



Parsely games are based on the old text adventure parsers from the 1980s. In this version, a person replaces the computer, and a map and an outline of the adventure to be played replaces the software.

One person (most likely you) is the parser – this title comes from the old name for the programs running text adventures (also called parsers). It’s your job to relay the game information to the players. You will describe what the player sees, the results of the player’s actions and anything else appearing in the game. You will also keep track of the player’s location, inventory and score. Refer to yourself as “I” when talking to the player. Everyone else in the game is a player. Or more accurately, THE player – that role is shared amongst all the participants. Refer to the player as “You” during the game.

You need at least two players to play a Parsely game. There is no maximum number of players, making Parsely an ideal activity for parties, conventions and other large gatherings of geeky folk who are into this kinda thing.

How It Works

The first step is to welcome the players to the game, usually by announcing the name of the Parsely game. Once this is done, state the player’s starting location, what he sees, any objects in the area and the exits from that area to other locations. During the game, you can skip over this information once the player has traveled to it a few times.

```
Cottage
You are standing in a cottage. There is a fishing pole here. Exits are: out.
```

Each player, in turn, offers one command. A command is a one- or two-word action, usually in the form of <verb> <noun>. Go West. Climb Tree. Smell Rose. Wear Crown. Commands can be a bit more complex, such as Give Fish to Troll. If the command is acceptable, relate the results to the player:

```
> Examine pole
The Fishing Pole consists of a stick, some string and a hook.

> Take fishing pole
You now have the fishing pole.

> Exit cottage
You leave the cottage.
```

When a player issues a command, play passes to the next person in line whether or not that command was acceptable. Each person playing the game gets one turn, then play loops back to the starting player. If the player travels to a new location, tell the player the name and description of the location, notable contents and exits out, This continues until the game is won or everyone gets frustrated and goes home.

If the command is unacceptable, nonsensical or far too complex, respond with a syntax error. If the command uses the correct language but doesn’t make sense, a response might look like this:

```
> Eat fishing pole
You cant eat that!

> Go fish
You cant go that way.

> Catch fish
There are no fish here.
```

```
> Cast the fishing pole
I dont know how to cast something.

> Hello
Hi.
```

Basic Commands

The following commands are useful in most games of Parsely and are used to interact with the environment.

- **Directions:** Go, Exit, Leave, Enter, East, West, North, South, Up, Down

The player can say GO WEST or just say WEST. LEAVE or EXIT may be used while in a room with only one exit.

- **Sensory:** Look, Examine, Search,Take, Drop

LOOK is used to repeat a room’s description, contents and exits, while EXAMINE gives the player a description of a person or object.

- **Interaction:** Talk, Kill, Light, Wait, Wear, Use

The player can also TALK TO <person> ABOUT <topic>.

Special Commands

There is another set of commands that are available in every Parsely game and which are used to interact with the game itself.

Help: The HELP command lists all the special commands: Help, Inventory, Save, Load, Restore, Score, Quit

Inventory: INVENTORY gives the player a list of what he is carrying. Worn items are noted as well.

Save/Load/Restore: SAVE stores the player’s current location, inventory and status at the moment the game is saved. If the player dies, LOAD SAVE or RESTORE GAME will return the player to the save point. Clever players will save a game before doing something risky, preventing them from having to do everything over again. Players are limited to three saves per game. Whenever the player saves or loads a game, be sure to let him know how many saves are left!

Score: SCORE tells the player his current score. This is a number (usually from 0 to 100) based on inventory and accomplished goals.

Quit: QUIT quits the game.

Winning & Losing

All Parsely games have a victory condition that ends the game. Although it can be a tortuous journey to this end point, playing the game as designed should always bring the player to the end. There should never be a place where the player gets stuck and cannot continue.

Winning a Parsely game usually results in a perfect score of 100. Scoring is up to the parser and the specifics of the Parsely game played, but it’s usually there for comedic/nostalgic value.

```
> Sit on throne
You sit on the throne. The people cheer your name, welcoming you as their new king.
Congratulations! Your score is 99/100!
```

Parsely games are lost when the player dies (either due to a monster, trap or a foolish command such as KILL ME or JUMP CLIFF. When this happens, the parser should announce that the player has died and what the score at the time of death. The parser should ask if the player wishes to restart the game or load a saved game (if available).

```
> Kill me
You have died. Thanks for playing! Your score is 15/100. Would you like to load your saved game?
```

If the player dies without having a save game present, this occurs:

```
> Kill me
You have died. Thanks for playing! Your score is 15/100. Would you like to restart the game?
```

Bells & Whistles

Parsely is a puzzle game at its heart, but it’s also entertainment. Think of it like karaoke—the act is more about entertaining the crowd than singing well. As the parser, you run the show and are must both challenge and entertain the players. This is easier than you might think.

1. Be cruel, but fair. One of the great things about text adventures (and why they’re remembered so fondly) is that the puzzles were annoying but logical, the parser stupid but reliable. Do not coddle the player by allowing sloppy grammar, complex commands or jokes. Respond the way a computer would (albeit a computer with a sense of humor). If the player issues a proper command but at the wrong time, let him know with a small clue. For example, in this exchange:

```
> Marry princess
The princess will only marry royalty.
```

The player now knows that he might be able to marry the princess if he can become royalty. Compare that to this comedic exchange:

```
> Kiss princess
*slap* I’m not that kind of girl!
```

The princess lets the player know that she’s a woman of virtue. When this happens in my games, I make a slapping sound and respond as the princess. It’s funny!

2. Be loud. Chances are you’re going to play Parsely with a large group in a noisy environment. This is no time to be a wallflower. You’re going to have to SPEAK LOUDLY to be heard above the din. Now, this doesn’t mean you have to make sure the people are paying attention -- that’s on them. It just means you need to be able to be heard.

3. Be funny. Most of the humor actually comes from the player of the game. Their expectations colliding with your results generates a lot of humor. You don’t have to wink at the crowd, tell jokes or act like a clown. But stay aware of what the player says to you. If there’s any room for misunderstanding, irony or wry humor, take advantage of it. In my experience, physical gestures, funny voices and sound effects go a long way to make the game come alive as a kind of comedic performance art.

```
> Take princess
*slap* I’m not that kind of girl!
```

4. Be consistent. The hardest thing to do is to keep track of everything. The game works best when you can do it all from memory, without writing things down or consulting maps or game rules. So learn it! And when you do, be consistent in your responses to the player. Every action has a reaction, whether it’s a valid response:

```
> Take key
You now have the key.
```

A question:

```
> Use key
Use it on what?
```

A syntax error:

```
> Make a copy
I don’t know how to make things.
```

Or something funny.

```
> What does the key look like?
A key. Dummy.
```

Credits (version 1.3)

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