



A Quest Log for Life

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The Premise

GOL started development based on the ideology of making task operationalization a more accessible and straightforward process.

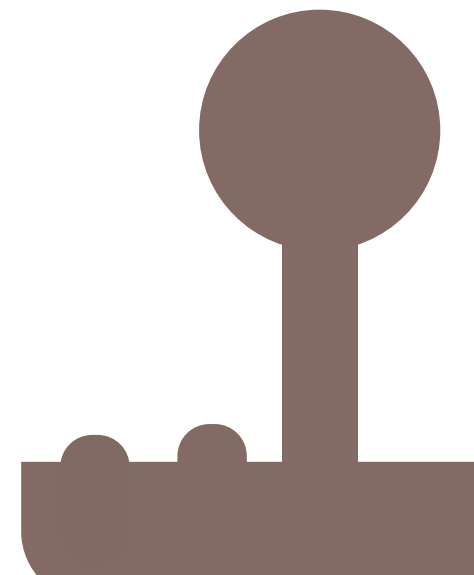
By breaking each thing you do in a day into smaller steps, you can feel more accomplished and achieve more, but that skill is hard to master in a world filled with electronic distractions, so how do we change that?

By taking inspiration from those distractions of course! Through utilizing a quest log system similar to how role-playing video games do, and provide simple steps in the form of 'quest objectives', tasks and long-term goals can become much simpler.

In doing this the hope would be to make long-term goals such as saving money, getting a degree, or finding a good career simpler to achieve.

A user could focus on the imminent details of a goal rather than thinking about the whole thing at once, and at the same time they work on those details, they'd be able to see their progress within the big picture.

So with that idea in mind, let's dive into the research that defined how GOL was designed and structured.



The Audience



The target audience for this project is **intensive-play gamers**.

While highly motivated *mentally* to achieve the goals described in the following research, this user group expressed a large issue with procrastination and lack of goal setting or actionable motivation.

To combat this, both primary and secondary research was conducted on a participant group of mostly gamers so that their ideas on what could keep them motivated could be incorporated into GOL's systems.

The Interviews

Interview participants were asked a series of questions regarding their **long-term goals**, **current life status**, what **keeps them engaged in a product**, and how they feel a solution like this might be able to help them **move forward in the pursuits of their goals**. Participants were also asked **how often they play video games**, what **types of games they enjoy the most**, and if they felt that **gaming** either negatively or positively **affected their goal progress**.

The following tables describe the **key topics** of these conversations.

Goals	Challenges	Engagement	Future Hope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Save up for a house/car · Improve mental health · Find a solid job · Finish education · Improve interpersonal relationships · Manage stress · Communicate better · Decrease screen time · Travel the world · Improve habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Too much time spent procrastinating · Lack of knowledge on how to make progress in regards to goals · Not enough motivation · Social-related mental issues · No visible starting line for where to begin · Lack of funds · Current living situation makes for a lack of time management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Item rewards · Emotional attachment · Player Level System · Customizable Interface · Receiving either fun or genuine utility · Periodic events · Flashy visual effects · Competition* · Working towards incremental progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Improved mental state · More financially stable · Better time management · Guidance in personally difficult pursuits · Companionship from a mentor figure · Utilizing a system to easily tackle tasks · Decreased stress · Increased motivation

**While competition was noted as very engaging, participants unanimously agreed that a competitive aspect for an application like this could cause unwarranted self-doubt, and as such it will not be implemented.*

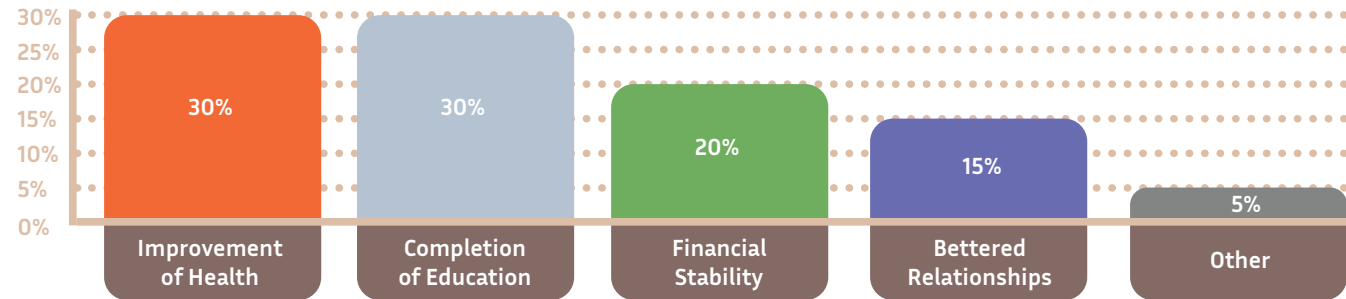
These interviews provided a basis of ideas to work from when I eventually moved on to developing the final system.

The Surveys

Participants were asked a series of questions via an online form survey on their **long-term goals, current challenges, preferred engagement methods** and **how often they currently track their goals**.

The following graphs compare the rounded averages of user response data from the 28 different submissions received.

Long-Term Goals

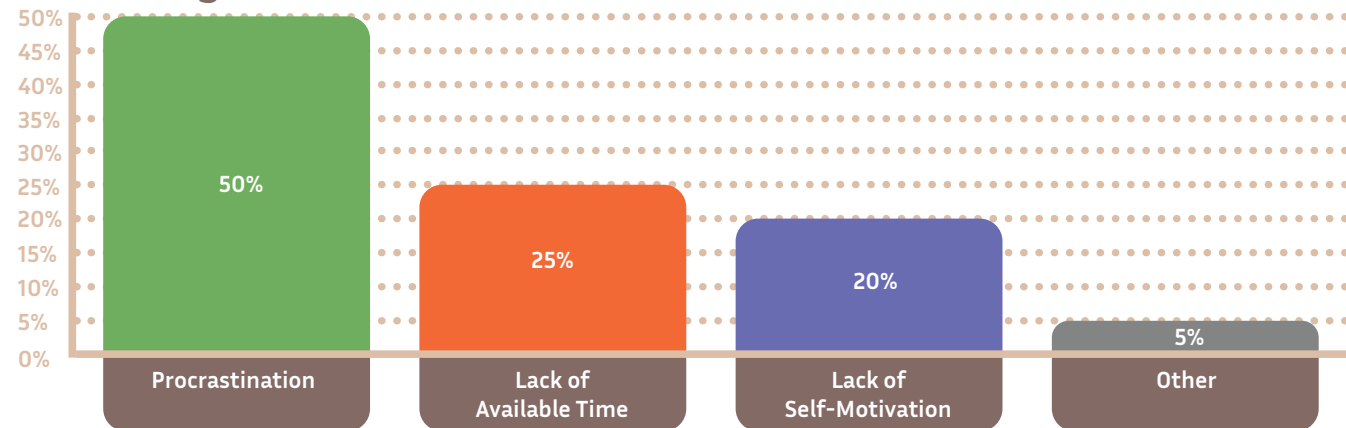


The 4 main themes of reported goals were improving one's **Health, Educational Progress**, improvement of **Financial Status**, and betterment of **Personal Relationships**.

The 'other' category primarily consisted of goals related to life experiences, such as 'Go Skydiving.'

Quest development will be mainly focused on **these four main categories** as uncovered here.

