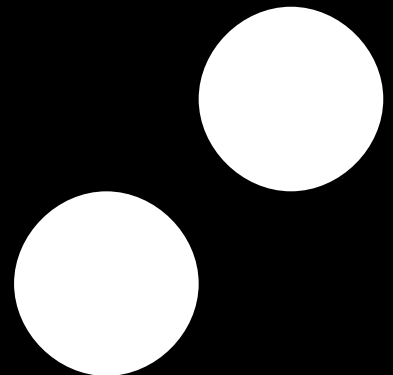
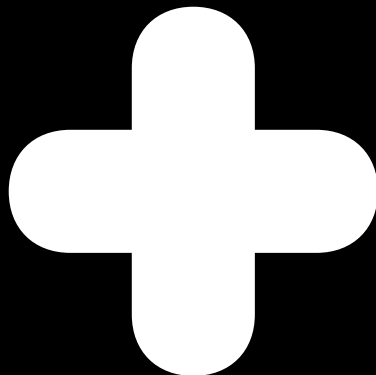


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GAME RESEARCH GROUP

**THE VIDEO GAME**  
**HISTORY FOUNDATION**

# Taxonomy of Video Game Development Artifacts



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# Introduction

The term 'artifact' is commonly used by game developers and other individuals working in video game production settings, so as to adequately describe the diverse nature of these information objects while simultaneously legitimizing them as objects worthy of preservation and study; based upon literary warrant and a desire to further legitimize these artifacts, we have intentionally chosen to refer to the information objects created and used by game developers as 'artifacts.' Based on the interviews and examination of collections of game development artifacts, we have identified the following types of artifacts, organized into three main categories.

We propose that artifacts are classified at a high level based upon the aspect of game development which they directly relate to. Artifacts which are created and used during the development of a particular game shall be classified under Development, and further classified among the seven listed subfields. Artifacts which are created and used in the organizational context within which games are developed shall be classified under Organization-Related Materials. Artifacts which are created and used while promoting and advertising a completed game shall be classified under Marketing, and further classified among the four listed subfields.

## 1. Development

- 1.1 *Design (Overall)*
- 1.2 *Engineering*
- 1.3 *Quality Assurance and Control*
- 1.4 *Art*
- 1.5 *Audio*
- 1.6 *Writing*
- 1.7 *Production*

## 2. Organization-Related Materials

## 3. Marketing

- 3.1 *Marketing (Overall)*
- 3.2 *Advertising Materials*
- 3.3 *Public Relations*
- 3.4 *Promotional Materials*

This controlled vocabulary is to be used to classify and describe officially-sanctioned artifacts created at some point during the production and distribution of video games. When considering how to describe artifacts created by fans or other creators which are unaffiliated with the official entity creating a game, please refer to our Best Practices Framework.

The following abbreviations are used throughout:

- SN: Scope note
- USE: Preferred term (See)
- USE FOR: Equivalent terms; lead-in terms
- RT: Related terms (See also)

# 1. Development

Artifacts related to the conceptualization, design, and implementation of the digital game itself. We propose that the industry tends to perceive several aspects of development:

1. Design (Overall)
2. Engineering
3. Quality Assurance and Control
4. Art
5. Audio
6. Writing
7. Production

## 1.1 Design (Overall)

Documents which serve as overall guides for the development of digital games. These are not specifically tied to the development of any given element, but offering vision for the entire project.

### **Brainstorming Document**

SN: Usually informal notes or records regarding the early design thinking for a game.

### **Concept Document**

SN: This document is an overview which explains a game concept that may be related to the main plot, characters, genre, or gameplay, and may include game art. Sometimes people use **game design document** (GDD) to refer to concept documents.

### **Game Bible**

RT: **Game Design Document; Story Bible**

SN: A complete (or mostly complete) collection of information about a game's concept, development, and process. This includes concept work such as art, story, narratives, music, code, gameplay, and development. It is a detailed outline to support the construction of the game. A game bible often contains ancillary information about the game world used to make design choices, but which may not appear in-game. In some cases, people do use the term Game Design Document (GDD) to refer to a game bible.

