

Making games fast.

I wanted to document the process I use for making most of my small-scale projects as of 2021-2022. It seems like after making a bunch of jam games, game-a-day projects, game-a-week projects etc. the edges have been sanded down into something that works consistently, at least for me personally.

Ideas

Ideas are worthless until proven otherwise. Prove that it is worth it before committing. Everyone has 10 at any point in time and each of them can be executed in countless ways. If you need ideas ASAP, I recommend you to have a notebook where you write the ones that idly pop into your head while you are not making games. That way you have a good selection to choose from when you need them. Not all of them will be made, because not all of them are worth your precious limited time on this earth.

Scope

Settle on something that you are certain you can make in 1/4th of the time you have for the project. Projects can always be bigger, more ambitious, more polished. You have to learn to stop working on them when they are good, not perfect. It's always possible to make it better but the diminishing returns set in pretty fast. A game made in 2 weeks is not twice as good as a game made in 1 week.

Some tips I found useful is to try to cut as many features as possible while retaining the core experience and atmosphere. Minimal games are faster and easier to make. Another trick to doing everything you planned is to plan less. If you are already mid-project and only 1 half of it is done - you can simply cut the half that is not done and say that the game is finished! Using the agile approach of having *something* playable and presentable ASAP that you then incrementally improve really helps with this as you can halt at any point and have something presentable.

Inspiration

Look at the world and get inspired, look at media you have not seen before and get inspired. Steal like an artist. Avoid stealing from or being inspired by other games – your work will look derivative. Look at movies, music videos, paintings, folk games, essays, books, your own life etc. It's hard to translate those inspirations a game without fundamentally changing it in some way and creating something original! Alternatively – look for patterns in noise and use them.

Examples of my games and their inspiration:

- Textreme – video where M1 Garand shots are synced to Blue Monday
- Nukeheck – enter the void, Tormentor x Punisher, DeepRockGalactic
- ChatStashers – Russian drug dealer dead drop manual
- Ladybug game from this pack – watching the sunset while high
- Boomchick – awful off brand candy with a funny name

A good way to decide on an idea is to start with the general feel of the game. A good way to find it is to look for music with good vibes and go from there. Go on freemusicarchive.org and search for something! Tick the “commercial use” box if you want to sell your game and remember to credit the creators! The soundscape also matters a lot, you can find good stuff on freesound.org and remix it in audacity into what you need.

Execution

Keep in mind what you (and people working with you) are capable of doing as well as what y'all enjoy doing. If you hate most of the things you need to do – they will not be finished, on time or at all. Remember to be nice to yourself and ESPECIALLY people you work with. Speaking of collaborators, go with the smallest possible team that works well as a group and is up to the task. Sometimes the smallest team is you on your own, that is also a good option. Beware of people who invite 7 of their friends on a project, I'm yet to see something like that succeed even once. (If you see someone you don't know doing that while also promising rev-share at some point in the far future - RUN)

P.S. The reception of your game by players is 2d6 + your skill. Also if you are involved in a big long term project – look into [agile](#) and [Kanban boards](#).

The Toolbox

In your head you have a library of tools and heuristics you can use to effortlessly solve common task, be it in your daily life or when making games. When you have at least an idea of how to approach the situation and know where to look for answers – that's when you can feel the flow, that's the only way to be really productive and feel great at the same time! Because of this I recommend you use the tools you are already comfortable with! Most mainstream engines and applications are similar enough to the point where not being able to enter flow for a period after switching is NOT worth the benefits of a different engine. (If you do not know any game engines – learn Godot or pico-8 / use whatever creative medium you know and vibe with, this advice is applicable there too)

Thing is, when you use the same tools from your mental toolbox your games risk becoming too self-similar. A good solution to that is to work on the edge of your comfort zone. Know how to make 90% of what you have planned and learn something new while doing the other 10%. The bigger your toolbox – the larger the possibility space of games you can make! That's when you really start to feel free to express yourself, it's great!

One trick you can use when you don't have an entire weekend to dedicate to a project is to only do those 10%. I always have a project in Godot that is populated only by scenes where I try something new and toy with that idea. No game, pure learning through experimentation. One scene has shaders using radial coordinates, the other – mouse-based movement controls using a steering wheel, etc. It's great fun and you usually still have something like a gif to post online after you are done.

Your body

Did you know that some professional e-sport athletes adhere to a strict diet? That's because the way you treat your body directly influences what you are mentally capable of. Skipping sleep or meals will not win you any time in the long run, suffering is not necessary for success. If you feel stuck on a problem – drink some water and go for a walk outside, your brain is always solving problems and coming up with solutions in the background, give it some new scenery and information to push off of.

P.S. Microdosing and nootropics are placebo.