On a phone, every pixel has a job. A player may be watching the action, checking a balance, learning a rule, and trying to tap a control—all on a screen smaller than a paperback cover. If important information is buried, cramped, or competing with decoration, players have to work too hard to play.

The answer isn't simply "put it at the top." Good **mobile UI placement** starts with what the player needs to know at each moment, then gives that information a clear position, enough visual weight, and enough room to be read or tapped. This guide covers how to build a useful **screen hierarchy**, protect small-screen legibility, and place controls, rules, and balances where people can actually find them.

Start with the player's most important question

Before arranging buttons or labels, ask what question a player needs answered right now. During a fast action sequence, it might be "What is happening?" or "What do I tap?" In a strategy game, it might be "How many moves do I have left?" In a game involving purchases or real-money decisions, the questions may be "What is my balance?" and "What will this action cost?" Those are not secondary details; they affect a player's choices.

Write down the three to five pieces of **priority information** for each screen state. A title screen, active game, pause menu, and results screen often need different priorities. The goal is not to show everything at once. It is to make the right information easy to locate at the right time.

- **Immediate state:** What is happening in the game?
- **Next action:** What can or should the player do?
- **Important constraint:** How much time, health, energy, or currency is available?
- **Decision context:** What does this action cost, change, or risk?
- **Support:** Where can the player find rules, settings, or help?

Rank these items by urgency, not by how prominent they are in a desktop version. Mobile layouts are often redesigned, not merely shrunk. A small-screen interface needs an intentional reading order.

Build a clear screen hierarchy

Visual hierarchy is the order in which a viewer notices and understands things. It comes from scale, contrast, position, spacing, and motion. If every element is bright, large, and animated, nothing is important. That is visual noise, not hierarchy.

Give the primary game action the clearest focal point. Then make the most important status information easy to scan, followed by secondary controls and supporting details. A common arrangement is to keep the play area central, place stable status indicators near the top or top corners, and group frequent actions close to the bottom of the screen. But the best layout depends on the game's orientation, hand position, and moment-to-moment demands.

Use position to show relationships

Keep information near the thing it describes. A timer can sit near the active play area; a price should sit beside the purchase action; a health indicator should be visually connected to the character or player it represents. This reduces the effort of matching labels to controls.

Group related items with spacing, dividers, or a shared background. Separate unrelated groups so they don't read as one crowded cluster. Alignment also matters: consistent edges and predictable rows help players scan without having to interpret a new layout every time.

Make one focal point—not five

Choose one primary focal point for each screen state. It may be the game board, a character, a "Play" button, or a crucial decision panel. Secondary elements should support that focal point instead of fighting it. Use color and scale sparingly: one strong accent can guide attention; a dozen competing accents make the screen harder to parse.

Animation deserves the same discipline. A brief pulse can help a new objective stand out. Constantly bouncing icons, flashing badges, and looping effects are usually just noise, especially when placed beside text players need to read. Test a still version of the screen: if the hierarchy only works because everything moves, it probably needs a layout fix.

Design for real phone readability

Text that looks comfortable on a large design canvas may be tiny on an actual phone. Check the interface on a phone or in a mobile browser at the sizes players will use—not only in a design tool. Review it at 100% for real reading, then zoom out to 50% and 25% as a quick way to spot whether the broad hierarchy still holds. At 25%, you should still be able to tell what the main action and primary information are, even if the small labels are no longer readable.

For body text, aim for a size that remains comfortable on common devices, and avoid packing essential instructions into a long paragraph. Short labels, familiar terms, and concise sentences are easier to read during play. Don't rely on thin fonts, all-caps labels, or low-contrast text to save space. If a label matters, it deserves enough room and contrast to be understood.

Contrast is more than a color choice

Text over a detailed illustration or photo can disappear in patches, even when the colors seem different at first glance. Put important text on a solid or sufficiently opaque panel, or add a deliberate shadow or outline that preserves legibility. Check contrast in bright and dim environments, and don't use color alone to communicate meaning. Pair color with a word, icon, shape, or clear change in state.

Unsplash can be useful when you need temporary photography or visual references for a prototype. But a beautiful image is not automatically a good interface background. Test the actual composition behind the text: a pale sky, busy foliage, or high-contrast subject can make labels difficult to read. Crop imagery with the interface https://mangaowl.io/blog/manga-panels-and-mobile-casino-screens-making-every-detail-count/ in mind, and reserve quieter areas for overlaid information.

Leave room for controls and thumbs

Controls must be easy to hit without covering the most important content. Consider reach as well as visibility: on many phones, the lower portion of the screen is more comfortable for one-handed thumb use than the far upper corners. Frequently used actions generally belong in an easy-to-reach zone, while less frequent options can sit farther away.

