

Intermediate Game Design and Production

Instructor:

Student Assistant:

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Meeting Information

Room: SCI L113

Times: Monday / Thursday 7pm to 8:50pm

Units: 4.0

Prerequisites: CTIN 488

Course Description

Intermediate Game Design and Production (known as "Intermediate") is the studio course that bridges the gap between introductory and advanced game design at USC. You will experience the full game development cycle—*ideation*, *preproduction*, *production*, and *postproduction*—over a condensed 17-week format.

In this class, you will:

- Work in a team of 2 for 80% of the semester
- Take a single game from ideation through prototype to a polished intermediate project

You will learn and practice skills in concept ideation, digital prototyping, interface design, usability testing, communication, teamwork, project planning, version control, healthy development practices, and Unity development.

You're encouraged to take risks and explore new design ideas beyond the examples of existing video game genres. At the same time, you also must complete a fully realized game, considering the course timeline and available resources. The focus is on quality over quantity, with a strong emphasis on feedback. You're expected to actively participate by providing high-quality feedback to peers.

You may collaborate with outside musicians, sound designers, voice actors, and artists to enhance your game, but you and your teammate are responsible for all game design and programming. Proper credit must be given to all contributors.

Note: This is a design course, not an engineering course. You are expected to independently learn the necessary software, coding, and project structure, but I'm here to help with any challenges.

- Robyn

Required Reading

The required book for this semester is:

[*A Playful Production Process: For Game Designers \(and Everyone\)*](#)

By Richard Lemarchand, MIT Press, 2021.

Available for free from this [Library Link](#) (Click EBSCOhost Ebooks)

Supplementary materials listed in the syllabus will be available on the web, as handouts in class or as digital files on the course website.

Specific readings cited below may be subject to change as the semester progresses.

Grading Rubric

Percentage of Available Points	Corresponding Grade	Grade Description
93	A	Work of excellent quality.
90	A-	Work of excellent quality in most aspects of the assignment; high quality work in the remainder.
87	B+	Work of high quality in all or most aspects of the assignment.
83	B	Work of good quality.
80	B-	Work of satisfactory quality.
77	C+	Work of satisfactory quality in most of the assignment, with the remainder being somewhat substandard.
73	C	Work of fair quality. Minimum passing grade for credit.
70	C-	Work of lower than fair quality. Failing grade for credit.
60	D	Little evidence of learning. Poor performance in all aspects of the assignment.
0	F	Complete absence of evidence of learning.

Grading

See Grading Details [here](#). Subject to change as semester goes on with at least 1 week notice.

Assignment	Points Toward Grade
Ideation Milestone	20 points
Pre-Production Milestone	30 points
Production Milestone	50 points
Post Production Milestone	60 points
Finals	20 points
In Class Work & Participation	20 points
Total	200 points

Assignment Descriptions and Turning In Assignments

Detailed descriptions of each assignment will be provided at least one week prior to the assignment deadline here in the syllabus. You are responsible for reading and understanding

[See Submission instructions here](#)

Course Content Summary

This course is organized into four phases, which mirrors the four project phases outlined in Richard Lemarchand's *A Playful Production Process: For Game Designers (and Everyone)*:

1. [Ideation](#)
2. [Preproduction](#)
3. [Full Production](#)
4. [Postproduction](#)

Ideation | Weeks 1-3

Ideation is the most open phase of development where you have freedom to explore. You'll generate ideas and **deliver a prototype each week** to help you narrow in on your game.

By the end of this phase, your team will have a set of project goals that will guide you through the rest of development.

Communication at this point will transition to Discord.

Week 1	
Monday, Jan 13, 2025	Thursday, Jan 16, 2025

<p>Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction, Course Overview, Expectations • Shifting Gears: Ideation • “Introducing Myself” Presentations 	<p>Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Introducing Myself” Presentations (cont’d) • Playtesting • Juice it or Lose It
<p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catastrophic Prototyping and Other Stories 	<p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapters 1-5 • Optional: How Fear Chokes Creativity and What to Do About It - Creativity Workshop
<p>Practical Assignments Due</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing Myself and Class Goals • Complete Basic Information Survey 	<p>Practical Assignments Due</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorm (individual) • Week 1 Prototype (Individual) • Dev Blog Week 1 (Individual) • Partner Requests Deadline (optional)

Week 2	
Monday, Jan 20, 2025	Thursday, January 23th, 2025
No Class - MLK Day	<p>Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication: Feedback • Project Goals • Playtesting • Partner Assignments
No readings for class	<p>Readings</p> <p><i>PPP</i>, chapters 6, 7, 12</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catastrophic Prototyping and Other Stories 	<p>Practical Assignments Due</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 2 Prototype (Individual) • Dev Blog Week 2 (Individual)

