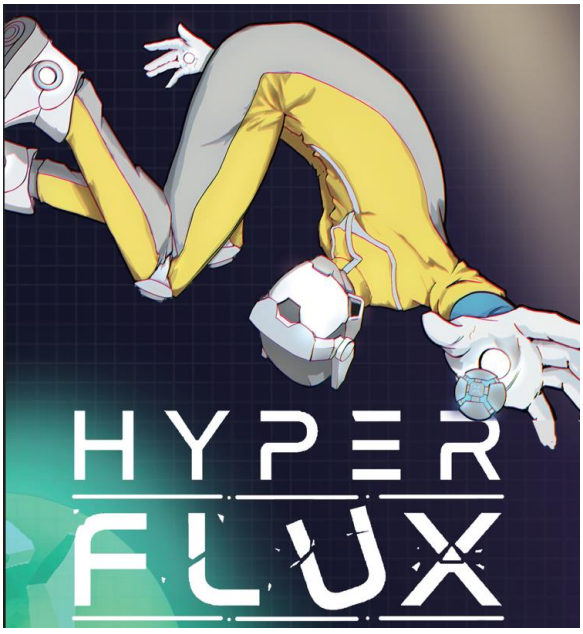
Game Tutorial Design Project

Project Brief and Initial Requirements

The client, a Game Designer, approached us with the task of designing an engaging and effective tutorial for their game, **Hyper Flux**, which was already designed and was in the development stage for the visual elements and additional levels. While the mechanics and gameplay were in place, the client wanted us to advise on the approach to the tutorial system. Their key challenge was deciding the format of the tutorial—whether it should be **forced, optional, guided,** or **non-guided**—and how to cater to a diverse audience with varying levels of gaming experience. (For those of you who are familiar with the learning design aspects, you would have understood what these terms mean.)



The game targeted three main categories of players:

1. **Skilled platforming gamers** – players familiar with fast-paced, precision platforming.
2. **Gamers not skilled in platforming** – players who might need support learning the game mechanics.
3. **Non-gamers** – players with little to no experience in gaming, requiring more comprehensive guidance.

The client wanted a solution that would effectively onboard all three categories, ensuring that each group received appropriate levels of instruction without making the tutorial an irritant for the advanced players or overwhelming for the beginners. We took this problem statement and set onto the journey of our first ever game tutorial – a new type of learning solution that was not really intended for learners 😊.

Research and Analysis

Hyper Flux is a futuristic first-person platformer where the player manipulates gravity to navigate complex 3D spaces. The game combines speed running elements, reminiscent of popular game titles like **Portal** and **Karlson**, with challenging platform mechanics. The primary focus is on providing players with an engaging, fast-paced experience that rewards precision, mastery of movement, and creative problem-solving through gravity manipulation.

Narrative and Setting

The tutorial is set within the game's overarching story, where the player is a portal mechanic in a post-apocalyptic world. The story provides context for the gameplay mechanics, explaining how the player must use the gravity suit and orbs to navigate a world shattered by alien technology and gravity implosions.

Player Experience Goals

The tutorial aims to ensure that players feel a sense of **progression** and **achievement** as they master the game's mechanics. The design prioritizes player engagement by:

- Offering **freedom** for advanced players to skip redundant instructions.
- Providing **structured guidance** for beginners who need more help.
- Encouraging **replayability** by incorporating **leaderboards** and **ghost competitors** for players to challenge their previous times.

Target Audience

The game is aimed at **hardcore gamers**, **speed runners**, and **precision gamers** who enjoy mastering complex mechanics and achieving the fastest times. The tutorial must cater to:

- **Experienced players** who are familiar with fast-paced platformers and may not need extensive guidance.
- **Novice players** who require a more structured and guided introduction to the game's core mechanics.

Constraints and Challenges

- The tutorial design must balance providing enough information for new players without overwhelming them, while also ensuring experienced players do not feel bogged down by unnecessary instruction. The primary challenge is ensuring that the tutorial is engaging for all skill levels and that players feel motivated to master the game's mechanics.

Gameplay Evaluation and Tutorial Direction

After evaluating the initial brief and understanding the game's fast-paced, skill-based nature, we decided to **forego the non-gamer category**. The mechanics of **Hyper Flux** require a level of familiarity with platforming games that non-gamers might find overwhelming. Creating an extensive, overly guided tutorial for non-gamers would potentially slow down the pacing and alienate the primary target audience, who are more familiar with these gaming conventions. Thus, we opted to focus on two core groups: gamers skilled in platforming and those who need additional support in learning these mechanics.

Following this decision, I developed a **questionnaire** targeted at gamers to gather their input on how they prefer to experience tutorials. The questionnaire asked about their preferences regarding forced vs. self-paced tutorials, guided vs. non-guided instruction, and their ideal balance between instruction and exploration. This feedback was crucial in shaping the tutorial design to meet player expectations while ensuring it complemented the game's fast-paced style.

Based on the insights gathered from the questionnaire, we adopted a **tiered learning approach** for the tutorial:

- **Category A**: Players who pass the initial test and demonstrate proficiency in platforming skills. These players can bypass guided tutorials and engage directly with more advanced mechanics.
- **Category B**: Players who fail the initial test and need additional support. They will be required to complete guided tutorials focused on teaching fundamental movement and mechanics.

