

## **Game Design Document (GDD) Outline**

This document is an outline of how I can arrange a standard Game Design Document for internal and external use by a studio (for purposes of this document, I am describing an action-based game). There are three main sections of the document that encapsulate information relevant to different areas of production, which I usually place in the following order:

### **1. CREATIVE SECTION**

The creative section is where all the conceptual ideas about the game live – it's an expanded pitch document that fills in the details. This section is designed to give everyone on the team a snapshot of the game we're going to build. The creative section includes information such as:

- What is the “elevator pitch” for the game?
- What is the player's purpose in the game?
- What is the genre? (First Person Shooter, Third Person Action, Real Time Strategy, etc.)
- Is the game single-player, multiplayer, or both?
- What is the gameplay like? (Narrative descriptions of gameplay and unique features.)
- What is the story?
- Who are the characters in the game and what are their motivations?
- What kind of weapons and/or equipment is used?
- What is the art style? What does the world look like? What do the characters look like?
- What platform(s) is the game being made for? (Xbox, PS3, Wii, mobile, web, etc.)
- What is the competition? How is this game unique? (Analysis of similar games.)

### **2. TECHNICAL SECTION**

The technical section breaks down the creative elements into specifications of game pieces that need to be built by the production team.

#### **Game Engine**

This defines what kind of engine the game is using: proprietary in-house or 3<sup>rd</sup> party (Unreal, Gamebryo, etc.)? If 3<sup>rd</sup> party, then this section would be relatively short, providing links to the existing engine documentation.

If using a proprietary in-house engine, this section may be larger if specific documentation is needed on how to use the engine (or may reference a separate game engine document).

## **Construction Standards**

This section deals with production pipeline requirements, ensuring the team understands how assets are expected to be delivered (proper scale for art assets, minimum code notation, use of prefabricated design elements, etc.). Often, this is a section of the Game Design Document that has portions written by different department leads.

- Art Standards
- Animation Standards
- Audio Standards
- Design Standards
- Engineering Standards

## **Game Feature Specifications**

This is the big breakdown of all the elements from the creative section into the defined “Lego” pieces that make up the game. Programmers build the features of the game from this section.

- General World Features
  - Physics System
- Game Shell
- Player Abilities
  - Physical
  - Weapons
  - Equipment
  - Special
  - HUD
- AI Specifications
  - Enemy AI
  - Neutral AI
  - Friendly AI
- Gameplay Scripting
  - Prefer Target Script Function
    - Allows game designer to designate a TARGET and have AI react according to the specification (When AI not under attack itself, choose to attack TARGET first).
- Multiplayer Features
  - Shell requirements
  - Multiplayer game types
- Gameplay Metrics
- Etc.

## **Platform-Specific Specifications**

Depending on the platform the game is being built for, there may be specific requirements that must be addressed in order to have the game approved for publishing.

- Xbox 360
  - Submission requirements
  - Achievements
- PlayStation 3
  - Submission requirements
  - Trophies
- Etc.

## **3. CONTENT SECTION**

This section is the roadmap for assembling the game. Think of the technical section as the unassembled parts and the content section as the instructions for putting them all together.

### **Game Shell**

This is a map/flowchart/outline of the game shell and how the player uses it to get to the game content. If a UI artist/designer is on the team, this portion of the GDD is usually written by them.

### **Single-Player Mission Progression Chart**

This chart usually appears as a companion document to the GDD, as I prefer to build a spreadsheet of all the missions in a single-player game. Generally, it is easier to visualize the “big picture” of a game and update a large chart before updating the text-heavy GDD itself. A typical Mission Progression Chart looks similar to the chart on the next page.

