ARABIC GAME JAM 2014

"THE MANUAL"

Game Jam Advices

One game concept – 48 h – where do you start?

What is this manual all about?

You are about to participate in the Arabic Game Jam, which is a very unique and intense experience. In the next 48 hours you are going to be developing a game with a group of individuals you may not be familiar with. You and your team members will very likely have different backgrounds both culturally and professionally. Some of them might be highly experienced game developers, while others have never worked on a game before.

Many problems may arise in this kind of situation, and we hope that this manual contains enough information and advice to get you through them. By the end of the game jam you should not only have a shiny new game prototype, but a new group of friends as well! Not to mention the valuable new knowledge and experience!

Good Luck and let the Game Jam begin!

1. Building a team

Present yourselves (20 minutes)

You are going to get to know each other over the next two days, but it's important to start with some basic information going into the jam. Go around the team and present your selves. What your names are, where you come from, what kind of games you like and why you decided to come to the game jam. This information should give you a good foundation to build on for the rest of the weekend.

Skills within the group (10 minutes)

Since you only have 48 hours, it is vital to the success of the group that you use what skills and competencies you already have in the group. Go around the team and tell each other what skills you have. Are you a great 2D or 3D artist? Do you know everything there is to know about Arabic culture and history? Are you a C++ Wizard? Or are you experienced in using Unity? Play to your strengths and make the best game you can make. If you have a fantastic 2D artist, don't waste his talent on a mediocre 3D game.

Collect contact information

It's important to be able to get in touch with each other. Here's a handy sheet you can fill out!

Name	Email/Mobile…etc.

Tip: When forming a team, try to make sure that your team has a balance of the skills required to make a game. In most cases your group should at least have a programmer, an artist and a designer.

2. Coming up with a game concept

So now that you and your team are more familiar with each other, it's time to come up with a great idea for a game! To do this you'll have to make use of some brainstorming techniques.

Brainstorming (30-60 minutes)

Brainstorming is a great method for generating a lot of creative ideas spontaneously and quickly in a group. Every brainstorming session needs a starting point and in the Arabic Game Jam you will be given a design brief that will serve as a great starting point. Based on the brief start writing down any ideas you or your teammates come up with. Sometimes it is difficult to develop fully formed ideas and in a brainstorm even simple words count. Simply saying "something with Jumping" could be enough to inspire someone else to develop a concept.

In a brainstorm no idea is bad and it is ok to build on each other's ideas. To keep track of all these ideas try to write them down on a white board, a large piece of paper or use post-its. This will help you remember all the ideas, make mind-maps, sort them into categories and even make it easier to combine some ideas to form new ones.

Try not to get stuck on one idea for too long and try to come up with ideas that are very diverse. It is also important to set boundaries for what is possible to do with the skills you have. Use those boundaries to your advantage.

After a while you will start converge on an idea that appeals to everyone and you'll know that you have a good idea. If that doesn't happen and you find that you're not getting anywhere, try to change the pace. Take a few minutes to think individually and then have each member of the team pitch 1 idea to the others.

From "Idea" to "Concept"

Now that you have an idea for your game, it is important to write it down. Having it written down clearly is the difference between a concept and an idea. Having it written down makes sure that everyone in the team understands perfectly what the concept is and does not lose sight of it as the development progresses.

Make sure the concept includes the game's "core features". What does the player do? What is the goal of the game? How do you win? Write down things about the characters and story of the game but make sure you focus on the gameplay. Don't forget to write down what makes your game special, fun and interesting.

Other things to include can be: your game's **genre**, your **target audience**, **setting** of the game, **art style** and the game's **point of view** (where the camera is: first person, 3rd person, top down …etc.)

Tip: The concept is flexible. You can develop it further or change things that don't work during development so don't waste too much time getting the concept perfect from the start.

3. Prototyping

Now that you have a game concept, it is time to build it! The only difficulty is that you only have 48 hours. It's time to get realistic and think of what is possible to build in this short time and what is enough to show what your game is about. Your Demo should be a playable section of your game that shows off the core gameplay and what people can expect from the game.