The tutorial also incorporates a combination of **guided and non-guided instruction**:

- **Guided instruction** for beginners who need step-by-step guidance.
- **Non-guided instruction** for advanced players who prefer to learn through exploration and experimentation.

This approach ensures that each player, regardless of their skill level, receives an appropriate learning experience that maintains the game's fast pace while providing necessary support for those who need it to experience the game play well.

Tutorial Design Requirements

Gameplay Requirements

- **Core Mechanics Covered:**
    - **Movement:** Instructs players on basic movements, including jumping, moving left/right, navigating slopes, and handling zero gravity. Changing directions in zero gravity is also emphasized.
    - **Gravity Suit:** Teaches players how to manipulate gravity by activating and deactivating the gravity suit while maintaining momentum, allowing for advanced traversal strategies.
    - **Gravity Orbs:** Demonstrates the use of **Push Orbs** (to push away) and **Pull Orbs** (to attract) for interacting with the environment and solving platforming challenges. Players learn to use these orbs to traverse difficult obstacles.

- **Fuel Meter Management:** Guides players on managing the fuel meter, which controls the use of the gravity suit. Players must balance fuel usage to maintain momentum while adding urgency to their movement, especially when suspended mid-air.
- **Speedometer:** Encourages players to monitor their speed to reinforce quick movement, which ties into the game's speed running aspect and rewards efficient navigation.

"?" to indicate help available: Just-in-time Help Style

Design Requirements

- **UI and HUD Elements:**
  - **On-Screen Prompts:** Visual and textual cues for actions such as "Press X to jump" or "Activate Gravity Suit."
  - **Fuel Meter and Speedometer:** Always visible on the HUD to reinforce resource management and speed running focus.
  - **Orb Indicators:** Clear color coding for **Push Orbs** (red) and **Pull Orbs** (blue), helping players easily identify the effects of their actions.
- **Tutorial Environment:**
  - The environment must be designed to isolate specific mechanics for focused learning (e.g., areas for practicing jumps, sections for orb manipulation).
  - **Checkpoint System:** Include checkpoints in longer tutorial sections to prevent player frustration and allow retrying specific mechanics if necessary.

Content Requirements

- **Instructional Content:**
    - **Contextual Prompts:** When a player encounters a new mechanic, context-sensitive prompts will appear explaining how to interact with it (e.g., using orbs to solve a puzzle).
- **Level Design**
    - **Design multiple short levels** that progressively introduce new mechanics, ensuring each level builds upon the previous one (e.g., starting with basic movement and gradually introducing more advanced mechanics like gravity orbs).
    - **Ensure tutorial levels are non-skippable for less experienced players** who need additional guidance, while allowing more experienced players to skip optional levels. This prevents frustration for those already familiar with platforming mechanics, while providing necessary support for those who need it.

Proposed Solution

The **Hyper Flux** tutorial system is designed to cater to different player skill levels while maintaining a structured and progressive learning approach. The solution focuses on segmenting players based on their platforming abilities and guiding them through appropriate tutorial levels. This ensures that both experienced and less experienced players receive instruction tailored to their needs without compromising the game's pace or engagement.

Categorization System

The tutorial begins with a **Level 0 skill test** that assesses the player's familiarity with platforming mechanics. Based on their performance, players will be divided into two categories:

- **Category A**: Players who demonstrate proficiency in platforming mechanics will proceed to advanced tutorials and can skip basic guidance.
- **Category B**: Players who struggle with the test will require additional support and will be directed toward a more guided, detailed tutorial designed to build their foundational skills.

This categorization ensures that players are placed in the correct path, optimizing the tutorial experience to match their skill level. The goal is to provide the right balance of instruction without overwhelming beginners or boring more experienced players.

Tutorial Structure and Flow

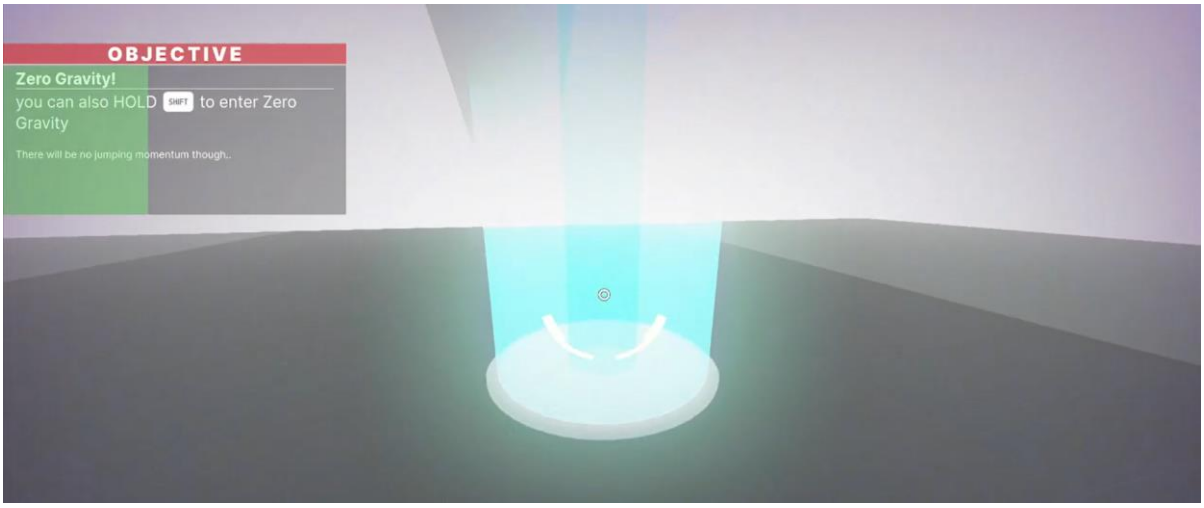
Once categorized, players are guided through levels that progressively introduce new mechanics. The structure consists of **short levels** that gradually build complexity, allowing players to focus on one or two mechanics at a time. The learning process begins with basic movement mechanics and slowly transitions into more complex systems like gravity orbs and fuel management.