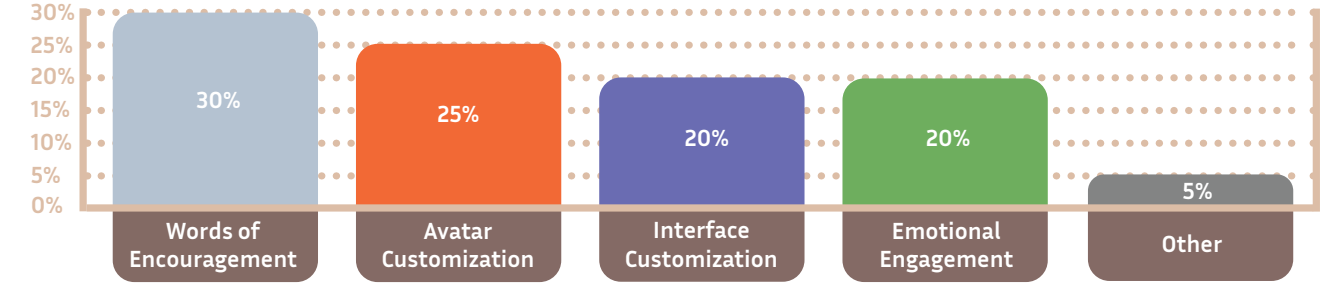
Challenges & Obstacles



The 3 most challenging aspects restricting participants from reaching their goals were reported as **Procrastination, Low Motivation** to do so, and a **Lack of Time** to fit everything into their schedule.

50% of participants reported **procrastination** as their **biggest challenge**, showing that this will be one of the **biggest hurdles** that must be overcome for **user retention and success**.

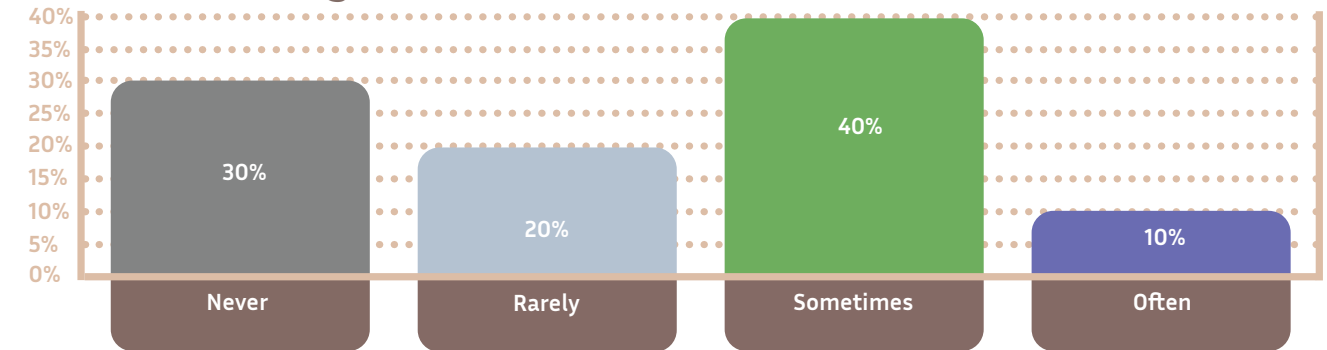
Engagement Methods



The main themes of the reported methods that kept users most engaged were **Words of Encouragement, Avatar Customization, Interface Customization, and Emotional Engagement**.

These methods were intriguing to hear, and are all valid ways of approaching user engagement and trying to conquer that challenge of procrastination.

How often are goals tracked



This question was **split 50-50** between the extremes, with half of respondents reporting that they **often** or at least **sometimes** track their goals, while half said they **rarely** or **never** do so.

Both participant groups said **they would be interested in a solution like Gol**, potentially showing that a **gamified solution** can motivate goal tracking.

Insights

These surveys provided me with the necessary information to solidify some of my initial hypotheses, especially in terms of what goals to focus on simplifying with my proposed system, as well as what challenges users currently face that would need to be addressed in some way.

Overall, the majority of reported goals revolved around the following:

- *Progression of Education*
- *Improvement of Mental Health*
- *Financial Success*
- *Betterment of Personal Relationships*

Whereas reported challenges centered on:

- *Procrastination due to stress/distraction*
- *Lack of knowledge on how to start making progress*
- *Low physical motivation to work towards goals*

The Personas

The next and final primary research method conducted involved organizing the information provided through the prior methods and creating user group personas that reflected the ideals heard within the prior research.



The Seeker

"I find that an emotional attachment within an experience is what keeps me interested the longest."

This participant is very creative but often struggles to find the motivation to pursue creative tasks. They are always searching for the next thing to do with their life.

Hobbies:

- Gaming
- Creative writing
- Video editing

Goals:

- Find a better job
- Start a family
- Improve mental health

Challenges:

- Doesn't know where to begin
- Overwhelmed by daily life
- Procrastinates often



The Quester

"I want to build a character and see it progress alongside myself, I think it would motivate me to get more done."

This participant often finds themselves already breaking down their tasks into small steps. They excel at working towards their goals but find it difficult to keep track of more than one thing at a time.

Hobbies:

- Gaming
- Reading
- Finding new music

Goals:

- Save up for a house
- Finish education
- Improve physical health

Challenges:

- Time management
- Trouble multitasking
- Current living situation



The Journeyman

"I think it would be helpful if I had an automatic log for all my goals, but I'd be scared that it would minimize my accomplishments that I worked so hard to achieve."

This participant has big hopes of getting to see every country in the world. To accomplish this goal, they often track their progress and are constantly saving up for their next adventure.

Hobbies:

- Gaming
- Travel
- Cooking

Goals:

- Save money
- Travel the world
- Improve relationships

Challenges:

- Time management
- Lack of guidance
- Staying close with people

The Media

The literature review centered around exploring the **psychology of goal motivation** and some of the **issues that intensive-play gamers struggle with.**

Many cases saw issues with **planning, time management, and motivation.** Often described was the need for an **'escape'** from reality by gaming or otherwise **ignoring personal obligations.** This need is often spawned from external factors such as **bullying, family problems, or mental health setbacks.**

Overall, the main key to tackle procrastination and motivation issues was to just force oneself to get the task done and avoid distractions entirely, however my hypothesis is that if a system reminiscent of one of the biggest distractions were implemented in order to help users get things done, it would make this challenge significantly easier to overcome.

Literature Sources

Collabra Psychology
HealthyGamerGG
National Institutes of Health

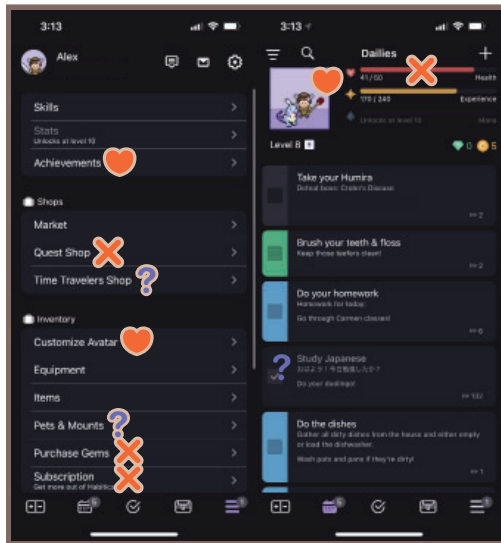


The Comparative Analysis

Three different mobile apps with similar objectives to GOL were analyzed to determine what works and what doesn't in this type of system. Reviews, heuristics, and visual interfaces were all taken into account to identify what the strongest ideas to incorporate were.

Habitica

Gamifies daily tasks and habit change



This app is similar to Gol in that it 'video-gamifies' daily tasks. While a great premise, Habitica falls flat in a few areas, such as a confusing and overly complex UI, and a relatively unengaging way of providing goals.

