



Hello Jammers! We are the Portland Indie Game Squad (PIGSquad) and if there's one thing we love, it's game jams! (Seriously we can't even joke about a game jam without community members making games at the drop of a hat.) With all these jams under our belts, we've found some tried-and-true tips to help anyone from newbies to veterans get the most out of their jams, have fun, and avoid burnout or crunch!

This document is a how-to guide for folks interested in participating in a game jam featuring all the advice we give our own jammers!

Without further ado, let's talk GAME JAMS.



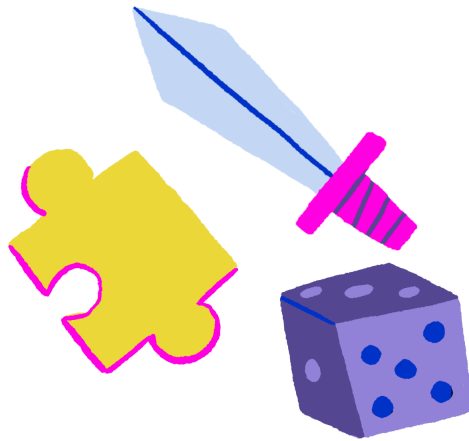
WHAT IS A GAME JAM?

A game jam is an event in which game developers of all disciplines and skill levels get together to form teams and create a game from start to finish. ***Anyone can participate in a game jam, from hobbyist gamedevs to professionals!***

Most game jams have a creative theme that is announced at the start of the jam. This theme can be anything from “the road less traveled” to “egg.” All jam teams are meant to use this theme as inspiration for the game that they’re working on.

Game jams are short – usually 48 hours to 1 week. However some jams, particularly PIGSquad’s Summer Slow Jams series, are around 2 weeks long. This is to make sure jammers aren’t crunching or overexerting themselves while participating! Because game jams are quick events, the types of games that jam teams make are scaled to be smaller in comparison to many full-scale or AAA games. It’s not uncommon for a finished jam game to only take a few minutes to play!

Many jams are online events, and team members participate fully remotely using tools like Discord or Slack to communicate. PIGSquad jams are a hybrid of in-person and online events. You can participate locally with developers in Portland, OR at our in-person events, or participate online via our [Discord server](#) and Twitch events! You do not need to live in Portland to participate in a PIGSquad Jam – all remote jammers are welcome!

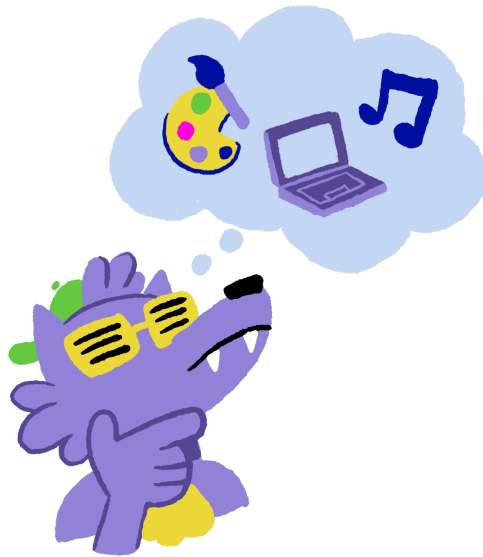


WHAT KIND OF PROJECTS CAN BE SUBMITTED TO A PIGSQUAD GAME JAM?

You may be asking yourself “what can I submit to a game jam?” Here’s some suggestions:

- Games of any genre
- Games built in any engine
- Tabletop games and physical games
- Interactive experiences
- Asset Packs
- Game mods
- Mockups of games
- *Unfinished games*
- Anything you can think of!

If the above list doesn’t make it clear, ***anything you make can be submitted to a PIGSquad Game Jam.*** There are no restrictions on what type of games are accepted or what even constitutes a “game.” Additionally, while the goal of a game jam is to make something that’s complete, we are also aware that sometimes a game just doesn’t come together in the time frame. We encourage you to submit unfinished games so you can share all the hard work you did during the jam! Unfinished games are an incredibly common part of the game dev journey :)



ROLES: WHAT KIND OF ROLES CAN YOU FILL ON A GAME JAM TEAM?

