TABLETOP GAME DESIGN JOURNEY
GUIDEBOOK

RULES

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GETTING STARTED

This guidebook is intended to help novice tabletop game designers understand what the full journey of making a game might look like, as well as provide resources and strategies to help avoid common struggles and pitfalls while starting, developing, and finishing their game. It also serves as a reference tool for both novice and experienced designers looking to refine, change, and improve their game design process. While not foolproof, this guidebook will help you make your game!

GAME DESIGN

Game design is the process of turning an idea into a game that can be played by you and others. There are many ways to make a game, but most journeys involve brainstorming *(think)* ideas for your game, prototyping *(make)* a playable version of your game, playtesting *(play)* it, and iterating *(change)* it by repeating any or all of the steps. Eventually, you will consider what you want to do with your game, which might lead you to:

Pitch to Publishers Persuade a publisher to make your game into a finished product.
**Self-Publishing** You lead all aspects of your game to make it a finished product.
Play with Friends & Family Make a game for fun, for you and those close to you.
Shelve It Put the game away for now, explore a new journey, or come back to it later!

Below is an example roadmap of the journey you and your game might make, but keep in mind your journey might look different for any number of reasons. You might skip steps, repeat steps, start over, or even end up on a completely different path!

DESIGNER ROADMAP

BRAINSTORM → PROTOTYPE → PLAYTEST → ITERATE

PITCH TO PUBLISHERS

SELF-PUBLISH

PLAY WITH FRIENDS & FAMILY

SHELVE IT
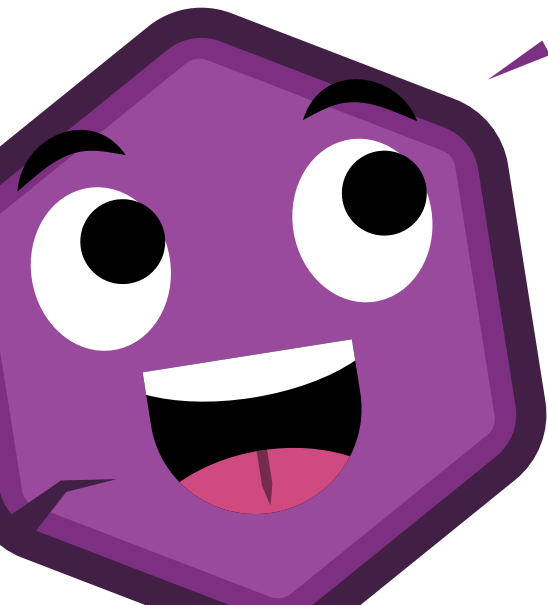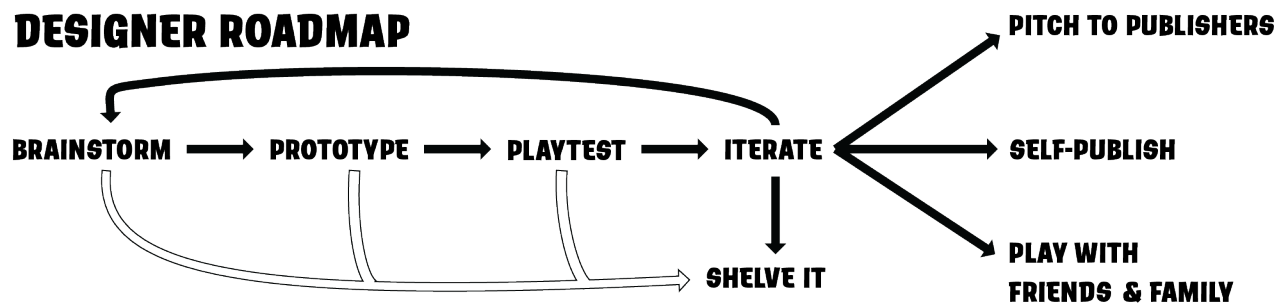
BRAINSTORM

Brainstorming is a thinking activity to help you create, consider, and develop your ideas. You will often brainstorm throughout your journey. It helps you to better understand your vision for your game, such as what it is about, how it works, and how it feels to play. Brainstorming might involve taking notes, thinking quietly, or talking with a friend or peer. Ask yourself questions to clarify your vision for the game and make your brainstorming more efficient.

WHEN SHOULD I MOVE ON FROM BRAINSTORMING?

It is helpful to move on from brainstorming as fast as you can, generally as soon as you have an idea that feels to you like it is worth spending time on. Making a prototype of your game and playtesting it can have a massive impact on the vision for your game, providing great insights and new challenges to consider and think on.

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN MAKING MY GAME?

Below are some questions you want to eventually have answers for as you think about and make your game. Try answering some now to help get you started. Then come back later to see if you have any more answers, changes to your answers, or new questions that can help guide the vision you have for your game.

