

project proposal

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BA (Hons) Computer Games Design

Independent project: Project proposal

The Effect of Storytelling Through artistic design

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Project Introduction

For my dissertation, I would like to investigate the effectiveness of the 7 elements [1] of design in storytelling and if narrative can be communicated through the design of characters and environments within video games. I will research into the different elements of design, such as line, shape, form, colour, texture, space, and value to discover which of them is most effective at increasing player immersion and story plausibility visually.

Furthermore, I plan on researching games that are successful for their style, characters and story and find connections between the 7 elements of design or discover new techniques that they use. For example, Elden Ring is a game that is highly successful for its design and storytelling. I will investigate the reason behind why its designs are so successful and unique compared to others, and how I can learn from this to expand on my own designs and prove my theory that narrative can also be shown through visual design.

An example of this, as supported by an article from G2A, *“In Elden Ring, this grim atmosphere complements perfectly the highly developed, mythically inspired lore, creating a cohesive and immersive experience that absorbs players completely.”* [1] The article discusses the various reasons behind the video game ‘Elden Ring’s’ [2] success, one of which being its visual design and aesthetics, mentioning that it complements the narrative of the game, creating an immersive experience for players.



(Image 1: Elden Ring Landscape [1]).

Identifying the problem

Regardless of the game's gameplay or graphics, some games fail in the industry due to their character and environment designs. One such example of this is the game 'Concord'[3]. An article from Forbes supports this, mentioning *"A core problem with the game is that it's just...viscerally unappealing"* [4]. Sony's decision to make Concord a paid game out of the gate, with no appealing designs to go with it, ultimately made the release a failure, and the game was shut down a month after release, with the developer even offering refunds to players who purchased the game. [5]



(Image 2 : Concord Characters [2]).

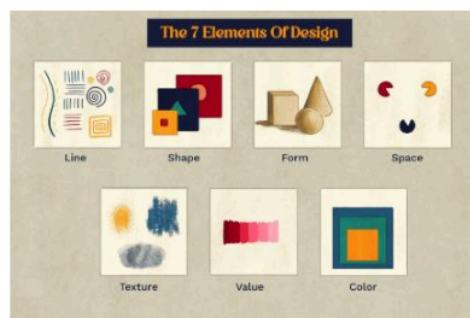
Comparing this to a game like 'Genshin Impact' [6] for example, which is one of the most successful mobile and PC games, generating a \$6.3 billion revenue since release [7] and considered to be the *'world's top grossing mobile game in 2022'* [8]. You can see the importance of good character designs. This theory is supported by the game's earnings, for example, despite the game's free-to-play nature, players have spent thousands on the game. In its first year, the game earned a *"jaw-dropping \$3.7 billion"* [9] on player revenue, the *"highest for any game in history"* [9]. This is thanks to the game's beautiful character designs, which players pay to collect through the Gacha mechanic.



(Image 3 : Genshin Impact Official Art [3]).

Aims of the project

My objectives of the project are to utilise the 7 elements of design to expand on the narrative of game characters and environments. I plan on researching various techniques within the 7 elements of design and discover what they are used for and how I can expand on this in a videogame environment, furthering player experience and gameplay.



(Image 4: 7 Elements of Design [4]).

SMART objectives

- To prove that good visual design can not only improve player immersion, but also expand on narrative
- To discover techniques within design that can be utilised for visual storytelling
- Learn the 7 elements of design and how they can be used in video game design
- Research games with highly successful designs and stories and find connections between them and why they are successful

Why is this topic worth investigating?

Mastering appealing game aesthetic design, especially character design is an important necessity for the success of many games. By researching the methods to do this, I can find ways to utilise this to improve player experience and immersion and prove the importance of concept designers in the Games development team. Furthermore, I can improve my own skills in character design, benefitting from new knowledge to further my career in this field.

Deliverables

The outcomes of the project:

- A portfolio of successful character designs and concept art, developed from player feedback and research
- Project report of all research, processes, failed attempts and conclusions showing my progress through the project
- Document summarising my findings and my research outcomes. Demonstrating what I have learnt through my research and showing how certain designs work better than others in games with strong story, and how these designs can add value to the narrative of the game.
- 3-5 well designed and in-depth characters with concept art and backstory, showcasing narrative and personality through their design.

Use of written work and research

The research conducted will investigate different methods to improve narrative through character design. Methods such as the 7 elements of design will be researched and utilised in the practical aspect of the project. Furthermore, I will investigate games with

successful character designs and aesthetic appeal, versus non successful games and use my findings to prove my theory, as well as improve my designs.

Previous research in this field

A blog by CG Spectrum investigates the different values that make up a good character design. They mention many of the seven elements of design, theorising that these can improve a character's appearance and recognisability for a game. For example, one of the seven elements of design is silhouette, which they mention *"When all details have been removed, does the character's silhouette still quickly identify them? (As an example, think about Mickey Mouse's simple but highly recognizable silhouette.)"* [10]

Furthermore, they mention that another important factor of character design is costume- *"Does the character dress in a way that is authentic with their characteristics and story? Does it work with their environment?"* [10] this statement relates to my theory of character aesthetics bare important for narrative as well, and how narrative can be told through visual design.

