

Tweak This, Not That

From Good to Great: Tech Blog Post

An analysis of [Designing your mobile game to flail: A look at the UX in PokémonGO](#)

There are a bunch of estimates out there on the web when you do a search on something along the lines of “How long should it take me to write [something]”?

Some people are talented enough to whip out first drafts like there's no tomorrow. Some of us need to get the main idea down, then go back in and shore it up with some structure. That was the case for this blog entry:

- I knew a lot about the software programs I cited (several hundred hours of gameplay)
- I had an idea of the improvement I wanted to make, after ruminating on it for several hours
- Had about 20 minutes of free time to gabble into the phone dictation app

With that amount of research behind me, I was able to take the baseline idea and knowledge about the programs to build a solid article-style blog entry. Introduction, brief explanation of gameplay (breaking the game into capture and battling) and examples of previous software improvements over the life of the game. This structure provided two things: context for readers unfamiliar with the software, and some authority that I knew what I was talking about, gameplay and software wise.

The rough numbers on this article/blog entry

It finally took me about 5 hours to write and edit to complete and post 1,200 words. Factor in at least that amount for research and calculated gameplay, as well, a couple hours for the images, and you get 12-15 hours total, in an industry I've already got a couple dozen years experience in from a gameplay perspective. If I'd written this article a few months ago, it might have taken longer (I've had a lot of practice in the last few months creating content for various clients, which is in turn making my stuff better).

Learning to count hours

I “grew up” writing in a corporate environment, with senior writers and mentors helping me get it all done. We figured out what we could do in the X number of weeks we had to

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get the pieces of the project done, and got it done. As I've ventured into freelancing more heavily, I've started tracking my time. That helps when I'm billing a project, but kills me if I estimate wrong (who wants to quote 20 hours and end up taking 60?). So I started looking for experts who had measured this over the long term, covering multiple styles of projects.

I found [this](#) PDF online, and it's been a pretty accurate guide so far for both my client and my personal work. While it doesn't specifically call out "blog posts", it can still be used as a guide. This article I'd rate higher than web content, more along the lines of a full on article or large newsletter section. Having this info does two things: provide me an authority to check myself against, and provide backup other than personal experience to accurately estimate projects.

Keeping count of your hours by prepping them well

Keep track of your hours, in 15- or 30-minute increments.

Save time at meetings by having an agenda ready to go.

- **Writers:** If it's an intake meeting, throw a few of your main questions at the client before the first meeting. Encourage them to send you the answers before you meet (so you can fine tune the rest of your questions).
- **Clients:** Ask your writer what kind of questions and topics will be part of the meeting so you can send the information out ahead of the meeting.

Shave time off of editorial meetings by doing edit and edit review ahead of time.

- **Writers:** Give the client enough time to review and comment on edits. Encourage them to send the notes to you at least a few hours before the meeting.
- **Clients:** Your writer should send you content for review, along with a meeting request to review the notes you send back. Get the notes back to your writer in time for the meeting; ideally a day ahead of time, but send notes at least a couple hours before the meeting for your review.

As a freelance writer, I work with my clients mostly virtually and record most meetings. I use GoToMyMeeting (I'm an old Citrite, so I've got a bit of a soft spot for our long-lived acquisition), and my clients are given the option to have a copy of the meeting sent to them. Run recordings to split out audio the audio, send it to a transcription service, and have transcripts made as well (if you work better visually).

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This old blog post: Before and after

Original	Final	
Designing your mobile game to fail: a look at the UX in Pokémon go.	Designing your mobile game to flail: A look at the UX in PokémonGO	“Fail” seemed a bit harsh, and versions referencing Nurse Joy seemed too niche-gamer oriented
<p>Years and years and years ago, there was a really nice Super Bowl ad for a job site called monster.com. One line stuck with me in a long litany of words spoken by kids who were pretending they were adults enjoying their careers, "I want to file all day."</p> <p>Reason that applies here is because nobody who is a gamer, casual, whale, obsessed, on and off, min max, is thinking "I want to look at menus all day." And that's what you do in Pokémon go. And I think it's really hurting gameplay and recurring player numbers.</p>	<p>Years and years ago, there was a really great Super Bowl ad for a job site called monster.com. The premise was kids dreaming aloud of grown up jobs, but speaking of their dreams in ridiculous terms. The one that resonated most with me at the time was a dead serious tween: "I want to file all day." Nobody wants to file all day.</p> <p>And this goes for gamers, too. The equivalent of filing in video games is organizing and maintaining your inventory. Chasing through ridiculous amounts of menus just sucks the enjoyment right out of the game. No gamer is thinking to themselves: "I want to click through menus all day."</p> <p>But that is exactly what you do in PokémonGO. Click through unnecessary menus all darn day. It hurts gameplay, and I bet it's even suppressing recurring player counts.</p>	<p>I broke two paragraphs into three, adding structure and content to expand the concepts.</p> <p>More depth and ridicule for the concept of “filing all day”, to set it up for parallel comparison to flipping through menus.</p> <p>Filing papers and flipping through menus aren’t exactly equivalent in function, but they can easily be framed as mindless ... but not mindless enough ... and time consuming ... and unavoidable.</p> <p>The last paragraph is then set up more firmly for the “why you should care about unnecessary menus in PokemonGo” – suppressed player counts, so you’re out there with bots and multi-account spoofers all day.</p>

