

# Crit 1: Reflective Document 1

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### “Music Agency in Video Games”

Group Members (Students)

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This is the first reflection of our project, written for the first critical point/submission. This document serves to give some reflective thoughts from the two of us on the early development of our project. Specifically the conceptualization of the game, as well as notes on the early development of game systems and assets.

We were asked to implement a **Music Customization System (M.C.S.)** within a game for our 4th year project, and after some feedback - we chose to work on a **small open-world game**. This was decided for multiple reasons. Namely, it gives us scalability of game-scope as well as a familiar framework for video-games that most players will recognize. This recognition is key, so that the player can mentally compare our game with other games of a similar genre. This comparison will highlight the main difference between our game, and others (the M.C.S.) and players will be able to more easily reflect on how the M.C.S. impacts their enjoyment of the game and how important “Music Agency in Video Games” are to them. More details on what we would like to achieve (like planned level design, narrative, UI, etc.) is discussed in our CRIT 1 Presentation.

So far, we have created the music selection system (UI and functionality) for the M.C.S., the player character concept and 3D prototype model, first draft of the default music as well as a prototype of the third-person view and ‘paper’ prototype world map. More of this is discussed in the recorded presentation.

It is very early on in the development, however **some challenges we've faced** so far include managing the pressure of a project with a larger scope than we've worked on before, but to mitigate that feeling of anxiety, we chose to create an open-world game which has a scalable scope. Consequently, we should have a polished product after our 800 hours and that fact eases our anxiety. Other challenges come with the territory of working on genres and systems we've not interacted with as designers yet, such as *open-world quest design* or the *3rd person over the shoulder camera*. These challenges are very small in the grand scheme of things, since all it takes is a few hours of research to troubleshoot a problem.

"For example: the 3rd person camera was a daunting idea at first, but when I found unity documentation and online tutorials about Cinemachine cameras in Unity, everything just clicked together. Additionally, since we're a group of 2, we struggled to get our presentation to 10 minutes, so we hope 15 minutes is okay." - *Jean-Francois Retief*.

"The 3D blockout of the character was initially really fragile as Blender would crash due to the many files of assets I had, once I deleted many files I was able to work a lot quicker. Another issue I faced in Blender was the turn-around of the character, the side profile was not aligned correctly which gave me an issue with scaling the arms. I will need to detach the arms of the model now and T-Pose the character after sculpting and before rigging in order for all the joints and bones to be aligned correctly. " - *Malakai Braam*

When discussing our **rubric of goals**, we've split the "Personal goals" into individual marks and made the "Project goals" a shared mark. This reflects how we want to improve, both as individuals (in our respective fields of expertise) and as a team that is creating an art project together. Of course, we would like feedback on these weightings and on how we split up the goals.

| Goal (Personal) Jean Francois Retief                    | Weighting |
|---|-----------|
| Further my skills in system design                      | 20%       |
| Further my skills in level/world/quest design           | 20%       |
| Learn and further my skills in Unity and game mechanics | 10%       |
| Total   | 50%       |

  

| Goal (Personal) Malakai Braam                                   | Weighting |
|---|-----------|
| Further my skills in 3D character/asset design                  | 25%       |
| Further my skills in cut scene animation                        | 15%       |
| Learn and further my skills in Ableton and audio implementation | 10%       |
| Total   | 50%       |

  

| Goal (Project) Shared Mark                                       | Weighting |
|--|-----------|
| Provide supervisor with suitable <b>research</b> game example    | 15%       |
| Have a fully playable <b>build</b> of small 3D open-world game   | 25%       |
| Have a fully working Music Customization <b>mechanic</b> in-game | 10%       |
| Total  | 50%       |

Figure 1: First Draft of Rubric of Goals (Shared Project mark, Separate Personal mark)

“In my engineering degree, I was exposed to more software development and coding courses than my art-degree counterparts in the Digital Arts field. This is the reason why I am the lead coder and system designer. ***I will make the game work, while Malakai will make the game good*** (with his animation, sound design and visual assets). My main personal goal is to improve as a game designer (in terms of the aforementioned goals). So, hopefully, the end product will be significantly better than my previous projects” - *Jean-Francois Retief*.

“As I have a deep passion for 3D modelling and music, this past year I have tried to hone and expand on my skills in 3D modelling in our other projects and assignments thus far. I believe that with the focus I have put on expanding this skill, I will be able to add the overall style, assets and sound for this project to the best of my ability. ***While Jean-Francois will ultimately lead making systems work, my main goal will be to reflect the themes of the narrative along with the goal of the game through the animations, assets and sound.***” - *Malakai Braam*.

Our **process** thus far in the planning and pre-production phase of development, is to constantly bounce ideas off of one another, while working on the Expression of Interest and the CRIT 1 presentation. As for our process going forward into semester 2 and the full-production phase of development is to have more meetups (both online and in-person) and have a more structured schedule for each week of development. As individuals, we will split off to work on our respective sections of the game and come together to merge our work during the meetups.

**The skills we need** to develop this game are the very same skills mentioned above in Figure 1 as well as in the CRIT 1 Presentation.