5 Star Reviews Summary:

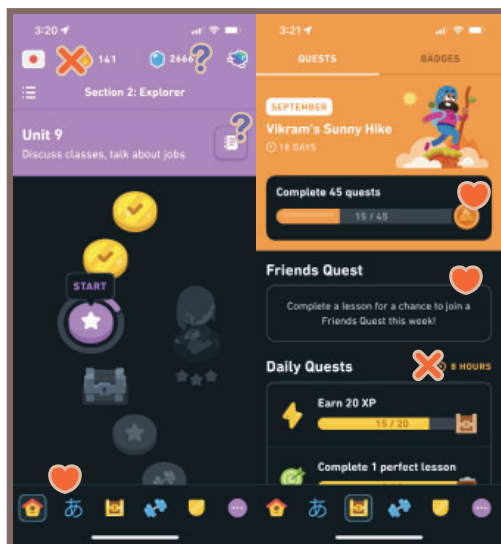
Group Challenges and Leveling up Characters make this a fun and engaging experience.

1-3 Star Reviews Summary:

Too many Micro-transactions, along with a lack of motivational features make this app bland.

Duolingo

Teaches a variety of languages within a structured path



The structured path and lessons in Duolingo are a great approach to motivating users to do more. Streaks and timed quests can be stressful but motivating. Adorable UI, however a few inconvenient elements deter from it.

5 Star Reviews Summary:

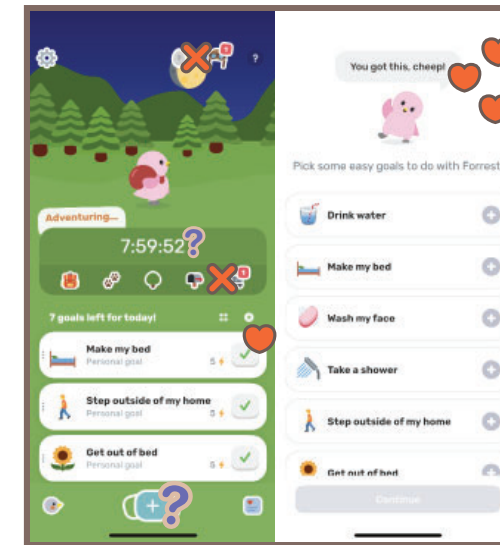
Intuitive interface, successful gamification, and stories along the way make this app great.

1-3 Star Reviews Summary:

Lack of legacy features, too much competition, and too many ads make this frustrating.

Finch

"Raise a self-care pet while taking care of yourself"



Finch tries to engage users through emotional attachment. This is done well, but some UI elements seem superfluous. The on-boarding process is well designed and eases users into the experience in an intuitive way.

5 Star Reviews Summary:

Cute graphics and emotional engagement with the bird make this a great tool.

1-3 Star Reviews Summary:

It got old after a while. Too much pressure to complete tasks and subscription notifications make this frustrating.

Insights

The takeaways from this exploration were quite helpful in the aesthetic development of GOL, and the road map for different systems in the app was shaped by some of the review feedback towards those same types of systems in these apps. Overall this comparative analysis helped shape the flow and layout of GOL feature wise. I also took a lot inspiration from my own personal experiences with video games and reminder apps to shape the way that the quest log itself looked visually and how the navigation layout functioned. I think that this process was quite valuable, as it lets the

design process expand beyond just ones own personal ideals and adds the allowment of external ideas and positive feedback to be built upon within the creation process of a new type of tool. Including user reviews in this research process was what I believe the most beneficial, as it let's the designer analyze through the critiques of other real people, and provides even deeper insight into the true strengths and weaknesses of a particular type of system, such as cosmetics, customization, navigation, and the likes.

The Objective

Design a system that breaks high-level tasks & goals into simple, actionable steps to help people make a positive change in their lives through achievement.

Through gamification and educating users on the specific steps for accomplish goals, the applications of this system should strive to encourage self-betterment and provide a strong foundation from which to tackle procrastination and help with self-motivation. In order to appeal to the target audience and provide a simple solution to the identified problem, a quest log like those in role play video games will be used to translate these real-world goals into tangible steps that a user can easily accomplish through the use of the system.



The Design Principles

Motivation

Promote a healthy state of being by providing words of affirmation, generous in-app rewards, and celebrations of a user's progress.

The experience should encourage and uplift users on their journey.

Simplicity

Keep the user interface and brand identity clean and intuitive, minimizing complexity and unnecessary elements.

Allow users to focus on their goals without any cumbersome elements.

Comfort

Prioritize user comfort through warm and welcoming design. Users should feel encouraged to feel at peace when using the app as they tackle challenging goals.

GOL should be like a calming cup of hot cocoa after a chilly day.

Customization

Provide a fully custom experience that is able to be tailored to each individual user.

A personalized experience leads to more connection and engagement.

The Design Applications

Primary

Brand Identity

A visual representation of the aspects of the service, including icons, brandmarks, default colors, and typography. This solution should provide a warm and comfortable atmosphere to the user while clearly communicating the messages of the brand itself.

Mobile Application

An experience that encompasses the main purpose of GOL: to provide a simple quest log and planner to help users track and achieve their goals in simple steps. This is the most important touchpoint and requires the most refinement and is where the majority of the insights from the research phase of the project will be applied.

Secondary

AI Mentor

A guiding companion to the users journey, with whom they can discuss their thoughts and get advice on how to proceed on with their quests. With an identity of it's own as a magical advice-giving wizard, it can also provide an element of emotional attachment that we saw was touched upon in the research.

Printable Workbooks

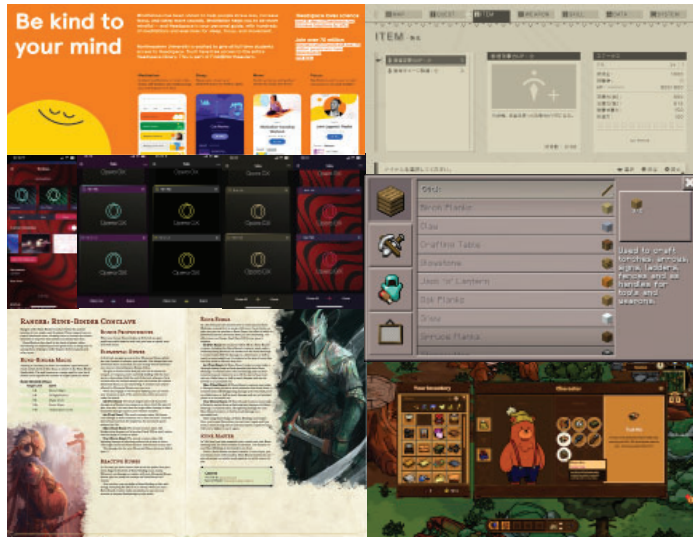
A printable quest log series with the same level of task breakdown as the mobile app. Users can easily access and print these workbooks from within the app, providing a more reality-grounded way of completing goals.

Gamification

Incorporate aspects of gaming such as achievements, customization, item collection, and leveling up to increase engagement and motivation to actually use the app.

The Design Process

Visual Inspiration



To the left is a collection of some of the visuals I drew inspiration from in this process. The theme was to create a welcome environment that felt like a break from the real world while checking tasks off, yet maintained a motivational backbone.