- What are your goals for your game? What do you want to accomplish?
- What is the story you want your game to tell?
- What interesting choices, moments, and feelings do you want players to experience?
- Which game mechanics inspire you?
- What is the core loop of your game *(what are players doing regularly)*?
- What games are like yours, and how might your game stand out from them?
- Who is the ideal player for your game? What other games or hobbies do they like?
- Are you interested in pitching to publishers, self-publishing, or keeping it for family/friends?
- What is the hook of your game?

WHAT IS THE HOOK?

The hook of your game is something you will think and brainstorm on throughout your game design journey. A hook is what makes your game captivating, compelling, stand out, or marketable. It could be an awesome player interaction, a fresh/exciting take on a game mechanic, a twist to a familiar genre, an immersive theme, or a one-of-a-kind component.

You likely will not uncover the hook when first making your game, but think on it as you design your game further to help uncover the most compelling part of your game that could excite and persuade someone to play it. Imagine you only had one or two sentences to tell someone about your game. What would you tell them?

SEEK INSPIRATION FROM MANY PLACES

While you are brainstorming, and really on any step of this journey, explore inspirations and activities outside of game design! It will help you form fresh ideas and perspectives as you think about and develop your game.

PROTOTYPE

A prototype is an unfinished version of your game you usually want to start putting together once you have ideas from brainstorming. It is generally made of components, which are various objects such as cards, a board, dice, etc. that make up your game.

Your first prototype is usually "rough" and likely will not capture the full vision of your game. Perfect! You will make many changes and improvements over time, but at the start you only need enough to get a feel for how some parts might look and work. With a prototype, you can see your game in action, observe what is and isn't working, and then change and improve it! Try using and thinking about the mnemonic **CHEFS** when starting your first prototype:
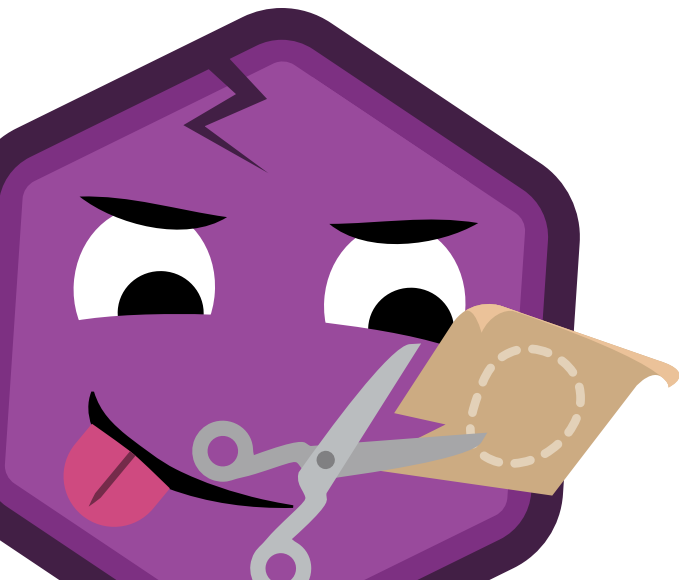
- **Cheap** Avoid spending money as much as possible to make your prototype. Don't spend much/any money on art.
- **Hierarchy** On any component, organize your most to least important information from top/left to bottom/right, or however is most efficient for players to interpret it.
- **Easy** Make just enough to test and see your ideas in action. Don't make a finished game.
- **Fast** Once you've brainstormed, make a prototype quick! Don't make a perfect game.
- **Simple** Use easy to read fonts/icons and as few words and components as possible.

PHYSICAL PROTOTYPING

Physical prototyping is the act of making a physical prototype of your game that can be played in-person, such as at a table. A first-time prototype will likely use paper, cardboard, and common game objects such as dice or meeples to represent different components for the game.

Your physical prototype doesn't have to look great, just good enough to understand! Some note cards or sheets of paper with writing and drawings can be a great first physical prototype. Make sure text and images are legible so players have a better understanding of what things are or do. As you continue on your game design journey, you might improve your physical prototype over time. Consider the following resources to craft your physical prototype:

- **Components** Paper, note cards, cardboard, blank stickers, card sleeves, dice, meeples, components from other games, a box to store everything
- **Create or Adjust Components** Pencils, pens, markers, ruler, stickers, scissors, glue, computer, printer, paper trimmer, clear contact paper
- **Print-on-Demand Services** Explore these later in your journey:
  - **Print and Play Games**
    https://www.printplaygames.com/
  - **The Game Crafter**
    https://www.thegamecrafter.com/
  - **Launch Tabletop**
    https://launchtabletop.com/
  - **Make Playing Cards**
    https://www.makeplayingcards.com/

VIRTUAL PROTOTYPING

Virtual prototyping is the act of making a virtual prototype of your game that can be played over the internet, usually on a computer program or website. This can be tricky to start but, as you adjust, it can become an efficient tool to create or change multiple components simultaneously. Consider the following resources to create your virtual prototype:

