Horizontal slice
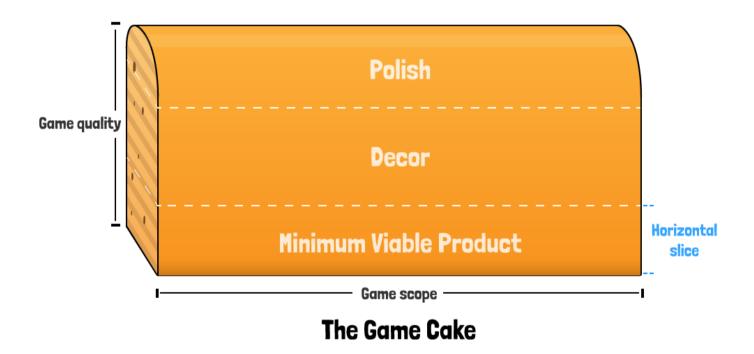
Horizontal slice (HS) indicates the bare minimum that we need in order to have the game playable from A to Z. In this phase, we try to put the most important and rough objects into the game as soon as possible. This is also known as the MVP (Minimum Viable Product). The horizontal slice is made up out of critical elements that are necessary for the game to function.

The result from this phase can be used to figure out if the core value of the game can already be experienced. Usually, the first result will not create the experience that the design has in mind. From this point onwards, a lot of iterations need to take place that will nudge the game towards where it needs to be. When the core design is present and representable for the game's intended experience, we can include play-testers into the iteration cycle who will be able to tell us whether or not the design and game is working as intended. While that happens, we can direct our attention towards creating a vertical slice.

The Game Cake

HS usually includes:
- Environment blockout (known as "whitebox" or "graybox").
- All game mechanics - key interaction objects and functionality.
- Critical user interface elements.
- Narrative system with placeholder scripts.
- Main characters in crude forms.
- Audio placeholders.
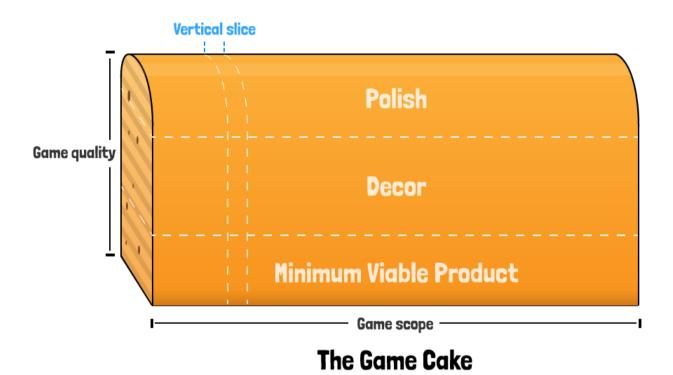
HS can, but doesn't have to contain:
- Game mechanics in final form (well balanced, working all together).
- Final, polished version of levels, characters, audio, etc.

Vertical Slice

A vertical slice (VS) represents a short segment of the game to a standard that is representative of the final product. On a graphical level, this can set the standard as to how the rest of the game should look and feel. Game mechanics used in VS should be completely bug free ad well balanced.

Additionally, this is useful for promotional purposes as it can give people a taste of what they can expect in the full game. If you are looking for funding for your game, then creating a vertical slice of your game can be used for this.

Usually, you can use one level of your game as vertical slice. See (play) for example the first level (not the tutorial) in the Mirror's Edge game (the first one, not the "Catalist") or basically any demo of a commercially successful game.

Vertical Slice doesn't need to show:
- All game levels (one finished level is better than five incomplete ones)
- Full list of anything (levels, assets, scripts)