The original idea

My initial idea was to create an interactive game that followed a user as they set up a social media account and started talking to someone they didn't really know. The experience was meant to feel familiar, like how people normally use social media, so nothing seemed risky at first.

I wanted the scenario to reflect common online risks that happen in everyday digital spaces, especially on social media. Generative AI plays a big role in this, as it makes it extremely easy to create convincing fake profiles. In the game, Alex's profile was made up using AI-generated images and details to show how someone can pose as a real person without proper identification and still appear believable.

As the interaction continued, the user began chatting with Alex, who shared mutual friends with them. This was intentional, as people tend to trust others more when they appear socially connected. Through different choices in the conversation, the user had to decide what to share and how to respond, which showed how small, normal decisions can slowly lead to issues like manipulation.

Rather than explaining everything upfront, the experience let users learn as they went. Short interactive questions were included to help users think back on earlier situations, and simple visual cues like green ticks were used to acknowledge safer choices. This kept the experience engaging without making it feel like a lesson, while still reinforcing awareness around online safety.

Elements

Minigame (texting)

The first part of my experience opens with a texting activity using a fake profile, Alexandra. I wanted to immediately draw users in with a fun, interactive scenario where they could select different reply options and see Alexandra respond accordingly. Even when users chose the "correct" option by pushing her away, I designed Alexandra to remain persistent and continue suggesting things like meeting up. This was intentional, as it reflects how, in real-life situations, perpetrators often continue to push boundaries rather than backing off immediately.

This allowed users to have the autonomy to make their own decisions while experiencing the consequences of those choices in a simulated environment.

Quiz/Testing retention

I tested retention through short "quizzes", but made a conscious decision not to use multiple-choice questions, as that felt like it defeated the purpose of the experience. Instead, I wanted these moments to feel less like an assessment and more like a quick self-check, encouraging users to actively think about what they had just learned rather than simply selecting an obvious answer. This helped reinforce understanding while keeping the experience engaging and low pressure.

Mini Lesson

I wanted to introduce bite-sized content without making the experience feel like a formal lesson where information was being directly taught or explained. To achieve this, I decided to use flip cards, similar to how flashcards are used when studying, with a short title on the front and more detailed information on the back.

Gamification

I took inspiration from simple matching activities commonly found in children's workbooks, where users match one item to another in a clear and straightforward way.

I also noticed that Brightspace uses a similar matching format, but from experience, I found dragging and rearranging items could sometimes feel sticky or frustrating, especially when using a trackpad.

To avoid this, I chose a simpler interaction where users click an item on the left and then select the matching response on the right. This approach kept the interaction intuitive and reduced unnecessary friction, allowing users to focus on choosing the appropriate responses rather than struggling with the game itself.

This constraint was designed to reflect how real conversations unfold. By requiring the red flag to be selected first, the interaction reinforces cause-and-effect thinking and ensures users recognise a warning sign before deciding how to respond. This makes the scenario feel more logical while encouraging deliberate rather than random choices.

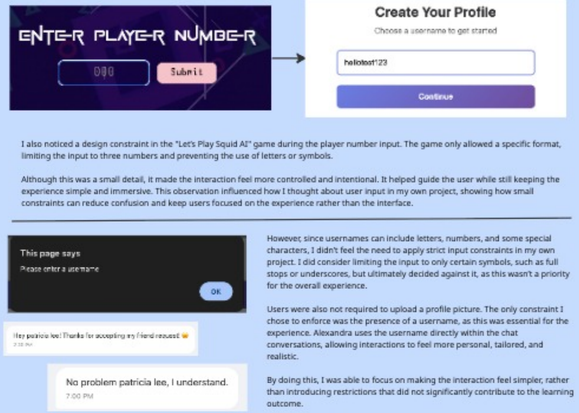
Inspiration

I took inspiration from one of the seniors works titled "Let's Play Squid AI", where users were asked to take an image enter a player number, similar to how contestants are identified in Squid Game.

Even though it was a small interaction, it made the experience feel more personal and immersive, as it encouraged users to see themselves as part of the scenario rather than just an observer.

I applied this idea by framing my experience like the setup of a real social media account. By asking users to "customise" their profile at the start, I thought the interaction would feel more realistic and relatable. This helped users ease into the experience and made the later scenarios feel closer to real online situations, rather than completely fictional.

For the profile picture, I chose a circular frame so the interaction felt intuitive, as this is how profile images usually appear on social media. It also allowed users to centre themselves naturally when selecting or cropping their image.



I also noticed a design constraint in the "Let's Play Squid AI" game during the player number input. The game only allowed a specific format, limiting the input to three numbers and preventing the use of letters or symbols.