Brandmark Process



Initial Brandmark



Second Iteration



Pre-Final Iteration

These early iterations show the growth of the mark from just a simple typed word into a more meaningful composition that makes up the main forms of the final brandmark. Working with pure forms rather than type allowed me to construct the meaning I wanted within it

Imagery Process

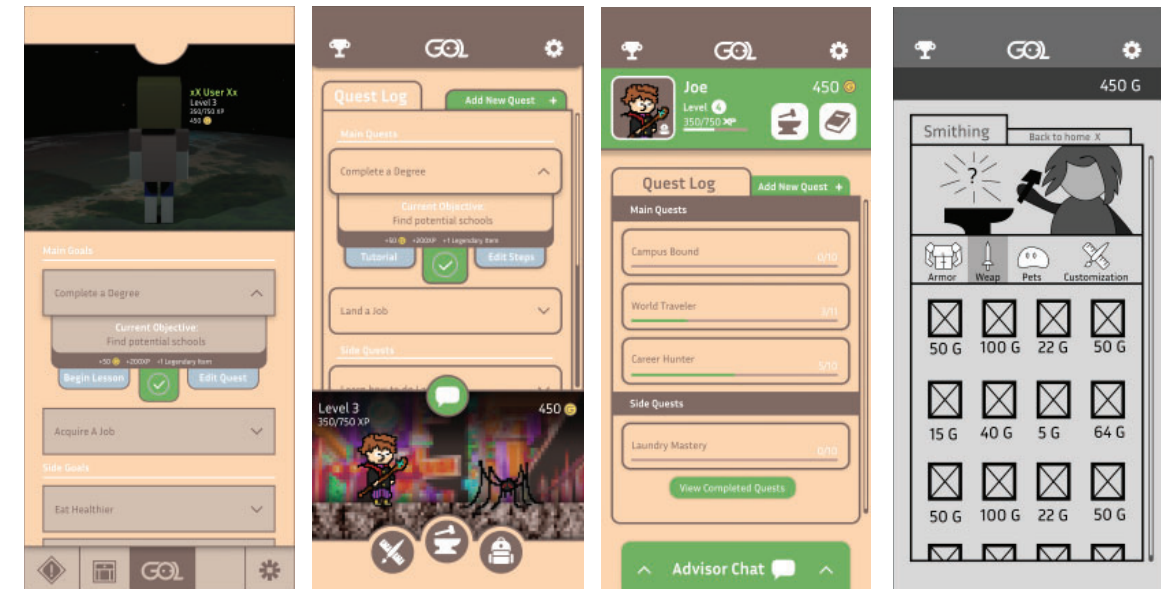


The imagery was intended from the start to be a mix of low-bit images and high-res UI, to evoke a more game-like persona, and this initial draft of a player character shows the style of that early imagery. All low bit image elements were either hand-drawn in Piskel or created with swatch-bound image pixelation programs.

User Journeys

To aid in the development of how the UI flows, user journeys were drawn out and referenced in order to find the best navigation flow through the app / workbooks. These included the flows of both a new user being introduced to the app and completing the on-boarding, as well as that of a regular user receiving a notification and working through a task with the app.

Mobile Application Process



Initial Quest Log Draft

Second Quest Log Iteration

Pre-Final Iteration

Smith Screen Wireframe

This was one of the longest processes as it took a while to nail the navigation and visual layout of the screens. A method called priority guides, introduced to us by ZoCo, assisted in this process greatly however. By letting required information and buttons be laid out in advance to doing any actual visual design, it gave greater control over the final result's functionality. I went through several iterations of screens and wireframes after this until it felt like the experience it needed to be in order to work as intended.

The Brand Identity

Brandmark



The Final Brandmark

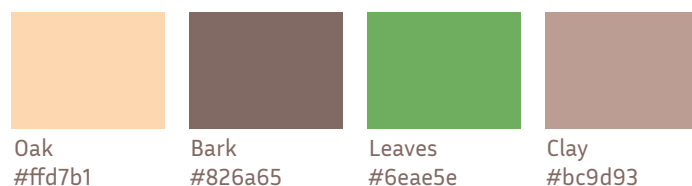


Color variations for customizable themes

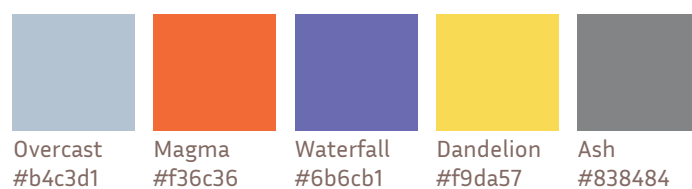
The brandmark is the main brand element and represent the face of the brand, so it should symbolize forward movement and play, as these are the main elements of the experience. A friendly yet sleek mark provides this and acts as the main brand icon.

Colors

Primary



Secondary



With a nature inspired palette for the default theme and branding, these colors give a sense of adventure and freedom. The muted tones are also intended to break away from the high contrast and saturation of modern UI while still being accessible.

Imagery



"Joe"
Player Model



Smithing Screen Graphic



Pastel Theme Background

The imagery for the app was created with the intention of blending modern UI with low-bit graphics to evoke a retro video game style. The pixelated elements consist on a palette of solely the brand colors (or a chosen theme's as seen on the right) to let the imagery look seamless with the rest of the experience.

Icons



From left to right: Printable Workbooks, Achievements, Settings, Favorite Quest, Experience Points, Smith, Add Quest, AI Mentor, Quest Log, Gol'd

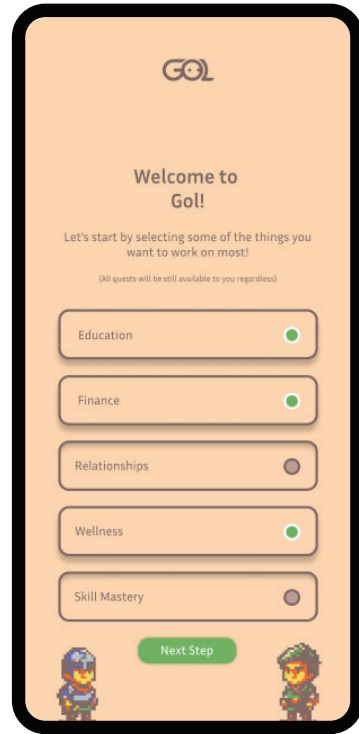
This icon set is intended to be easy to understand while still evoking both a modern app feeling and one of a roleplaying video game. With soft edges and simple shapes, these give nods to fantasy elements of gaming and provide fast and easy navigation.

Type

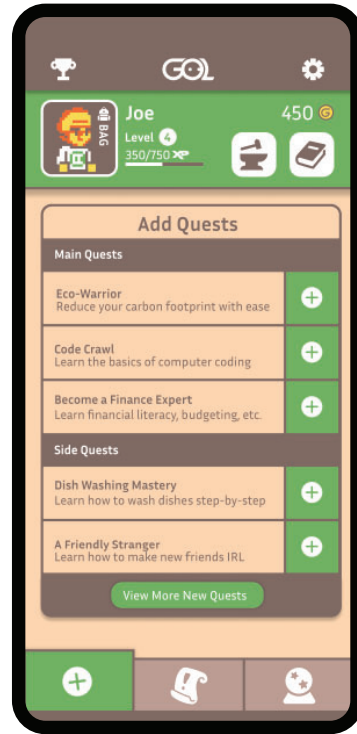
Inria Sans Bold
Inria Sans Regular

Inria Sans was chosen because it is a well-designed free font that is extremely legible, even at smaller sizes.