- For **Category B** players, these tutorial levels are **non-skippable**, ensuring they fully absorb the essential game mechanics needed to succeed.
- For **Category A** players, the tutorials for basic mechanics are **optional**, allowing them to skip redundant instructions and focus on more challenging aspects of the game.

Overview of Gameplay Learning

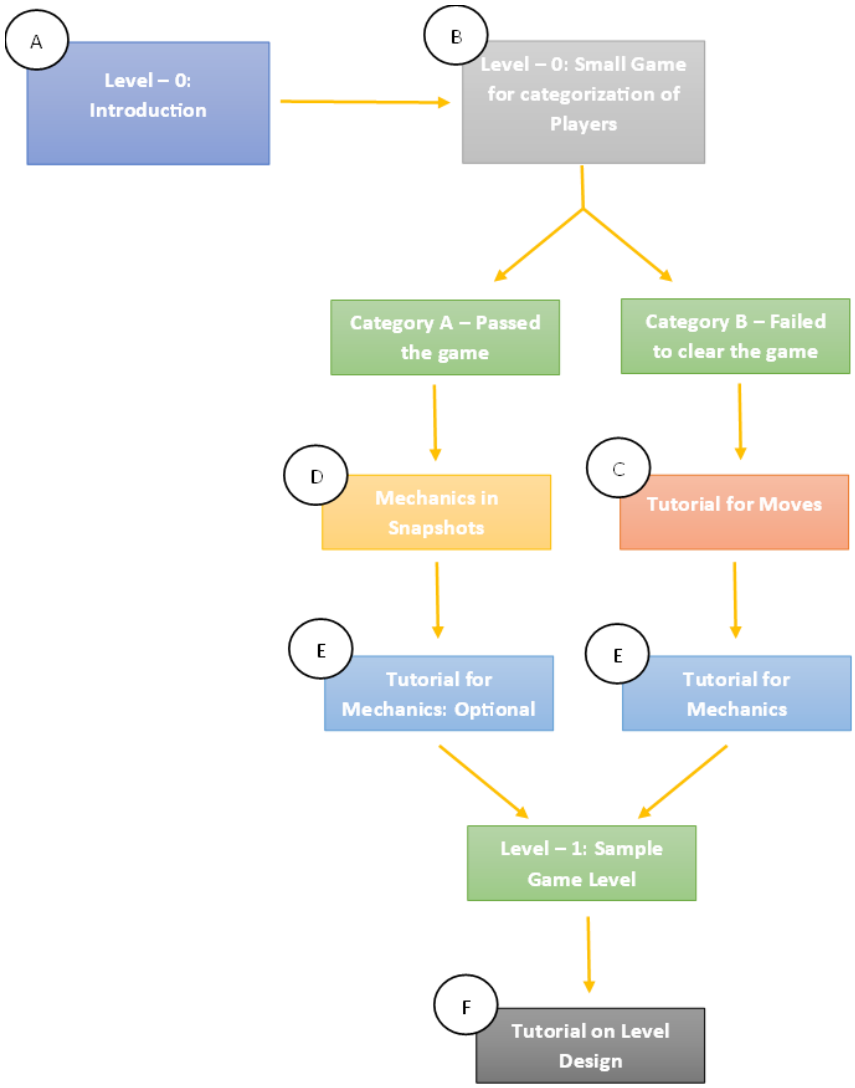
The tutorial covers critical game mechanics, including movement, the **Gravity Suit**, **Gravity Orbs**, fuel management, and the **Speedometer**. By the time players progress through the tutorial, they are well-prepared to tackle the game's real challenges.

The structured flow, guided by the initial skill test, ensures that each player has a smooth and appropriate learning curve, with advanced players moving quickly through the system and beginners receiving the step-by-step guidance they need.



Tutorial Flow Diagram

The diagram illustrates the **Hyper Flux** tutorial flow, detailing how players are categorized and guided through their respective tutorial paths based on their platforming skills. It visually represents the progression for both categories of players, highlighting differentiated tutorials for movement and mechanics tailored to their skill levels. This visual aid emphasizes the thoughtful design of the tutorial system, ensuring that all players receive the necessary support and instruction to enjoy and succeed in the game.