Although this was a small detail, it made the interaction feel more controlled and intentional. It helped guide the user while still keeping the experience simple and immersive. This observation influenced how I thought about user input in my own project, showing how small constraints can reduce confusion and keep users focused on the experience rather than the interface.

However, since usernames can include letters, numbers, and some special characters, I didn't feel the need to apply strict input constraints in my own project. I did consider limiting the input to only certain symbols, such as full stops or underscores, but ultimately decided against it, as this wasn't a priority for the overall experience.

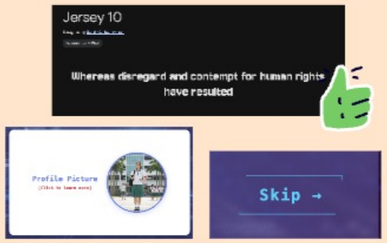
Users were also not required to upload a profile picture. The only constraint I chose to enforce was the presence of a username, as this was essential for the experience. Alexandra uses the username directly within the chat conversations, allowing interactions to feel more personal, tailored, and realistic.

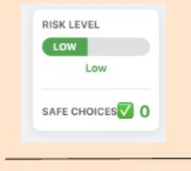
By doing this, I was able to focus on making the interaction feel simpler, rather than introducing restrictions that did not significantly contribute to the learning outcome.

Design Rationale

When considering typography for my design, I initially wanted to use a pixel-style font to match the overall aesthetic. However, I quickly realised that using a pixel font for longer paragraphs made the text difficult to read.

I explored several pixel fonts on Google Fonts and found that some were overly blocky, which made even short words hard to read. As a result, I chose Jersey 10, as it was more legible while still fitting the pixel-inspired style. I also decided to limit the use of the pixel font to headers and key UI elements, such as the front of the flip cards, Byte's name tag, and the skip button. For larger bodies of text, I avoided using the pixel font altogether to prioritise readability and ensure a more comfortable reading experience.





I decided to include a risk meter at the top left of the screen so users could track their progress and see, in real time, how their choices were affecting the outcome. I didn't want users to have to wait until the end of the game or experience to understand whether they were making the right decisions. By providing instant feedback, the risk meter helps users reflect on their choices as they play, reinforces learning moments, and keeps them more engaged throughout the experience.

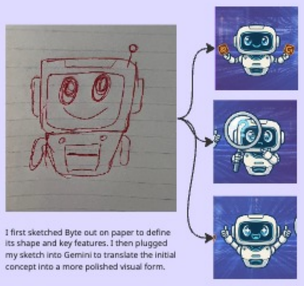
I chose to make the final section of the experience non-skippable, as it provides closure and reinforces the learning outcomes from the choices users made earlier. This ensured that users reflected on their actions rather than moving on too quickly.

Rather than only giving users a score at the end of the activity, I decided to build instant gratification directly into the experience whenever users made the correct choices. This allowed users to keep track of their progress in real time and better understand how their decisions were affecting the outcome. By providing immediate reinforcement, the activity felt more engaging and rewarding, which helped incentivise users to stay attentive and make more thoughtful choices throughout the experience.

When considering feedback within the activity, I wanted to make interactions as obvious and clear as possible. For example, instead of only showing a tick when a user selected an option, I designed the box to slightly shrink in size and slightly grey out once it was selected.

This provided a stronger visual cue that the action had been registered. Personally, I find interactions clearer when there is more immediate feedback, similar to how buttons often change appearance when hovered over. This approach helped make selections feel more responsive and reduced uncertainty for users.

The use of a mascot (Byte)



I first sketched Byte out on paper to define its shape and key features. I then plugged my sketch into Gemini to translate the initial concept into a more polished visual form.

Prompted Gemini to generate various expressions

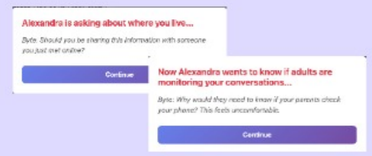
Why Byte

Byte is designed as a cute robot character. When exploring different visual directions, I realised that generating human characters with consistent features and expressions could become difficult and unpredictable, especially when repeatedly prompting AI. Choosing a robot helped avoid these inconsistencies while still allowing for a wide range of expressive emotions through the face (screen of the robot).

Beyond practical considerations, the robot form also felt conceptually appropriate. Byte is meant to exist as a figment of the social media space and something that belongs within the app itself rather than the real world. As a non-human character, Byte can guide, and more importantly interrupt/comment on interactions without feeling intrusive.

Especially when navigating environments like social media, guidance plays a crucial role in shaping how users interpret and respond to what they encounter. Similar to how people are influenced by their friends and the people around them. Byte is designed to take on the role of a trusted companion, much like said friend, who walks the user through different stages of the experience, offering timely guidance and reflection.