- **Screentop.gg** *Free* 2D showcase of game with top-down view; very quick to load and interact with; great tools to customize games. Subscribe for more features.
  https://screentop.gg
- **Playingcards.io** *Free* 2D showcase of game with top-down view; very quick to load and interact with; great for smaller games, especially small card games.
  https://playingcards.io
- **Tabletopia** *Free* 3D showcase of game; fairly quick to load and interact with; some tools to customize game experience.
  https://tabletopia.com
- **Tabletop Playground** *$14.99* 3D showcase of game; high quality graphics, players must purchase as well.
  https://store.steampowered.com/ app/838410/Tabletop_Playground/

USEFUL COMPONENT CREATION TOOLS

There are a variety of computer programs, tools, and websites that can help you develop text/visuals for your game and components. Later on in your journey, explore these and other resources to see which work best for your physical and virtual prototyping:

- **Google Sheets** *Free*
  Amazing for making/editing game data.
  https://www.google.com/sheets/about/
- **Nandeck** *Free* Great for prototyping. May need some basic coding.
  https://www.nandeck.com/
- **Dextrous** *Free or Subscription*
  Great for making cards.
  https://www.dextrous.com.au/
- **GIMP** *Free* Great for visuals, basic or some professional work.
  https://www.gimp.org/
- **Affinity** *License*
  Great for basic or some professional work.
  https://affinity.serif.com/en-us/
- **Component Studio** *Subscription*
  Good for basic or some professional work.
  https://component.studio/
- **Canva** *Subscription*
  Good for basic or some professional work.
  https://www.canva.com/
- **Inkscape** *Free*
  Good for basic or professional work.
  https://www.inkscape.org/
- **Adobe** *Subscription*
  Expensive. Great for professional work.
  https://www.adobe.com/
- **Game Icons.net** *Free*
  Incredible for icons/simple art.
  https://game-icons.net/
- **The Noun Project** *Freemium*
  Incredible for icons/simple art.
  https://thenounproject.com/
- **Diagrams** *Free* Great for visualizing diagrams and game choices.
  https://app.diagrams.net/

PLAYTEST

A playtest involves teaching your game, playing the game, and discussing feedback on the game. Playtest your game to see your ideas in action and what you want to change. Playtesting your game will help you discover what is and isn't working, changes you want to make, and help you decide the best next steps to take.

SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT SOMEONE STEALING MY GAME IDEA?
No. Or, at least, don't let it stop you from making and sharing your game! While it is common in the tabletop game industry to be loosely inspired by others' ideas, it is extremely rare for an idea to be stolen. It is difficult to effectively steal someone's game idea and, at least in the US, game mechanics are not protected IP *(Intellectual Property)*. Sharing your game through playtesting is one of the best ways to protect your game and can serve as a proof of your journey.

I'M WORRIED MY GAME ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH YET. WHAT IF MY PLAYTEST DOESN'T GO WELL?
Much like a cold pool, you kind of just have to jump in to get used to things!

Often, the first playtest is a bit of a mess, and that is okay! Actually, the first couple playtests and even later ones might be messy. Teaching your game will feel awkward, playing the game might not work so well, and there might be a lot of new and surprising feedback to consider. Playtesting your game with other people will build your confidence, improve your game teach, and help you learn how to improve your game.

Try to set expectations on where you are on your journey when playtesting with others. For example, let players know if it is your first playtest with the game! Most people, especially other game designers, are very understanding. If they know where you are in your journey they might also be able to give better, focused advice to help.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAYTESTING
- **Solo Playtesting** Play the game on your own to fix easy-to-catch problems and ensure things are working well enough to play.
- **Guided Playtesting** Be present to teach players how to play your game so you can observe gameplay, answer questions, provide insight, and potentially play as well. This is likely the type of playtesting you will do most.
  - **Targeted Playtesting** A type of guided playtesting that focuses on a specific rule, component, interaction, or mechanic. These are intended to be quick, focused, and efficient playtests to study and improve one or several aspects of the game.
- **Unguided Playtesting** Usually later in the journey. Players teach themselves how to play the game by reading the rulebook without the designer influencing the teach *(unless something critically wrong is happening)*.

DO I NEED TO PLAYTEST THE ENTIRE GAME?
No, you do not have to playtest the full game for great insight. A playtest may only involve seeing one or two mechanics in action, a player choice, or something important to you. If you feel you have seen enough, say so! Encourage players to do the same. Respect everyone's time by focusing on what you need most from the playtest.

PLAYTEST GAMES MADE BY OTHERS
Playtesting games made by different designers will help you build your confidence and knowledge base to playtest your own games effectively. It will teach you to think critically about games, build connections with other designers, avoid mistakes others have made, gain new inspirations and ideas, and give you the opportunity to learn from the journeys others are making.

Many playtest communities follow the "golden rule" which means to give more than you take. For example, if you ask 3 people to playtest your game for an hour, you should spend at least 3 hours playtesting others' games. Playing the games of others gets people excited about playing yours! Remember, everyone is on their own journey to take their game somewhere, and helping them succeed helps you succeed.