Tutorial for Moves

This will include:

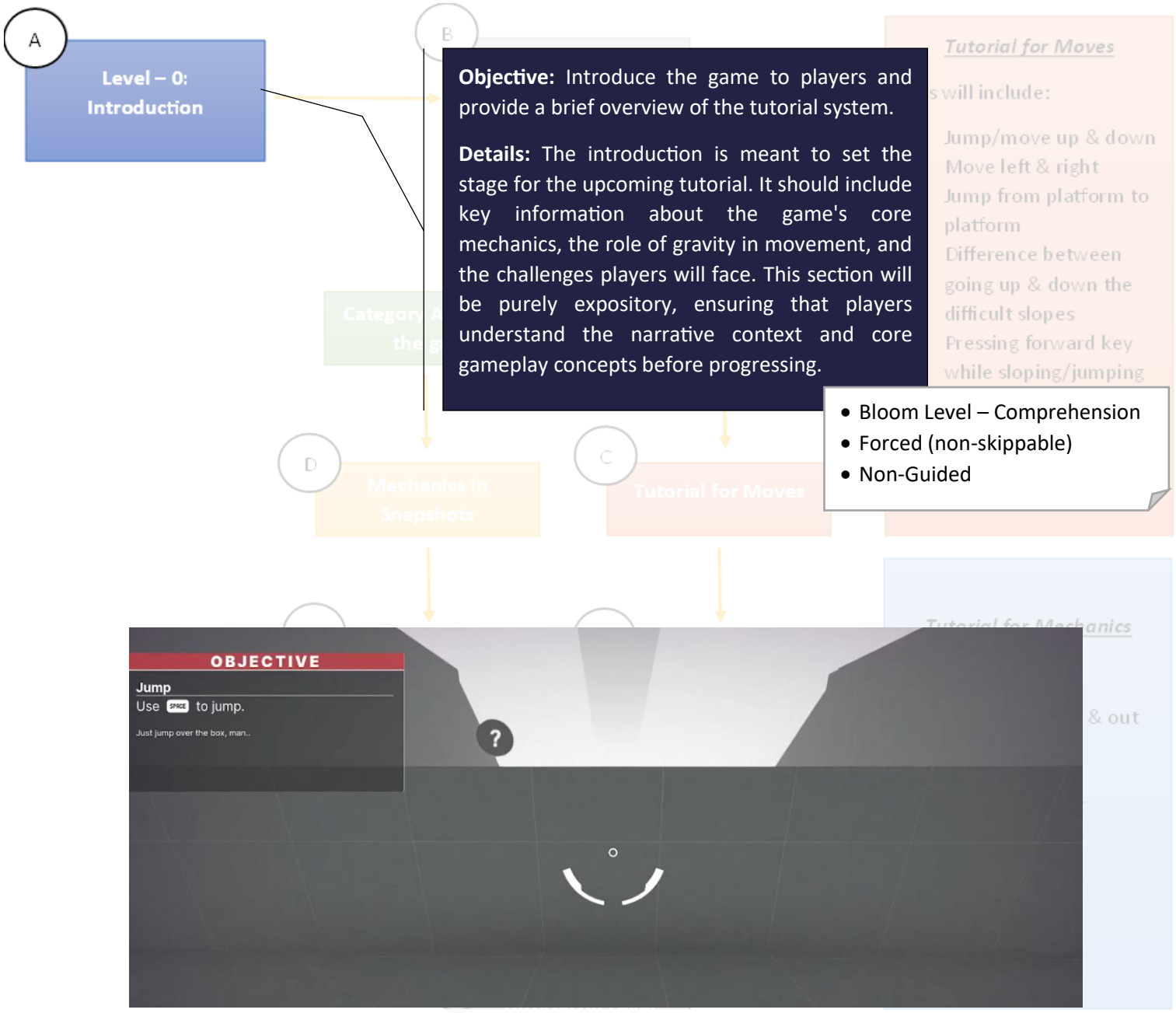
- Jump/move up & down
- Move left & right
- Jump from platform to platform
- Difference between going up & down the difficult slopes
- Pressing forward key while sloping/jumping gives a huge boost
- Moving in zero gravity
- Changing direction in zero gravity

Tutorial for Mechanics

This will include:

- Transitioning in & out of Gravity
- Gravity Suit
  - Fuel Meter
- Gravity Orbs
  - Push Orb
  - Pull Orb
- Speedometer
- Map