Byte in Action



Rather than presenting advice in a detached or instructional manner, Byte appears organically throughout the journey. For instance, during moments of heightened tension within a chat conversation, Byte intervenes through short cutscenes to pause the interaction and provide perspective, prompting users to reconsider their assumptions and be careful with their next choice.

Beyond these moments, Byte also functions as a narrative anchor between the activities, lessons, and minigames, helping to contextualise each segment and maintain continuity across the experience. I went with this approach as I felt it allows for guidance to feel more natural and embedded reinforcing learning through subtle interaction rather than direct instruction right away.

Challenges I Faced

As mentioned in my user testing feedback, it was not obvious enough that Byte was speaking during the cutscenes in the text activity. To address this, I initially wanted to overlay Byte on the screen to make it clearer that the dialogue was coming from him. However, because my project was designed in a separate file (not yet uploaded onto the iframe), loading it into the iframe caused layout issues, and the overlay ended up covering parts of the pop-up. Additionally, since the bottom of the Byte icon was flat, it did not align well across pop-ups with different widths, which made the layout look awkward.

Instead of keeping Byte as a small floating icon, I decided to make him larger and flush to the bottom of the screen. This turned out to be a win–win situation. Not only did it solve the alignment and layout issues, but it also made it far more obvious that Byte was speaking, as the character presence was much stronger overall. What initially felt like a technical setback ended up being a blessing in disguise that improved both clarity and the overall design of the screen.

Another challenge I faced was finding alternatives to traditional multiple-choice questions for the gamification aspect of the experience. While reviewing past projects, I noticed that many relied heavily on MCQs to test user knowledge, but this felt too much like a test to me. I wanted the experience to feel less formal and evaluative, and more interactive and engaging. To achieve this, I integrated three different interaction types: a matching game, a drag-and-drop activity, and a short, quick check where users selected and submitted their answers. These interactions helped test users' understanding in a more playful and natural way, while still reinforcing key learning points.

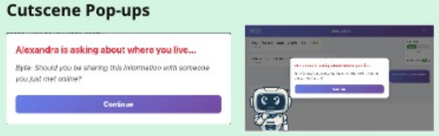
User Tester findings

To improve my project, I ran a few user testing sessions to see how people actually interacted with the design. Hearing their thoughts and watching how they interacted with it helped me understand what was working and what wasn't. The feedback I gathered was used to refine the design, reduce friction, and make the overall experience feel smoother and more engaging. User testing was especially helpful in highlighting areas where users felt confused, slowed down, or lost interest. These insights allowed me to make more thoughtful changes where needed, ensuring the final experience felt clearer, and more enjoyable.

Flipcards

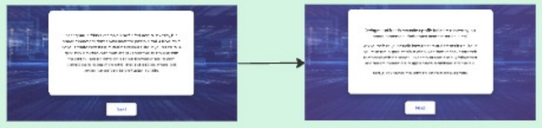
One key piece of feedback was that the "click to learn more" prompt on my flip cards was not obvious enough. Many users found it easier to simply click "next" without realising they could flip the cards to access more information. To address this, I changed the prompt colour from a light grey to a more attention-grabbing red and added a square bracket to frame the text, making it stand out more clearly as an interactive element. This helped signal to users that the cards were clickable.

Cutscene Pop-ups



Another change I made was adding an image of Byte into the cutscenes of the text activity. Byte was designed to offer perspective and guidance during these moments, but during testing, many users did not realise that Byte was the one speaking, even though the dialogue was labelled "Byte: comment." To address this, I added an overlay of Byte in a thinking pose within the cutscene pop-up. This visual cue draws more attention to the content and makes it immediately clear that the message is coming from Byte, helping users better understand the role Byte plays in the experience.

Flipcards Paragraphing



One key piece of feedback was that the "click to learn more" prompt on my flip cards was not obvious enough. Many users found it easier to simply click "next" without realising they could flip the cards to access more information. To address this, I changed the prompt colour from a light grey to a more attention-grabbing red and added a square bracket to frame the text, making it stand out more clearly as an interactive element. This helped signal to users that the cards were clickable.

Social Media Page Layout

The original social media profile was optimised for vertical scrolling, so the posts were designed in a landscape format. However, during user testing, I received feedback that the images were difficult to see clearly at a glance. Users felt they had to spend more time examining each post to understand the content, as they needed to click to see the full post. Based on this feedback, I decided to change the images to a square format so they would be easier to view quickly. I took inspiration from Instagram, where posts are organised in a grid layout, allowing users to see all content at a glance. This change improved visibility, made the profile feel more familiar (as it was similar to an existing apps layout), and helped users engage with the content more intuitively. (e.g click to enlarge and see caption etc).