

# Game Art and Design: Level Design

## Materials Needed:

- Graph Paper (or one plain A4 sheet)
- Pencils
- Colouring Pencils

## Objective:

- To explore the opportunities available within the UK Game Industry
- To learn about the Kishōtenketsu level design technique
- To apply the Kishōtenketsu technique to your own video game level

The video game industry is massive across the globe and here in the UK that same industry is thriving. There are 2285 studios in the UK that develop and publish video games. Just imagine how many jobs are available across all of those studios for young creatives to apply to. A lot of these studios have created titles and franchises that have sold millions of copies: Playground Games and their Forza Horizon series, Traveller's Tales with their Lego video games and Rockstar North with their Grand Theft Auto games.

With the character you have designed in the previous activity (complete the Character Design worksheet if you haven't yet) we can now think about creating a world for your character to explore.

Traditionally video games are split into levels: contained areas for the character to explore and complete specific objectives. Different game developers have different approaches when it comes to designing a level but there is one particular studio that has devised a way of designing a level that helps with structure, difficulty and fun: Nintendo.

The famous Japanese studio that created iconic games such as Super Mario Bros and The Legend of Zelda use a technique called Kishōtenketsu: which actually originated from Chinese and Japanese poetry. The format suggests you can tell a story in four simple acts: introduce a narrative, develop it, give it an unexpected twist then conclude the story. In the world of video games we can look at the very first Mario level as a great example of Kishōtenketsu (or the Four Step Level Design).

## Introduction:

The player, as Mario, is forced to jump over a single enemy and a single object within a safe area.

## Development:

Mario's ability to jump is developed as he must jump over higher obstacles and navigate multiple enemies.

## Twist:

To complicate matters there are pit falls and a new type of enemy!

## Conclusion:

To prove the player has mastered the jump ability, if they can reach the very top of the finishing flag pole they will receive bonus points.



(source- NUA)



(BagoGames/Flickr)



## Task:

Design your own video game level using the four step level design technique.

In the early days of video game design, developers didn't have high-end equipment and instead designed levels purely on graph paper or with cheap programs. Below is an original level design sheet used on the first Prince of Persia game:



Use your graph paper to produce a level using the four step level design technique.

Think about the following:

- Who are the enemies?  
How many are there, how do they get harder to avoid as the level progresses?
- What are the obstacles?  
How does the character overcome them? Is there enough room for the character to jump/duck/roll?
- Are there any rewards throughout the level?  
Are these attainable?

To prepare for your task, if you don't have graph paper to draw up your levels, you can draw a grid on an A4 sheet of paper.

A 1cm grid would work well and you can then cut the sheet in half vertically. There you should have two long strips to design your levels!

### Consider:

Has your level followed the four step technique? Does the level design make good use of your character's abilities? How could this level be used in a full game?

### Conclusion:

There are many different techniques and methods when it comes to designing video games but the Kishōtenketsu Four Step Level Design philosophy helps make sure your particular level has good pace, an increase in challenge and ensures your level is fun for the player. You may not have all the software and equipment that a top game developer might have but that shouldn't stop you from designing games right now on paper: just like legendary Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto did!

### Further resources:

#### Screenskills

<https://www.screenskills.com/>

#### Access VFX

<https://www.accessvfx.org/>

#### Game Maker's Toolkit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBmlkEvEBtA&t=7s>



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### Useful Links

**Creative Careers:** <https://discovercreative.careers/#/>

**UCAS:** <https://www.ucas.com/>



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