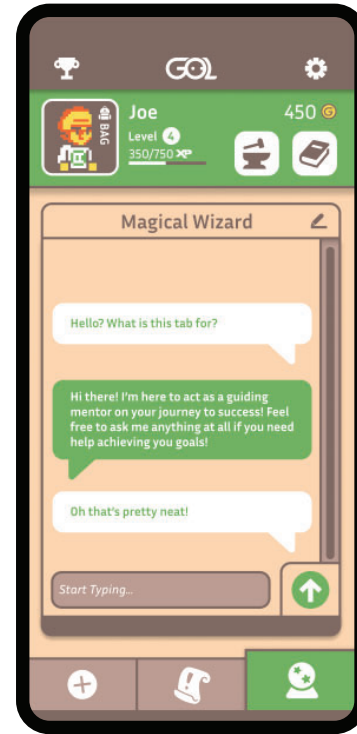
The Mobile App



Goal Focus Selection

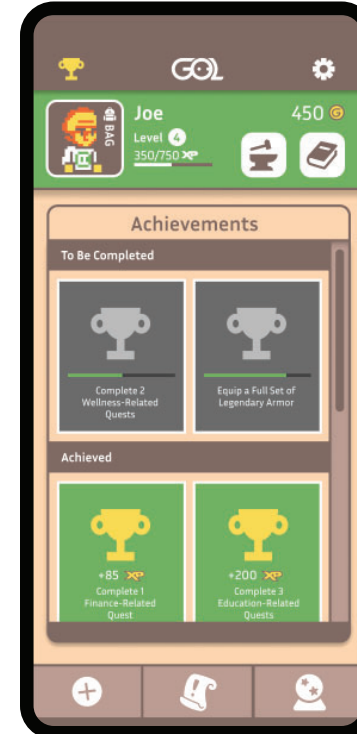


Add Quests



AI Mentor Chat

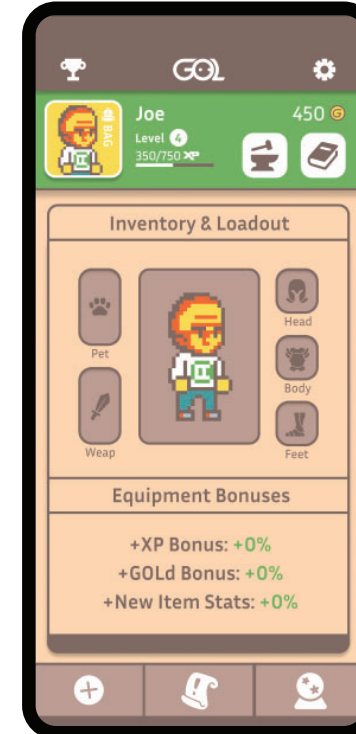
Onboarding



Achievements



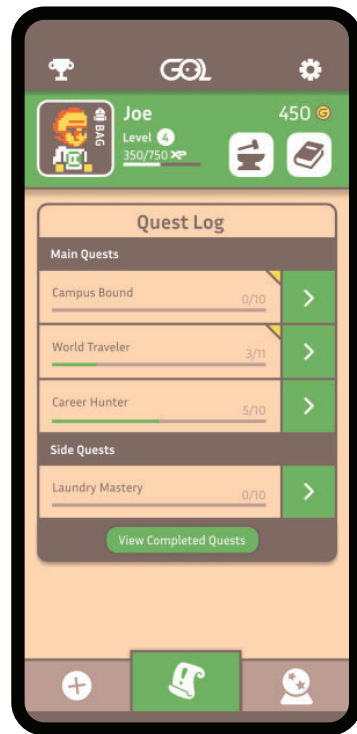
Smith / Shop



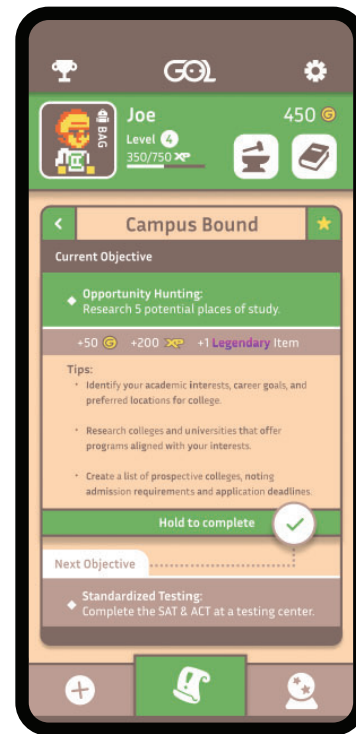
Player Equipment

Gamification

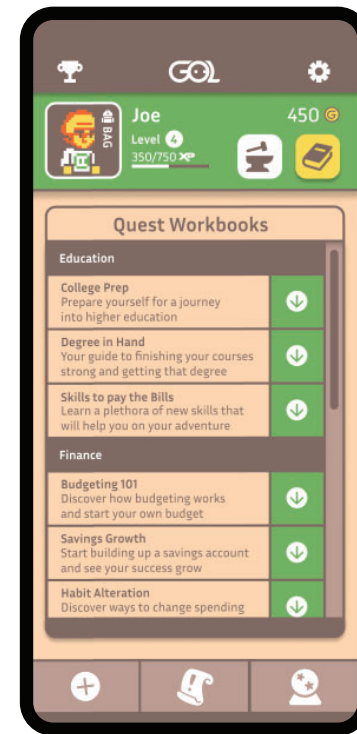
Quest Screens



Quest Log

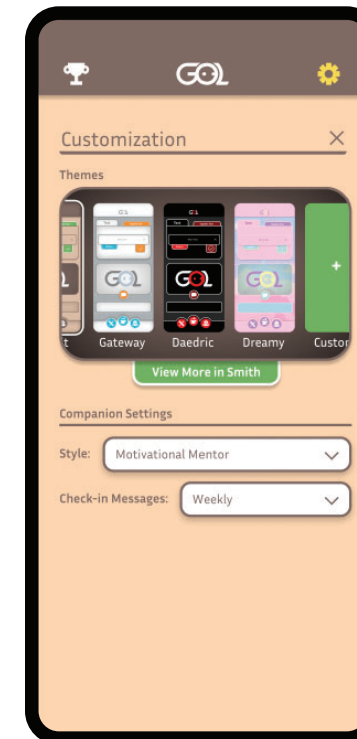


Quest Details

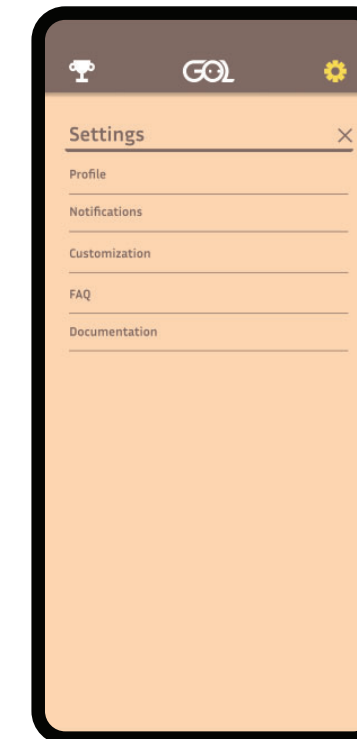


Workbook Download

Customization



Theme Customization



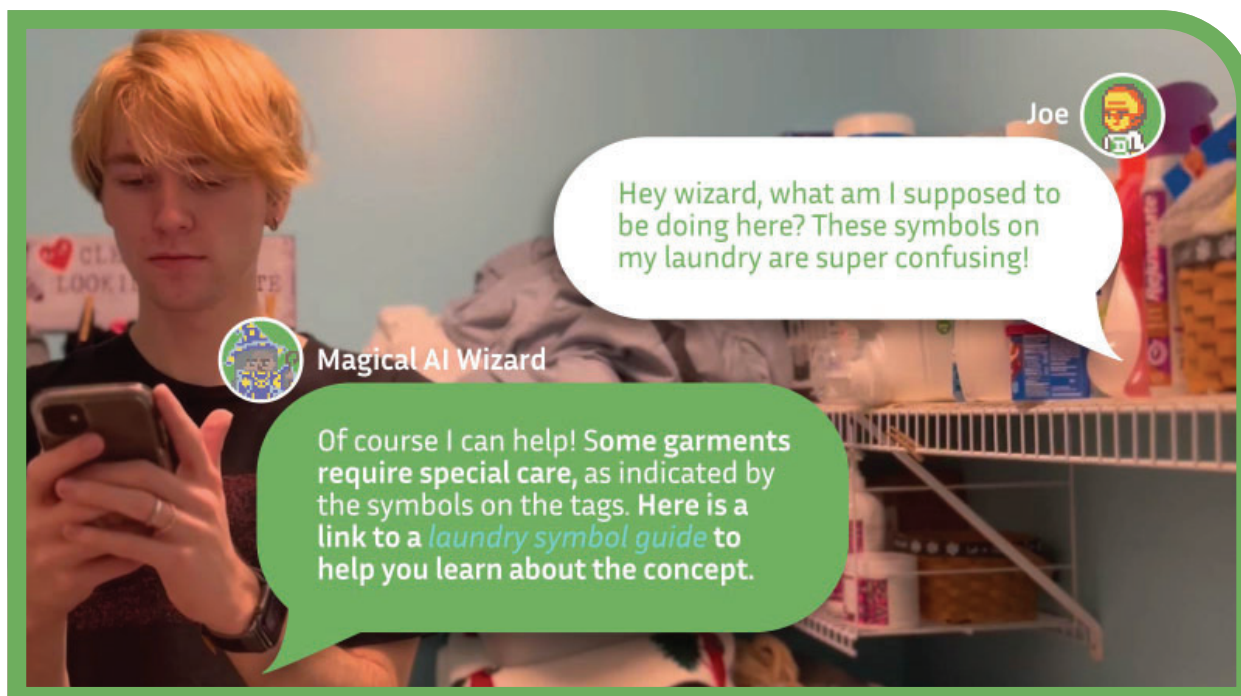
Settings

The app design was meant to reflect the brand identity and provide a holistic experience. Quick and easy navigation was a big focus. Creating a cohesive mesh of each system was a challenge in finding the perfect workflow to have fun while still accomplishing tasks in the real world.

The AI Mentor

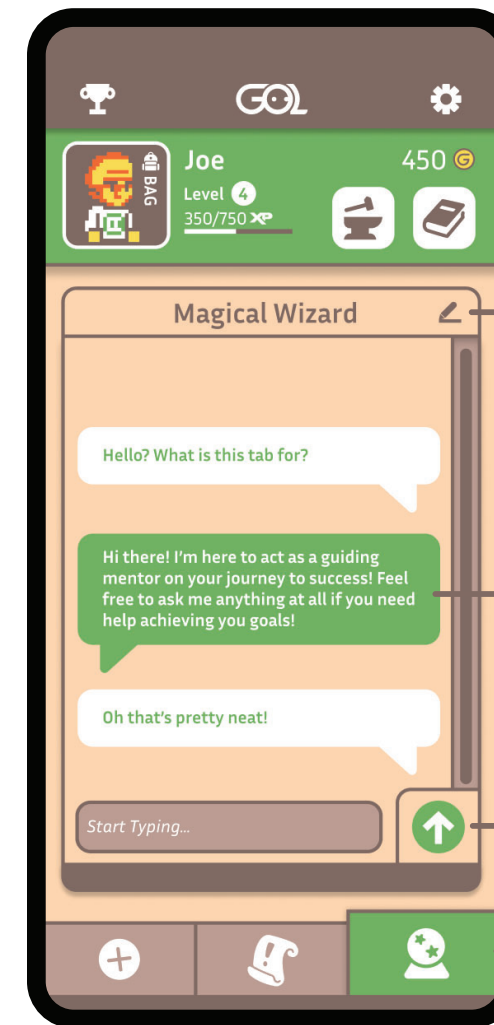
This system focuses on providing **extra assistance to users**, as well as an emotional attachment to their journey. Users can ask the ‘wizard’ whatever they’d like, and **the wizard will give them feedback and support** through each quest.