### **Game Design Document (GDD)**

USE FOR: **Master Design Document**

RT: **Game Bible; Concept Document**

SN: This is a *living document* intended to present the game design elements for the purpose of communicating ideas to the development team. Ideally, it is continuously updated to represent the intended final game state although this may not happen due to the nature of the game design environment. The format and maintenance of a **GDD** are dependent on organizational cultures within the originating company and the individuals working within a particular creative team.

### **Research Materials**

RT: **Brainstorming Document**

SN: Notes and reference materials of any media type intended to inform game design.

## **Consumer Research Materials**

USE FOR: **Audience Research Materials**

SN: Materials related to gathering information on a game's intended audience

## **Reference Materials**

SN: Part of **research materials** that serve a specific purpose of referencing, often in the context of art. For example, photos of buildings in Washington, D.C. may be used as **research materials** to better understand the setting; some of those photos would become **reference materials** when they are selected and passed to artists as references for game art (e.g., animation guidelines, animation reference materials, art reference materials).

## **1.2 Engineering**

Artifacts related to the technical implementation of a game.

### **API Documentation**

RT: **Technical Design Document**

SN: Reference materials for a game, game platform, or a third party software library regarding its Application Programming Interface (API), which allows other software to interact with it.

### **Build**

USE FOR: **Game Build**

RT: **Build Notes**

SN: A compiled version of the game intended for testing or production. While the game state is generally taken from prototype to alpha to beta to release, the specific differences depend on the development environment and based on the level of playability and polish.

#### **Alpha**

SN: An early playable **build** to test out different elements of the game.

#### **Beautiful Corner**

RT: **Vertical Slice**

SN: A **build**, usually also a **milestone build**, which demonstrates a small but highly polished sub-section of a digital game.

#### **Beta**

RT: **Consumer Research Materials**

SN: A **build** that is close to a finished product and may be shared with a limited number of players (playtesters) for testing and research purposes.

#### **Gold Master**

RT: **Minimum Viable Product**

A **build** intended to be copied onto a commercial medium (CD, DVD, CART, etc.) for sale to users.

#### **Milestone Build**

A **build** produced to satisfy internal requirements attached to a development milestone.

#### **Release**

NT: **Patch**

SN: A build that is deployed to users.

### **Minimum Viable Product (MVP)**

RT: Gold Master

SN: A release that represents the smallest feature set expected to be viable on the market.

### **Patch**

SN: A release intended to partially update a game, often to address bugs.

### **Vertical Slice**

RT: Beautiful corner

SN: A **build**, usually also a **milestone build**, which demonstrates progress across all components of a digital game. (Adapted from Wikipedia)

### **Build Notes**

RT: **Build**

SN: A set of notes regarding a specific **build**. Often auto-compiled from source control. Focuses on changes between prior builds and the one to which the notes are directly related, such as details of bugs fixed or features added/removed.

### **Code**

USE FOR: **Script (Code)**

SN: A set of machine-readable instructions.

### **Source Code**

SN: **Code**, written in a human-readable language, intended to be transformed by an assembler or compiler into an executable file, used to produce some or all of a digital game

### **Executive Review**

SN: Documents, sometimes including a **build**, used for communication between development staff and upper management regarding project progress.

### **Prototype**

RT: **Brainstorming Document; Concept Document**

SN: An artifact reflecting early stage of the work

#### **Prototype (Build)**

USE FOR: **Proof of Concept**

SN: A very early **build** used for testing out the core gameplay as a proof of concept.

#### **Prototype (Paper)**

USE FOR: **Paper Prototype; Proof of Concept**

SN: An artifact that reflects early work on a game mechanic or feature as a proof of concept.