Similarly to the previous question, the answer can really be “anything!” Some common roles on game jam teams are:

- Programmer
- Designer
- Artist
- Musician
- Sound Designer
- Producer
- Writer

If there’s anything you feel like you can contribute, no matter how small, you can totally join a team. In the past, we’ve had folks who took it upon themselves to design a website for the finished game. We’ve also seen team members who only had time to design a logo for a game. All contributions and time commitments are welcome! Remember, you are not confined to just one role either! If there’s more than one role you like to perform, feel free to try wearing multiple hats!



Another important note on roles: If you're totally new to game dev or unsure of what role you'd be able to contribute to, you are also welcome to shadow a team and learn a bit more about the process of jamming to get comfortable! If this sounds like something you'd like to do, feel free and reach out to a PIGSquad organizer, and we can set you up with a team!



FORMING A JAM TEAM

An exciting part of game jams is team-forming! We host various team-forming events leading up to our jams in the form of socials and speed-meets. We also have a dedicated #gamejam channel in our [discord](#) where folks are encouraged to share their skillsets and connect with other potential team mates. Game jams are a great opportunity to work with new people you've never worked with before!

Usually a core jam team is made up of a programmer, artist, and musician. But teams can be made up of any mix of roles and specialties. Some people even choose to jam solo! If you're making a game jam team, we recommend keeping your team size close to 3-5 people. Having *too* many people on a jam team may seem like a great idea to get a lot of work done at first, but it can become difficult and unruly to manage communication and decision making between a large group of people in such a small amount of time.

When participating in team-forming, chat with people to see if you have similar needs, fill complimentary roles for a team, or like to make similar games!

