Game Jam Learning Plan

Game jams are a great tool for practicing your game development skills. With proper planning, they can help you to deepen your knowledge and skill with your chosen game development tools, while also building up a portfolio of games to show off and maybe even monetize.

The plan outlined in this document aims to provide you with a systematic, intentional approach to learning and practicing game development, through alternating periods of focused studying and game jams. You can use this plan even if you are a beginner to game development or your particular tools.

What is a Game Jam?

A game jam is a time-bound event, in which participants are given a theme and a timeframe in which to develop a game from scratch, based on that theme. The theme is generally announced at the beginning of the jam.

There are usually many ways to incorporate a theme into your game. For example, if the theme is money, then you might have game mechanics that focus on money in some way, or the story might heavily involve money. You might play a merchant who is trying to make a lot of money, or a character mining for metals to create coins, or a struggling student taking on odd jobs to cover tuition expenses and school fees.

The Game Jam Learning Plan

This learning plan is divided into two main components: a study period and a game jam period.

The Study Period

The study period is a timeframe set aside for you to focus on completing tutorials and learning useful skills.

Choosing a Tool

To begin the initial study period, choose a game development tool, language, or engine. If you are an absolute beginner, with no coding experience, I suggest a beginner-friendly tool such as GDevelop or Scratch. I recommend that you look for tools that have the following:
- Plenty of up to date tutorials and learning resources
- An active community/forum

- An option to easily release the game in HTML and a web browser, because for the game jam period, many potential players prefer to at least play the game initially in a web browser, rather than downloading and installing something

Minimum Skill Set

Once you have chosen your tool, identify and complete the official tutorials that teach the basic elements of the tool. At a minimum, you should focus on learning the following skills:
- Drawing sprites and images to the screen
- Drawing text to the screen
- Getting and responding to player input (via keyboard, mouse, controller, gamepad, touchscreen, and so on, depending on what devices you want to release your games for)
- Using conditional statements (if one condition is true, take a certain action, else if a different condition is true, take a different action)
- Storing, checking, and using data in variables
- Basic arithmetic and number comparisons (addition, subtraction, checking if two values are equal, checking if one number is greater than/less than another, and so on)

These skills will allow you to at least make a very simple game with minimal features. Depending on your creative skills (which this plan will help you to build and practice), you can even create more complex games with this skill set.

If your chosen tool has good documentation, tutorials, and support, you should be able to learn all of this information when you complete the basic tool tutorials, for the most part.

Study Period Time Frame

For the initial study period, I recommend setting aside at least two weeks, maybe even a month, to learn this baseline skill set. A month might seem like a long time, but keep in mind that you likely still have other responsibilities and duties in your life outside of game development.

Since the first study period will be covering quite a few skills, you want to make sure you set yourself up for success by giving yourself plenty of time to learn and process the new information. You can adjust this time period to your specific needs, but make your best effort to stick to your decision.

The Game Jam Period

Once you have gotten a basic understanding of the baseline skill set, it's time to put it into practice, with a game jam period. Here's what you'll do:
- Set aside a two week period, starting no more than a few days after your learning period ends. You want to make sure that the skills that you learned are still fresh in your mind.
- Choose a theme for your game jam. There are several websites that will randomly provide themes that you can use.

- ○ [Let's Make a Game generator](#)
- ○ [Another generator](#)
- ○ [Flash Museum generator](#)
- Using the skills you learned, come up with a game idea that incorporates those skills and the game jam theme
- Create the game. It can be very rough, and does not need fancy art or sound.
- If you are able to and willing, share the game online or with people you know, so that you can start getting feedback.
- At the end of the jam period, do a quick self-evaluation of how your jam went. What worked well, and what did not work so well? What did you learn? How did people respond to your game, if you gathered feedback?

A Note on Game Ideas

Especially when you're starting out, your game ideas might borrow heavily from tutorial projects or existing games. Sometimes it's easier to focus on the implementation skills if you don't get too hung up on a completely original game idea. Even still, it would be good practice for you if you try to make some minor changes to the game, so that it's not a complete copy of a tutorial or different game.

Always give credit and don't try to pass off a clone game as your own original idea. Inevitably, games will borrow and reuse themes and features, so no game is completely unique, but what I mean is don't do things like make a carbon copy of a game and then put it on the app store or something like that. Believe it or not, some people do game development tutorials, and then just submit the exact game from the tutorial to the marketplace. Use your best judgement.

The jams you do for this plan are a specialized process specifically designed to help you practice and build your skills. As such, it is more understandable if you make games that are more derivative of others, for the sake of practice. I would not recommend taking this approach for other game jams, though. In those situations, participants, players, and judges will be looking for more originality and creativity. And again, as stated before, if you do a copy of another game, for your personal practice, it should be just for practice, and it's probably best if you state that in your game description if you open to feedback from a wide audience.

Repeat the Process

Once you've done your first jam with the baseline skill set, repeat the process. Begin another study period, and then do another jam period.

Choose one or two new skills to focus on for your learning period. If you have a specific type of game or idea that you'd like to eventually make, maybe choose skills you will need for that game. For example, if you love RPGs, maybe one learning period will focus on how to add dialog to a game, the next might include different dialog branches and choices (a more complex

level of the skill), and then after that you might learn about how to make an inventory system for your player, and so on.

If you don't have any specific skills in mind, you can also continue with the official tutorials or other resources for your tool. If you feel up to it, you might even look through the non-tutorial documentation to learn some new skill ideas.

After your initial jam, you might also want to shorten your learning period to just two weeks, since you will be focusing on just one or two skills, rather than that minimal skill set you worked on for your first jam. With this approach, you would be doing one game a month.

Additional Resources

Now that you've seen the plan, it's time to start your game development learning journey! You can check out our free Game Jam Planning Resource Pack for some more guidance on how to participate and get the most of a game jam. It applies to this learning plan, as well as any other jams.

You can bookmark this page and the resource pack, as we will be continuing to update and add to both as needed.

You can also join our practice game jam Discord channel, the channel for our regular practice game jams on Itch.io.

Good luck with your game development journey!