#### **Prototype (Technical)**

USE FOR: **Proof of Concept**

SN: An artifact that reflects early work on game hardware.

### **Technical Design Document**

RT: **Game Design Document**

USE FOR: **Technical Specification**

SN: Document detailing the proposed technical solution to the implementation of a digital game.

### **Technical Schematic**

RT: **Technical Design Document**

SN: A technical diagram for a game that runs on dedicated hardware.

## **1.3 Quality Assurance and Control**

A set of artifacts used by QA or QC staff to help developers fix issues in a game.

### **Performance Tool**

RT: **Benchmarking Tool**

USE FOR: **Telemetry**

SN: A tool, commercial or custom-designed, intended to assist with controlled measurement of software performance.

### **Benchmarking Tool**

RT: **Performance Tool**

SN: A tool, commercial or custom-designed, intended to test the limit of the hardware performance.

### **Bug Report**

RT: **Build Notes; Patch**

SN: Demonstrates a development issue, usually contrasting expected and experienced results. Shared with designers, developers, and managers who determine a course of action.

### **Playtest Materials**

RT: **Consumer Research Materials**

USE FOR: **User Test**

SN: Materials related to the testing process, aiming to identify problems with the digital game via gameplay and feedback (e.g., playtest notes, playtest questionnaire, playtest comments).

## **1.4 Art**

SN: Artifacts related to the visual design of a digital game. Can include UI, character, environmental, animation, and brand/marketing elements, as well as typeface selection or design.

### **Animatic**

RT: **Ripomatic; Storyboard**

SN: Animated versions of storyboards to capture data that cannot be conveyed as well in storyboards (animation, flow, changes).

### **Art Asset**

USE FOR: **Graphic; Illustration; In-game Art Asset**

SN: Any artwork used in a released version of the video game, such as 3D models or 2D artwork (e.g., mesh, model, render, sprite, texture, wireframe).



## **Art Bible**

RT: **Game Bible**

USE FOR: **Visual Style Guide**

SN: A reference guide that contains details regarding the game's appearance. Often authored by an art director to help artists maintain consistency. Can include concept art, sketches, photographs, completed assets, and reference materials. Generally intended to be a complete reference to the look and feel of a video game.

## **Art Notes**

SN: Notes regarding specific assets, art pieces, or scenes within a game, intended to provide context for artwork, animation, or other visual concepts.

## **Concept Art**

RT: **Concept Document**

USE FOR: **Concept Work**

SN: Sketches or completed artworks, often with notes, intended to provide visual concepts for levels, characters, or other game elements (e.g., drawing, scan, sketch, illustration, graphic).

## **Industrial Design Materials**

SN: Materials related to the industrial production of games, often used in reference to coin-op game boxes.

## **Logo**

RT: **Representative Art**

USE FOR: **Emblem; Logotype**

SN: A symbol or other design intended to represent a video game company or its products.

## **Representative Art**

RT: **Logo**

USE FOR: **Box Art; Key Art; Packaging Art; Packshot; Promotional Art**

SN: The officially released images prominently featured in a physical or digital distribution package of the video game (including all sides of the package) (e.g., jacket, jewel case, poster).

## **Ripomatic**

RT: **Animatic; Storyboard**

SN: Clips of existing media (e.g., games or movies) that capture a feel for the game without directly referencing any of the game's assets.

## **Screenshot**

USE FOR: **Bullshot; Screen Capture**

SN: Image captured from a game during play (sometimes faked: "bullshot").

## **Storyboard**

RT: **Animatic; Ripomatic**

SN: A graphic organization in a sequence used for planning scenes.

## **Typography Document**

USE FOR: **Font; Typeface**

SN: A document describing the style, appearance, and organization of typefaces.

## 1.5 Audio

Artifacts related to the sound design of a digital game.

### Audio Asset

USE FOR: **Audio Effect; Audio File; Audio Sample; Digital Record; Discourse; Environmental Audio; Sound Effect; Submix**

SN: All audio assets that make up the discourse or sound effects in the game.

