

Process & Decision Documentation

Project/Assignment Decisions

A key decision in this project was to transform the professor's provided example code from a simple win/lose state machine into a life simulation–style interactive narrative. Rather than building a single linear story, I chose to design the game around branching life phases (education, career, relationships, housing, family, and death), allowing the player's choices and stats to meaningfully affect outcomes.

Another important decision was to separate customization, story progression, and endings into distinct game states and files. This helped manage complexity and supported the assignment requirement of unfolding an interactive story across multiple states, while keeping the logic readable and debuggable.

Finally, I decided to gate certain story options behind stat thresholds (e.g., intelligence for university, charisma for relationships). This reinforced player agency and ensured that stats meaningfully influenced narrative paths rather than acting as cosmetic values.

Side Quests and A4 (Individual Work)

One significant change I made was shifting the game from a general life decision flow to a branching decision tree driven by player stats, where choices unlock or lock paths and lead to different life outcomes. I made this change to better align with the side quest requirement and to ensure the player's stats meaningfully shaped the narrative. As a result, the game now ends with multiple distinct life endings rather than a single shared outcome.

Goal of Work Session

The primary goal of this work session was to build and stabilize a multi-phase interactive story system, including:

- Sequential life stages
- Stat-based decision locking
- Scrollable narrative presentation
- Multiple endings based on accumulated choices and stats

A secondary goal was debugging layout, spacing, and logic issues that emerged as the story grew more complex.

Tools, Resources, or Inputs Used

- GenAI tools (ChatGPT 5.2)
- Example code provided by Dr. Karen Cochrane
- p5.js documentation
- Self-playtesting
- Course assignment criteria

GenAI Documentation

If GenAI was used (keep each response as brief as possible):

Date Used: Jan 31, 2026

Tool Disclosure: ChatGPT 5.2

Purpose of Use:

- Debugging logic errors across game states
- Designing branching narrative structures
- Refining stat-based conditions and endings
- Improving UI clarity and interaction feedback
- Assisting with documentation wording and structure

Summary of Interaction: GenAI was used to help reason through complex state transitions, identify bugs related to stat resets and branching logic, and suggest structural improvements for managing narrative flow. It also assisted in refining written explanations for instructions and documentation.

Human Decision Point(s): I frequently modified or rejected GenAI suggestions when they conflicted with course structure, consist UI flaws, introduced unnecessary abstraction, or removed required functions. Narrative tone, life themes, and final story outcomes were entirely human-directed.

Integrity & Verification Note: All GenAI output was reviewed manually. Logic was verified through repeated playtesting, debugging, and comparison against assignment requirements. Narrative suggestions were adapted to align with the project topic and personal design intent.

Scope of GenAI Use: GenAI did not autonomously write the full assignment, determine final mechanics, or generate the complete narrative. All final decisions, story content, and implementation choices were made by the student.

Limitations or Misfires: GenAI occasionally oversimplified logic, removed required functions, or misunderstood multi-state dependencies. These outputs required correction and restructuring.

Summary of Process (Human + Tool)

The project evolved through repeated cycles of building, testing, breaking, and refining. As features were added—such as stat gating, scrollable story text, and branching endings—new bugs and layout issues emerged, requiring iterative debugging. GenAI supported this process, but progress depended heavily on manual testing, re-reading code, and aligning decisions with project objectives.

Decision Points & Trade-offs

One major trade-off was limiting the scope of life events to a manageable number of phases rather than simulating an entire lifetime in detail. This allowed the project to remain stable and readable while still delivering meaningful branching.

Another decision was prioritizing clarity and accessibility over visual complexity. The scrollable “web novel” format was chosen to support longer narrative text without overwhelming the player.

Verification & Judgement

Decisions were evaluated through:

- Self-playtesting with different stat distributions
- Checking whether choices are unlocked/locked correctly
- Comparing outcomes against the side quest requirements
- Reviewing assignment instructions to ensure all criteria were met

Limitations, Dead Ends, or Open Questions

Due to time and scope constraints, the current version of the game focuses on narrative progression and stat-based choice gating rather than a fully systemic life simulation. With more development time, the project could explore advanced mechanics such as actively tracking character state through decisions (for example, increasing wealth while reducing popularity), dynamically aging characters, mid-life stat decay, and emergent life events. These systems would allow long-term consequences—such as housing, family planning, or health—to be influenced by accumulated resources and past choices rather than fixed thresholds. These limitations reflect intentional design trade-offs and point toward meaningful opportunities for future expansion.

Appendix

A comprehensive appendix documenting the use of Generative AI during the development process is available via the link below.

<https://chatgpt.com/share/697fabbd-3014-8005-9d1b-9e25e89285b6>