Kari Green
EECS 494
Justification Document

BASIC INFO:
Title – Elephant Escape

CREATIVE PROCESS:
My initial concept was a 2D platform game where an elephant mom tries to rescue her baby that is locked in a cage somewhere in the level. The elephant would get through the level by jumping on clouds and knocking down trees to create bridges.
I decided on this concept because I love elephants and I wanted to make a game about them. I also wanted to make a game that was cute and non-violent that my little cousins could play. I decided that a puzzle game would best accomplish this.

DEVELOPMENT AND PLAYTESTING:
I began making the game on Friday, February 3, 2017 and by Monday was ready to start receiving feedback. This first 'game' to playtest included the elephant character, a simple jump mechanic, the cloud, a key, and the baby elephant in the cage.
I received some fantastic feedback from people in class to help me improve my game. There were two notable suggestions that I subsequently implemented. The first was to allow the player more control over the jump (the upward velocity halts when the player lifts up from the spacebar). The second was to have the elephant interact with the trees more than simply knocking them over; this inspired the mechanic where the elephant is able to water the trees to make them grow. I took this feedback and produced some improvements to the game.

By Wednesday, February 8, I was prepared for another round of testing. At this point, the game now included 3 levels, the first having again, the simple jump mechanic and a cloud; the second incorporating a tree and a watering hole, instructing the player how to deal with this; and the third, a puzzle level with many trees and clouds.
I received feedback from my classmates and a few friends. Again, suggestions of my play-testers helped me to continue to improve my game.   The first new feature this round was to allow the player to zoom the camera in and out so that the player has better control over their field of vision; I added this because play-testers were alarmed that they could not always see where the elephant would go when jumping. The second new feature that I added was a timer to give the player a desire to do better on the levels and to encourage the player to solve the puzzle in the most efficient way; one of my friends suggested this to make the game seem more challenging. The third new feature was to allow for continuous water spraying when the X key is held down, versus one drip for each click. Adding a continuous water spray inspired me to add a new animation (the elephant lifts its trunk when spraying water) to make this more obvious to the player.

I received more feedback from friends and graders on February 12 and 13th. Play-testers were frustrated about getting stuck behind barriers without any hope of returning other than hitting a spike. To address this, I incorporated grass ledges along barriers that the player may get stuck behind. These grass ledges take time and effort to accomplish, and a wrong jump may land them in the spikes, encouraging the player to avoid getting stuck in these situations; however, they are no longer left without hope.

Some play-testers asked for more meaningful choices in the game. To address this, I also added these grass ledges to other areas (such as another barrier on level 3), that allow the player to bypass things like watering trees or giving the player access to an additional watering hole; offering a tradeoff as to what the player sees as less time and effort to accomplish the task. This is further built upon in level six, where the player is given the option to climb up a grass ledge, or simply use the spike to lose a life, but avoid having to waste the time climbing the ledges. In addition, wildfires were implemented. Wildfires are moving obstacles that can hurt the elephant. The elephant can put out the wildfire by spraying water on it, or the elephant can choose to save water and simply jump over the fire (situation permitting).

Some play-testers were confused about the elephant's jump mechanic being so floaty; to address this and help explain this, I added an animation (Dumbo style ears) to explain why the elephant can jump so lightly and be in the clouds.

How does this game differ than the initial concept?
The final version of Elephant Escape is significantly different than the original concept I had in my head. In the original concept, the game was painfully simple. I had no trees, grass ledges, water, wildfires, or really anything originally thought of that would make the game challenging.

Interacting with play-testers helped me to really consider the player's experience and I think that the player's experience was also greatly improved throughout testing/adjusting. I became aware of the player's need to control certain things (such as the zoom of the camera), the player's desire to always have a way out of sticky situations (other than suicide), and the player's need to be instructed on certain things (adding/improving helper text). I also became aware of the need for explanations of certain things that go against the players' natural intuition (like why the elephant would jump).