### Dialogue

USE FOR: **Conversation; Discourse; Voiceover**

SN: Audio of extended discourse in a video game.

### Composition

USE FOR: **Audio Track; Game Soundtrack; Music; Original Soundtrack;**

### Soundtrack

SN: An original piece of music in which long or extended audio is used, often in the background to add to the mood of the game (e.g., song, background music).

### Score

RT: **Composition**

USE FOR: **Sheet Music**

SN: A written form of a **composition**.

### Voice Acting Artifact

USE FOR: **Audition; Casting Call; Session Tape; Voice Test**

RT: **Dialogue; Script (Narrative)**

SN: Information related to voice performers and performances (e.g. name of voice actors/actresses, audio samples, takes, etc.)

## 1.6 Writing

Artifacts related to the narrative design of a digital game.

### Linguistic Style Guide

RT: **Reference Materials**

SN: A guide that contains details of textual/linguistic structure, including dialect, slang, etc. Developed as a reference for script authors.

### Localization Document

SN: Document providing information regarding the translation of a digital game from a source language into one or more additional languages.

### Narrative Design Document

USE FOR: **Narrative Activity Flow; Narrative Structure Document; Story Bible**

SN: A flow chart, diagram, or text description representing the progression of dialog, story elements, or plot.

## **Setting Documentation**

USE FOR: **Point of Interest Information; Lore Documentation**

SN: Information about the world or environment of a game.

## **Script (Narrative)**

RT: **Voice Acting Artifact**

SN: Not to be confused with script (code). As in cinema or radio, but for a digital game. Text that could be used for the recording of voice actors/actresses, or for on-screen written text. May be single lines, an entire digital game, or anything in between.

## **Story Bible**

RT: **Game Bible**

NT: **Narrative Design Document**

SN: A complete (or mostly complete) collection of information about a game's narrative. This includes work such as backstories, character treatments, and other elements that creative writer(s) can generate which will be referenced in the **narrative design document**.

## **1.7 Production**

Artifacts related to the logistical management of game development processes.

### **Asset Archive**

USE FOR: **Inventory (of a specific resource type such as Art, Code, etc.)**

SN: List of all of the resources of one type required to complete a game design, often with production tracking information included. May apply to art, code, narrative, audio, or other resource types. Active/in progress versions are often referred to as an **inventory** and/or a **list**.

### **Budget (Game)**

RT: **Budget (Organization)**

SN: An estimate of income, expenditure, and/or amount of resources to be used for a particular purpose in developing games. May include information on many types of resources: employee labor, marketing, etc.

### **Burndown Chart (Agile)**

RT: **Burndown Chart (Finance); Schedule**

SN: Shows the actual amount of work completed, usually contrasted with the original schedule of work.

### **Focus Group Materials**

RT: **Consumer Research Materials**

SN: Documents or records regarding the use of focus groups to discuss game features, including the planning documents and notes from focus group sessions.

### **Pitch Document**

USE FOR: **Proposal Document**

SN: The goal of this document is to convince stakeholders to support the development of the game in some way. It may include some basic concepts of the game (e.g., plot, characters, genre, gameplay), information about its potential audience, market analysis and budget, and engineering detail.

### **Postmortem**

SN: Records of a post-milestone, post-launch, or post-cancellation review of the game creation process, including insights on what went wrong and right.

### **Schedule**

RT: **Burndown Chart (Agile)**

USE FOR: **Backlog; Roadmap**

SN: Information regarding deadlines and milestones for a project.

## **2. Organization-Related Artifacts**

These documents are commonly in archives and potentially important to understanding game development context by offering information about the parent organization.

### **Board of Directors Materials**

SN: Materials related to the membership and performance of the organization's board of directors.

### **Business Plan**

RT: **Company Culture Document**

SN: Documents detailing a company's strategic goals and the tactics intended to achieve them.