The style in which the wizard chats with the user can be customized in the settings, but it will always be encouraging and make an effort to help the user achieve their positive goals. It would be able to provide links to helpful resources as shown in the video below, give advice on complicated tasks, help with writing, and serve as a source of emotional attachment to the process of goal completion by serving as a companion that pushes the user to complete their quests in an encouraging way. By incorporating AI, a new and rapidly growing technology, GOL further shows its use of both modern and retro methods of user encouragement.



A shot explaining the Mentor in the Explanation Video

The Wizard: EXPLAINED



A button that allows for the customization of the mentor’s name. By default, their name is “Magical Wizard.”

An example of an introductory message from the mentor.

The textbox and send button to interact with this system.

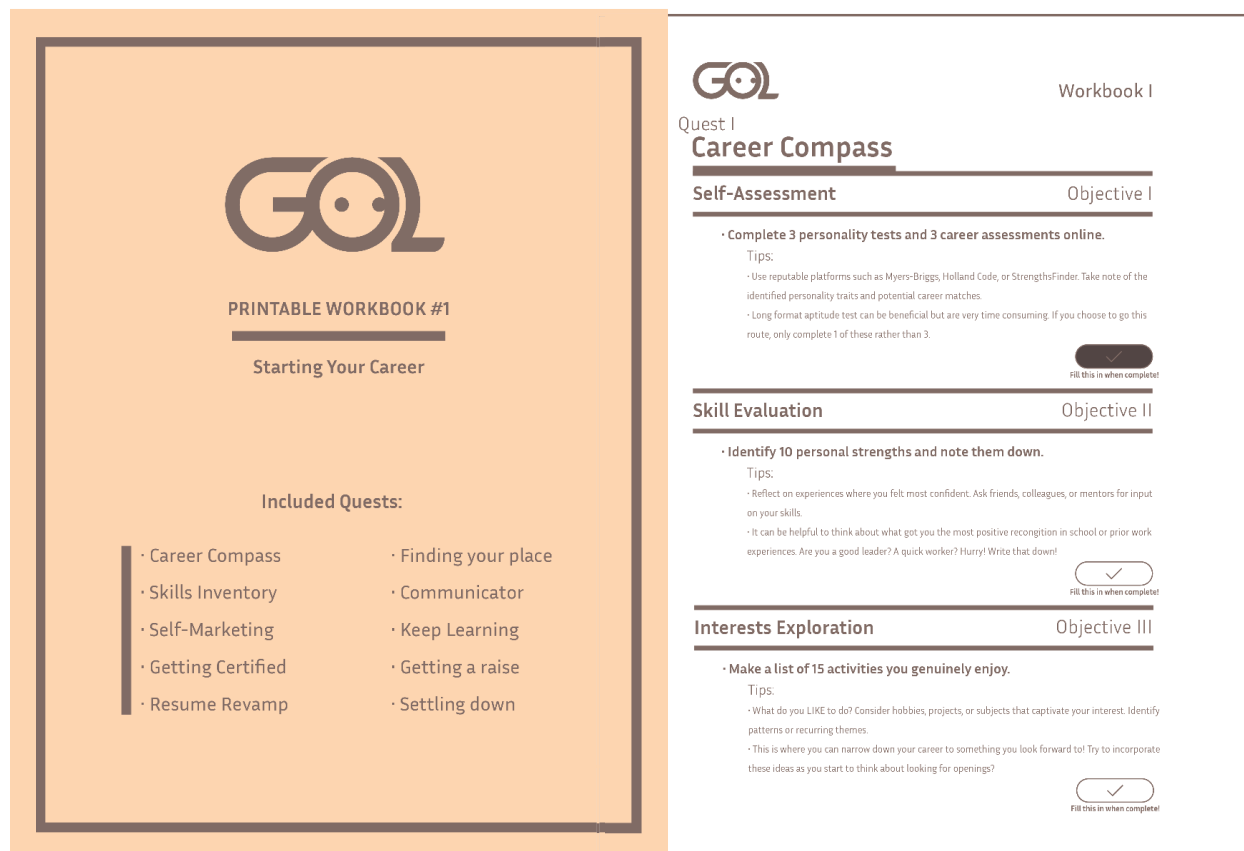
The navigation tab of the AI mentor system.