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<p>I've been playing Pokémon go on and off since it's public release. When I play depends on time interest and frankly what kind of day I'm having.</p> <p>They fixed several annoying features early on. They stopped hiding the "IV" information about each monster by adding in a feature that allows you to asses the monster.</p> <p>They changed the functionality of candy distribution when they added in the new types of berries. You had a slide out option to match the slide out option of pokeballs.</p>	<p>I've been playing PokémonGO on and off since it's public release. There have been some changes to the "capture" side of the gameplay that are fantastic. Improvements to the "battle" side of the gameplay experience are still lacking, however.</p> <p>Capture Gameplay Improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sliding Capture Menus • Appraisal function on the secondary character screen • Buddy System <p>[Several paragraphs explaining the three "capture side" fixes]</p> <p>[Several paragraphs explaining the "battle side" fixes]</p>	<p>Here I stroll out my creds and experience. I've been playing since it came out ... I started maybe a month after general release?</p> <p>I expanded on the improvements made to the capture side of the game. Again, adding authority and context.</p> <p>I also added two "battle side" fixes to prepare to launch my thesis ... that the healing click tree post-battle needs to be improved out of its current state of menu hell.</p>
<p>However they've neglected to improve the healing function in Pokémon go, and for most casual players that is a huge disaster. Instead of looking at a Pokémon evaluating it, And then deciding how to heal it you have to blindly heal your guy every time you have to guess where I want to use a 200 potion do I want to use an ultimate potion do I just want to use a couple twenties to get it up.</p> <p>Mostly what this means is you spend a lot of</p>	<p>But what happens after the battles or training sessions are over?</p> <p>You have to click through menus all day.</p> <p>I've put up with it for nearly a year now, but I've had enough. Let's take a look at how you do essential quick-action functions in PokémonGO.</p> <p>[Comparison of two of the capture functions and their new short click tree]</p>	<p>And there it is. "You have to file all day" ... for gamers.</p> <p>After bringing back the "catch" improvements to show how quickly you can use those features, I show how it might seem like the current heal method is quick, but is also wasteful.</p>

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<p>time going back-and-forth unnecessarily between menu items and you never really get a chance to quickly heal your guys.</p>	<p>Healing a Pokemon? You can do it in four steps. But you're wasting your time and your equipment over time to do it that way.</p> <p>How do you heal a Pokemon in PokemonGo?</p> <p>Easily available Potions and Revive Gems mean you can heal on the go. You can do it in a minimal four steps, eyeballing who needs how much healing and making healing decisions on the fly. But if you're in the middle of trying to take down a gym (or add your Pokemon to the gym), you can burn through and waste a lot of potions guessing what kind of healing you really need.</p> <p>If you take eight or more steps, you can more precisely tune your healing inventory.</p>	<p>I took my rambling about potions and broke it into simple steps and numbers. I could have (and probably will at some point) use a drawing or action tree to break out the steps.</p> <p>But either you're a player and can count them yourself, or you're a casual but techie kind of a reader and don't care. You just need to know what's important. It's double.</p>
<p>Ideally you should be able to heal the Pokémon from its individual such as sticks screen. Have a little picture of Nurse Jo and I on there, and a lot and from there when she looking at the stats could say yeah let's hit it with a 50, looks healed it with the 200, let's heal it with an ultimate.</p> <p>It shows the potion, it shows the quantity, it shows the description, and from there you can</p>	<p>Imagine a Pokemon that needs 42 points of healing.</p> <p>If you the use 4-point eyeball method... [how that's a waste one way]</p> <p>If you use the 8-step method (check the Pokemon's HP, then figure out the heal)... [how that's a waste its own way]</p> <p>Four steps, eight steps, one potion, three potions, what's a few steps here and there?</p>	<p>I flipped the paragraphs on this section.</p> <p>First, I continued on the "how to heal" theme by putting some numbers to an example to justify my claim that you are "wasting" clicks, and time, and potions.</p> <p>Next, I put that first paragraph at the end. I've laid out my case just</p>

