct use of referencing with bibliography; Strict word limit There is a professional level of formatting and flow to the document with a clear narrative. Good use of headings and bullet points to streamline information and increase readability.	20	16

IEEE Referencing has been used correctly throughout with a bibliography.		
TOTAL	100	68

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