A study blog on Narrative art [2] suggests that *"Everyone can relate to art that tells a story, and so narrative art is an excellent vehicle for engaging audiences"*[11]. With this in mind, videogames could improve their narrative and player-immersion experience through visual design alone.

Topic Familiarity

This project will help me refine my skills as well as learn new things specific for concept art and character design and how it can be used to improve a game's worldbuilding and player experience. This will teach me the skills needed to get into a career in concept art as I will have researched this topic specifically thoroughly.

While I have strong skills in art as well as character design and storytelling, I have not researched in depth into the elements of design and how they can be used, especially in relation to storytelling in a videogame setting.

Literature review

Katherine, I. (2016) How Games Move us, Emotion by Design. "Chapter 1 – A series of Interesting Choices: The Building Blocks of Emotional Design", p.11-20. The MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. [12]

This section of the book discusses the effect video game avatars can have on players emotionally and how the design, qualities and player experience can build the character.

Marianne, K. Jeannie, N. (2006) Game Story & Character Development. "Chapter 1 – The History of Story: How we've evolved as storytellers", p.4-14. Cengage Learning, Delmar Cengage Learning. [13]

This chapter discusses how stories and narrative have been told through history using different methods of visuals, such as art and television.

Marianne, K. Jeannie, N. (2006) Game Story & Character Development. "Chapter 4 – Game Storytelling Devices: integrating game-specific elements into a story", p.90. Cengage Learning, Delmar Cengage Learning. [13]

This page of the book discusses character customisation and its effects on player experience. This could be useful for my research as it involves how players react to specific designs and their connection to a character.

Marianne, K. Jeannie, N. (2006) Game Story & Character Development. "Chapter 6 – Character Development: Building Compelling Characters", p.147. Cengage Learning, Delmar Cengage Learning. [13]

Discusses the importance of visuals in character development and how they may affect the player's experience. I will compare this to other sources regarding character design to see if design for videogames may differ from outside sources.

Jim, T. (2007) The Computer Game Design Course. "Chapter 1 – Design Theory", p.58. Thames & Hudson, Quarto Publishing plc. [14]

This section discusses the growing importance of storytelling and how narrative structure should be created. This can benefit what I am researching as I may find links to aesthetic design through this.

Jim, T. (2007) *The Computer Game Design Course*. "Chapter 2 – Design Process", p.94. Thames & Hudson, Quarto Publishing plc. [14]

Emphasises the importance of populating the game world with in-depth character designs. It discusses visual aesthetics, character backstory and their behaviours. This will benefit me as I can learn more on how a good videogame character is made and apply that knowledge to visual design.

Selection of Models & Concept

-**The 7 Elements of Design** [1]: The seven Elements of design are the fundamental building blocks of visual composition used by artists and designers.

-**Narrative Art** [2]: The art of depicting or narrating a story through visual design

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[1] FromSoftware. (2022). Elden Ring. Tokyo, Japan. (Accessed: 19 October 2025).

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project proposal

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

62/100

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

Student – Elana Autumn Rees
Mark –
62%

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 Good project title with a clear focus. Introduction has a clear focus on 7 elements (line, shape, etc.) for visual storytelling in characters/environments – timely with examples like Elden Ring [1,2] (grim aesthetics enhance lore) and Genshin [6] (\$6B+ revenue via appealing designs [7,8,9]).	40	23

Problem has been identified with strong contrasts (Concord [3] failure due to "unappealing" designs [4,5]; Genshin success via gacha appeal). Deliverables and justification for project tie to industry success/career; tangible: portfolio (3-5 characters), report, feedback-driven art. Aims are somewhat vague/redundant with objectives. In the main work, potentially sharpen to one. (E.g.: "To evaluate how the 7 elements of design convey narrative in video game characters/environments, enhancing immersion via analysis and practical portfolio.") SMART objectives could potentially be made more relevant with the introduction of measurable success metrics/timelines. Add a success metric potentially for the project going forward. (I.E. project could be considered a success with >20 survey responses and an 80% link of elements to narrative (e.g., silhouette readability).		
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	40	24

review using appropriate sources – 6-8 journal papers and book chapters rather than just websites; Selection of relevant models & concepts There is a brief ethical consideration given but covers the research/practical work to be completed. Work already completed in the field has been reflected on with relevant sources. There is an honest reflection of topic familiarity with personal skills reflected on as well as career focused goals for growth. Well done. References used are strong but potentially would have benefitted from more academic sources (books, journals etc.).		
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 good level of formatting – good flow to the document with a clear narrative. Use of headings and bullet points to streamline information and increase readability.	20	15

IEEE Referencing has been used correctly throughout with a bibliography present		
TOTAL	100	62

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