By allowing users to have what is essentially **unlimited access to resources within the app**, the chance of **getting stuck on a particularly tricky objective** can be mitigated. This was one of the worries initially when constructing the actual quest system, which works by providing **quick tips and advice** for completing tangible tasks, but if a user would like more info, they can use the **mentor tool as a backup** to the tips.

The Printable Workbooks

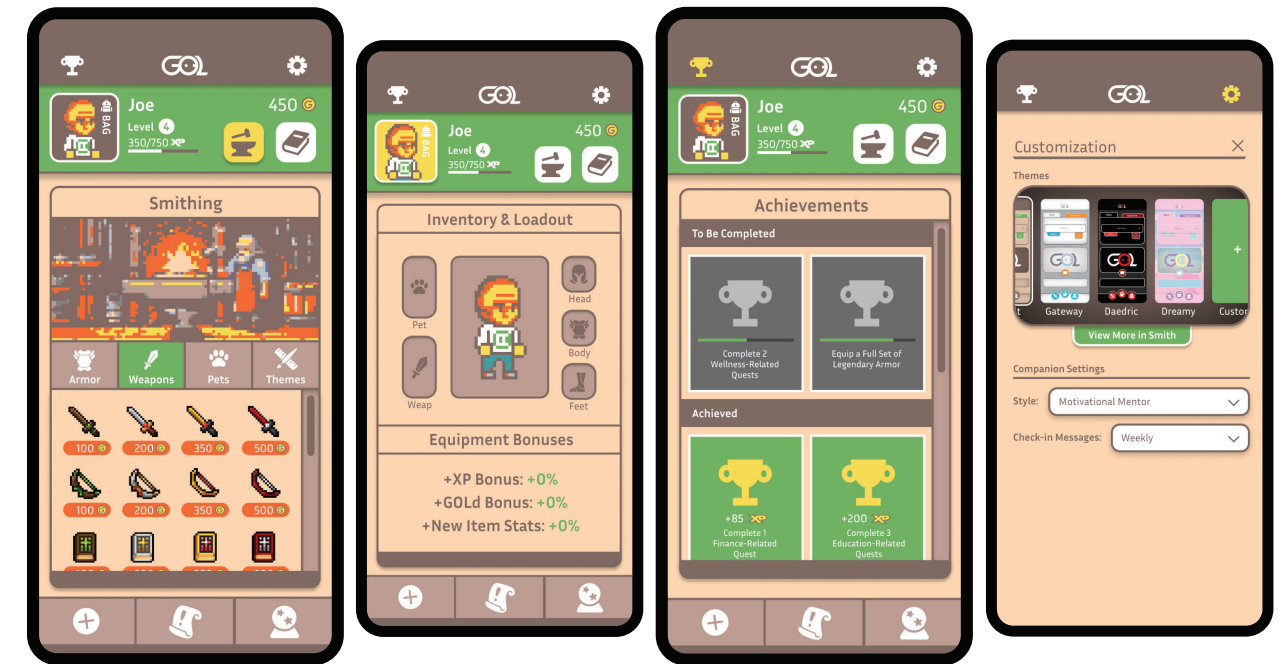
By creating a physical version of the quest log system, users are able to track and complete tasks without requiring their cell-phone. This promotes a more focused journey and decreases reliance on tech.

The process works much the same as the app, just without the gamification elements. Quests are laid out step by step with tips on each one's completion. Each book covers a specific topic of quests such as the "Starting your career" book seen below. These are accessed and printed for free from the workbooks section of the app (Denoted by the book icon).

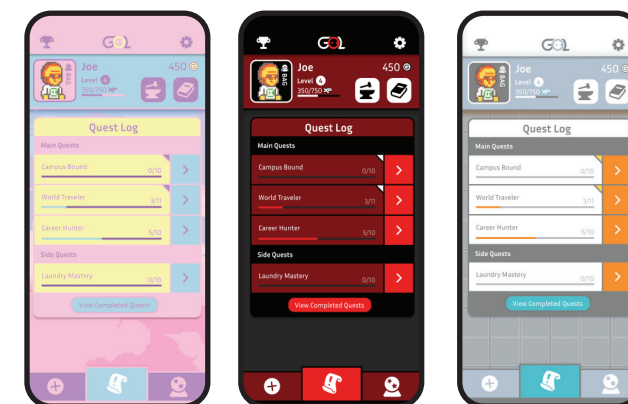


The "Starting Your" Career Book's Cover and 1st Page

The Gamification Elements



Through the app's gamification, users are further encouraged to pursue their goals to earn more in-game rewards. A shop system, character loadout, achievements, and robust customization system were all implemented as the gamification elements of the app. As these ideas were inspired by real video games, they should evoke even more of a sense that this is an experience promoting 'positive play' in an effort to help users succeed in their endeavours. Users are encouraged to accomplish more goals in their lives to earn items in GOL, which increase the earnings of their future quests, giving a sense of progression: each thing done makes the next even more meaningful.

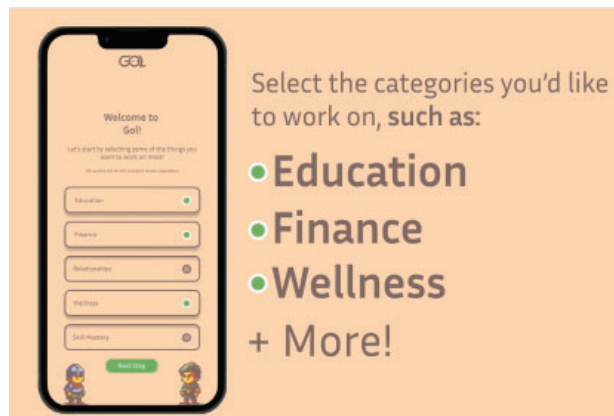


UI Color Customization was focused on quite a bit, as it allows users to personalize the app. This was noted as highly desirable by participants in the research phase. These themes would be unlockable through the shop system.

