

1. Design history

A design document is a continuously changing reference tool. Most of your teammates won't have time to read the whole document over and over again every time that a new version is released, so it's good to alert them to any significant modifications or updates that you've made. As you can see, each version will have its own section where you list the major changes made in that iteration.

1.1 Version 1.0

1.2 Version 2.0

1.2.1 Version 2.1

1.2.2 Version 2.2

1.3 Version 3.0

2. Vision statement

This is where you state your vision for the game. It's typically one or two pages. Try to capture the essence of your game and convey this to the reader in as compelling and accurate a way as possible.

2.1 Game logline

In one sentence, describe your game.

2.2 Gameplay Synopsis

Describe how your game plays and what the user experiences. Try to keep it concise—no more than a couple of pages. You may want to reference some or all of the following topics:

- Uniqueness:
What makes your game unique?
- Mechanics:
How does the game function? What is the core play mechanic?
- Setting:
What is the setting for your game: the Wild West, the moon, medieval times?
- Look and feel:
Give a summary of the look and feel of the game.

3. Marketing information

3.1 Target audience

Who will buy your game? Describe the

demographic you're targeting, including age, gender, and geographic locations.

3.2 Platform

What platform or platforms will your game run on? And why did you choose these platforms?

3.3 System requirements

System requirements may limit your audience, especially on the PC where the hardware varies widely. Describe what is required to play the game and why those choices were made.

3.4 Top performers

List other top-selling games in the same market. Provide sales figures, release dates, information on sequels and platforms, as well as brief descriptions of each title.

3.5 Feature comparison

Compare your game to the competition. Why would a consumer purchase your game over the others?

3.6 Sales expectations

Provide an estimate of sales over the first year broken down by quarter. How many units will be sold globally, as well as within key markets, like the United States, England, Japan, etc.?

4. Legal analysis

Describe all legal and financial obligations regarding copyrights, trademarks, contracts, and licensing agreements.

5. Gameplay

5.1 Overview

This is where you describe the core gameplay. This should tie directly into your physical or software prototype. Use your prototype as the model and give an overview of how it functions.

5.2 Gameplay description

Provide a detailed description of how the game functions.

5.3 Controls

Map out the game procedures and controls. Use visual aids if possible like control tables and flowcharts, along with detailed descriptions.

5.3.1 Interfaces

Create wireframes for every interface the artists will need to create. Along with each wireframe should be a description of how it functions. Make sure you detail out the various states for each interface.

5.3.2 Rules

If you've created a prototype, describing the rules of your game will be much easier. You'll need to define all the game objects, concepts, their behaviors, and how they relate to one another in this section.

5.3.3 Scoring/winning conditions

Describe the scoring system and win conditions—these may be different for single-player versus multiplayer, or if you have several modes of competition.

5.4 Modes and other features

If your game has different modes of play, such as single and multiplayer modes, or other features that will affect the implementation of the gameplay, you'll need to describe them here.

5.5 Levels

The designs for each level should be laid out here. The more detailed the better.

5.6 Flowchart

Create a flowchart showing all the areas and screens that will need to be created.

5.7 Editor

If your game will require the creation of a proprietary level editor, describe the necessary features of editor and any details on its functionality.

5.7.1 Features

5.7.2 Details

6. Game characters

6.1 Character design

This is where you describe any game characters and their attributes.

6.2 Types

6.2.1 PCs (player characters)

6.2.2 NPCs (nonplayer characters)

If your game involves character types, you'll need to treat each one as an object, defining its properties and functionality.

6.2.2.1 Monsters and enemies

6.2.2.2 Friends and allies

6.2.2.3 Neutral

6.2.2.4 Other types

6.2.2.5 Guidelines

6.2.2.6 Traits

6.2.2.7 Behavior

6.2.2.8 AI

7. Story

7.1 Synopsis

If your game includes a story, summarize it here. Keep it down to one or two paragraphs.

7.2 Complete story

This is your chance to outline the entire story. Do so in a way that mirrors the gameplay. Don't just tell your story but structure it so that it unfolds as the game progresses.

7.3 Backstory

Describe any important elements of your story that don't tie directly into the gameplay. Much of this might not actually make it into the game, but it may be good to have it for reference.

7.4 Narrative devices

Describe the various ways in which you plan to reveal the story. What are the devices you plan to use to tell the story?