FIND A SPACE TO PLAYTEST

Playtest with a lot of different people! Playtest with people outside of your network to gain diverse perspectives. Then, use insights gained from these experiences to make your game better. Here are some places to find and meet people interested in playtesting:

- **BMG Online and In-person Playtesting Events**
  https://breakmygame.com/
- **BMG Tabletop Playtesting Discord**
  https://discord.gg/breakmygame
- **Playtesting Events** Game designers and players who playtest games often attend these and can offer valuable, critical feedback and a unique lens thanks to their own journey and experiences in game design.
- **Home** Playtest with family/friends/acquaintances/solo. Friends and family might offer a supportive space to playtest, however may not always offer critical feedback that helps you make your game what you want it to be. Try to playtest with folks elsewhere as well!
- **Game Stores** Playtest with familiar and new players and designers.
- **Game Conventions** Playtest with familiar and new players and designers.
- **Unpub** Unpub often hosts playtesting at game conventions.
  https://www.unpub.org/
- **Protospiel Online** Protospiel Online hosts online game conventions.
  https://protospiel.online/
- **Convention List** Filterable list of game conventions.
  https://tabletop.events/conventions
- **Online Communities** Playtesting groups on sites like Discord or Facebook.
- Anywhere you can share your game and people want to play!
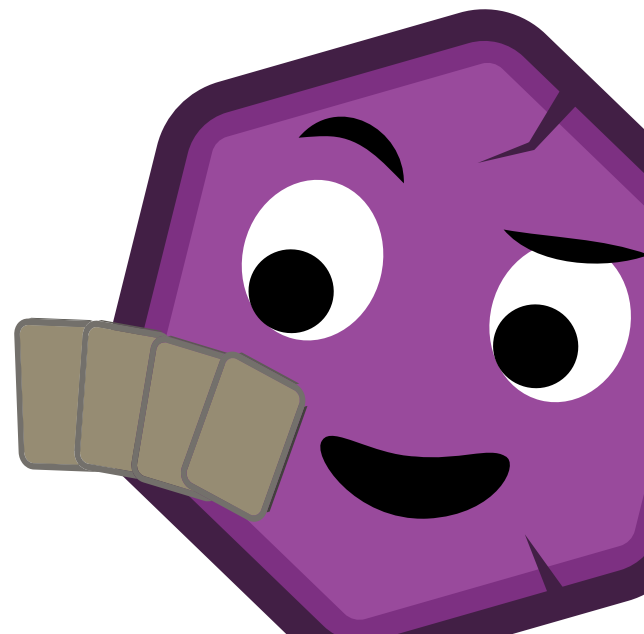
TEACH YOUR GAME

Teach players just enough to effectively play your game. Keep your teach friendly, simple and efficient so players can get into playing fast. You don't need to teach every nuance of your game to do a playtest. Players won't remember everything, so teach more nuanced things during play or as players get used to the game. Consider asking players to physically do certain things as you teach to help them understand faster.

Useful order of things to share when presenting and teaching most games:

- Friendly greeting
- Who you are/Your Name
- If unsure, ask for names of players
- Title of game
- *Optional: Where you're at on your design journey (such as "This game is very new!")*
- *Optional: The hook of the game*
- Who the players are in the game
- Goal of the game/How to Win
- What a turn looks like
- How the game ends
- Any other key info
- Anything you're specifically hoping to test
- *Optional: What feedback you're looking for or what you want players to think about*
- *Optional: When you want players to discuss feedback (such as during or after play)*

PLAYER AIDS
Player aids are references *(usually on a card)* in your game that efficiently show your players important key information, such as the options they have on their turn, or even how to win. Player aids are very helpful to build into your prototype—even at early stages—as you come to understand how your game works through teaching your game and playtesting. Be sure to give each player their own player aid!

RULEBOOK
A rulebook is an in-depth book/booklet/sequence of pages that thoroughly but efficiently teaches players how to play the game while also serving as a reference tool. It is not necessary to write out a full rulebook for your initial playtests, but as you make changes to your game, it is very helpful to have a rulebook where you have written rules and images to help teach your game. It can serve as a teaching tool for playtests, especially during unguided playtesting, and helps you as the designer understand your game and its needs better.

There are many ways to build a rulebook, so there's no perfect system. Here are some things you generally will want to include in a recommended order:

- Title
- Thematic Introduction
- Components
- Game Overview
- Player Goals/How to Win
- Set-Up
- Gameplay
- Game End
- Resolving Player Goals or Who Won
- Terminology

PLAY YOUR GAME

Whether you are playing your game during a playtest or watching others play, this is a great opportunity to take notes, consider changes, and think about the player experience you want the game to provide. Check in on players during play to see if they want to continue playing or are ready to discuss feedback. You also may notice players making mistakes. Sometimes these mistakes are worth correcting, but you may want to observe and see what happens! You also may want to end play early after you or players have seen everything you/they need to see.