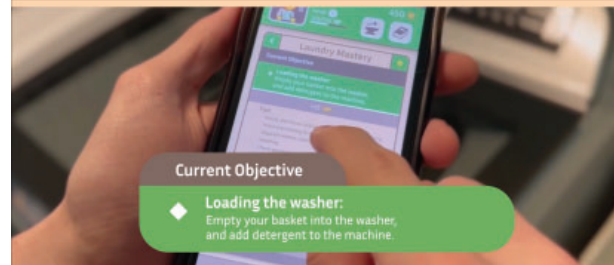
The Explanation Video

Summary

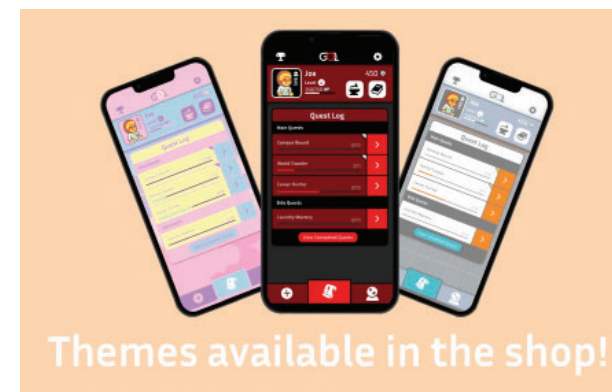
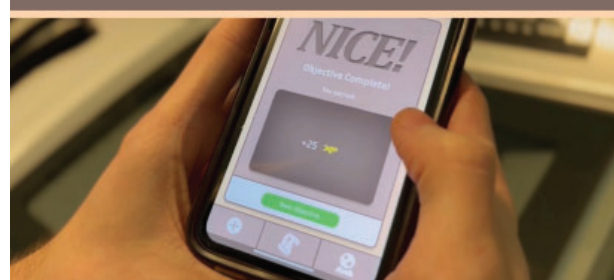
The video starts by describing the initial user journey of a character wishing he could stop procrastinating, but not knowing where to start. Another character introduces them to GOL. Animations describing the onboarding process follow, which introduce the viewer to this system. After this, a journey of a regular user of the app is adhered to, where we see them learn how to do laundry with a side quest. After following the steps, talking to the mentor, and showing the reward aspect, it's explained that the same process is applied to long term goals as well. A few examples of these long term goals are shown: completing higher education, budgeting, finding a dream job, and making friends. This concludes the user journey portion of the video, moving into the gamification elements and secondary touchpoints, showing the printable workbook hanging on a fridge. The video ends with a call to action and a final marketing screen to download the app when it becomes available.



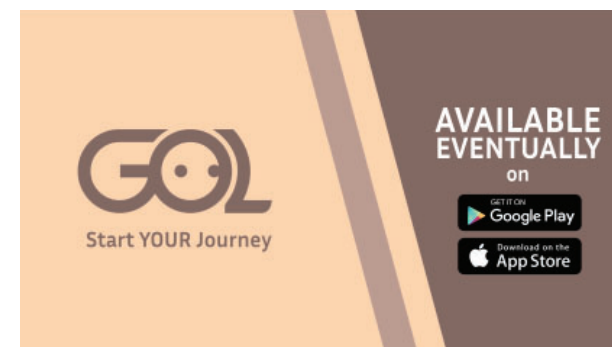
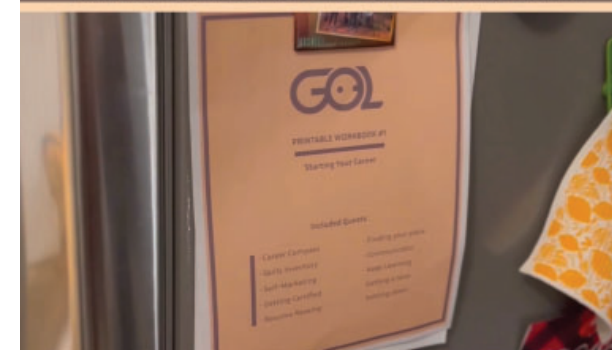
This user wants to learn how to efficiently do laundry, so we'll be following along on their 'Laundry Mastery' side quest.



After following the tips and completing the objective, they mark the step as done and are rewarded.



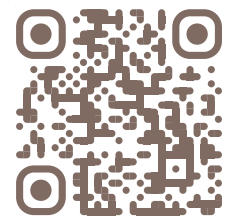
With printable quest workbooks, it's easy! These workbooks can be downloaded in the app and printed for a tangible quest log experience!



Process

This portion of the project took an immense amount of time as all animations were hand done. I spent a lot of time in this process refining the actual UI as well, since it had a fair amount of screen time and some things stood out to me when I was working with them. The sound design for the video was quite fun. I opted for an AI voiceover to get the right emotions across, and added in some sound effects for extra impact in the background. For "user voices," I used an animalesse generator (the language from Animal Crossing, a popular Nintendo game). This was done to extenuate the video game inspired aspects of the experience. The narrative required several iterations, but this method of describing the user journey and then moving to the supplementary features seemed the most logical and explanatory of the system. Overall I think this video aptly describes all aspects of GOL.

The full video is available to watch here on Youtube:



The Conclusion

About the Research

Doing research for design is usually something I struggle with, since finding participants tends to be quite challenging in a student position, however due to the target audience for GOL, this process proved to be much simpler and approachable, as I just found candidates in online games. The methods I employed gave a lot of quality insights into how many of the systems should function to give the most value to the any user of the product. I think collecting goals and engagement methods was the most helpful, as this let me gauge what exactly it was people were wanting to accomplish within a system like this, and how to keep them on track to doing so. The interviews were also very helpful, as I got to bounce some ideas back and forth for some of the different systems, how they should look, what rewards should be, etc. Overall I learned a lot from surveying and talking to the people I was trying to help with the service, and got a ton of great feedback.

About the Design Process

Designing graphics is one of my favorite things to do, but I didn't expect to encounter so much creative block in this process. Constant critiques and advising sessions helped alleviate that however, and I was quickly able to get on track to an outcome that I think came out quite successfully. I'm very happy with the overall look of all the systems in GOL, especially since UI design was not one of my strong suits going into this project, and it was a great exercise in improving that skill. Looking back I wish I would have spent a bit more time developing my presentations and some extra graphic elements for the app, like my own item icons (the ones currently in the project are from a free pack shared by a generous independent artist). I think the video took the most actual time due to hand keyframing and curving all the animations, and acquiring content from all my project files took a while too, but I think it encapsulates the intentions of the system well.



About the End Product

GOL is intended to be a catch-all solution for goal achievement, and the product I ended up with at the end of this process reflects that quite well in my eyes. I think the color palette is a bit tricky to work with in terms of accessibility, but when used properly it accurately reflects the intention of a nature inspired, adventure invoking theme. If I were to continue with this project and develop the app, I would most definitely make a color guide determining what colors are applicable together in terms of accessibility. The system itself turned out nearly exactly as I envisioned when first coming up with the idea for the project: turn long-term goals into simple steps in the form of quests. The flow and navigation of this works quite well too, as described by it's use in the video. The system is easy to use, not very intrusive, engaging, and with proper development of each quest, could provide a great resource for those looking to achieve their goals with a simpler solution.

About this Book

You may have noticed that there's a lot more words than pictures in this book. While a picture may be worth a thousand words, I think being able to aptly describe and elaborate on the processes and intentions of design is an important skill, and I believe this system deserves a lot of explanation. I wanted to go over each of these systems in detail and provide you, the reader, with the best understanding of the final solution as possible. You may also notice that there's a lot of white in this book, and a lot of information on each page. The goal with the lack of color is to reduce ink waste, and the condensed information is to provide an organizational structure for the flow of the book, as well as save paper. Sustainability has been on my mind a lot since taking professor Paul Nini's design seminar class, so I wanted to make sure the production of my final process book for the thesis followed this. Thank you for reading, have an awesome day!



GOL is a system developed to help users accomplish their goals through a quest log system similar to that of a role playing video game. By breaking these complicated tasks into tangible steps, the process of achieving success can be made much simpler. Through use of implemented systems like an AI mentor, printable workbooks, and gamification with items and experience, GOL is a game in and of itself, meant to push its players to succeed in any endeavor.

So... What are you waiting for?
Let's do some quests!