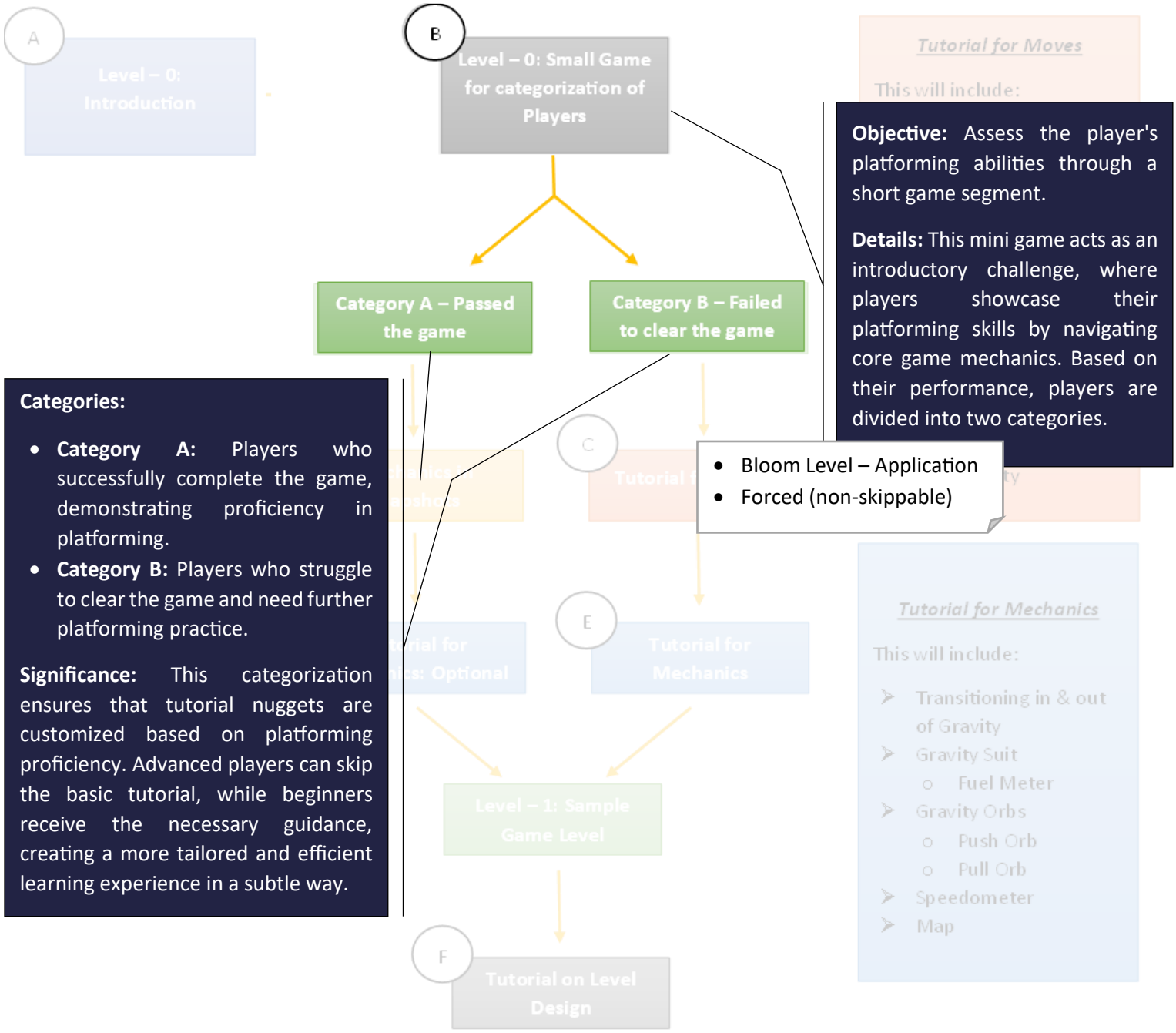
A. Level – 0: Introduction



Screenshot of the game tutorial

This section serves as the opening stage of the tutorial, providing players with a foundational understanding of the game world, the main character's role, and the overarching narrative. Rather than overwhelming players with complex mechanics right away, the introduction eases them into the experience. The reasoning behind this soft entry is to immerse players in the story while creating an emotional connection to the game's setting and objectives. By establishing context first, players are more motivated to learn and engage with the mechanics later in the tutorial.

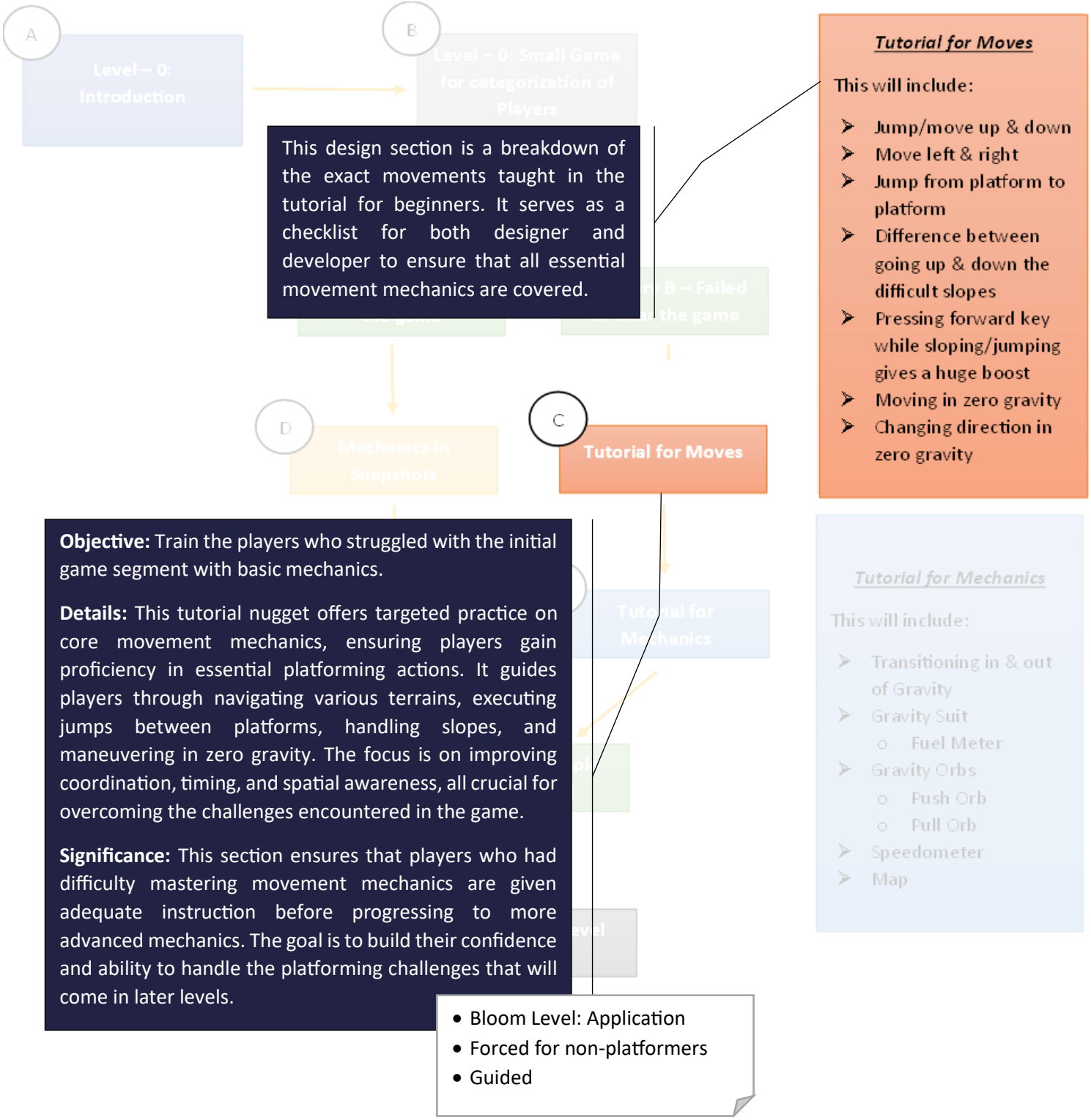
B. Level – 0: Small Game for Categorization of Players