Week 3	
Monday, January 27, 2025	Thursday, January 30, 2025
<p>Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Goals • The Three C’s 	<p>Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method • Playtest

Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapters 8, 9 • D.I.C.E Summit 2002 - Mark Cerny 	No readings for class
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase a headphone splitter • Purchase a headphone cable extension • Team-Member Character Sheet • Back of the Envelope • Ideas 	Practical Assignments Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 3 Prototype (Individual) • Dev Blog Week 3 (Individual) • Project Goals Statement (Team)

Preproduction | Weeks 4 - 6

Preproduction is the most important phase of game development. You'll take the project goals generated during ideation to narrow your focus, answer tough questions, and create several deliverables that will guide you through the rest of development.

By the end of this phase, you'll have a **vertical slice** (with a **beautiful corner**) that demonstrates what kind of game you're making and what it will look like; you'll have a **game design macro** that provides a 10,000-foot view of your project from start to finish; and you'll have a schedule in the form of a **burndown chart** to help you track your progress through the rest of development.

Week 4	
Monday, Feb 3, 2025	Thursday, Feb 6, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentric Development • Vertical Slice 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playtest • Perforce
Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perforce and Unity by Peter Brinson • Perforce Startup Guide • <i>PPP</i>, chapters 10, 11, 13 	No readings for class
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Basic Pitch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio Guidelines • Audio Asset List 	Practical Assignments Due <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 4 Build (Team) • Week 4 Dev Blog (Team) • Revised Project Goals Statement

Week 5	
Monday, February 10, 2025	Thursday February 13, 2025
Class	Class

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Game Design Macros • Beautiful Corners • Creating Narrative Through Juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playtest • Narrative - Show vs Tell
Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapters 17, 18 	No readings for class
No assignments due	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 5 Build (Team) • Week 5 Dev Blog (Team) • Game Design Macro

Week 6	
Monday, February 17, 2025	Thursday February 20, 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Class - President's Day 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juice #2 • Game Design Macro review • Burndown Charts • Playtest
No readings for class	Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, Chapters 14, 19, 21
No assignments due	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 6 Vertical Slice Build • Week 6 Dev Blog (Team) •

Full Production | Weeks 7-12

Full production is the longest phase of development. You'll execute on your schedule generated during preproduction.

You will achieve two milestones: the **alpha milestone** ("feature complete" and "sequence complete") and the **beta milestone** ("content complete"). Along the way, you'll run **two formal playtests** and collect **metrics** from your game to measure how successful your game is at reaching your project goals.

Week 7	
Monday, February 25, 2025	Thursday February 27, 2025

Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain Trusts (Vertical Slice) • Against Crunch • Burndown Chart review 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical Slice milestone reviews • The Alpha Milestone • Playtest?
No readings for class	Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, Chapters 12, 28
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised Game Design Macro • Burndown Chart 	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical Slice Slide Deck • Week 7 Build • Audio Guidelines • Week 7 Dev Blog (Team)

Week 8	
Monday, March 3, 2025	Thursday, March 6, 2026
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical Slice milestone reviews (cont'd) 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standups • Playtest • Types of Testing • Game Metrics • Scoping
Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapters 29, 34 	Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapters 23, 26, 27 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's Not Just Standing Up • No More Heroes
No assignments due	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 8 Build • Week 8 Dev Blog (Team)

Week 9	
Monday, March 10, 2025	Thursday, March 13, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing for a Formal Playtest • Running a Formal Playtest 	No Class
Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapters 24, 25 	No readings for class

Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine how long your game is • Invite 2 people to the Playtest 	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 9 Build • Week 9 Dev Blog (Team) • Telemetry
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Week 10	
Monday, March 17th, 2025	Thursday, March 20, 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Class - Spring Break 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Class - Spring Break
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No readings for class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No readings for class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No assignments due 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No assignments due

Week 11	
Monday, March 24th, 2025	Thursday, March 27, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standup • Playtest 1 Telemetry • Brain Trusts (Alpha) 	Class (Online) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Playtest
Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapter 31 	No readings for class
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpha Build • Alpha Playtest Exit Interview • Alpha Playtest Script • Alpha Playtest Survey 	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpha Dev Blog (Team) • Alpha Playtest

Week 12	
Monday, March 31, 2025	Thursday, April 3, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpha milestone reviews 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpha milestone reviews
No readings for class	No readings for class
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpha Slide Deck • Alpha Playtest Telemetry 	

- [Playtest Invitations](#)

Postproduction | Weeks 12-15

Postproduction is the phase of development where you tie up loose ends, fix bugs, add polish, and stabilize your game. An important part of every project is to reflect on what you learned, what you'd do differently, and plan for the future.