There is no single perfect thumb zone for every player. Hand size, grip, device size, and whether someone plays with one or two hands all matter. Try the layout on a real phone and count the taps required for common tasks. Note where the thumb has to stretch, cross over other controls, or obscure the action. Those small frictions add up.

Make controls large, separated, and predictable

- Give primary controls a generous tap area, even if the visible icon is smaller.
- Leave enough space between neighboring controls to reduce accidental taps.
- Keep destructive or costly actions away from routine controls.
- Use consistent placement for actions that appear across multiple screens.
- Show a clear pressed, disabled, or selected state so players know a tap registered.

Don’t place a critical control directly over a busy part of the game unless it remains distinct in every state. Also account for device edges, notches, system bars, and the browser interface. When testing in a phone or mobile browser, verify that the usable area is what you expect and that controls don’t end up under system UI.

Give rules and balances the right visibility

Rules are useful only if players can find and understand them. Don’t hide essential instructions behind an unfamiliar icon with no label. A question mark may be widely recognized as help, but a new player should still be able to discover it. Use a visible “Rules,” “How to play,” or “Help” label when the information is important to starting or making a decision.

Keep quick instructions close to the action they explain. More detailed rules can live in a dedicated panel that players can open without losing their progress. Break long explanations into short sections with headings, examples, and clear terms. If the game uses unusual symbols, explain them in the rules and reinforce their meaning in the interface.



Balances and costs need especially careful treatment. If a player is about to spend currency, show the cost beside the action before confirmation. If the balance changes, make the new amount easy to verify. For real-money

decisions, use plain language, distinguish real currency from in-game currency, and avoid making costs look like decorative or optional fine print. A player should not have to hunt for the amount at stake or infer it from an icon.

For consequential actions, a confirmation step can help—but it should explain what will happen, not merely ask "Are you sure?" State the cost or outcome clearly, make the choices distinguishable, and ensure the safer or cancel option is not tiny or hard to tap. The interface should help people make informed decisions, not pressure them through obscurity.



Use recognizable silhouettes and shapes

Players often identify controls before they read labels. Familiar silhouettes can speed up recognition: a gear for settings, a house for home, a magnifying glass for search, or a speech bubble for dialogue. Shape and placement can also distinguish categories—such as a rounded primary action button versus a simple text link.

Use recognizable conventions carefully. An icon that looks familiar but behaves unexpectedly can be more confusing than a text label. Pair less universal icons with a short label, particularly when the action is important, costly, or irreversible. Keep the silhouette simple enough to remain distinct at small sizes and avoid placing several similar-looking icons side by side.

Shape can support accessibility, too. For example, a selected state can use a filled shape and a checkmark, rather than changing color alone. A warning can combine a clear symbol with an explicit label. The aim is not to decorate every element, but to create a visual language players can learn and rely on.

A practical placement checklist

Use this checklist when reviewing a screen on a phone, not just in a design file:

1. **Identify the task.** What should the player understand or do first?
2. **Rank the information.** Separate essential status from helpful and optional details.
3. **Choose a focal point.** Make the main action or game area visually dominant.
4. **Place related information together.** Keep labels, costs, and controls close to what they describe.
5. **Check thumb reach.** Test common actions one-handed and count the taps involved.

6. **Read every important label at 100%.** Confirm it is legible on the smallest target device.
7. **Inspect at 50% and 25%.** Make sure the large-scale hierarchy remains clear and the screen isn't overloaded.
8. **Test busy backgrounds and motion.** Verify that text survives the imagery and that animation earns its attention.
9. **Review decisions and costs.** Make rules, balances, and consequences clear before the player commits.

Information type Useful placement principle Common mistake Primary action Make it prominent and reachable, with a clear tap state. Hiding it among decorative buttons or placing it in an awkward corner. Game status Keep it visible and grouped near the play area it describes. Using tiny labels or separating the value from its meaning. Rules and help Use a recognizable, labeled entry point and concise sections. Relying on an unexplained icon or burying essential rules. Balances and costs Show amounts clearly beside relevant decisions and actions. Using ambiguous symbols or revealing the cost only after a tap.

Put importance ahead of decoration

The best mobile layouts make the next step feel obvious without making the screen feel crowded. They establish one focal point, keep essential information readable, place common controls within comfortable reach, and use shapes players can recognize. They also treat rules, balances, and costs as part of the experience—not as details to hide when space gets tight.

When in doubt, test the screen on a phone or in a mobile browser, at the scale people will actually see. Check it at 100%, 50%, and 25%. If the main action is unclear at a glance, or an important number takes effort to find, revise the layout before adding more polish. A good **screen hierarchy** doesn't just look organized; it helps players understand what's happening and make their next move with confidence.