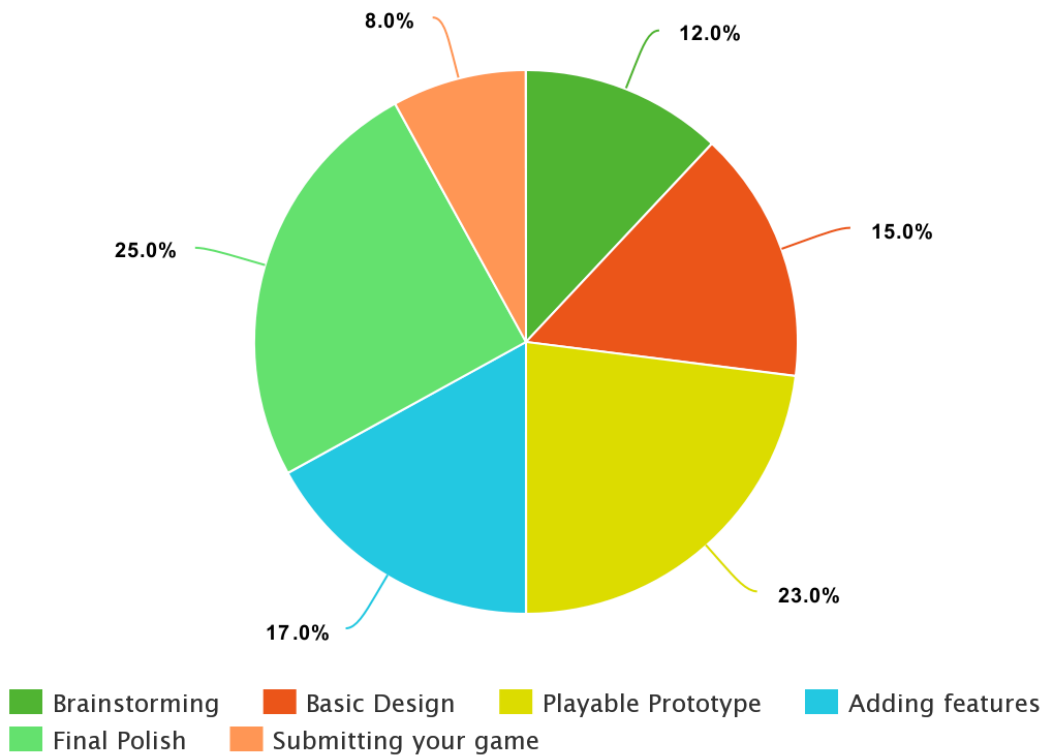


INTERPRETING THE THEME

As previously mentioned, PIGSquad jams (and most jams in general) have a theme. You can interpret this theme in any way that you see fit. Maybe the theme inspires game mechanics, art, a certain type of character, a piece of dialogue, a sound effect. Whatever grabs your imagination, go for it! Use the theme as a jumping off point and don't worry too much if your finished product doesn't show its inspiration very clearly. PIGSquad jams are not a competition and there's no points given for adhering strictly to the theme!



GAME JAM RECOMMENDED TIMELINE



meta-chart.com

Take this all as a suggestion – there's not a real formula to jamming! Use this chart as more of a rough idea of where your time should be spent! **Remember when you're budgeting your time,**

you also need to eat and sleep and live your life during your jam time!

- Brainstorming: 12%
 - This is the phase where you and your teammates come up with the concept for your game! This translates to ~2 days of a 2 week jam (and ~5 hours of a 48 hour jam)
- Basic Design: 15%
 - This is the phase where you finalize the design of your game. What is the main mechanic that you're going to base your game on?
This translates to ~2 days of a 2 week jam (and ~8 hours of a 48 hour jam)
- Playable Prototype: 23%
 - By the end of this phase, you should have a playable version of your game. It will be unpolished, but players could technically play through your whole game at this point!
This translates to ~3 days of a 2 week jam (and ~10 hours of a 48 hour jam)
- Adding Features: 17%
 - In this phase, you are adding any related features to your game. Do you need a title screen? Do you need a pause feature? Do you need some more UI or other animations for the player character? This is where you add them! Try not to add any additional features after this phase!
This translates to ~2.5 days of a 2 week jam (and ~6 hours of a 48 hour jam)
- Final Polish: 25%
 - This is the phase where you take everything to the finish line. Fix all those small bugs, tweak all those visuals, add in those extra sound effects, give the game some juice!
This translates to ~3.5 days of a 2 week jam (and ~11 hours of a 48 hour jam)
- Submitting your game: 8%
 - Push your final build! Export your executables! Get your game in whatever format you need to to share it with others to play, and submit it to your jam (don't forget to take screenshots!)
This translates to ~1 day of a 2 week jam and (~3 hours of a 48 hour jam)



WHAT TO DO WHILE JAMMING

- Talk to your team. Make sure to stay in communication with your team and talk frequently about what you're working on, and what each other need! Schedule a few all-hands calls or meetings with everyone throughout the jam to touch base.
- Share progress and ask questions in the [PIGSquad Discord!](#) We have an active #gamejam channel where jammers share their progress, as well as channels for different disciplines where you can ask for advice or feedback.
- If you have any questions or concerns, contact a PIGSquad Organizer! We are here to help, and it's our job to help you have a great experience!



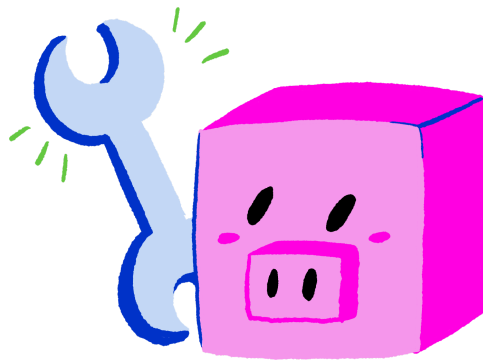
TIPS FOR ACTUALLY FINISHING YOUR GAME:

While it's not required to finish your game to participate, it is something you should aim for! Being able to properly scope games and your work is a valuable skill as a game developer, and game jams are a great no-stakes place to practice that skill! Some tips we have to help you finish your game:

- Do 1 thing very well instead of multiple things “ok.” Everything will take longer to implement than you think it will. Instead of making an MMO in a week, maybe pick 1 mechanic that you like from your ideas and build your whole game around that 1 mechanic.
- “Save it for the sequel.” It may be tempting to add extra features, mechanics, art, levels, music, etc, but trust us when we say it's often more trouble than it's worth is a short game jam format. We always suggest you keep all those ideas, write them down and say “save it for the sequel.” Who knows, maybe you'll want to work more on your jam game post-jam, or really make a sequel! That can be a good opportunity to revisit those ideas you had during the jam that didn't have enough time to make it in.
- Make the MVP first. It's best to make the MVP (Minimum Viable Product) first and the build off of that. Make something that's playable. You can start and end it, win or lose it. Maybe it doesn't have any of the bells and whistles, and maybe it's not even fun yet, but it's *technically* a game! Everything can be placeholder and that's okay! Use a red square as your player character until the artist has the time to make the sprites for it.

Once you have an MVP, you can build on it knowing that you'll have *something* finished and playable by the end of the jam.

- Take care of yourself! It's important not to burn yourself out or crunch during a game jam. Sleep regularly, eat regularly, shower and take breaks regularly. If you're feeling the pressure of needing to crunch or spend more time than is comfortable on your jam game, that probably means that you've overscoped, and this would be a great time to consider some features to cut to make your game more doable. Remember, game jams are meant to be fun, enjoyable, and a great tool for learning or practicing game dev! There's no need to sacrifice your well-being for a jam!
-



TOOLS: WHAT KIND OF TOOLS CAN YOU USE TO MAKE YOUR GAMES?

Say it with us, everyone: **ANYTHING!** There are no restrictions on what tools you use to make you jam games. Use whatever is the most inspiring to you! We've had folks make games with anything from Unreal Engine to google slides to literal cardboard boxes. Below are some recommended tools you can try out!

Game engines

- [Godot](#), a free and open source 2D and 3D game engine that uses GDScript, a language similar to python. [Check out the Learn GDScript from Zero app if you'd like to get started!](#)
- [Unity](#), A popular C# engine that supports 2D and 3D. Due to its popularity as an engine for both commercial and personal games of all sizes, there are a lot of tutorials that can help you navigate how large it is. There is a free version for developers who have less than \$100k USD in revenue from their games.
- [Unreal Engine](#), another popular engine for commercial and personal projects that uses C++. There's a lot of node-based work you can do in Unreal that requires no coding

knowledge to navigate. It's free to use for folks who have revenue of under \$1 million USD. It can tend to have higher requirements for PC specs to play Unreal games due to their size.

- [Game Maker Studio 2](#), a 2D game engine that uses the GML language, similar to Javascript and C languages. It's paid, but there's a free trial!
- [Twine](#), a free and open-source text-based engine that requires no coding to use (but you can do scripting if you want to get fancy!) Great for making text-based games, and can even be used entirely in-browser!
- [Ren'Py](#), a free and open-source engine for visual novel games. Easily incorporate images, text and sound, and explore further scripting if you want!
- [PICO-8](#), a "fantasy console" that's easy to learn and helps you make small games! It uses Lua language, and costs \$14.99. PIGSquad Organizer Dylan has created a 72-page Zine for getting started in PICO-8 [that you can download here!](#)
- [Bitsy](#), a free in-browser engine for making tiny games. No coding or previous game dev experience needed to dive into Bitsy! You can also follow [PIGSquad's written Bitsy Tutorial](#) made for first-timers!
- [GB Studio](#), a "drag and drop" retro game engine that's free to use. Make Game-Boy-Style games easily with this engine. Games can even be played on Gameboy cartridges or played directly on the Analogue Pocket system!
- [Playdate](#), Make games for this quirky little handheld crank device that uses the Lua language! There's also an emulator that you can use to play the game on PC if you don't own a playdate. Check out their [SDK](#) or try out [Pulp](#), their new browser-based click and drag editor.