CONSIDER PAYING ATTENTION TO:
- Choices players are making
- Player expressions, language, and tonality
- Moments that seem exciting or frustrating
- Questions asked by players
- Interesting player decisions or tensions
- What players sometimes or often forget to do
- Length of time game is played for
- Questions you think of as you observe play, to ask immediately or during feedback
- Anything important to you

DISCUSS FEEDBACK

Feedback consists of the reactions, thoughts, and feelings players have for your game. When the game finishes or you/the players decide to end play, it is a great time to ask questions and gather feedback from players. In general, you can expect a wide array of different types of feedback during this stage and even before, such as during play. Take notes as needed.

Avoid arguing and being defensive with players. No matter what feedback you receive, aim to be receptive, friendly, respectful, thoughtful, engaging, and sometimes firm as needed. Feedback on your game is not feedback on you. Don't let difficult feedback keep you from continuing your journey! This sort of feedback can be one of many steps to a great game.

You do not have to implement feedback provided by players, but acknowledge their feedback and consider taking notes and thinking on feedback whether or not you feel it is relevant. Remember, players are donating their time to try and help you achieve your goals and share their experience with your game. It is up to you to decide what feedback matches the vision for your game and how to best use it.

EXAMPLES OF PLAYER FEEDBACK
- ***Little/No feedback*** Few/no thoughts or feelings or opting out of feedback.
- ***Experiential feedback*** Frustration, joy, opinions, and feelings.
- ***Critical feedback*** Thoughtful statements, suggestions, and in-depth analysis.
- ***Chaotic feedback*** Actions and statements generally not helpful or relevant.
- ***Preferential feedback*** A desire to transform your game or make it very different.
- ***Authoritative feedback*** Perspectives and thoughts from industry insiders.

Thoughtful questions can help you receive thoughtful feedback, but sometimes players may stray from the topic you want to focus on. That's okay! Acknowledge their feedback. Try to guide them to what you want to discuss. Throughout the playtest, consider questions you want to ask.

EXAMPLES OF THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS
- How long did you feel you were playing this game for?
- What was your favorite moment during the game?
- What was your least favorite moment during the game?
- Was there anything you wanted to do, but couldn't? What was it?
- What was your strategy during the game?
- If you had to change one thing about this game, what would you change and why would you change it?

You also can always just ask for general feedback, ideas, and input! It is okay not to have or provide questions in every playtest.

ITERATE

Iterating in game design can involve changing your game, how you think about your game and your goals for it, and even your process for designing your game! This usually means additional brainstorming, prototyping, and playtesting, based on feedback and new ideas you explore. If you have a rulebook, you will want to update it to match the current state of your game.

Over the course of your journey, after playtesting and discussing feedback, you will likely iterate often. These changes can range from small to significant. If you don't know where to start, try to find the fun! Change, improve, or remove areas of the game that don't seem as fun. In some cases, these changes can make your game and your vision for your game look and feel entirely different from when you started. This part of the process is much less a step and much more something that happens throughout the entirety of your journey, from start to finish.

This also can be an opportunity to update assets like components, art, graphic design, and consider or further define the hook(s) of your game. However, just like when you first prototype, the guidelines of **CHEFS** generally stick around, albeit with a bit more leniency. For example, you may create or improve assets such as art or graphic design to fulfill your vision *(avoid paying for art if you are pitching to publishers!)*. Or you may want to improve the quality of your components for better handling by players. Before making these decisions, think critically about whether they're necessary for your game and journey.

While you iterate, it is also helpful to think about how you want your journey to end. For inspiration, think about some of the goals you brainstormed before and how you feel about your game and journey so far. If possible, talk to other designers or people close to you for inspiration and to clarify where you want your game to go. Additionally, participating in online or in-person design communities can help you connect with other game designers and peers to discuss and help consider changes to your game.

Cardboard Edison While you go deeper into iterating your game, Cardboard Edison has a lot of great resources and information that can help you think about how to improve your game or where you want to take your game *(such as final steps like pitching or self-publishing)*. *https://cardboardedison.com*

FINISHING

Over time, you may notice as you change your game it becomes more difficult to improve it. You might find that most parts of the game work well, you are getting consistent positive experiential feedback, and the changes you make are more subtle or nuanced. Maybe you simply feel the game is done or, for that matter, you are done with the game. If any of these are true, it might be the case that your game is close to finished! At this point, it is worth considering what you want to do with it next, such as pitching to publishers, self-publishing, keeping it for friends and family, or shelving it.

There is no correct amount of time to reach this point. You might finish working on some games after a few days while others you spend years working on! Game design is not a race, so take the time you feel is needed for each journey.

Strangely, finishing does not always mean you are truly finished with the game. As you explore next steps for your game, you may need to revisit different parts of your journey to prepare it for publishers, additional feedback, or to help it play better for a specific audience of players.

PITCH TO PUBLISHERS

Pitching to publishers is a way to shift your game from a prototype to a finished product. It generally involves marketing your game to publishers and persuading them to create and sell it. Generally, they handle final artwork, graphic design, and development work for your game.

While this is often one of the final steps for your game, it might influence every step of your journey beforehand as well. You may also find opportunities to pitch to publishers at earlier steps of your game design journey.

