What is Writers' Bloc?

Writers' Bloc is a collaborative storytelling game in which 4-8 players work together to create a story. Inspired by research in crowdsourcing, *Writers' Bloc* provides players the first sentence and the last sentence of a story, prompting them to fill in what happens in between.

How to Play

The game host creates a new game, choosing to either create his own starting and ending sentences or letting the server provide randomly chosen pre-written sentences. The host can also designate how many turns the game will last. Players waiting to join a game can view the starting and ending sentences, allowing them to choose a game to join that interests them.

Each turn, one sentence is chosen to add to the story. A game turn is divided into two phases: the writing phase and the voting phase. During the writing phase, players have 90 seconds to write what they believe the next sentence of the story should be. For example, on the first turn: all players will be tasked with writing the second sentence of the story, while on the second turn they write the third sentence, and so forth. Players can choose to submit early by pressing the "Submit" button. The writing phase ends once all players have submitted or ninety seconds have elapsed, whichever comes first. If ninety seconds pass, all non-submitted entries are automatically submitted. At the end of the writing phase, each player's submission is sent to the server, compiled into a ballot with entries in randomized orders, and sent back to all players to begin the voting phase.

During the voting phase, players have 60 seconds to vote for the one entry that they believe should be used in the story. Players are not able to vote for their own submission. After

all players have selected a sentence or sixty seconds pass (whichever comes first), the results of the vote are shown. Players receive one point for each player that voted for their submission, one bonus point if their sentence obtains the second-most votes, and three bonus points if their sentence earns the most votes, and the winning sentence is added to the story. If a player does not vote during the voting phase, they cannot earn any points that turn (although their sentence could still be added to the story). In the event of a tie for second-most votes, all tied players receive the one point bonus. In the event of a tie for most votes, all tied players receive two bonus points, and one of the tied submissions is randomly selected to be added to the story.

Gameplay lasts for the number of turns specified by the host at the beginning of the game. The final turn of the game determines the title of the story. This turn functions identically to all other rounds, except that all point rewards are doubled. The player with the most points at the end of the final round wins the game, and is awarded the title of *First Author*! The players' names are listed below the title of the story, in descending order of player scores. The resultant story may be shared to social media sites such as Facebook, or simply copied and pasted.

Design Philosophies

The game, Writers' Bloc, is meant to evoke a sense of collaboration. However, we acknowledge that players want to be rewarded for being an active contributor to their stories. Thus, we envision Writers' Bloc as a primarily collaborative game with competitive elements. Many rules exist as a means of preventing players from gaming the vote system to increase the chances of their sentence winning. For instance, players are forced to vote for another player's sentence, and are penalized for not voting at all. In addition, all players are acknowledged in the list of authors at the end of the game. A player cannot definitively win *Writer's Bloc.* While players certainly want to be listed as the first author, we believe they are less likely to game the

system when the focus of the game is pulled away from competitiveness and the concept of winning.

Implementation Plan

  Writer's Bloc was originally conceived as a Facebook application, with a prototype independently developed by a group member before this semester, using Google App Engine. With a perceived decline in customer satisfaction with Facebook, as well as issues with a relative lack of support for Google App Engine, we have decided to start from scratch, creating a standalone web app, independent of Facebook. As our group members are fairly inexperienced with web app development, we have chosen Meteor as our framework, due to its active support and accessibility to new developers. Early development will focus on learning Meteor, as well as refining our prototype to more loyally represent the envisioned final product.