Art tools

- [GIMP](#), a free and open source image-editing software. It touts much of the same tools and features as common image-editors like Photoshop. A great place to start for digital artists.
- [Photopea](#), a free, browser-based recreation of Photoshop. Easy to use and has most if not all of the features of Photoshop.
- [Clip Studio Paint](#), the popular "photoshop alternative" that does basically everything photoshop does for a fraction of the cost. It's a one-time purchase of \$49.99 or a monthly subscription for \$0.99/mo.
- [Aseprite](#), a popular tool for creating and animating pixel art. With pixel artists in mind, this tool can far surpass other image editors that "do it all" with its specificity for pixel artists. There's a free trial, and a one-time purchase of \$19.99 for the full version.
- [Blender](#), a free and open-source 3D creation suite that supports modeling, rigging, animation, rendering, compositing, and even motion capture. This is a tool that can do as little or as much as you need!
- [Procreate](#), an ipad-specific drawing software that's quickly become many artist's go-to. Supports drawing and animation. When paired with the Apple Pencil it can have a really natural feel to its drawing. One time purchase of \$12.99.

- [Photoshop](#), an “industry standard” image-editor. It has many standard features, and anyone familiar with digital art will be able to navigate it with relative ease. Additionally supports animation. A free trial is available, but otherwise must be purchased via the Adobe Suite Subscription.
- [JSPaint.app](#), remember MS Paint? This is that. :)
- [Spine 2D](#), a games-specific animation tool for 2D art that supports rigging, mesh warping, puppet animation, and much more. Easy integration into some popular game engines. There’s a free trial and a one-time purchase of \$69 USD for the essential version.

Audio Tools

- [LMMS](#), a free and open source digital audio workstation (DAW)
- [Reaper](#), a DAW with a free 60 day trial, after which you can continue to use it for free but must click away a lil popup at launch.
- [FL studio](#), a popular DAW choice for professionals. There’s a free trial, and a variety of one-time purchases with lifetime updates.
- [Ableton Live](#), another DAW. There is a free trial, and a variety of one-time purchase options.
- [Famistudio](#), a free music editor for creating NES/Famicom style chiptune music
- [Audacity](#), a free and open-source audio editing software.
- [Garage Band](#), a free to use music-creation app for mac devices.
- [SFXR](#), an in-browser SFX creation tool
- [SoundDevX](#), an in-browser SFX creation tool
- [Chiptone](#), a free tool for creating SFX
- [Surge](#), a free and open source hybrid synthesizer
- [PLUGINS 4 FREE](#), a collection of free audio plugins

Other Tools

- [Trello](#), a free task-tracking software. Can be helpful when working remotely or with larger teams to track who’s working on what.
- [Toggl](#), a time-tracking app that can help you and your teammates keep track of your time spent on specific aspects of your jam game.
- [Google Suite](#), a free-to-use suite that can help with documenting and development. Specifically, docs is a great word processor, sheets is helpful for creating spreadsheets, and drive can store and share files between teammates.
- [Apache Open Office](#), a free and open source suite that has essentially all the same features as its google suite equivalent but without the online hosting. A great alternative if you want to keep all your files local and outside the watchful eye of google ;)
- [Dropbox](#), a file-storage service that is free to use if you only need 2GB, there’s also a variety of paid plans available.

- [Discord](#), an app that allows you to chat, talk, and video call with other users either in private groups or as part of a larger server (like the PIGSquad server!) A go-to for teams working remotely from one-another. Free to use with the option to unlock more features with a subscription.
 - [Slack](#), the alternative to Discord that does a lot of the same things with a slightly different coat of paint. There's a free version as well as some paid options.
 - [web whiteboard](#), a collaborative whiteboard app that multiple users can draw in in real time. Great to use for the brainstorming phase for remote teams!
-

