Chapter 6 Summary – Brainstorm Ideas

The process of Game Design starts with an initial idea about the game. Chapter 6 covers the process for coming up with the initial idea for a game. This is often called Brainstorming. While the early stages of game design seem unstructured, starting with the initial design and moving into the creation of an actual game is a process. Even if there is not an established process in coming up with initial idea for game, the game designer should try to create their own initial game idea process.

The stages of coming up with ideas can be described as:

- Preparation: Preparation is becoming immersed in a topic or domain of interest, a set of problematic issues.
- Incubation: Incubation is a period of time in which ideas “churn around” below the threshold of consciousness.
- Insight: Insight is sometimes called the “aha!” moment, when the pieces of puzzle, or an idea, fall together.
- Evaluation: Evaluation is when the person decides whether the insight is valuable and worth pursuing. Is the idea really original?
- Elaboration: Elaboration is the longest part of the creative process; it takes the most time and is the hardest. This is what Edison meant when he said invention is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration.

An important concept is that game ideas can come from a lot of non-game areas. In fact, some of the most interesting games implement ideas from non-game areas (Papers Please and Return of the Obra Dinn are good examples). Additional ideas can come from analyzing games and game systems, but if your game ideas always come from other games then they can become derivative.

There are some general principles for Brainstorming. These include:

- State a Challenge – start your brainstorming session with some specific challenge. For example, create a game that has Digging as the central game mechanic.
- No Criticism – don’t evaluate an idea too early.
- Vary the Method – Change how you come up with your ideas.
- Playful Environment – choose an interesting and fun environment for your brainstorming.
- Put it on the Wall – write down your ideas so you can see them.
- Generate Lots of Ideas – keep generating a number of ideas and don’t set an initial limit.
- Don’t go on too long – Stop generating ideas when you get tired.

Other methods of brainstorming include:

- List Creation – Choose a topic and then create a list of words or phrases that relate to this topic.
- Idea Cards – This technique includes writing down words on various topics on index cards, mixing up the cards, and drawing two cards with different words and matching them together. For example “Gopher” and “Mechanic”.
- Mindmaps – these are maps of ideas that use lines to interlink the ideas. There are a number of free software applications that help in creating mind maps. (https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/8-free-mind-map-tools-best-use/)
- Stream of Consciousness – without thinking of specific ideas, write down everything that comes to mind and then analyze the results.
- Shout it Out – this works in a group where game ideas are presented to the group and additional ideas are presented and written down.
- Cut it up – take a newspaper or magazine and cut up random words, put them in a bowl, and draw out the words.
Once you have a general idea about a game you need to evaluate the idea from several different perspectives.

- **Research the Game Idea** – Once you have a general game idea you should conduct some research about the game topic. For example, if your idea is a strategy game related to ancient warfare in India you need to do some research on the topic.
- **Technical** – is this game technically feasible? This means that you can get the resources necessary to create this game or the group or company you are working for has the technical means.
- **Market perspective** – is your game idea too similar to a number of games on the market? Are games similar to your idea not selling well or have been poorly reviewed?
- **Artistic perspective** – does your idea have the ability to connect with the player?
- **Business/Cost perspective** – is your idea and proposed game be too expensive to create?

After evaluating the initial game idea, you need to expand the game idea and start into the game prototyping step. At this stage of game design you could either use an existing game genre (FPS, Adventure, RPG) to develop some core game mechanics and game system. The problem with jumping into forcing your game into a game genre is that your game becomes limited. If your game does not fit neatly into a game genre you should evaluate your game idea outside of any genre.

With your game idea you need to focus on Formal Game elements and try to answer the following questions about your game:

- What are the rules and procedures?
- What actions do the players take and when?
- What is the conflict in my game?
- Are there turns? How do they work?
- How many players can play?
- How long does a game take to resolve?
- What is the working title?
- Who is the target audience?
- What platforms will this game run on?
- What restrictions or opportunities does that environment have?


When answering these questions you can also consider:

- Define the player’s goal(s).
- What does a player need to do to win?
- Write down the single most important type of player action in the game.
- Describe how this functions.
- Write down the procedures and rules in outline format.
- Only focus on the most critical rules.
- Leave all other rules until later.
- Map out how a typical turn or core loop works. Using a flowchart is the most effective way to visualize this.
- Define how many players can play.
- How do these players interact with one another?

Exercises:

1. Brainstorm an idea for a game that uses the First Person perspective mechanic. Write down the following information about your game idea:
   a. Describe the game you want to create in no more than two paragraphs.
   b. Describe the player character in your game and what role this character plays in the game.
   c. Describe three challenges and three goals the player character has in this game.
   d. Outline the main game narrative you want to include in your game.
   e. Describe why the player would enjoy playing your game.

2. Brainstorm an idea for an Adventure game where the main character is a kitchen appliance.
   a. Describe the game you want to create in no more than two paragraphs.
   b. Describe the player character in your game and what role this character plays in the game.
   c. Describe three challenges and three goals the player character has in this game.
   d. Outline the main game narrative you want to include in your game.
   e. Describe why the player would enjoy playing your game.

3. Count the number of letters in your first name and count the number of letters in your last name. Pick one word from list A and one word from list B that matches the number of letters in your first and last names. Combine these words (choose the order). Brainstorm an idea for a game using these two words:
   a. Describe the game you want to create in no more than two paragraphs.
   b. Describe the player character in your game and what role this character plays in the game.
   c. Describe three challenges and three goals the player character has in this game.
   d. Outline the main game narrative you want to include in your game.
   e. Describe why the player would enjoy playing your game.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List A – First Name</th>
<th>List B – Last Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1 to 3 letters) Goat</td>
<td>(1 to 5 letters) Apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4 to 7 letters) Tree</td>
<td>(6 to 8 letters) Computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8 to 10 letters) Cloud</td>
<td>(9 to 12 letters) City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(over 10 letters) Bus</td>
<td>(over 12 letters) Rock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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