This brief, skill-based test is designed to assess the player's platforming abilities and categorize them into either **Category A** (skilled players) or **Category B** (players needing more guidance). The reason for this categorization is to tailor the learning experience based on individual performance. Advanced players, who may find basic tutorials tedious, are spared redundant instructions, allowing them to engage more quickly with the game's more complex systems. On the other hand, beginners receive the necessary support to build a strong foundation, ensuring they aren't left behind. This customized approach ensures that each player is appropriately challenged and prepared for the gameplay ahead.

C. Tutorial for Moves

This section is dedicated to players who struggled in the initial test. It focuses on mastering basic platforming mechanics, such as jumping, navigating difficult slopes, and adjusting to zero-gravity environments. The inclusion of this detailed tutorial is vital because these mechanics form the backbone of the game's movement system. Without a solid grasp of these foundational skills, players will struggle to advance. By offering this dedicated space for practice, the game ensures that beginners can refine their abilities and feel more confident as they progress. This approach also prevents frustration, ensuring that all players can enjoy the game's challenges at their own pace.



D. Mechanics in Snapshots

For players who demonstrated sufficient platforming skills in the categorization test, this section offers a quick, high-level introduction to more advanced mechanics. This concise tutorial nugget allows players to get an overview of the game's gravity manipulation, use of orbs, and other complex systems. The reasoning behind this approach is to respect the abilities of experienced players, who might find a more in-depth tutorial unnecessary. Instead of being forced through redundant instruction, they are allowed to engage directly with the game's more advanced elements, maintaining their interest and momentum. The snapshot format ensures that they are still exposed to critical concepts without slowing down their progress.

How to use Orbs

D **Mechanics in Snapshots**

Objective: Provide advanced players with quick insights into the game's core mechanics.

Details: Players who pass the small game will skip the basic movement tutorial and engage directly with the **Mechanics in Snapshots**. This involves a more high-level and concise introduction to key gameplay elements, allowing advanced players to quickly understand the more complex mechanics.