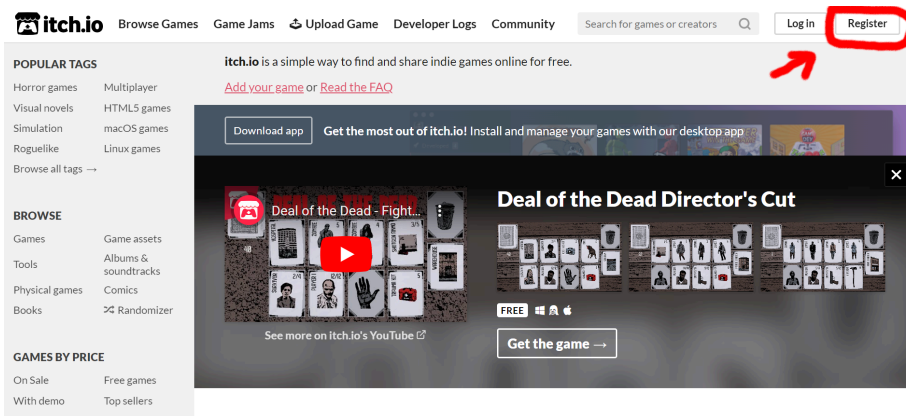


SUBMITTING YOUR GAME TO THE JAM

Remember to take the time to submit and upload your game! This can be an easy thing to forget when you're budgeting your time, but remember at the jam deadline you have to submit your game! That means pushing a build or otherwise documenting your game in a way that others can play it.

PIGSquad jams are hosted on itch.io. In order to submit to our jams you must have an itch.io account that you can upload your game to. Here's how you submit:

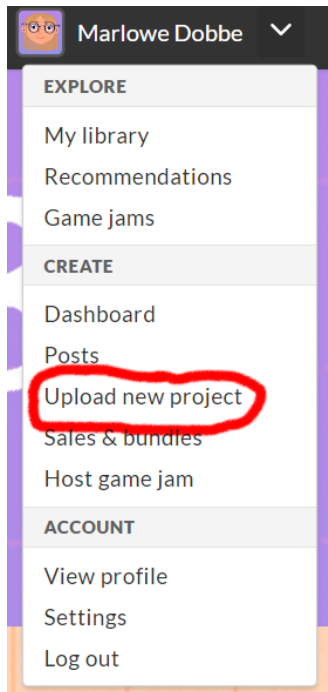
- If you don't already have an account on itch.io, create one.



- Once you are logged in, on the jam page, select “join jam.” (you can find links to all the SSJ jam pages [here](#).)



- When you're ready to submit your game, you must first upload the game to itch. Click on your profile in the top right of itch, and select “upload a new project”



- This will open us the dashboard, where you can fill out the relevant information and images for your game. (At the end of this section, we will provide templates for the sizes of images you can upload to your project page.)

A screenshot of the 'Create a new project' dashboard on itch.io. The form is titled 'Create a new project' and includes several sections for project information. On the left, there's a 'Make sure everyone can find your page' section with a link to 'quality guidelines'. Below that are input fields for 'Title', 'Project URL' (pre-filled with 'https://marlowedobbe.itch.io/'), 'Short description or tagline' (with a note to avoid duplicating the title), 'Classification' (a dropdown menu currently showing 'Games — A piece of software you can play'), and 'Kind of project' (a dropdown menu currently showing 'Downloadable — You only have files to be downloaded'). On the right, there's a large dashed box for the 'Cover Image' with an 'Upload Cover Image' button. Below that, there's a 'Gameplay video or trailer' section with a text input field (pre-filled with a YouTube link) and a 'Screenshots' section with a note that screenshots are optional but recommended, and an 'Add screenshots' button.

- Upload your playable game file in the upload section of the dashboard.

Someone downloading your project will be asked for a donation before getting access.
They can skip to download for free.

Suggested donation — Default donation amount

\$2.00

Uploads

TIP Use **butler** to upload game files: it only uploads what's changed, generates patches for the [itch.io app](#), and you can automate it. [Get started!](#)

Upload files

or  Choose from Dropbox

[Add External file](#) ?

File size limit: 1 GB. [Contact us](#) if you need more space

Details

Description — This will make up the content of your game page.

- Save your page, and select public when you're ready to set the game as public

Visibility & access

Use Draft to review your page before making it public. [Learn more about access modes](#)

- ☐ Draft — Only those who can edit the project can view the page
- ☐ Restricted — Only owners & authorized people can view the page
- ☒ Public — Anyone can view the page [Configure settings...](#)

Save

[View page](#)

- Once your game is public, you can return to the jam page, and there will be a button that says “Submit your project” click it!



- From there, select your game from the drop down menu and submit!

Submit game to jam

Existing project

Fire Emblem Gilmore Girls Edition

Submit

Create new project

Upload game

or
[Go to my dashboard](#)

Creating a new project? Remember to return to the jam page to make sure you've submitted.