7.5 Subplots

Because games are not linear like books and movies, there may be numerous smaller stories interwoven into the main story.

Describe each of these subplots and explain how they tie into the gameplay and the master plot.

7.5.1 Subplot #1

7.5.2 Subplot #2

8. The game world

If your game involves the creation of a world, you need to go into detail on all aspects of that world.

8.1 Overview

8.2 Key locations

8.3 Travel

8.4 Mapping

8.5 Scale

8.6 Physical objects

8.7 Weather conditions

8.8 Day and night

8.9 Time

8.10 Physics

8.11 Society/culture

9. Media list

9.1 Interface assets

9.2 Environments

9.3 Characters

9.4 Animation

9.5 Music and sound effects

List all of the media that will need to be produced. The specifics of your game will dictate what categories you need to include. Be detailed with this list, and create a file naming convention up front. This can avoid a lot of confusion later on.

10. Technical spec

As mentioned, the technical spec is not always included in the design document. Often, it is a separate document prepared in conjunction with the design document. This spec is prepared by the technical lead on the project.

10.1 Technical analysis

10.1.1 New technology

Is there any new technology that you plan on developing for this game? If so, describe it in detail.

10.1.2 Major software development tasks

Do you need to do a lot of software development for the game to work? Or are you simply going to license someone else's engine or use a pre-existing engine that you've created?

10.1.3 Risks

What are the risks inherent in your strategy?

10.1.4 Alternatives

Are there any alternatives that may lower the risks and the cost?

10.1.5 Estimated resources required

Describe the resources you would need to develop the new technology and software needed for the game.

10.2 Development platform and tools

Describe the development platform, as well as any software tools and hardware that are required to produce the game.

10.2.1 Software

10.2.2 Hardware

10.3 Delivery

How do you plan to deliver this game? On CD-ROM, over the Internet, on wireless devices? What's required to accomplish this?

10.3.1 Required hardware and software

10.3.2 Required materials

10.4 Game engine

10.4.1 Technical Specs

What are the specs of your game engine?

10.4.2 Design

Describe the design of your game engine.

10.4.2.1 Features

10.4.2.2 Details

10.4.3 Collision Detection

If your game involves collision detection, how does it work?

10.4.3.1 Features

10.4.3.2 Details

10.5 Interface technical specs

This is where you describe how your interface is designed from a technical perspective. What tools do you plan to use and how will it function?

10.5.1 Features

10.5.2 Details

10.6 Controls' technical specs

This is where you describe how your controls work from a technical perspective. Are you planning on supporting any usual input devices that would require specialized programming?

10.6.1 Features

10.6.2 Details

10.7 Lighting models

Lighting can be a substantial part of a game. Describe how it works and the features that you require.

10.7.1 Modes

10.7.1.1 Features

10.7.1.2 Details

10.7.2 Models

10.7.3 Light sources

10.8 Rendering system

Rendering is a big part of games these days, and the more details you can provide the better.

10.8.1 Technical specs

10.8.2 2D/3D rendering

10.8.3 Camera

10.8.3.1 Operation

10.8.3.2 Features

10.8.3.3 Details

10.9 Internet/network spec

If your game requires the use of the Internet, LANs, or wireless networks, you should make the specs clear.

10.10 System parameters

We won't go into detail on all the possible system parameters, but suffice to say that the design document should list them all and describe their functionality.

10.10.1 Max players

10.10.2 Servers

10.10.3 Customization

10.10.4 Connectivity

10.10.5 Web sites

10.10.6 Persistence

10.10.7 Saving games

10.10.8 Loading games

10.11 Other

This section is for any other technical specifications that should be included, such as "help menus," "manuals," "setup and installation routines," etc.

10.11.1 Help

10.11.2 Manual

10.11.3 Setup

11. Appendices

The appendix is the perfect place for reference documents, such as agreements with third party developers, subcontractors, or talent. Also details on hardware or software can be included in the appendices so that they don't clutter up the main design document. In general, if there are lengthy pieces of information and data that your team may need but that don't belong in the body of the design document, you can place them in the appendices.

11.1 Appendix A

11.2 Appendix B

11.3 Appendix C

We want to emphasize that the previous outline is merely a list of suggested topics that may need to be addressed in order to communicate your design. Every game will have its own specific needs and the organization of your design document should reflect these needs.