

Chapter 2 – formative review 30/-3/23

2 - Background, objectives & deliverables

2.1 Project Background

Games for wellbeing and mental health fall into the subcategory of serious games (or applied games). There's no single definition of a serious game, but the most used is 'Games which do not have enjoyment, entertainment, or fun as their primary purpose' (Chen & Michael, 2005).

Serious games have existed since the early days of video games, and multiple titles have reached high levels of popularity and financial success. One of the earliest examples is the Microsoft Flight Simulator franchise, the first edition of which was released in 1982. It is one of the few flight games which focuses on civil aircraft and doesn't feature combat. The 40th anniversary addition released in 2022 reported over 10 million players and is still receiving updates (Neumann, 2022). In addition to commercial success, studies have suggested that the game has 'capability to improve novice student performance in an aircraft' (Callender, et al., 2009), supporting the educational benefits of serious games.

The design of serious games specifically to improve mental health has also proven successful. A meta-analysis of ten studies into serious games for mental health suggested that they can be effective for reducing disorder-related symptoms in patients (Lau, et al., 2017).

2.2 Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to create a serious game that provides entertainment and escapism whilst simultaneously teaching the players good mental wellbeing practices. To better understand this objective and stay on task throughout development, it has been broken down into smaller, measurable objectives as follows.

- Create a research document on mental health practises and therapeutic techniques informed by psychology. Write up at least 3 techniques that could be applied to the project by February so they can be referenced in the writing portion of development.
- Write at least one character dialogue with a full storyline that they player can interact with. Complete this by 13th February so it can be sent out as a standalone text game to at least 5 testers for early feedback.
- Write at least 5 minutes' worth of dialogue for the player to read by the completion of the project. Measure this by entering the wordcount into wordstotime.com.
- Make a slice of gameplay that can run from start to end without any major errors or bugs (for example, software doesn't crash, players can move around and access the storyline as expected).

2.3 Deliverables

The deliverables for this project include both the working build of the game and the research that informs it.

The working game will be delivered as an executable which can be played on a PC with mouse and keyboard/keyboard only. The game will be a vertical slice of the game, with limited characters and storyline to interact with, with the intention that it can be built upon and expanded at a later point. All art assets featured will be original, and copies of the original PSD files and PNG files will be saved in a folder in the submission folder.

Alongside the game itself, two small scale research documents will be delivered. These will inform the game, and act as an educational resource available for others. One will detail the steps and methods employed in the development of a serious game, whilst the other will provide a quick reference guide to different mental practises and habits encouraged in therapy.