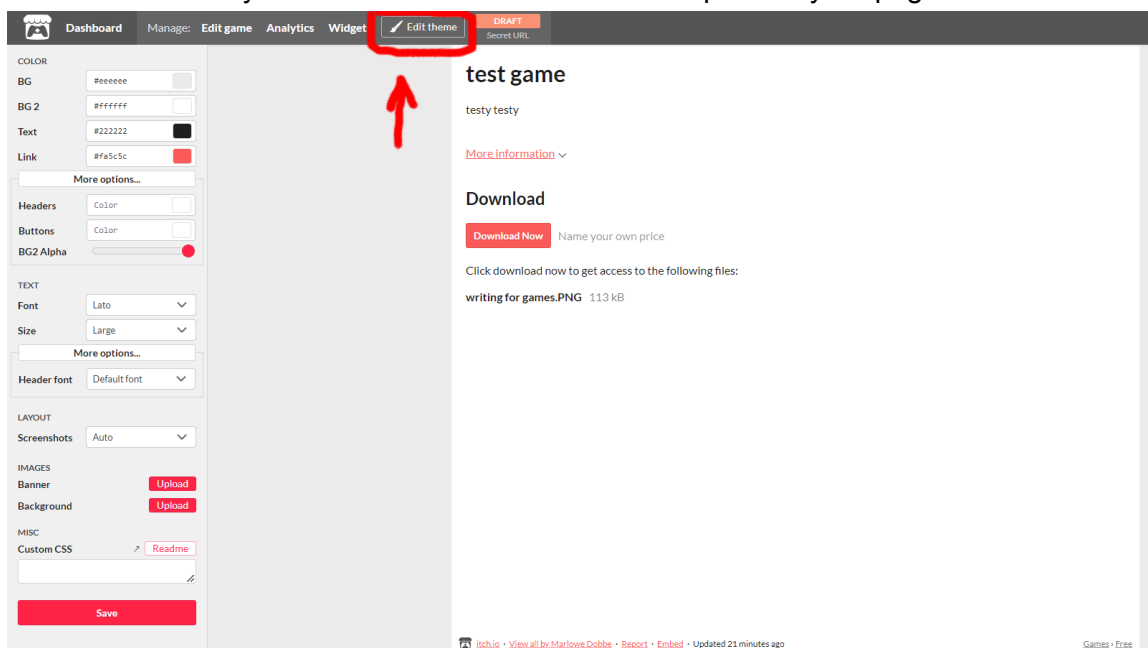
- THEN TAKE A DEEP BREATH! YOU DID IT!



MAKING YOUR ITCH.IO PAGE LOOK GOOD

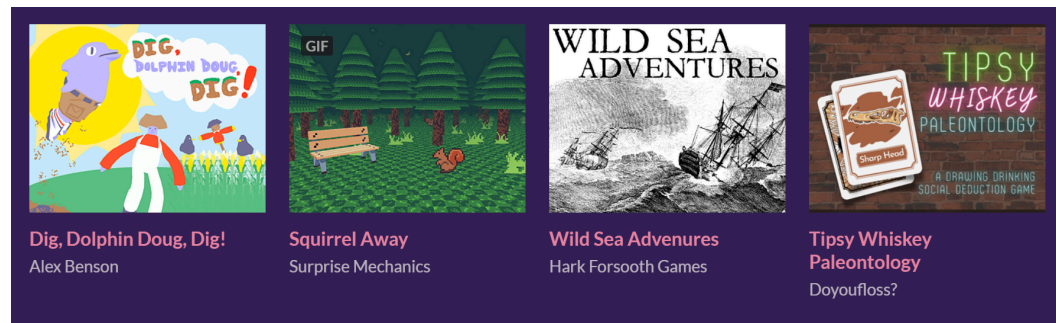
While not a requirement to submit to a jam, it can be fun to customize the look of your itch page when you submit your game! You can make your page look any which way you like!

- When viewing your page, you can click the “edit theme” button, which will open a sidebar to the left that lets you edit fonts and colors of various parts of your page.