### Single-Player Mission Progression Chart

<b>Mission</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Time To Complete</b>	30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<b>Setting</b>	Military Base, night	Forest & Small Town, dawn	Train & Train Station, day
<b>Story Development</b>	Player escapes from captivity.	Player evades search parties, finds ally NPC.	Player & Ally discover they've been set up by the same villain.
<b>Player Abilities</b>	Walk, Run, Jump	Walk, Run, Jump, Pick Locks, Shoot	Walk, Run, Jump, Pick Locks, Shoot
<b>NEW Player Abilities</b>	Pick Locks, Shoot	-	Drive Vehicle
<b>Player Weapons</b>	-	Pistol, Shotgun	Pistol, Shotgun, Submachine Gun
<b>NEW Player Weapons</b>	Pistol, Shotgun	Submachine Gun	Silenced Machine Pistol
<b>Enemies</b>		Soldier	Soldier, Heavy Soldier
<b>NEW Enemies</b>	Soldier	Heavy Soldier	Agent
<b>Game Mechanics</b>	-	Player-Controlled Doors, Locked Doors	Player-Controlled Doors, Locked Doors, Player Hidden In Shadow
<b>NEW Game Mechanics</b>	Player-Controlled Doors, Locked Doors	Player Hidden In Shadow	Mounted Machine Gun
<b>Player Equipment</b>	-	Lock pick Set	Lock pick Set
<b>NEW Player Equipment</b>	Lock pick Set	-	Humvee
<b>Game Difficulty</b>	1/10	2/10	5/10
<b>Combat Intensity</b>	4/10	5/10	7/10
<b>Challenge Intensity</b>	3/10	5/10	2/10
<b>Non-Player Characters</b>	-		Ally
<b>NEW Non-Player Characters</b>	-	Ally	Civilians

## Single-Player Mission Breakdowns

Mission Breakdowns take the basic details from the Mission Progression Chart and flesh out the details for each individual mission.

### Summary

The summary is a paragraph or two that condenses the details of the mission into a short briefing, so people can get an idea of what to expect from the mission without having to delve into the technical details.

### 2D Maps

Each mission breakdown has a set of 2D maps, providing the initial layout for a designer or artist to use for construction.

### Mission Contents

This is a simple list of what game elements are present in the mission, generally extrapolated from the Mission Progression Chart

- Time To Complete
- Setting
- Story Development
- Player Abilities
- NEW Player Abilities
- Player Weapons
- NEW Player Weapons
- Enemies
- NEW Enemies
- Game Mechanics
- NEW Game Mechanics
- Player Equipment
- NEW Player Equipment
- Game Difficulty
- Combat Intensity
- Challenge Intensity
- Non-Player Characters
- NEW Non-Player Characters

### Mission Timeline

This is a beat-by-beat walkthrough of the entire mission, arranged on a timeline to illustrate how the mission will achieve its target Time To Complete.

- **00min – 05min** – New game starts with introductory cutscene. While still locked in prison cell, player given tutorial on how to use basic abilities (look, walk, run, jump). Player is incarcerated by paramilitary types, but doesn't yet know why.

- **05min – 15min** – NPC Soldier tosses a lock pick set in the player's cell and tells the player to escape before he is executed. The NPC soldier leaves. The player is prompted to use the lock pick set to open his cell door. The player escapes his cell and starts searching for an exit, avoiding Soldier patrols by ducking into rooms. The player finds a Pistol in one of the rooms. A tutorial prompt tells the player how to shoot the gun.
- **15min – 20min** – The player locates the exit, but there is one Soldier standing guard. The player must shoot the Soldier to escape, which sets off an alarm. A tutorial prompt tells the player how to reload the Pistol.
- **20min – 25min** – The player exits the building where he was being held captive and finds himself on the grounds of a small military base on the edge of a forest. There is a clear exit on the far side of the compound, which is filling up with enemy Soldiers armed with Pistols and Shotguns. In the shootout, the player has multiple opportunities to acquire a Shotgun weapon.
- **25min – 30min** – The player reaches the forest and must defeat several patrols of Soldiers armed with Pistols and Shotguns before leaping into a fast-moving river and being swept away, completing his escape. **END OF MISSION.**

## **Multiplayer Map Breakdowns**

Multiplayer map breakdowns are a simplified version of the single-player Mission Breakdown.

### **Summary**

The summary is a paragraph or two that condenses the details of the multiplayer map, so people can get an idea of what to expect when playing a multiplayer session.

### **2D Maps**

Each multiplayer map breakdown has a set of 2D maps, providing the initial layout for a designer or artist to use for construction.

### **Multiplayer Map Contents**

This is a simple list of what game elements are present in the multiplayer map.

- Setting
- Number Of Players (Range)
- Multiplayer Game Types Supported
- Player Weapons Available
- Game Mechanics Available
- Player Equipment Available

### **Game Script**

This section generally references an external document that contains the dialog script for the game. The runtime dialog is easier to manage in a spreadsheet format so audio and engineering department requirements can be addressed.

### **Achievements/Trophies/Reward System**

This is the master list of Xbox Achievements/PlayStation Trophies/Custom Reward System items.