
WEEK 3 / SESSION 3

Researching Visual Direction

From references to purposeful art choices

ACCA7034 · Advanced Games Design and Production



What you will leave with

- A focused visual research question for your game concept
- An analysis of how a reference works visually
- Three annotated references that point toward your own art direction

Output today → a small evidence set for CW1, ready to refine next session

Visual direction starts with the concept

CONCEPT

What is the player doing?

PLAYER EXPERIENCE

What should that feel like?

VISUAL DECISIONS

How will shape, light and colour support it?

Example: exploration in an unfamiliar place → cautious curiosity → layered depth, a clear focal light, and landmarks that invite movement.

What CW1 expects

- Relevant games, artists, or other media as influences
- Art style, colour palette, lighting, composition and visual storytelling
- Concise annotations showing how influences informed your own decisions

Keep a source link and creator / title beside every reference.

Collecting is only the first step

COLLECTION

“I like this look.”

Image + game title

ANALYSIS

“The low contrast background keeps the route readable; I could use this for my quiet exploration scene.”

Observation → likely effect → proposed use

Search beyond your genre

Games

Legibility, interface, camera and world detail

Photography

Light, atmosphere, material and place

Architecture & objects

Shape language, scale, affordances

Film, illustration, fashion

Composition, visual storytelling, palette

Choose a research question (Examples)

01 How can the player spot a safe route in a dense environment?

02 What light and colour express a fragile, hopeful tone?

03 How can spaces reveal the history of a place without dialogue?

Write one question for your own concept before opening an image search.

A three-part reading method

01 OBSERVE

Name what is visible:
hue, value, scale, shape,
light, framing, texture.

02 INTERPRET

What might this direct
attention toward or make
the player expect?

03 ADAPT

Which principle could
help your concept? What
would you change?

Separate visible evidence from your interpretation.

Firewatch: palette & depth



Firewatch · official Steam screenshot

Observe

Warm horizon; cool violet foreground; repeated vertical trees.

Possible use

Layer value and temperature to make a distant destination legible.

GRIS: composition & scale



GRIS · official Steam screenshot

Notice

The small figure sits amid broad, flowing forms and areas of open colour.

Ask

Where does your eye travel?
How would a camera crop change the feeling?

Hollow Knight: silhouette & clarity



Hollow Knight · official Steam screenshot

Test the image

At a glance, where is the player? Which shapes could be threats or platforms?

Design question

Will your key actions remain readable at the intended camera scale?

Break

Return with one visual question about your own concept.

Keep your concept and intended player experience in mind.

Control: materials & architecture



Control Ultimate Edition · official Steam screenshot

Visible evidence

Dark monolithic forms, cool concrete and a small human figure.

Design use

Choose materials and proportions to signal a place's scale and character.