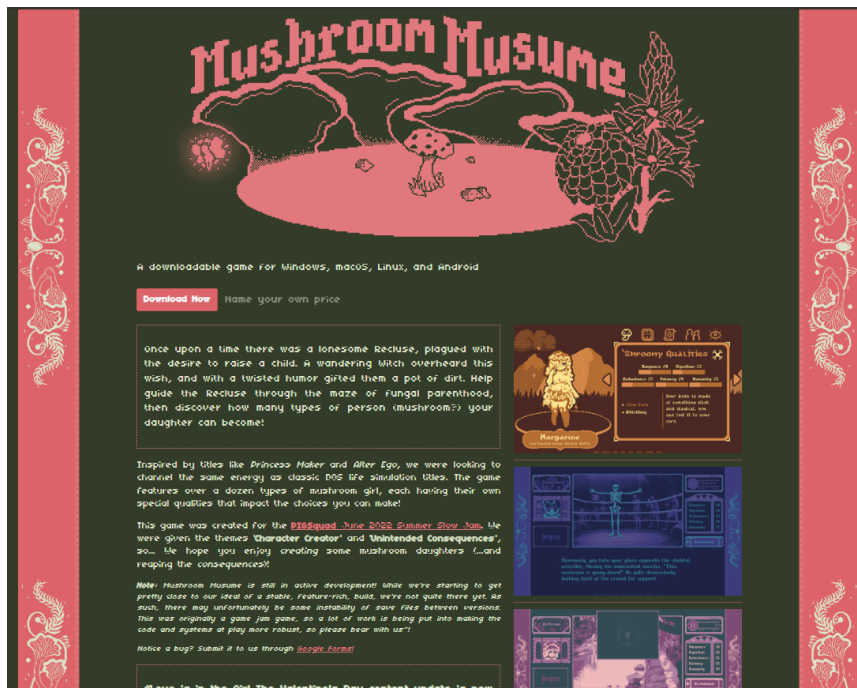


- You can also upload a custom banner, and background to your page. [Check out our folder of image templates for itch pages to get good dimensions for these images.](#)
- Finally, back on your dashboard page, you can upload a cover image and screenshots.
 - The cover image is what people will see when browsing on itch. We recommend including a title/logo for your game in this image! Dimensions are in the [template](#)

[folder](#) as well. Examples of cover images below!



- Screenshots can be any size. If possible, it's great to upload moving gifs for your screenshots so people can see your game in action!
- With all that done, your page is good to go! Here's some examples of different game pages that have been submitted to PIGSquad jams:







FINAL NOTES ON JAMMING

- **HAVE FUN!** Game jams are meant to be fun and enjoyable, if you're not having fun, maybe think about some of the ways you can make the process more enjoyable for yourself, or feel free and contact a PIGSquad organizer for advice!
- **DON'T CRUNCH!** Always put your physical and mental well-being before your game project. With PIGSquad jams we do not encourage a crunch-culture and do not expect or ask jammers to work long or strenuous hours. If you are feeling like you may need to crunch to finish your game, that's a good sign that it's time to cut some features or scale back the scope of your project!
- **DON'T STRESS!** Game jams are low-stakes. Even if your final project doesn't come out the way you'd have liked, you still learned something and you still got experience making games! Remember we are all here to try new things and experiment in a safe environment, and game jams can be a great place to do just that.
- **JOIN THE COMMUNITY!** Jams are always the most fun when you're jamming together, be sure to join the [PIGSquad discord](#) and hang out with us during game jam events to share what you're working on and see what other community members are jamming on!

As always, if you have any questions, reach out to a PIGSquad organizer! We'll see you at [Summer Slow Jams!](#)
Happy Jamming!

-THE PIGSQUAD ORG TEAM



A SUMMER SLOW JAMS TEAM MID-JAM



JAMMERS SHOWCASING THEIR GAMES AT AN IN-PERSON EVENT



JAMMERS SHOWCASING THEIR GAMES AT AN IN-PERSON EVENT



JAMMERS SHOWCASING THEIR GAMES AT AN IN-PERSON EVENT