Don't waste time. Instead of wasting time trying to build the game right from the start, try prototyping your core mechanics separately. You can use paper-prototypes, sketching and physically acting things out to test mechanics and level designs to find out if they work before putting in a lot of work to build them digitally.

Puzzle games can usually be prototyped on paper and level designers can always sketch out their designs long before they can implement them digitally. Storyboards are also very useful when designing gameplay.

To make the best use of your time, don't wait for artists to finish working on assets. Using simple geometric shapes and colors is more than enough to make your game playable. These placeholders can be replaced by real assets later.

Prototyping helps you test your ideas and allows you to change them before it is too late and too much time has been wasted on them.

Tip: Don't be too embarrassed to act out your gameplay. It can often reveal what is fun and what is not.

4. Testing

It is important to test your game whenever it is playable in order to find any flaws your game might have and fix them. While testing can be done within the team, it is recommended that you find testers from outside your team. Being so close to the project might blind you to issues that others might discover. If you are designing the game, you know how to play it and it is unlikely that you would make mistakes. Some bugs and crashes can only be found when someone does something the game does not expect.

There are plenty of sources for testers. Don't be afraid to ask someone from another team or one of the visitors to the Arabic Game Jam to test your game. There are also coaches roaming the halls who are always happy to test your game and give you honest feedback on it. Don't get too attached to your ideas and don't take feedback personally. Learn from it and make the changes necessary to make them game as good as it can be.

Tip: When observing testers, try to find out whether or not the players understand what they need to do. Which parts are too difficult? Which parts are too easy? Is it working as you intended?

5. Defining roles

Game development like any project has roles that need to be defined. In a game jam the small team size often requires that team members assume more than one role. The most common roles are:

Project leader
the project leader is a person who makes sure the work is getting done as it should be. He/she is the link between team members and knows what everyone is working on and facilitates any quick changes that need to be made. This makes sure that the team doesn't need to take unnecessary meetings. In the Arabic Game Jam the project leader also serves as the contact person for the team and must attend a meeting on Saturday to go over the hand in procedure and deadlines.

Game designer
A game designer focuses on generating ideas and getting them down on paper so they can be easily implemented. He/she should have a good instinct for what works in the game and what doesn't.

Artist
Visuals are the first thing people see in a game. Artists focus on producing visual assets for the game in either 2D or 3D.

Programmer
Programmers are the backbone of any game development team. They are responsible for making the game work by connecting visuals and game design using code.

Tip: Make use of your individual strengths when defining roles in the team but don't be afraid of trying something new. Roles in a game jam are flexible and you will often need to switch roles to support each other in different parts of the process.

6. Time planning

You only have 48 hours so make sure to get the most of your time. Don't spend too much time brainstorming and make sure you have time to test and make changes to your game before it is time to present it.

Set deadlines and milestones for when things need to be done and try to always have a playable version of the game so that you never run out of time without having something to show for it. Set times for meeting to discuss the state of the game at important milestones like after the first play test ...etc.

Make sure you have enough time to prepare a presentation for your game!

7. Presenting your game

By 15:00 on Sunday your game should be done and handed in. 30 minutes after that you will have to present your game to a jury and an audience comprised of other game jam teams and visitors to the Arabic Game Jam. This is where you need to show all the hard work and effort you put into your game so you can't afford to mess it up.

- As we suggested before set aside some time and put someone in charge of preparing a presentation.
- Demo or Die! Include a live playable demo of your game (and make sure it works beforehand).
- Make sure you show off the best parts of your game.
- Only have one or two people presenting the game. Any more than that makes it hard for the audience to focus.
- Practice your presentation. Make sure you know what you want to say and when you want to say it.
- Even if you're demo doesn't cover the whole game or your team doesn't have a playable prototype, there are other ways of showing your concept.
- Showcase the potential your game has if given more time to develop. Give us the big picture.
- Talk about how your game relates to the design brief.
- Keep the presentation short and focused.
- Make sure you leave enough time to receive and answer questions from the jury and audience.
- Enjoy the applause when you're done!

