

I enrolled in ENGL295 with the expectation that the class curriculum would be mostly focused on video game storytelling. My preconceived notion regarding the term “digital storytelling” was that the advantage the digital medium provides to storytelling is the added layer of interactivity. By “game-ifying” your stories, you’re able to heighten both the immersion and emotional impact of the final project as the audience plays a more active role in the depicted world.

I still believe that this is an advantage that the digital medium provides to stories, and we’ve covered projects that use that strategy throughout the semester: such as *Blackbar*. I wrote about how the game achieves this in [my blogpost review](#) of the project. To quote myself, “an active participant will be more invested in the story than a bystander. *Blackbar* understands this, and so by being frustrated by the puzzles, you better understand how frustrating censorship is in the fictional world the game depicts.”

The error in my thinking was believing that that was the **only** advantage the digital medium provides. Initially, I was confused by projects such as *Morning 0*, a project where the interactivity is limited to changing the braiding pattern and nothing else. The audience has no active role in the story, or the rate at which the story is told. I couldn’t see how the digital medium enhanced the story being told, and so I couldn’t understand what the difference would’ve been had the text been printed out on a piece of paper and read to the audience at the same rate the website prints at.

I now feel like I understand the project a little better. *Morning 0* does not use the digital medium to revolutionize the way stories are told, but rather to enhance the analog medium. For example, *Morning 0* features a three way conversation, where the characters Milli, Nontsi, and Mama are all speaking to each other. If this was depicted in an analog format (book, screenplay, ect.), a lot of space on the pages would be dedicated to clearly identifying who is currently speaking. *Morning 0* uses the digital medium to hide this information and only show it once the consumer hovers over a piece of text. The same effect is achieved, as the audience will clearly understand who is speaking, but *Morning 0* does it in a far more elegant and aesthetically pleasing way. The digital medium also presents a new level of accessibility that is impossible to achieve with analog content. Books cost money and require some effort to obtain, but I can access *Morning 0* with a click of a button for free.

All these things show how *Morning 0* uses the digital medium to make itself objectively better than if it was told in an analog format, which is something that I had not previously considered prior to this class. I still prefer projects that use digital technology to transform their story into something unique and exclusive to the digital world, and there are times where I wished projects like *Morning 0* pushed a little bit farther with their levels of interactivity, but I have a newfound understanding and appreciation for what those projects have to offer.

My projects have always been made with interactivity in mind. My first Twine project: *Five Minutes to Freedom* is a good example of this. It’s a game where you play as a scientist trying to escape a lab before succumbing to a poisonous gas that will kill you in 5 minutes. I enjoyed building the game, but I’m a little disappointed with how it came out. I think it succeeds as a

video-game, but fails as a digital story. The difference between *Five Minutes to Freedom* and *Blackbar* is that *Blackbar*, and interactive projects like it, have a core idea behind them: an idea that is symbiotically reflected in both the story and gameplay. I can't identify what that idea is in *Five Minutes to Freedom*, other than possibly "fun". I was proud of my next project, *Station 17*, because I feel like it does have a core idea behind it: it's a celebration of the game *Moirai*, and comments on the ethics of player decision making in games. I talk a lot more about *Station 17* in my [artistic statement for the project](#). I think this shows that I've progressed as a digital storyteller, which I'm proud of.

There's one more thing I've learned about myself and how I approach my projects. I'm a programmer at heart, and so I get most excited about the projects where I overcome a new technical challenge. For *Five Minutes to Freedom*, this challenge was learning how to use Twine, and for *Station 17*, this was learning how to set up a dynamic backend as well as trying to get pre-rendered 3D graphics into Twine. I have yet to decide if this is a blessing or a curse. The upside is that I always feel like my projects are unique; each one of my projects tries something different and so it stands out as a unique entry into my portfolio. The downside is that I feel a lack of motivation when attempting to build a simpler project. As I've discussed above, sometimes it's the simplest projects like *Morning 0* that end up being something great. I want to continue to keep track of this to see if it's something to overcome or something to embrace.

I've learned a lot about digital storytelling and about myself throughout this course. I want to continue down this road of storytelling and self-discovery in the future.