Week 13	
Monday, April 7, 2025	Thursday, April 10, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standup • Beta Playtest Telemetry • Beta Slide Deck • Shifting Gears - Postproduction • Playtest • Understanding Playtesting Feedback 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Class Playtest
Readings <i>PPP</i> , chapter 32, 33	No readings for class
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beta Playtest Exit Interview • Beta Playtest Script • Beta Playtest Survey 	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 13 Build • Week 13 Dev Blog (Team) • Upload your build to the playtest builds folder

Week 14	
Monday, April 14, 2025	Thursday April 17, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal Playtest 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beta Milestone Reviews
No readings for class	No readings for class
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beta Playtest Build 	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 14 Dev Blog (Team) • Beta Slide Deck • Beta Playtest Telemetry

Week 15	
Monday, April 21, 2025	Thursday, April 24, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ? 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playtesting • Polish and Final Juice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No readings for class 	<p style="text-align: center;">No readings for class</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">No assignments due</p>	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 15 Build • Week 15 Dev Blog

Week 16	
Monday, April 28, 2025	Thursday, May 1, 2025
Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release Candidate milestone review • Final 	Class <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release Candidate milestone review (cont'd) • Evaluations
Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>PPP</i>, chapter 36 	<p style="text-align: center;">No readings for class</p>
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release Candidate Slide Deck 	Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 15 Release Candidate Build

Finals | Weeks 17-18

After a project ships, teams go into “maintenance”, or in many cases (especially mobile games), “LiveOps” (Live Operations). However, this doesn’t apply to us, so finals week it is!

Week 17	
Monday, May 5, 2025	Thursday, May 8, 2025
No Class - Study Days	

Week 18	
Monday, May 12, 2025	Thursday, May 15, 2025
Practical Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final (Postmortem) 	<p style="text-align: center;">No Class</p>

Additional Class Policies

Attendance Policy

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an absence from class, unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media & Games Division handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

Guidelines for absences affecting grading

- Two absences: lowers grade one full grade point (for example, from A to B)
- Three absences: lowers grade two full grade points
- Four or more absences: request to withdraw from course (instructor's discretion)

Additionally, we may ask you to withdraw if your total absences become excessive.

However, these guidelines may be altered in respect of absences that are for illness, family emergencies, and (with advance notice) commitments related to a scholarship you are receiving, e.g. for a varsity sport or commitments related to your professional practice, such as to attend a festival where you are showing a game or a conference where you are speaking. You must contact us as soon as possible regarding your absence. Generally, we will expect to hear from you before class; in exigent circumstances I would expect to hear from you within 24 hours. If we do not hear from you in a timely fashion, you may forfeit your option to make up what you have missed.

All that said:

1. **If you are sick, stay home.** You need to be healthy to learn, and so do your classmates (and instructor).
2. We do not distinguish between mental health and physical health. If you cannot complete an assignment on time or come to class because of mental health issues, you must contact us promptly, just as with physical health problems. See the Support Systems section below for additional information.

Contact your instructor as soon as possible when one of these circumstances arises (ideally before class, but within 24 hours for exigent circumstances). Being a team-based class, it's also expected that you communicate your absences with your partner.

Students can make up absences by completing the Absence assignments which are found here: [Absence Assignments / Make Up](#)

Generative AI Usage

The use of large language model (LLM) tools such as ChatGPT to complete written assignments and exercises in this class is not permitted. However, LLMs including ChatGPT are permitted to assist with the creation of game code. If you have any questions about this, please consult the instructor.

Some instructors allow the use of generative AI image generation tools such as Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, and DALL-E to create images for presentations and concept visualization. Please ask your instructor for permission if you wish to use such tools, and it hasn't already been given.

AI is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using. **Please include a paragraph at the end of any assignment that uses AI explaining how (and why) you used AI and indicate/specify the prompts you used to obtain the results and what prompts you used to get the results.** Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.

Social Media Usage in Class

Social media use (including text messaging, Internet messaging, email) is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructors. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student found using social media in class.

Late Assignment Submissions and Incompletes

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructors before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

For assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from the instructor, a penalty will be imposed equal to 10% of the total available points for the assignment, for each day or part of a day that the assignment is late, up to a maximum of seven days.

Disruptive Student Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

Syllabus Updates

This syllabus is liable to change up to the beginning of class and possibly over the semester. Please check the posted syllabus regularly, and note all changes that are shared by the instructor in class.

Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences, up to and including expulsion from the program and the university. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, [Behavior Violating University Standards](#). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on [scientific misconduct](#).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the [Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX](#) or to the [Department of Public Safety](#). This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. [Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services](#) (RSVP, formerly known as the Center for Women and Men) provides 24/7 confidential support.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the [American Language Institute](#), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The [Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, [USC Emergency Information](#) will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.