

Production Next Steps (For Fall 2023)

From Kyle James, Production Lead Summer 2023

Hello!

Welcome to the Changeling project! I'm hoping to make the transition from the Summer 2023 Team to the Fall 2023 Team as smooth as possible, so each team has worked diligently to fill out their [Product Backlogs](#), their [Next Steps documentation](#), and the documentation associated with the work they've completed (in their associated Google Drive folders).

This document will outline the [Priorities and MVP](#) that you should strive for in the Fall 2023 semester, the [Workflow](#) that I've put into place to improve the transparency and efficiency of the project, the [Organizational Work](#) that the Summer 2023 Team worked hard on to accomplish to prepare you for success, the theoretical [Next Steps](#) for the production side of things, and all other [Next Steps for each section of the Changeling project](#).

I'm hoping to keep this document short, but know that what that means is required readings of more extended documentation to understand the priorities, the workflow, and the project's current state. I would also be available to talk at any point during your semester to discuss any questions or concerns you may have; feel free to DM me or tag me in Discord.

Good luck; have fun!

Sincerely,
Kyle James

Priorities, “MVP,” and Team Formation

Priorities

Coming into this semester of work, I’m hoping that Elouise Oyzon outlined the hope for shipping the game as an Early Access title to Steam. That said, you’ll need to be very pointed in how you shape the priorities to hit the Minimum Viable Product for Early Access release. There will be people that want to work on unnecessary elements that exceed the requirements for Early Access; you’ll need to work with Elouise Oyzon to keep people on track and focused on the necessary goals, not the stretch goals. And as a note from me to you, you’ll sometimes need to remind Elouise Oyzon that this is Early Access; future teams can add some of the “nice-to-have” features later, but the focus is to get the MVP out in Early Access. You should still try to get as many in as possible but do not crunch.

To clearly outline the priorities, your team’s work for the semester should cover the onboarding, apartment, street, taxi, family, mind palace, mother, and second mind palace levels. Work on the father, tween, and toddler levels needs to get pushed to the next team unless your team finishes all other work early, which then, and only then, should you start working on those levels.

MVP

As alluded to above, the minimum viable product for Early Access, according to Elouise Oyzon, should be the onboarding level up through the mother’s level and back to the mind palace. This MVP requires a finished onboarding level, apartment level, street level, taxi transition, family level, first mind palace level, mother’s level, and second mind palace level. Coordinate with Elouise Oyzon to confirm definitions of done for each level outlined in the relevant “next steps” documentation, clarified below.

The below list of next steps documents are required to work toward the MVP. The names of these documents also coincide with the names of the relevant backlogs in ClickUp.

- [Onboarding Next Steps](#) (onboarding & apartment levels)
- [Introduction Next Steps](#) (street, taxi transition, & family levels)
- [Mind Palace Next Steps](#) (mind palace pt1 & mind palace pt2 levels)
- [Mother’s Level Next Steps](#) (mother’s level)

Other relevant work for these levels may be in the following next steps documents, so reviewing those and their backlogs is essential.

- [Art Next Steps](#) (look for art assets needed relevant to these levels)
- [Audio Next Steps](#) (look for audio assets needed relevant to these levels)
- [Tech Art Next Steps](#) (look for tech art items relevant to these levels)
- [Under The Hood Next Steps](#) (look for overarching needs relevant to these levels)
- [Narrative Next Steps](#) (look for narrative items relevant to these levels)

Team Formation

Changing team sizes are typically much smaller during the Fall and Spring semesters. However, I think it is still worthwhile to read the “Team Formation” section of the [☰ Summer 2023 Production Documentation](#) .

My guess is that your team formation won’t require as much overhead. As discussed with [Elouise Oyzon](#) at the end of the Summer 2023 session, I recommend that you only have teams work on the necessary levels and don’t budge on this until you reach the MVP, which I presume will take the bulk of the semester as is. Depending on how many people are in your cohort, this may include a dedicated art team, audio team, onboarding team, intro team, mind palace team, and mother’s team; this will be up to your and [Elouise Oyzon](#) ’s discretion.

Workflow

Initially, I was going to write more of the items relevant to the Production Lead here, but the [☰ Workflow Documentation](#) got way more fleshed out due to some excellent points from those reviewing it. So, if you haven’t already, familiarize yourself with it. I tried to cover as many bases as possible in the “Process Advice / Common Questions” section of the document, but if you have further questions, please reach out to me via Discord.

Organizational Work

I won’t bore you with many details, but the Summer 2023 Team, spearheaded by myself and the Technical Art Team Lead [Holly Allen](#) , Toddler Team Lead [Kevin Insinna](#) , and

Under The Hood, took much time reorganizing the Google Drive and the Unreal project. Please ensure that this organizational work is upheld for the sanity of you and every team after you. Here are the important links regarding it:

- [!Asset Naming Conventions](#)
- [!Unreal Folder Structure](#)
- [!Changeling Google Drive Key](#)
- [!How to Structure Dev Team Folders](#)
- [!Blueprint Documentation Template](#)
- [!Archive Note](#)
- [ClickUp Organization for Changeling](#)

Tips for Moving Forward with Organizing

For Google Drive and ClickUp, you're pretty safe to organize as you please, following the structure documentation mentioned above. However, some severe challenges come with reorganizing the Unreal project and some essential steps to ensure it works appropriately after organizing.