Outer Wilds: clues in the world



Outer Wilds - official Steam screenshot

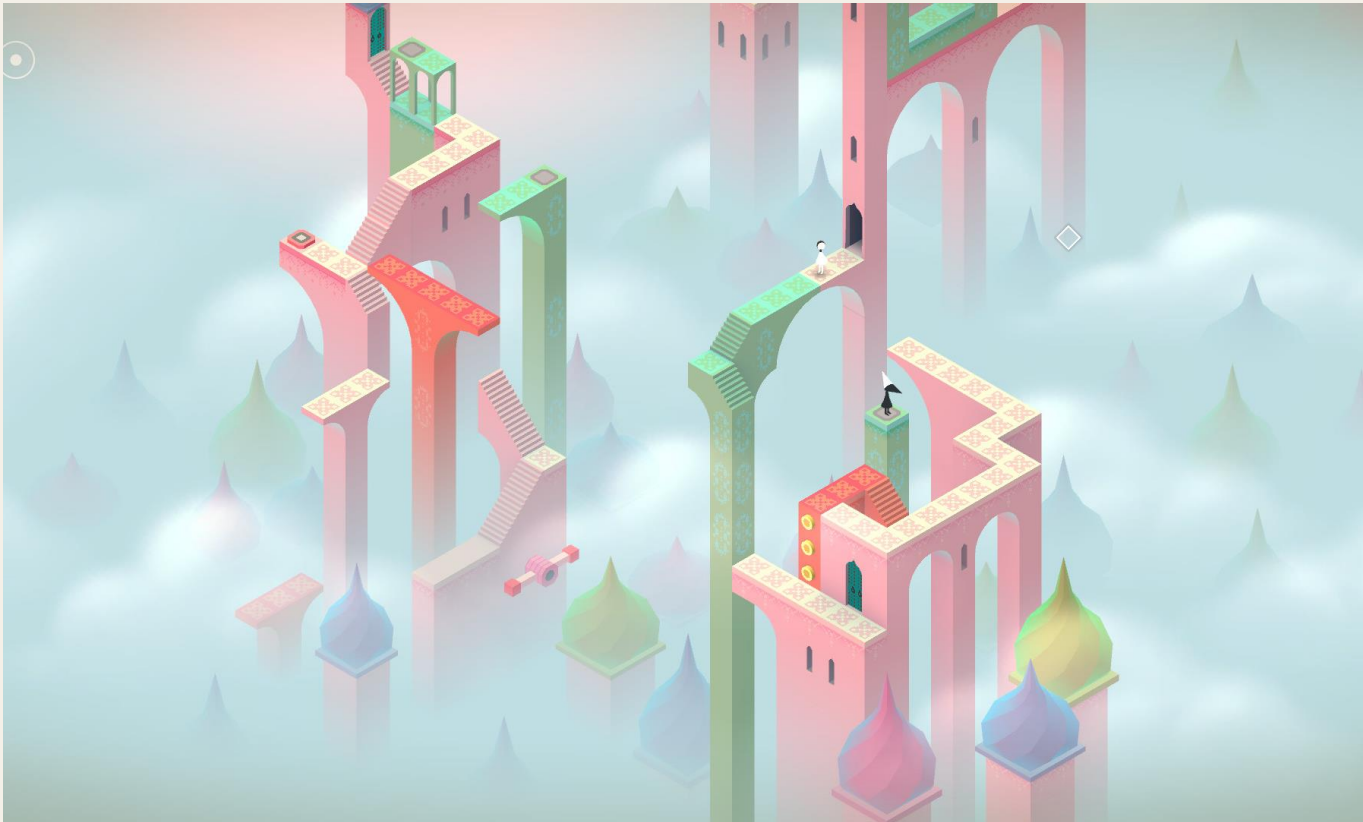
Observe

Instruments, labels, worn surfaces and an arranged interior.

Ask

What can objects imply about purpose or history before any exposition?

Monument Valley: reduce to a principle



Monument Valley · official Steam screenshot

In pairs, annotate:

- 1 What visual rule repeats?
- 2 Where does the eye go?
- 3 What might you borrow without copying the scene?

Good references answer different questions

GAME REFERENCE

Does it show a relevant solution for camera, navigation, feedback or visual hierarchy?

NON-GAME REFERENCE

Does it reveal a material, place, atmosphere or shape language worth studying?

OWN OBSERVATION

Could a sketch or photo from life make this world more specific?

An annotation worth keeping



Record the exact image URL and date accessed in your portfolio.

SOURCE

Firewatch · Campo Santo · Steam screenshot

OBSERVATION

The tower rises above the surrounding trees.

APPLICATION

I could use a tall, distinct landmark to orient players between small exploration spaces.

Your research sprint

- 1 Write a visual research question linked to your concept.
- 2 Find three varied references; record title, creator and URL.
- 3 Annotate each: observation → possible effect → adaptation.
- 4 Choose one decision to test in a sketch or prototype.

Bring your three annotated references into Session 4.

Next: build the visual direction

Bring your annotated sources.

We will compare patterns, choose a palette and shape language, and assemble a mood board that serves your game concept.

Image sources/Games Shown

Firewatch

store.steampowered.com/app/383870/Firewatch/

GRIS

store.steampowered.com/app/683320/GRIS/

Hollow Knight

store.steampowered.com/app/367520/Hollow_Knight/

Control Ultimate Edition

store.steampowered.com/app/870780/Control_Ultimate_Edition/

Outer Wilds

store.steampowered.com/app/753640/Outer_Wilds/

Monument Valley

store.steampowered.com/app/1927720/Monument_Valley/

Assessment guidance: ACCA7034 CW1 brief, “Visual Research and Influences.”