8. Available resources

As the Arabic Game Jam takes place in Malmö University, you will have access to the school's computer labs. Here is a list of the software you have at your disposal:

Adobe Photoshop
The standard software for image editing and digital painting. You can use it to create 2d art assets or textures for 3d assets for your games.

Autodesk 3d Studio Max & Autodesk Maya
These 2 programs are used in the game industry to model, rig and animate 3D graphics.

Unity 3d
A popular game engine which can be used to create both 3d and 2d games. Code can be written in C# or Javascript. Unity can export games for web, windows, mac and mobile platforms.

Game Maker
A simple but effective game engine that can be used to create 2d games without programming knowledge. Suitable for beginners and useful for experts.

Construct 2
Another simple and effective game engine for creating 2d games without programming knowledge. Exports games for web easily. Excellent for begginers and very useful as a prototyping tool for experts.

Audacity
Used for recording and editing audio.

CamStudio
Can be used to record video from your screen. Useful for creating gameplay videos.

Adobe Flash
can be used to create interactive material and graphics. Has been used to create games for a long time.

We recommend bringing your own equipment if you wish to use other software than what is listed above.

Tips for other useful software:

UDK
Unreal Development Kit is an engine you can download and use for free.
http://www.udk.com

Blender
Open source software for creating 3D graphics.
http://www.blender.org

Gimp
Open source software for creating 2D graphics.
http://www.gimp.org

Xnormals
A great tool for exporting normal maps.
http://www.xnormal.net/1.aspx

SFXR
Simple retro sound effects generator
http://www.drpetter.se/project_sfxr.html

Musagi
Editor for chiptune style music.
http://www.drpetter.se/project_musagi.html

Useful online resources

Ludum Dare
An online Game Jam where people around the world develop games over 48 hours. Lots of inspiration and good advice to find there.
http://www.ludumdare.com/compo/tag/motivation

Polycount wiki
for all your art related questions.
http://wiki.polycount.com

Vertex
Excellent art tutorials.
http://www.artbypapercut.com/

How to build games in UDK using Kismit Node coding
http://www.worldofleveldesign.com/categories/wold-members-tutorials/petebottomley/udk-kismet-introduction.php

Unity tutorials
http://unity3d.com/learn/tutorials/modules

Construct 2 Tutorials and Manual
https://www.scirra.com/tutorials/top
https://www.scirra.com/manual/1/construct-2

Flash Game Design
Tutorials for creating games in flash.
http://www.flash-game-design.com

Tip: When in doubt, Google! The internet is a great resource and you can often find solutions to your problems with a simple google search.

*Special thanks to Erik Nilsson for contributing to this list.

9. Tips and advice from experienced Jammers

- Always be playable.
- Identify your strengths and focus on them.
- Always bring deodorant.
- If you're feeling tired take a nap.
- It's ok to get some sleep and take a shower.
- Make sure you have your snacks! (Fortunately food is taken care of at Arabic Game Jam)
- A game jam is a great place to meet people and make connections with people from the industry.
- It's not a competition; you can be friendly with other teams.
- KISS; Keep it simple stupid!
- You have 48 hours; don't try to make an MMO!
- Sunday night is the best sleep you will have in your life!

10. Final remark on the Arabic Game Jam

The Arabic Game Jam is a great opportunity to try and create game concepts for a target audience that is rarely considered at all. It is a chance for us to learn more about the culture of a region so rich with it and an opportunity to create games inspired by it. It is also a chance to meet and work with people with diverse backgrounds. These things make it a very unique creative experience for everyone involved.

We are often asked "What do you mean by Arabic game jam? What makes a game Arabic?" and we've had so many answers over the years that makes it difficult to just choose one. That is why it is up to each and every one of us to explore this question and come up with our own answers.

Good luck!

Written by Jaffar Salih, Jaffar.salih@gmail.com
Special thanks to David Österlind and Elisabet M. Nilsson for writing the original manual