Changing file names, locations or deleting folders or files tends to work correctly with redirectors; however, it does not always, and it's usually best to remove redirectors, if possible. That said, individuals seeking to tackle this task must test each level associated with the items they're organizing in the editor and complete and test a build before submitting their work to Perforce. Again, some bugs only appear in the builds, so this is necessary. As I outline in the Production Next Steps, perhaps you can solve a much deeper-rooted problem with the process that could prevent the headaches that come with this type of work (i.e., having to roll back people's work, enact code freezes, etc.). I would strongly recommend looking into it.

Production Next Steps

I will outline these next steps in order of what I think is likely the most important for you to tackle for the semester; I'll also have most of these items outlined in the [Production Product Backlog](#), hopefully with more details on how you could approach it. Steps 1-3 focus on the overall goal for your semester; beyond that are other vital steps for the production process moving forward, but should not get in the way of steps 1-3.

1. Getting the game ready for Early Access release

See the MVP above for more details on what that entails. The steps for this are hazy to me since this quickly became unlikely for the Summer 2023 Team, causing me to shift my focus to much-needed process improvements. I know you'll need to coordinate with [Elouise Oyzon](#) and heavily focus on prioritization for the Fall 2023 Team.

2. Research Early Access release

This step is in service of step one, but it's essential to note either way. Again, I have little clue what this entails, but it's necessary in ensuring the game's release to Steam.

3. Ensuring there's a path for past, present, and future employees to get credit

The Summer 2023 Web Team started this, and it should be ready to go by the time you come in. Your job might be less on the technical side of this and more on ensuring that you check in with all employees from Changeling as you close in on release and ensure that the in-game credits scene reflects the website. This step is necessary before releasing to Early Access.

4. Setting up branching for Perforce and the project

This step should have happened at the beginning of the project but has yet to happen. Beyond the overarching goal, I encourage you to do this step as your long-lasting mark on the Changeling project and process, as it will hopefully save your team and future teams a lot of headaches. This step could also do away with code freezes, which simplifies and improves the process for everyone involved. The following links are courtesy of [Erika Mesh](#) as a starting point (these will also be in the [task card](#) in the backlog).

- [Perforce Branching 101](#)
- [Maintaining Perforce Branches](#)
- [Freezing & Unfreezing Perforce Branches](#)

5. Regular Itch.IO updates

This is pretty standard. Still, you'll need to do this for each official build (I also recommend leaving the Summer 2023 Final Build uploaded alongside your builds until the end of your semester). The login details are here:

[📄 Forward Facing Account Info](#)

6. Improving playtesting methodology

It's a learned skill to be hands-off and observation heavy in playtesting. The Changing playtest results are notoriously bad at doing this (the Summer 2023 Semester included). You'll still want to use Playtest

Write-ups: [📄 !Playtest Write-up Template - 0/0/2023](#)

Some very brief notes that you should consider closely about how to implement methodology improvements:

- Don't answer the playtester's questions until after the playtest concludes (unless they get stuck for too long - which is a different issue altogether)
- Don't ask the playtesters to explain thoughts for improvement after the playtest
- Limit talking to the playtester during the playtest
- Ask playtesters to do a "talk-aloud" playtest (also a learned skill)
- Take everything at face value (deliberate the "why" and solutions after the playtest session)
- Record a lot of notes (perhaps the playtester looked at something for a long time you hadn't intended - again, deliberate the "why" afterward)
- Do not ignore data (if you're going to discard data, there should be a clear explanation as to why)

7. Production Documentation

Do this throughout the semester. Do not wait until the end; you *will* regret it. I created a new template for this, use it:


[📄 Production Documentation Template](#)

8. Standardizing "Next Steps" Documentation

We were the first team to start formally doing these "next steps" / "loose ends" documents in depth; I didn't think to make a template until teams had already started. Oops. This step may be a nicety moving forward.

9. Other process updates

You'll learn from the Fall 2023 Team what works and what doesn't work for them in the current process. Read the postmortem of the

 Summer 2023 Production Documentation to get some of my last thoughts and reflections on the process as a starting point.

10. Other ClickUp updates

ClickUp is new; there will probably be some kinks I hadn't considered when passing to a new team. First of all, don't hesitate to ask me questions. Second, make changes as needed, but probably only do this once you understand ClickUp and roughly understand why I approached the setup the way I did.

That's all I can think of for now (9 & 10 are catch-alls, as is); this does not mean this is all there is to do. Spend the first week reading my production documentation; based on that alone, you might get more ideas about necessary work.

Other Next Steps Documents

- [Narrative Next Steps](#)
- [Aesthetics Next Steps](#)
- [Audio Next Steps](#)
- [Technical Art Next Steps](#)
- [Under The Hood Next Steps](#)
- [Onboarding Next Steps](#) (also holds information for the apartment level)
- [Introduction Next Steps](#) (street, taxi transition, and family level)
- [Mind Palace Next Steps](#) (all instances of mind palace)
- [Mother Next Steps](#)
- [Father Next Steps](#)
- [Tween Next Steps](#)
- [Toddler Next Steps](#)
- ["Boss Fight" Next Steps](#) (no development started yet, but there are design notes)