“I will use my existing skills that I obtained during my engineering degree’s software development courses as well as previous years of Game Design, when creating the various systems in the game. One of the reasons I wanted to work on this type of game, is that I would like to improve upon my level design skills, specifically in the open-world genre, i.e. I would like to get experience with world design and quest design. I also just want to improve my general game design skills with a larger scale project and get many more hours of experience with coding and the Unity Editor. I have made a lot of progress over the last few years at WITS as a game designer/developer, but I see this project as a big opportunity to make a big leap in quality of my work due to the bigger than usual time-frame we have for this project. I have never been this excited to work on a game, and I can’t wait to continue with this project.” - *Jean-Francois Retief*

“I will need to use my current knowledge of 3D Asset Development in Blender, my Unity knowledge of C# and the software to assist Jean-Francois in debugging and importing the assets and sounds, and my music theory knowledge to assist me in creating the various assets and environments and the audio tracks that will be used within the game. All of the skills mentioned are skills that I would like to become incredibly proficient in. Which is why for my 4th year in Digital Arts, I have chosen to focus on them. I see this project as an opportunity to grow my skills in character and narrative design as my past projects I have worked on the set design and animation around the characters. I also see this as an opportunity to use my skills as a musician in a new way.” - *Malakai Braam*

We will **manage this project** similar to how we've done in the past, namely weekly meetings (online and/or in-person) to discuss progress and plans, as well as to actually work on sections of the project together. Sometimes all members of the team need to talk to each other while implementing something new, to ensure the merges well with each other's work. In semester 2, we will also try to implement set schedules for meetings and time to work on the project itself, treating this project similar to a regular course in our week's timetable.

In terms of the **themes** we will tackle in this project, we initially focused on the mechanical and visuals of the game while planning, due to the nature of this project. However, after coming up with a story outline, we settled in the theme of EMPATHY. The playable character, being a robot, starts out with little empathy and speaks in a robotic manner. However as the story continues, the robot starts to develop empathy as it helps a human to survive. Its speech patterns will slowly change to demonstrate this to the player. The backstory of the game, as well as the antagonist, tackles how the lack of empathy causes pain and destruction.



#### Side Quest 2: "Getting the 8.A.N.D back together"

In this quest you go and talk to other robots with names that start and end with the number 8. Each robot will like a different genre of music that the game offers. (Maybe you have to switch the music settings to match their preferences). Once 808 completes this journey, all of these band members will hang out at the barn where Kate stays.

#### Side Quest 3: "A real life human"

In this quest, you find a robot, 113, claiming to have found a 'real life human' in a crater near the town. The robot goes on to claim that it helped this human and hid them away somewhere in town. Upon investigating this 'human', 808 finds a scarecrow and 113 gets killed by law enforcement for harbouring a human.

#### Side Quest 4: "The butler-bot did it - a parable"

The butler-bot, 427, is no longer at the mansion, and needs your help (unaware that 808 is the defective bot that rescued a human). This quest is inspired by the game "The Stanley Parable" since it will feature some player choice and the butler will fulfil the role of the narrator that the player listens to or ignores.

The player will get to a set of two open doors, and the butler will tell the player to go through the door on the left. If the player goes through the left door, the butler will be happy and

*Figures 2 & 3: Images taken from the Quest/Narrative Design Document*

Our rationale for doing this project is simple - we were in the unique situation of being prescribed a system to implement, while working closely with our research supervisor. However, despite having some of the project be requested, we still have an enormous amount of creative freedom when it comes to the game itself. We are working within a genre we both enjoy, and can't wait to implement. We can both focus on aspects of Game Design we're both good at, and get better at them (as mentioned above). Why are we working on this project? - Because we think it's fun and a good learning opportunity.

Our project situates us as artists/thinkers by allowing us to split the workload into sections so that both members are working on their speciality. As mentioned in the presentation, we are an **Animation student** and an **Engineering student**. Because of our two very different backgrounds at this university, the creative process gives way to two very different schools of thought that can clash or merge in interesting ways. This interdisciplinary blend of art and technology, creativity and science, presentation and function - it is what Digital Art and video games are all about. And then adding music creation to the equation, that will just make the next few months more fun.

“As an engineering student, I tend to think of things in a more systematic / cause-effect way. I see many parts of game design as IF-THENs and how to code my way from the ‘*IF-ideas*’ to the ‘*THEN-consequences*’ of said ideas or mechanics or systems or... etc. I also tend to think of mechanics or game systems first when working alone - so having a BA student as my team member - is invaluable to creating a cool game - not just a cool *tech-demo*.” - *Jean-Francois Retief*

“Jean-Francois always pulls me out of this constant loop that I have with my creations and art where I end up over-analysing and overcompensating. I will try to do the most intricate details and maybe add too much to either the songs and or the assets and I will be reminded about its overall function rather than aesthetic, which I think is a great skill to learn. Even when I had coded a function in a previous game using Arrays, Jean-Francois allowed me to see a longer yet more efficient way to get the system to work without arrays. I believe having a logical perspective as well as an aesthetic and design perspective for this game will allow us to have an aesthetically pleasing game with intricate and functioning systems to aid the overall themes, mechanics and narrative of the game.” - *Malakai Braam*

In conclusion, the process thus far, in these early planning stages of the project, has been exciting. We keep bouncing ideas off of each other, to see what sticks, and what we think would be doable in the given timeframe, keeping each other from over-scoping. We think this will likely be our best game yet, and thus will be the “main attraction,” so-to-speak, in our respective portfolios to show off for whatever comes next - whether that be moving into the industry, or more academics.

**[1971 words]**