

SESSION 4

Core Mechanics and Gameplay Loops

What does the player do, and why do they do it?



Today's outcome

- Describe a game through player verbs, rules, goals and feedback.
- Separate a repeated play cycle from longer progression.
- Break down an existing game, then draw a loop for your own project.

Output: one gameplay loop diagram with a clear risk, reward and next decision.

From visual direction to play

VISUAL DIRECTION

**The world looks dangerous
and inviting.**

PLAYER ACTION

**What can the player attempt in
that world?**

Examples: inspect, climb, collect, bargain, dodge, repair.

Six parts of a playable idea

Verb

What the player does

Mechanic

How an action changes the game

Rule

What permits or limits that change

System

How mechanics interact

Goal

What the player tries to achieve

Feedback

How the game shows a result

Player verbs give the concept focus



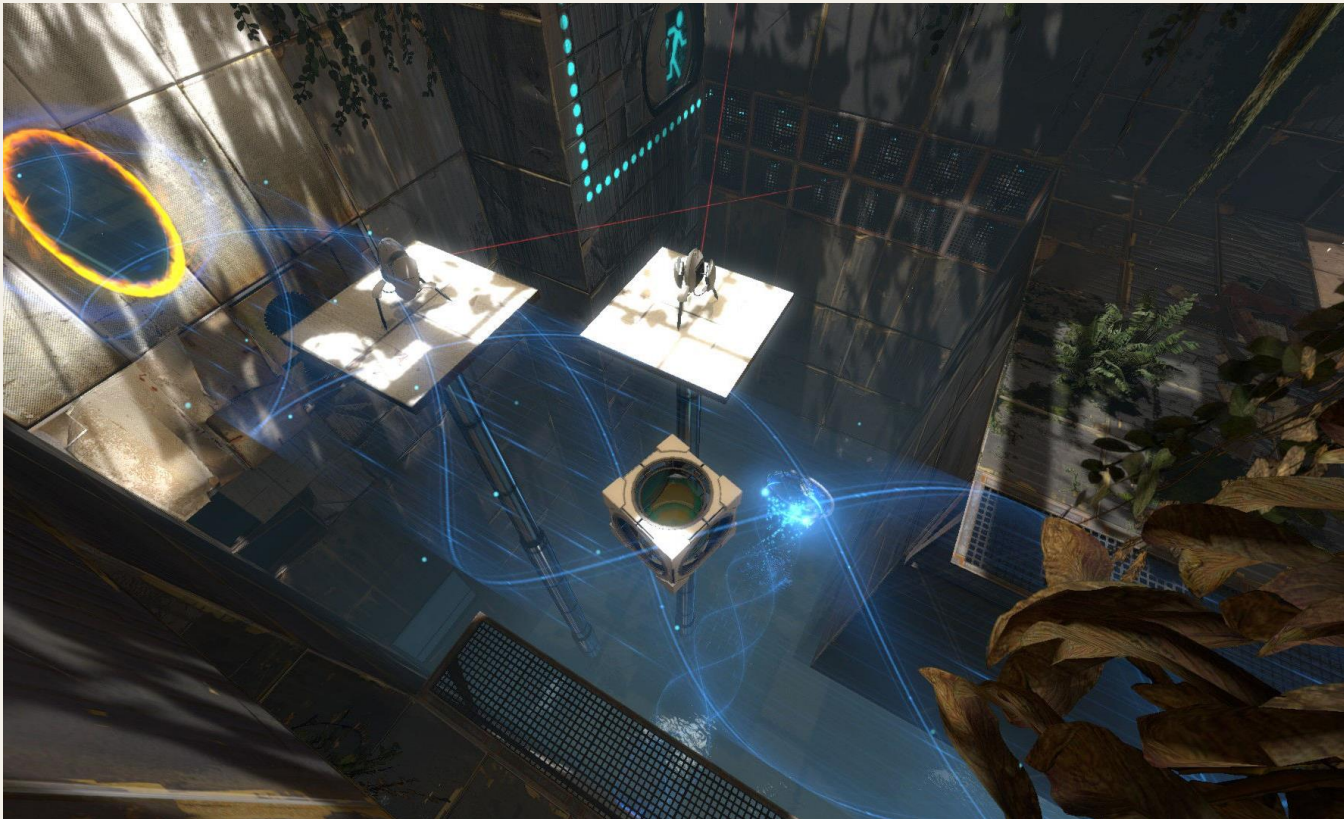
Hollow Knight

Hollow Knight

Move, jump, slash, dodge,
explore.