Consider publishers you think might be a good fit for your game or interested in your game by exploring other games they have made, their websites and social media, *https://boardgamegeek.com/*, or by potentially talking with them in spaces like conventions. You will have opportunities to submit information on your game, sell sheets and pitch videos to publishers, sometimes through websites, emails, design contests, direct messages/social media comments, and in-person communication.

Generally in all pitch-related communications, you want to effectively and efficiently share the coolest parts of your game, what makes it stand out *(the hook)*, who the game is for *(the ideal player)*, and why it is a good fit for the publisher. It can be helpful to develop a snappy 2-3 sentence pitch that contains most of or all of these elements, in a way that helps the publisher see a vision for how the game might be pitched to potential buyers of the game later on.

As a heads up, pitching to a publisher does not mean that they will accept your game. In fact, you may pitch to many different publishers, sometimes simultaneously! Publishers reject the vast majority of games that are submitted to them. All publishers have their own goals and needs that may not align with yours, and that is totally okay!

If a publisher is interested in your game, they may ask you to provide a prototype in order to perform their own playtests. Eventually, you and the publisher might negotiate a contract. The contract is a legal document that sets terms for all parties involved in order to move forward with publishing the game. Review the contract carefully. You always have options, and if the contract cannot be negotiated in a way that works for you, you do not have to move forward with the publisher.

SELL SHEETS

A sell sheet is a one-page image *(usually 8.5"x11" inches)* that showcases what makes your game special for a publisher. It uses clean, concise, captivating language and evocative images that capture the strongest elements of the game. It expertly shows the hook(s) of your game.

Every sell sheet is going to be different. Generally though, you probably want to include the following:

- **Title**
- **Information** Player Count, Age, Time
- **Keywords** 3-6 big words somewhere (probably at top) that share highlights of the game. *Eg. "Cooperative, Family, Thinky, Cozy, Deck Building"*
- **Hooks** 1-2 exciting, interesting, high-level, expressive, sentences with the main hook(s)
- **Components list** Combine the count for stuff that's the same component.
  - DON'T say "5 attack dice 5 defense dice."
  - DO say "10 dice."
- **Photos / Mockup** 1-3 focused/close-up images of exciting/interesting/expressive moments of gameplay.
  - DON'T just show the entire game layout.
  - *Bonus points for showcasing the hook(s).*
- **The Cool Stuff** 3 really cool or innovative features/moments/mechanics/decisions of the game/gameplay. Each should be a short sentence, roughly 10-25 words each.
  - DON'T stress on game accuracy *(but help the reader create a vision of how the game works in their mind)*.
  - DO provide the coolest moments of your game and how they make players feel. *Eg. "Clever card-play and a little luck can shatter enemy defenses before you strike."*
- **Contact Info** Name/Email/Other
- **Miscellaneous information** you feel is important to express in the sell sheet. *Optional: Playtest groups that you've tested with (these groups often have a logo/icon you can share for this purpose).*

Generally, avoid using generic words like "unique" and phrases like "activate effects." Tell *(or show)* what's unique. Tell *(or show)* the reader the coolest effects! If you have the choice between general language or specific language it is, in most cases, better to showcase the specific language so you can better highlight just what makes your game special.

PITCH VIDEOS

A pitch video is a short—usually 2-3 minute—video that showcases what makes your game special for a publisher. It uses clean, concise, captivating language and evocative moments that capture the strongest elements of the game. It generally also expertly shows the hook(s) of your game.

Every pitch video is going to be different. Generally though, you probably want to include the following:

- Quick introduction of yourself, your game, and its snappy tagline
- Player Count, Play Time, Player Age
- A general sense of gameplay and player experience. DON'T teach all the rules!
- The hook(s) of your game
- The game itself! Don't talk about the game without showing it
- Good sound and video quality. A phone can be a great resource for both if you don't have other tools
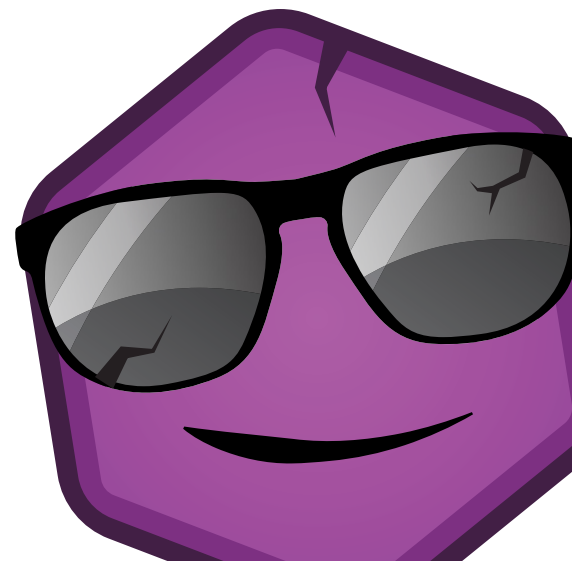
SELF-PUBLISH

Self-publishing is a way to shift your game from a prototype to a finished product. It generally involves handling and/or leading most or all aspects of your game, including final artwork, graphic design, development work, and marketing for your game. Additionally, you might try to sell your game to potential buyers like players or retailers.