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<p>make the decision hey I've only got 49HP on this guy. I should use a 50 potion not I don't know how many HP this guy has so throw a bunch of 20s on him and then he wasted 20 on nine points.</p> <p>For minimax point of you that really sucks. From a casual gamer point of view, well they're already gone they gave up because they couldn't figure out the crazyness . You have to drop to the main menu and instead of selecting Pokémon to look at you need to go to your inventory and arbitrarily decide based on some colored little bars and having memorized everybody stats which potions you should fling randomly at them.</p>	<p>Eight steps more than doubles your menu clicking. In the heat of the battle, that time can be crucial (annoyance factor aside). Multiply that by 20 or 30 Pokemon per gym experience, and you're doubling your time all the time, every time.</p> <p>I don't want to be flipping back and forth among menus all day. I want to be able to look at a Pokemon's character screen, figure out how much it needs to be healed, and throw the appropriate heals real-time ... not six menu steps later. Add a Nurse Joy assistant right on the character screen, opposite the secondary screen menu, so you can heal them on the spot.</p>	<p>enough, but not too far that they've clicked away out of boredom. Then I spiced them up with images of my fix, right on a main character screen.</p>
<p>The company that designed Pokémon go also designed another game which uses the same geographical database called Ingress.</p> <p>They put a lot of fixes in over the years for gameplay, most of which I agree with. They added the ability to grab your power cubes easily while you're in combat. I wish that I had that ability during portal recharging, but usually, recharging isn't a big deal. Unless you're in battle. Then it can be a big deal.</p>	<p>I bet most casual players find it annoying as well. They might not know why it's annoying. And the menus might not be the annoying part. It might be the sensitivity of the touch screens. You're trying to scroll among your injured Pokemon to figure out who to heal, but oops! You're healing everyone instead of scrolling. And now you're out of potions.</p> <p>We can leave the "old" way of chasing through the menus to heal Pokemon if that's what you</p>	<p>There was a lot of fat to cut here, which I did. I slimmed down the Ingress section to one line.</p>

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<p>There's no reason they can't learn from what they did to the INGRESS UX to improve the Pokémon GO UX.</p> <p>You can leave the current functional functionality in there. Let people go to the inventory. Let people heal from the inventory. Fine.</p> <p>But let people who don't want to just fling potions randomly around heal their Pokémon while looking at them.</p> <p>Because that's another problem with the Pokémon UX from the screen in inventory. We're working with touch screens here and there's no confirmation for healing or anything else. So when you're think you're trying to scroll up between your Pokémon, so the scrolling up or down you're accidently healing. And I can be a problem when you're working with limited resources.</p> <p>Bring Nurse Jo away and her friendly manner to poke Pokémon go. Make it easier for casual players and minmaxers to scroll through and make the decisions they need to run an individual basis. And if you like, do it the old way.</p>	<p>like, but add the option to remove the annoyance factor. Let us heal Pokemon directly. This kind of gameplay was added to Niantic's game Ingress several years ago (recharging during battle), and most players I've spoken to love to skip all the menu fiddling. Seconds count when you're under the (virtual) gun in mobile augmented reality games.</p>	<p>I also wrapped back around more to focus more on what "players probably want". This pulls the focus away from "what I want" and more towards "what I would want if I were the product manager of this game".</p>

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<p>Improving the number of Pokémon go players that stick with the game does hinge on some things that you've been doing. Special events. Reagents that rely on long gameplay. Extra bonuses on special days.</p> <p>But if it's hard to use, it is not intuitive and logical to someone using their fingers on the fly in a hurry in a battle, not going to waste your time something between menus all day.</p>	<p>Make PokémonGO easier to play. The current chasing menus function is not intuitive, and is not logical to someone using their fingers on the fly in a hurry in a battle to flip between menus all day. Fresh storylines and time-limited events are great to bring back lapsed players, but a greatly improved user experience can keep them beyond the event days.</p>	<p>Cleaner ending. I was rambling at that point, trying to wrap it up and then get on to the next drafts of this article.</p>
	<p>Post script – I know there have been rumors of needing to feed Pokemon you've got defending gyms, similar to the "recharging" of portals in Ingress. That can be added as an option in the same menu position as the Nurse Joy button; just swap it out with a food icon when that option can be put to use.</p>	<p>And finally, a post script that shows I do read the spoiler blogs to keep up on rumors and code changes ... adding just a touch more credibility at the end here ...</p>