

CSCI 321, Game Journal Specifications

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- Your game journal is a record of what games you played, and what you learned from them.
- You should record entries in your journal as soon as possible after playing games, and not leave them off to the last minute.
- You are required to play at least two hours a week.
- Include a word count at the top of every submission. Each weekly journal entry must have at least 250 words.
- Game journals should be simple text files (preferred for size and loading speed), not word or pdf.
- You should not record mere mechanics and trivia about the game, but insight and analysis about what makes playing it a good or bad experience. Consult the notes on evaluating games, also on the website, for parameters to consider in evaluating games. Just as examples, consider questions like the following:
 - What technique did you use to analyze your experience?
 - What experience were the game designers trying for? How well did they achieve it?
 - How did the game pique your interest?
 - How well were each of the four elements (aesthetics, mechanics, technology and story) developed in the game? How good was the balance?
 - Was there a theme? Was it reinforced in every element?
 - What was the target audience for the game? How well did the game suit it?
 - What was your dominant emotion while playing? How was it brought about?
 - Does the game keep your interest for a long time? How?
 - Analyze the game's mechanics—could they have been improved? How?
 - Were various elements balanced?
 - Were the puzzles fair?

Example game journal I wrote a few years ago:

Game Journal, Geoffrey Matthews

Entry: Monday, Jan 9, 2012 Word count: 730 words.

Got a new smartphone last week, and so I spent some time over the weekend playing some casual games that come free with the phone.

BEJEWELED 2: Casual game. Played 30 minutes, approximately 1:00-1:30pm Saturday.

Demo version comes with phone, small price for full version (probably not worth it).

This game has a very relaxed feel, searching for three-in-a-row patterns with no time pressure (standard version), is very relaxing. The glowing, sparkling, jewels give the game a rich, luxurious feeling, which goes well with the relaxing feel. The music is particularly annoying--it is some kind of funky, disco-feel trash, completely jarring with the rich and relaxed look and feel of the game. One feature I found annoying, and

again clashing with the "relaxation" feel, is the "hint" that pops up if you take too long looking for a match without doing anything. I resent the pressure to find a match before the hint comes up, and after the hint comes up I feel insulted--"Look you idiot, move THIS one." It's the same feeling you get if someone comes up to your crossword puzzle or sudoku and tells you where to fill something in--you're not grateful for the help, you resent it. I suppose you could turn off the hint somewhere in the preferences, but given that the game is supposed to be a casual game you should not have to spend time configuring it. Perhaps if it was more obvious how to turn the feature off. Casual games like this should not warrant reading anything to figure out. You open it, you play it, you go do something else.

ANGRY BIRDS: Free download. Played 2 hours or more, maybe 2:00-4:00pm or so. Free download version has annoying popup ads, but they are mostly ignorable. This game is genuinely addicting--why? For one thing, the pure joy in the random destruction is excellent. For another, the "odds" of winning with only moderate skill seem to be about what they are in Solitaire--maybe 1 one 5 tries? This seems to be about right to keep you playing, not too frustrating, not too easy. For another thing, the theme and aesthetics are charming. The birds and the pigs make cute noises as a constant running commentary and don't get annoying in the first hour or two (I particularly like the way the pigs laugh at you when you lose). Another thing is the many different ways to win--the physics is such that very unpredictable things happen (kind of an anti-tetris), and you can struggle to win a level for some time, and then when you finally win on a fluke you have two or three birds left over. This gives it a constant surprise factor, wanting to see what happens next. The skill component is somewhat disappointing. The slightest deviation in firing the birds makes for radically different outcomes, and so there is a large degree of chance in the game which can get frustrating in some levels. I finally gave up on a level in which (it seemed) the only way to win was to fire birds with great precision over and over. This seemed to make the level "too hard", and made me resent the fact that all other levels beyond (possibly some very enjoyable ones) were blocked until I played this one over and over, doing essentially the same thing every time, until I got the aiming "just exactly right". I quit after trying this level for a while. When I came back to play it again the next day, I tried this level a couple of times, but gave up again and went back to replay some of the solved levels. That was way more fun than the frustrating "skill" level. This is NOT a game of skill--but it could be if there was a better way of getting feedback on your aiming. Perhaps they could add a "predictor" arc that showed you where the bird would go when you let go. Right now its mostly a guess. That does enhance the level of surprise and joy in random destruction, but then they should not put in levels with required skill components. All levels should be defeatable by "luck" and moderate skill after a few dozen tries. The levels before this one seemed to follow that model.