While this is often one of the final steps of your game, self-publishing might influence every step of your journey beforehand as well. Self-publishing usually involves spending more money than other final steps, as you will often be paying others for their skillset and to develop content for your game. It is strongly recommended to research and consider the risks involved, develop a budget, and strategize a business plan, even if you only plan on making a small number of copies of your game.

Self-publishing does not always mean you need to create hundreds or thousands of copies of your game. Sometimes it means just making a few copies. That's great too! In general, you might try one of a few different options:

- *Small Print Run*
  Generally 1-100 copies of your game.
- *Medium Print Run*
  Generally 500+ copies of your game *(most manufacturers require 1500+)*.
- *Large Print Run*
  Generally 10,000+ copies of your game.

Whether you want to make a few or many copies of your game, you may explore crowdfunding, which is an attempt to persuade many people and businesses interested in your game to financially support it in order for you to make your game a finished product.

You will generally also want to market your game. This could include sharing your game with others at conventions or other game spaces, requesting or paying content creators to discuss your game, paying to advertise your game, sending emails, and building a community of fans. Some ways to make your game a finished product:

- Hand make or use your own equipment to make copies of your game
- Work with a manufacturer to make copies of your game
- Upload a digital version or printable version of your game to a website
- Upload the components of your game to a print-on-demand website

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR SELF-PUBLISHING
- *Crowdfunding Tools*
  - *Kickstarter*
    https://www.kickstarter.com/
  - *Backerkit* *https://www.backerkit.com/*
  - *Gamefound* *https://gamefound.com/*
- *Print / Download On Demand Tools*
  - *PNP Arcade* For printable versions of a game to download/purchase.
    https://www.pnparcade.com/
  - *The Game Crafter* For print-on-demand versions of a game.
    https://www.thegamecrafter.com/
  - *Itch.io* For digital/printable versions of a game to download/purchase.
    https://itch.io/
- *Manufacturing Tools*
  - *List of Manufacturers*
    https://boardgamemanufacturers.info/
  - *Manufacturing Guidebook*
    Panda GM manufacturer and manufacturing guidebooks.
    https://pandagm.com/tools/
  - *Generate Barcode*
    Get a barcode for your game box here.
    https://www.gs1.org/standards/barcodes

RETAILERS

You may decide you want to bring your game into retail, so it can be purchased at stores both in-person and online. Keep in mind that the type of game you make, its appearance, and any other number of factors may influence whether or not retailers purchase your game so they can sell it. Retailers usually purchase your game at 50% of its MSRP *(Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price)*. This means if your game costs $20 dollars to buy normally, they would likely purchase it at $10 to make a profit! Retailers will usually buy your games in bulk, but probably not more than 4-12 copies at a time depending on the game.

You may also want to explore distribution, which is a service that many retailers use to purchase games. Keep in mind a distribution service would also take a cut of profit *(usually 10-15% MSRP)* on top of the 50% the retailer takes. They also usually have preferences or requirements on the kinds of games they take.

It is important to consider as you work on your game how it might be displayed on a shelf, such as at a store or in a home. Take some time to study your local FLGS *(Friendly Local Game Store)* to see how they display their games for others, and talk to folks who work there to gain wisdom and insight on how they buy and sell games!

Some retailers will rarely buy games from publishers directly, they will instead buy games through distributors. Retailers all have different infrastructure and audiences, which also can influence the types of games they shelve and how they shelve them.

Game Retailers Who Back Kickstarters A facebook group of retailers and publishers. *https://www.facebook.com/groups/gameretailers/*

WHAT DO I SELL MY GAME FOR?

This is up to you! You might decide the price of your game for any number of reasons such as the price of similar games, your costs to manufacture and market the game, whether or not you plan to work with retailers, your profit-margin, what "feels right" for potential buyers, and the value you feel and know your game has.

PLAY WITH FRIENDS & FAMILY

This is great if you just want to share your game with those close to you! You/Those close to you can be your ideal player(s) for your game, and while that can be useful to consider for any part of your journey—even other outcomes such as pitching to publishers or self-publishing—it can be great for having a game for you, by you, for your personal use. Not every game needs to be a business, and you can always pursue that option later on or on a new journey when you're ready!

SHELVE IT

You don't have to do anything with your game if you don't want to. At any time you can put your game away and start a new journey, or leave it alone for a while and revisit it later with fresh ideas. You can shelve your game whenever you want to on your journey, even during brainstorming! Sometimes taking a break from your game temporarily or permanently can help you gain greater clarity with whatever next steps you decide.

CONCLUSION

There's no perfect path to making a game. On this journey you might change your mind often on the best next steps, and that is okay! Explore new and different options often. Learn from the decisions, mistakes, and successes of others as well as yourself!

