

A step-by-step guide to game design

1) First ideas

Start with two key ideas: what the game is about, and how you play it.

— What the game is about (the theme)

A good way to start thinking about theme is to write down where the game is set, who the players are, and what they are trying to do. For example, it could be set at the breakfast table, the players could be a family, and the aim of the game could be to eat as much food as possible.

— How you play it (the mechanics)

What do you do on your turn? Is there something you'd really like to have in this game? Perhaps it's rolling lots of dice, or stealing cards from other players, or racing against each other? Choose one or two things to do.

Do you have a favourite game? You could start from that game and imagine what it would be like with a different theme, or with some things added.

Talk to other people about your ideas! Sometimes they say something which helps.

2) First prototypes

The best way to see if something is going to work is to make a draft! This is called a prototype, and is a rough version of the game. Make your first prototype quickly and simply. At this stage all you need is to see if it works.

There is a very high chance that your first idea won't work quite as you imagine. This is normal and happens to all game designers.

3) Lots of little changes

If the game isn't quite fitting together, then try making small changes to either the initial theme or the mechanics, or both.

This is the stage where you ask "what if instead of players eating cereal, the players were the cereal" and other such strange questions. You'll probably go back to stage 1 and 2 and make changes there.

4) Playtesting

Ask other people to help you play! Having seen other people play your game, what do you want to change? You'll probably go back to steps 1, 2, and 3.

5) Finished game

Make a stronger prototype, write out the rules neatly, and take your game out to show people. Perhaps enter it into a competition?

Most designers will go back to step 1 at least ten times during the design process. Sometimes a good idea sits unused for a long time before you find the right game for it.



Are you interested in designing more of your own board or card games?

Submit your ideas to the Tabletop Game Design Challenge, a contest for anyone based in the UK and aged 7-16. Find out more at kidsgamedesign.org.