### **Communication Documentation**

SN: Documentary traces of communication among game developers, game development organizations, cultural heritage institutions, and other entities.

#### **Communication App Archive**

SN: A log or other archive of the communication hosted by an application that facilitates communication at the organization, such as Slack or Discord.

#### **Correspondence (External)**

SN: Communication between two or more individuals, at least one of which is not inside the organization.

#### **Correspondence (Internal)**

SN: Communication between two or more individuals, all of which are inside the organization.

### **Company Culture Document**

SN: Reflects and showcases the personality of the company including its mission and core values, goals, and work environment. (e.g., mission statement, newsletter, annual report).

### **Company Ephemera**

SN: Organization-related items generated for short-term usefulness (e.g., business cards, holiday cards)

### **Financial Documents**

SN: Documents related to the company's monetary resources and affairs.

#### **Budget (Organization)**

RT: **Budget (Game)**

SN: An estimate of income, expenditure, and/or amount of resources to be used for a particular purpose.

### **Burndown Chart (Finance)**

RT: **Budget (Game); Burndown Chart (Agile)**

SN: Shows the actual expenditure of budgeted resources, usually contrasted with the original budget.

### **Profit and Loss Statement**

SN: A financial report covering income and expenses for a set period of time.

### **Receipt**

RT: **Contract**

SN: A document acknowledging the exchange of goods or money.

### **Royalty Statement**

SN: A report intended for royalty rights holders regarding money owed to them for use of their work or intellectual property.

### **Sales Data**

USE FOR: **Sales Report**

SN: Information pertaining to income from a digital game.

### **Shareholder Report**

SN: A report produced by a publicly held company intended to summarize business activity for a given financial year, intended for use by current and future investors as well as government regulators.

### **Stock Certificate**

RT: IPO document

SN: A document acknowledging ownership of one or more shares of the stock of a corporation.

### **Human Resources Materials**

USE FOR: **Recruiting Materials**

SN: Materials that are used for recruiting, hiring, and on-boarding new employees (e.g., job listing, resumes, organization chart, performance reviews, salary structures).

### **IPO Document**

RT: **Shareholder Report; Stock Certificate**

SN: A document related to the initial public offering of a corporation.

### **Keepsake**

RT: **Company Ephemera**

An artifact representing a memorable event or achievement for the organization (e.g., clippings, awards, memento).

### **Legal Documents**

SN: Documents related to the company's legal affairs.

### **Cease & Desist**

SN: An order directing someone to stop engaging in a particular activity (derived from Oxford dictionary).

**Contract**

SN: A binding agreement between two or more persons or parties, intended to be legally enforceable (e.g., employment contract, marketing agreement, noncompete agreement, non-disclosure agreement).

**Copyright Document**

SN: Regards the application for a copyright or the granting of one.

**Due Diligence Document**

SN: Documents tracking the organization's adherence to contractual or legal obligations.

**Patent Document**

SN: Regards the application for a patent or the granting of one.

**Statement of Work**

RT: **Contract; Receipt**

SN: Documents detailing work to be performed by a third party, often as part of a contract.

**Trademark Document**

SN: Regards the application for a trademark or the granting of one.

**Third-Party Software Report (TPS Report)**

SN: A progress or status report from a third party.

**Operational Materials**

SN: Artifacts generated during the regular day-to-day operations within the company (e.g., meeting notes, presentation slides).

## 3. Marketing

Materials related to the selling of a game through earned, paid, and owned media.

We propose that the industry tends to perceive several aspects of marketing:

1. Marketing (Overall)
2. Advertising Materials
3. Public Relations

### 3.1 Marketing (Overall)

Documents which serve as overall guides for the marketing of digital games.

**Community Management Plan**

SN: Internal planning documents related to community management efforts.

**Convention Materials**

USE FOR: **Conference Materials**

RT: **Lecture**

SN: Materials related to a trade or consumer show at which the game was represented in some fashion. May include materials used during the show (parts of a company booth or promotional "swag") or records of the event (photographs, videos, receipts, notes).