Don't let perfect be the enemy of good, be willing to try new things often to see how they shake out, and don't give up! That last part is important. It is okay to walk away from the journey and go on a new one, but do it because you want to, not because you are worried you will fail. Failing is an important and common part of this journey, as at every step, when you experience it you have the opportunity to learn from it and make something even better.

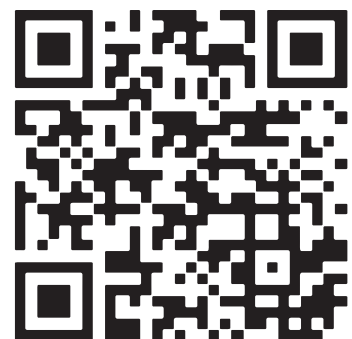Best of luck on your game making journey, and happy playtesting!

Donation Link

JOURNEY OVERVIEW

DESIGNER ROADMAP

BRAINSTORM → PROTOTYPE → PLAYTEST → ITERATE

ITERATE → PITCH TO PUBLISHERS

ITERATE → SELF-PUBLISH

ITERATE → SHELVE IT

ITERATE → PLAY WITH FRIENDS & FAMILY
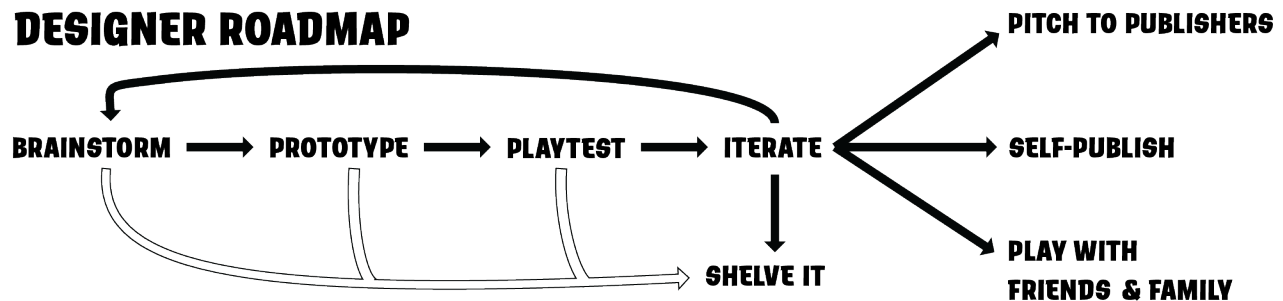
BRAINSTORM
Have an idea, ask yourself questions to clarify your idea.

PROTOTYPE
Make your game cheap and fast. Make enough to play. Keep it simple and clear!
- *Useful Prototyping Tools*
  - *Nandeck* *https://www.nandeck.com*
  - *Affinity* *https://affinity.serif.com/en-us*
  - *Game Icons.net* *https://game-icons.net*
  - *GIMP* *https://www.gimp.org*
  - *Google Sheets* *https://www.google.com/sheets/about*
  - *The Noun Project* *https://thenounproject.com*
- *Physical Prototyping* Use physical materials to make a game.
- *Virtual Prototyping* Use applications or websites to make a game to play online.
  - *Screentop.gg* *https://screentop.gg*
  - *Playingcards.io* *https://playingcards.io*
  - *Tabletopia* *https://tabletopia.com*
  - *Tabletop Playground* *https://store.steampowered.com.app/838410/Tabletop_Playground/*

PLAYTEST
Share your game. Try to move from prototyping to playtesting as fast as you can.
- *Solo Playtesting* Play your game on your own.
- *Guided Playtesting* Teach your game to others and watch them play.
- *Unguided Playtesting* Rulebook teaches your game to others so they can play.
- *Spaces to Playtest* Find spaces where you can share your game.
  - Playtesting events, home, conventions, game stores

- *Break My Game*
  - *Website* *https://breakmygame.com*
  - *Discord* *https://discord.gg/breakmygame*
- *Teach Your Game* Keep it friendly, quick, and simple. Get players right into play.
- *Player Aids* Usually a card, with key info like choices a player has or how to win.
- *Rulebook* In-depth booklet that thoroughly but efficiently teaches the game.
- *Play Your Game* Observe play, take notes, consider questions for later.
- *Discuss Feedback* Ask questions and gather thoughts from players. Be friendly. Don't argue.

ITERATE
Make changes to and improve your game. Involves repeating other steps often.

FINISHING
- *Pitch to Publishers* Negotiate a contract and your game with a publisher to publish and sell it.
  - *Helpful Tools* Sell Sheet, Pitch Video, Email, Website Submissions, Design Contest.
- *Self-Publish* You lead design for all aspects of your game to publish and sell it.
- *Play with Friends & Family* Make a game for fun, for you and those close to you.
- *Shelve It* Put the game away for now, and explore a new journey, or come back to it later!

ALSO, CHECK OUT
- *Cardboard Edison* Great resource to help on all facets of the design journey! *https://cardboardedison.com*

FINALLY, DON'T GIVE UP, YOU GOT THIS!