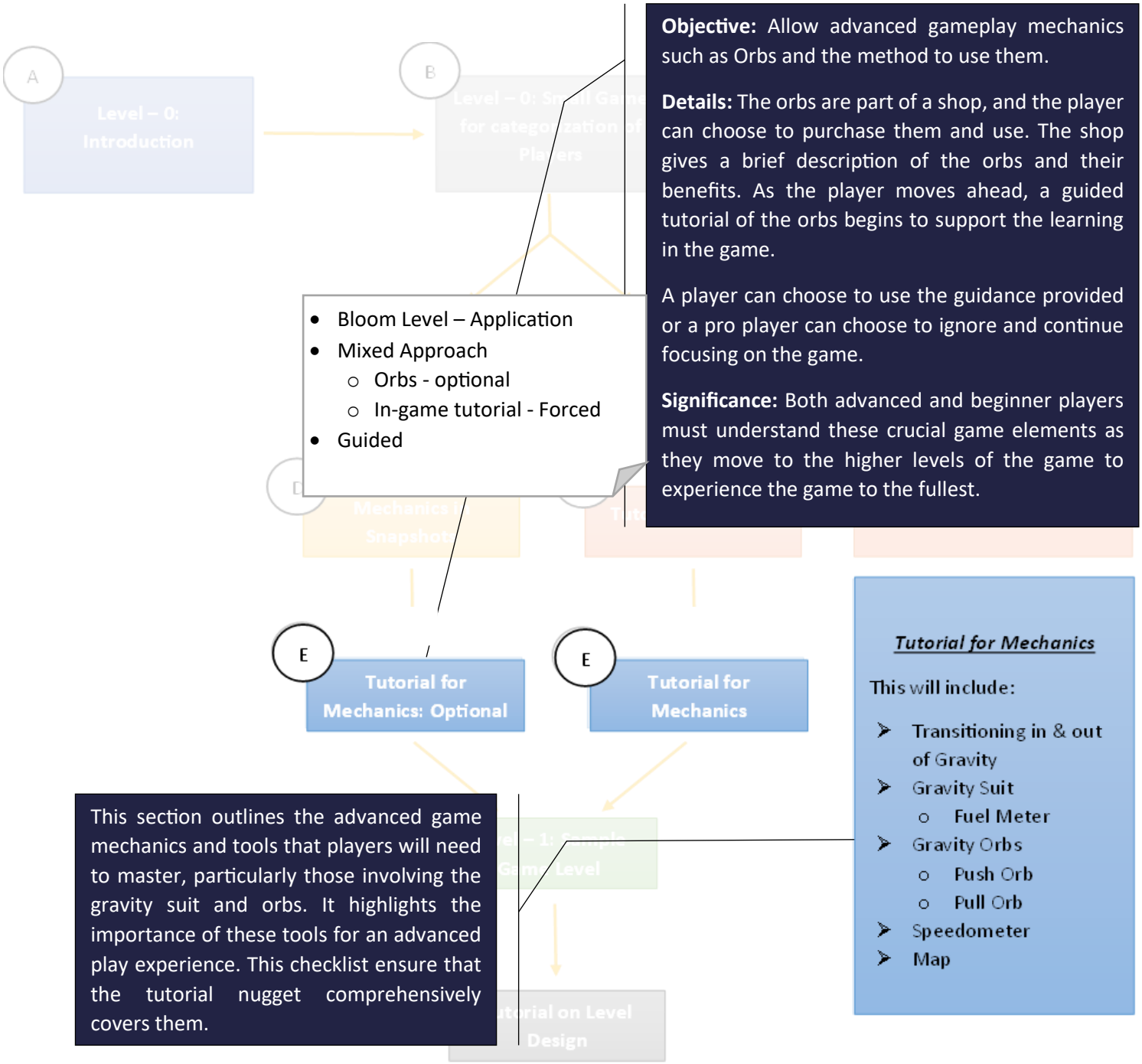
Significance: Advanced players are not bogged down by redundant tutorials, improving engagement and pacing.