### **Customer Service Document**

SN: Artifacts related to official company interaction with the public, including information to be shared, policies regarding interaction, and records of interaction (e.g., guidelines for interacting with players, fan mail).

### **Derivative Media**

SN: Licensed media goods related to the game's intellectual property.

### **Lecture**

USE FOR: **Talk; Panel**

SN: A record (text, audio, or video) of a public appearance of one or more people related to a digital game, often from a conference, convention, or consumer show.

### **Marketing Plan**

RT: **Marketing Road Map; Social Media Plan**

USE FOR: **PR Plan; Advertising Plan**

SN: Documents coordinating or organizing marketing activities.

### **Merchandise**

USE FOR: **Licensed Product; Merch**

SN: Physical goods related to the game's intellectual property. Could be given away free (as a promotion) or offered for sale.

#### **Feelie**

SN: A physical item intended to make the game feel more "real" to players (e.g., the cloth map in *Ultima 2*). Some function as copy protection, wherein players need the specific physical object to play the game.

### **Social Media Archive**

RT: Social Media Plan

SN: A log or other archive of the interactions from a social media platform, such as Facebook or Twitter.

### **Social Media Plan**

RT: **Social Media Archive**

SN: Internal planning documents related to marketing efforts through social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter.

### **Strategy Guide**

USE FOR: **Walkthrough**

SN: Documents that are intended to help players progress through the game by explaining the necessary actions and other gameplay relevant information (e.g., tips, tricks, cheats, FAQs).

### **Teacher's Guide**

SN: Materials distributed to educators to facilitate the use in classrooms or with learners.

### **Trailer**

SN: An edited selection of scenes that advertise a digital game.

## 3.2 Advertising Materials

Artifacts related to public marketing of games, game-related products, or services in any medium.

### **Creative Brief**

SN: Document created by the game producer for the sake of their advertising department or third-party agency, intended to help with the production of advertising and marketing materials.

### **Game Catalog**

USE FOR: **Price List**

SN: A list of games published (or intended to be published) by the organization.

### **Key Art**

RT: **Packaging**

SN: Art used for the marketing and promotion of a video game (e.g., poster).

### **Packaging**

RT: **Key Art**

SN: The box and other materials accompanying a game when packed for physical distribution.

### **Promotional Materials**

USE FOR: **Contest; Giveaway; Swag; Sweepstakes**

RT: **Retail Support Materials**

SN: Documents and artifacts related to promoting games, game companies, or game related events such as a public contest or sweepstakes.

### **Retail Support Materials**

USE FOR: **Point of Purchase; Retail Display**

RT: **Promotional Materials**

SN: Materials provided (free or paid) to retailers to support sales, intended to be used for in-store promotion. Common types include posters, standees, and retailer guidelines.

## 3.3 Public Relations

Materials specifically given to press for promoting the game.

### **Biography**

SN: A profile of a person associated with the game or parent company. May include photos.

### **Company Profile**

SN: A document that provides information related to the company—such as company size, financial information, and company history—rather than the game itself. Almost always supplemental materials sent alongside other press documents.

### **Fact Sheet**

SN: A press document that gives bullet point specifics about a specific product or announcement. Usually literally titled “Fact Sheet”.



**Interview**

SN: A record (text, audio, or video) of a discussion with one or more people related to a digital game, often hosted by internal marketing staff or members of the press.

**Membership List**

SN: Records of an official mailing list, email or snail mail, with recipient names and addresses.

**Press Materials**

USE FOR: **Article; Clipping; Press Clipping; Press Coverage; Press Release**

SN: Information provided to the media or produced by the media.

**Press Kit**

SN: A collection of materials intended for distribution to members of the press.

**Reviewer Guidelines**

SN: A document distributed to game reviewers to help them understand the game and write reviews.