

STUFF THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN DESIGN SCHOOL, BUT SHOULD

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exactly needed to be completed for the project. We were not content with broad stroke ideas like “Design World 1.” We broke down tasks such as that into minute detail.

World 1

- ☐ Create wireframes of World 1 for client approval
- ☐ Modify client assets to be usable for comps
- ☐ Design the landing screen
- ☐ Create storyboard animations
- ☐ Design icons to direct the user to the three activities
- ☐ Create rough animations for client approval
- ☐ Create final animations
- ☐ Create gray box programming of World 1 screen
- ☐ Integrate approved design assets into gray box version of the game
- ☐ Create sound effects library for World 1
- ☐ Integrate sound effects and final animations
- ☐ Link activity icons to the finished activities and games
- ☐ Perform testing and quality assurance

To further illustrate the point, each game carried its own set of tasks to be completed. It is not sufficient to simply task someone to “Design Game 1.”

Game 1

- ☐ Create wireframes of Game 1 for client approval
- ☐ Design title screen
- ☐ Design game play screen
- ☐ Design win/lose screens
- ☐ Create illustration and animation of characters and elements for the game
- ☐ Write copy for each of the game screens
- ☐ Create gray box programming of game play

WHILE THERE MAY BE MANY
WAYS TO SKIN A CAT,
THERE IS REALLY ONLY ONE
WAY TO EAT AN ELEPHANT:
ONE BITE AT A TIME.

- ☐ Integrate approved design assets into a gray box version of the game
- ☐ Create sound effects library for Game 1
- ☐ Integrate sound effects and final animations
- ☐ Perform testing and quality assurance

After we created similar lists for all remaining project elements, we began asking for volunteers and assigning people to the tasks.

Share the burden. As volunteers came forward and assignments were made, we wrote their names down beside each of the line items. Each person clearly understood that if their name was listed beside an item, they were the person who held full responsibility for executing that task. In order to succeed on the project as a whole, each person would need to successfully complete their specific tasks.

- ☐ Create storyboard animations (Alan)
- ☐ Design title screen (Janet)
- ☐ Write copy for each of the game screens (Rachel)

By breaking down the tasks into small pieces, we were able to share the burden of the project across our seven dedicated people, and we were able to get several people involved who were not specifically on the project. As I said, our office manager did much of the research and copy preparation. And, although there was no PHP programming

on this project, one of our PHP programmers volunteered and oversaw the testing and quality assurance aspects of the project. The more you break down the project into bite-sized pieces, the easier it is to identify ways for people to help.



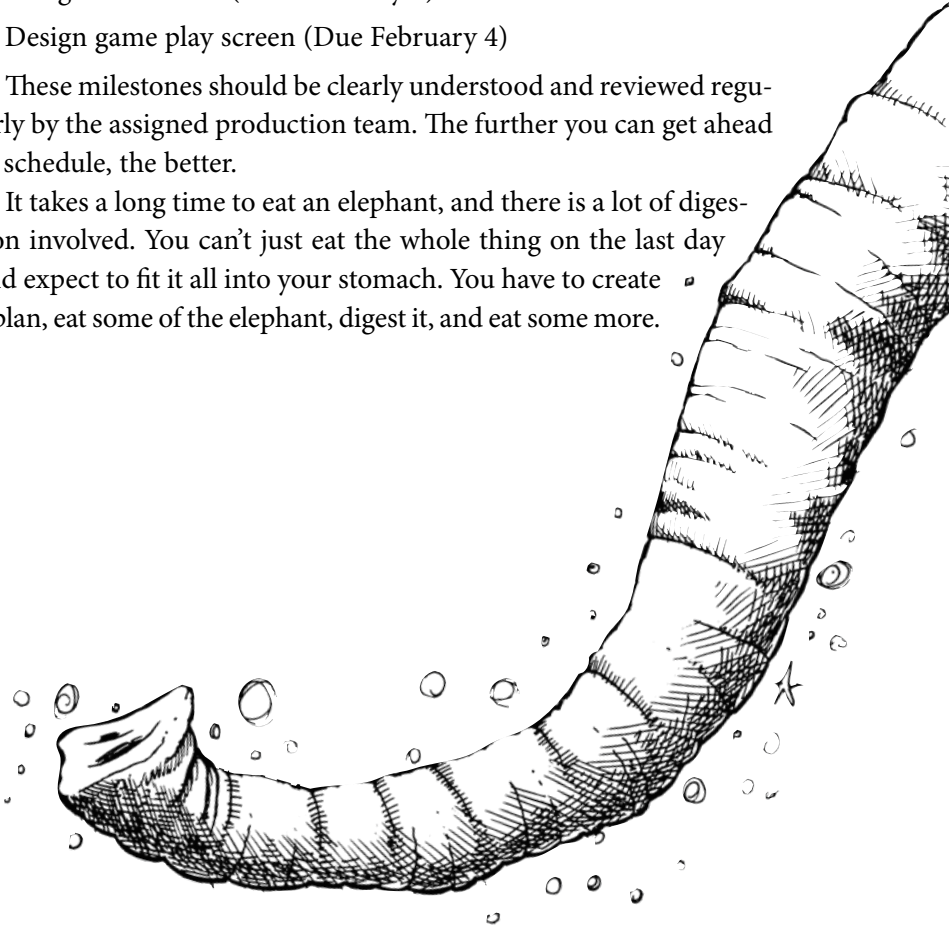
Feel the pressure now. The amount of pressure you feel on any project should be directly proportional to the size of the project: the bigger the project, the bigger the pressure. (And surprisingly, the size of the broken-down tasks should be inversely proportional to the size of the project: the bigger the project, the smaller the tasks.)