- Bloom Level: Comprehension
- Forced
- Non-Guided

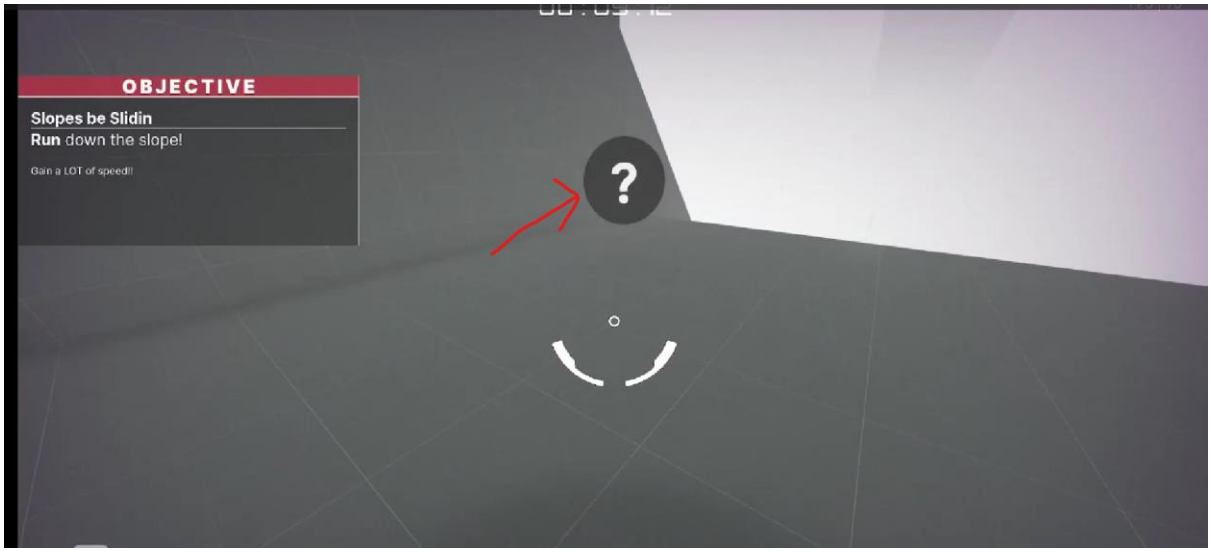
E Tutorial for Mechanics: Optional

F Tutorial on Level Design

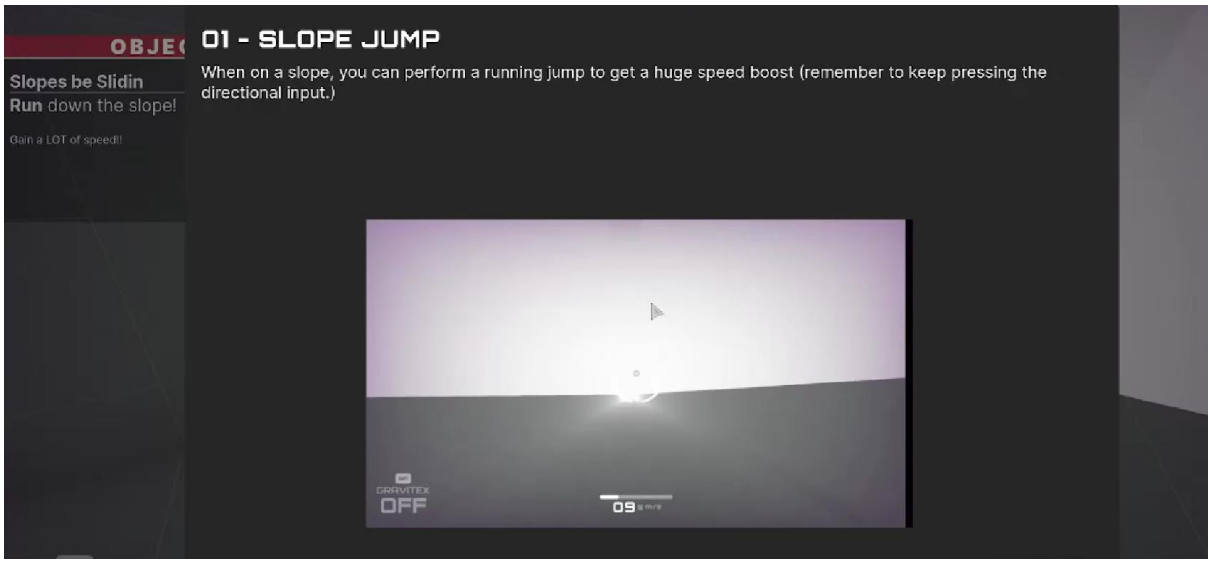
E. Tutorial for Level Design



Once players complete **Level 1**, they are introduced to more complex aspects of level design. This tutorial nugget focuses on teaching players how to strategically approach the game's more advanced levels by utilizing the game's unique mechanics, such as **Slope Jump**, using the **Gravity Suit**, managing the **Fuel Meter**, and utilizing **Push** and **Pull Orbs** for traversal and puzzle-solving. Both categories of players engage with this tutorial. The reasoning here is to ensure that every player, regardless of prior experience, has a solid understanding of the key systems required for success in the game. Ensuring all players are familiar with these mechanics prevents potential roadblocks later in the game.



Guided practice for Slope Jump – Just-in-time Help Style: Click the "?"



Guided practice for Slope Jump

Reasoning for Solution

Designing a game tutorial is very different from designing any other learning, such as eLearning or classroom content. The key challenge here is that the audience comes in for playing and not for learning. They still need to learn the basics of the game or the challenges it throws. A game like Hyper Flux uses layers of physics to navigate the player. So, the challenge lies in educating a player who is not really a learner but will need to learn a bit to enjoy the game. This learning must happen in a hidden subtle way to not break the momentum of a player or the fun of playing.

To address this need, an adaptive tutorial system was created that offers a balanced, player-centered approach that successfully integrates both flexibility and progression. By assessing each player's platforming skills at the start, the game is able to provide targeted instruction, ensuring that beginners are supported while advanced players are not hindered by redundant tutorials. This structure fosters an engaging and satisfying learning experience, allowing players to gradually develop mastery over the game's mechanics. The system's emphasis on gradual progression, combined with opportunities

for competitive engagement, helps maintain player interest and encourages replayability, making it an effective method for onboarding and long-term retention.

The solution was deployed, carefully tested with several test players of each category and approved as a good solution by our client and the players who are beginning to enjoy Hyper Flux as it releases without realizing that they were taught the nuances of the game to become a pro.

Conclusion

The design of **Hyper Flux** successfully merges a dynamic narrative, innovative mechanics, and a carefully designed tutorial system to create a well-rounded player experience. The game's core concept of gravity manipulation within a fast-paced platforming environment introduces both challenge and creativity, engaging players with unique mechanics such as gravity orbs and the fuel-powered gravity suit. The target audience—ranging from speed runners to precision gamers—will find the combination of skill-based gameplay and competitive features appealing.

The adaptive tutorial system, detailed in the diagram, plays a crucial role in onboarding players by assessing their platforming skills and offering a personalized learning journey. This tutorial has been tried and tested by several gamers and was found useful in enhancing their understanding of the game mechanics. By tailoring the tutorials based on each player's proficiency, **Hyper Flux** ensures that beginners receive the guidance they need, while experienced players can quickly progress to more advanced levels without redundancy. This thoughtful structure not only improves the onboarding process but also sustains player interest by encouraging mastery and replayability through competitive elements like leaderboards and performance tracking.

Overall, the design harmonizes narrative, gameplay, and learning experiences, providing players with a challenging yet approachable platformer that encourages both skill development and competition. The game's balance of accessibility and depth makes it an engaging experience for players of all levels, fostering long-term retention and community-driven replayability.

For the real experience of the game and the tutorial, find it on Steam as per the details given below.