Which verbs take up most of a
normal minute?

A mechanic has a cause and effect



Portal 2

PORTAL EXAMPLE

Player places a portal.

The game checks the placement rule and changes where movement can lead.

Visual and audio feedback confirm the result.

Rules make choices meaningful

PERMISSION

What can the player interact with, and when?

COST

What does the action consume or put at risk?

CONSEQUENCE

What changes in the world after the action?

Example: the player can heal by spending a limited resource, but doing so uses a chance to attack.

Systems connect small mechanics



Stardew Valley

Stardew Valley

Planting uses seeds, time and space. Harvesting produces goods or income.

The combined rules create planning choices across days.

Goals and feedback keep play legible



Control Ultimate Edition

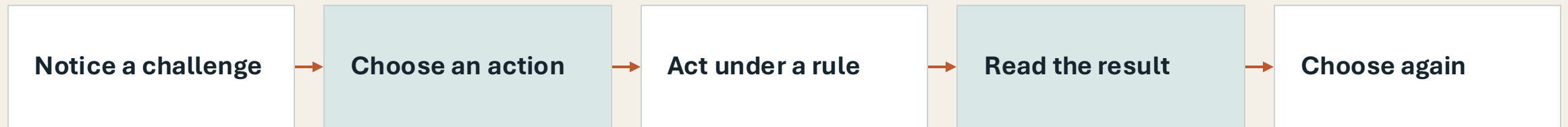
GOAL

What am I trying to do right now?

FEEDBACK

What changed after I acted, and how can I tell?

The core loop repeats during ordinary play



Each pass should change the next decision: position, information, resources, danger or opportunity.

If nothing changes, the sequence may be a task list rather than a loop.

Hades: a room-to-room loop



Hades

Encounter

Fight enemies → survive the room
→ choose a reward → adjust the
build → enter the next room

What carries into the next encounter: health, abilities and the player's knowledge.

Risk and reward change the next choice



Hades

RISK

Taking damage or losing a run can undo progress.

REWARD

A stronger build or new route can justify pushing ahead.

Break

On return, we will separate moment-to-moment play from longer progression.

Keep one existing game in mind for the breakdown exercise.

Progression changes future play



Hollow Knight

Hollow Knight

**Explore → face obstacles →
gain a new ability → revisit or
reach another route.**

The new ability changes what the
player can do next.

One loop can sit inside another

CORE LOOP

Explore

Meet obstacle

Use ability

Gain result

PROGRESSION LOOP

Repeated results build toward an upgrade or a new area, which changes future attempts.

The example sequence is a design model; each game will have its own structure.

Mechanic breakdown: an existing game

- 01** Choose a game you know well.
- 02** List its main player verbs and one important rule.
- 03** Draw the short cycle a player repeats.
- 04** Mark a risk, reward, goal and feedback point.

Use Hades, Hollow Knight, Stardew Valley or your own example.

Does the breakdown explain play?

- Where does the player make a decision?
- What changes after the action?
- Why would the player repeat the cycle, or choose differently?

A sequence of plot events is not enough to explain the gameplay loop.

Your project: draw the core loop

Start with a player verb. Show what it changes.

Notice

Choose

Act

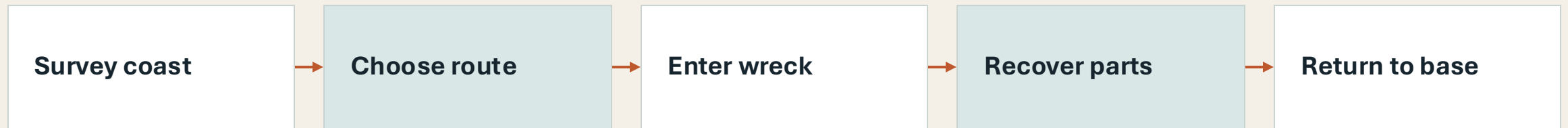
Get feedback

Try again

Add one rule that creates a choice, plus a risk and a reward.

Then add a separate progression arrow: what changes after several cycles?

A small fictional example



Risk: a storm damages carried parts. Reward: recovered parts. Feedback: cargo and map update.

Progression: after several trips, repair a beacon to reveal a safer route.

Review

- Exchange diagrams. Can your partner explain the repeated action?
- Mark any missing rule, consequence or feedback.
- Revise the diagram and keep it with your project concept.

Exit sentence: “The player repeatedly ___ because ___ changes.”