

# **Elements of a Game Design Document**

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## **General Notes:**

1. Put off dealing with details here and they will come back to bite you hard.
2. This is not a sales tool. It is a working blueprint. Put the fluff in the Proposal and Concept Documents.
3. Allow enough time in the development cycle to do this right. Design Documents can prevent crunch mode.
4. Structure the document so individual sections can be broken out by those who need them the most.
5. Provide mechanisms for creation, protection and distribution of revisions.
6. Link common topics from different sections.

## **Elements:**

1. Table of Contents (updated automatically; provides links to various sections)
2. Executive Summary (a one or two page summary for people who do not need to read the entire document, but need to know what the game is about)
3. Game Mechanics
  - a. Overview (brief mention of various technical features like screen resolution, type of graphics, basic interaction, cursor behavior etc. -sort of an Executive Summary of the Technical Design Document)
  - b. Extra-Game Interfaces (outside the world of the game; DETAIL may go in TDD)
    - i. Install
    - ii. Main Menu
      1. New Game
      2. Load Game
      3. Options
      4. Credits
      5. Exit
    - iii. Save Game/Load Game Menu
      - c. Gameplay Interface (DETAIL may go in TDD)
- i. Avatar
- ii. Action Window
  1. Hotspots
  2. Objects
  3. NPCs
  4. Travel

iii. Controller controls (make them as consistent as possible with other games to reduce learning curve), or...

iv. PC Controls (keep them as simple as possible)

1. Smart Cursor (cursor states list and descriptions)

- a. Ready Cursor
- b. Action Cursor
- c. Talk Cursor
- d. Search/Examine Cursor
- e. Travel Cursor

2. Left Mouse Button

3. Right Mouse Button

4. Keyboard

v. Conversation Window

vi. Inventory/Paper Doll

vii. Maps

viii. Journal

d. Additional Design Topics (DETAIL may go in TDD)

i. Voice of the Super-Ego

ii. Rest States

iii. Music

iv. Captioning

4. Art & Animation Style (the look and feel of the game)

5. Setting and Main Features (The world of the game: geography, time period, genre, history, backstory specific to this game, etc.-DETAIL)

6. Weather (how the weather-storms, seasons etc.-affects story and gameplay-DETAIL)

7. Time of Day (does it change? What does that add to gameplay? Day, night, morning afternoon, twilight, etc.-DETAIL)

8. Character Descriptions (PC & NPC; who are they and what do they do; include concept portraits as soon as possible in development cycle-DETAIL)

9. Systemic Gameplay (only a few possibles listed here-DETAIL)

a. Social interaction (multiplayer; text communication, range, emotes, voice, ingame email etc.)

b. Mini-Games (gambling, fishing, racing, etc.)

c. Combat

d. Non-Combat Interactions with NPCs

e. Crafting/Economy

f. Magic/Invention

- g. Quests
- h. PvE
- i. PvP
- j. Mobs/Bosses (set or spawned, level, special attacks, territory, etc.)

10. Story (two or three page walkthrough describing the "beats" of the story-the executive summary of the story)

11. Cut Scenes (aka cinematics; screenplays for them-DETAIL)

12. Gameplay by Location (largest section by far; zones, levels, rooms etc. What happens here, what the player can do here-DETAIL)

13. Database Functions (multiplayer mainly; what do you expect the database to store and track?)

14. Additional Documents (Only a few possibilities listed here; often in other formats: Visio, Excel, etc.; these are lists and charts for quick access to data)

- a. Art & Animation
- b. Sound
- c. Location list
- d. Object list
- e. NPC list
- f. Mobs
- g. Cutscene list
- h. Voice script
- i. Maps (topographical and logical)
- j. Game logic charts
- k. Puzzle/Quest logic charts
- l. Conversation logic charts
- m. Milestone schedule
- n. Internet component