It is imperative for large projects to fight against human nature's procrastination tendencies. To create adequate pressure, it is advised that each of the broken-down tasks be assigned a specific milestone.

- ❑ Design title screen (Due February 3)
- ❑ Design game play screen (Due February 4)

These milestones should be clearly understood and reviewed regularly by the assigned production team. The further you can get ahead of schedule, the better.

It takes a long time to eat an elephant, and there is a lot of digestion involved. You can't just eat the whole thing on the last day and expect to fit it all into your stomach. You have to create a plan, eat some of the elephant, digest it, and eat some more.



36 THE VENUS INITIATIVE

When our agency was relatively new and growing, we felt it necessary to assess potential areas of improvement and further growth; we did this by analyzing the core components that we felt determined our success as a design company. These areas were profitability, client satisfaction, and quality of work. During these early years of our company, we were operating at over 50 percent profitability, and we had a constant stream of praise and unsolicited referrals coming from our clients. But we had never been published in a national magazine such as *Communication Arts*, and we had not felt ready to submit many designs for award consideration, either. While our work was certainly “good,” we wanted it to be “great,” and we determined that the area of “quality of work” was the element that most needed our attention moving forward.

Our best designers got together to figure out some systems to better enable us to achieve high-quality design and maximize collaboration. We created a process that we endearingly titled “The Venus Initiative,” appropriately named after the Roman goddess of beauty and love.

Over time, this process has become more organic in our organization, and these elements happen without the formality of structured meetings. However, the principles we put in place years ago are still key to effectively arriving at high-quality work and can be implemented in your process as well, in whatever manner works the best for your organization. Here is our quality of work improvement process from start of a project to near delivery to the client.

1. Art Director Kickoff

Who Attends: Assigned design team and art director (sometimes business development team members who brought in the project are involved, as well)

Summary: After a project is kicked off within the organization, the art director will meet with the assigned design team to discuss the general details of the project.

Objective: Ensure that the design team has all of the information for the project. This includes:

- Client objectives
- Client's design style (direction)
- Details about what the project entails
- Target audience
- Understanding of what assets are available for use
- Understanding of what content should be included on each element of the project
- Understanding of the timeline
- Understanding of the budget (how much production hours can be spent)

Deliverable: An assigned attendee should take notes and distribute the information to the other attendees for reference throughout the course of the project.

2. Define the Barometers

Who Attends: Assigned design team

Summary: Prior to the meeting, the assigned design team will perform research to find projects similar to the assigned project. The research should include websites, design magazines, design books, and any other appropriate source. Each team member brings their proposed example designs to the meeting for discussion with the group.