

HONOURS PROJECT LEARNING CONTRACT

NAME

Shubh Ravishankar Gawhade

STUDENT NUMBER

2202875

PROJECT TITLE

One-Way Ride

PROJECT SUPERVISOR

Martin Zeilinger

IDENTIFY THE PROJECT BRIEF YOU ARE RESPONDING TO

Artistic Research Project ☐ Design Research Project ☒ Technical Research Project ☐
User Research Project ☐ Critical Research Project ☐

VISION STATEMENT

In no more than 200 words, outline your vision for your honours project. This should be a general overview of the research you plan to do, what you think the final work might be (e.g. game, film, animation, art portfolio etc.), and why you want to tackle this project.

I will be working on a puzzle game prototype with storytelling driving the main gameplay. This project will be inspired by the storytelling in the game "What remains of Edith Finch" and the gameplay will be inspired by other games such as "Disco Elysium", "Return of the Obra Din" and "Firewatch".

The game will be set around the 1900s - 2000s with an 3D, Top-Down art style. The story is about a mafia, his pals and how the past led him to be at the current situation.

This project is a bit ambitious compared to the other work I've done before. The final product will be a fully playable game prototype which will help my portfolio by showcasing my design and development skills which will be supported by the research put into the interplay between narrative and game design.

1. RESEARCH PREMISE

Please tell your supervisor what the premise of your research is. Write in full paragraphs to explain the core research questions, problems, challenges, or provocations of your study, linking this to your creative practice and field. How you choose to approach this will in part be shaped by the type of project you are proposing to tackle.

It is recommended that this should be outlined in no more than two pages expanding the box below.

I would like to explore the interplay between narrative and game design. How game design shapes the narrative and narrative, the game design.

Narrative design is simple in movies as compared to games because it's very linear and there is a story being told. Whereas in video games, the game must respond to the player's actions in a natural way to keep it immersive. Every player will play through the story at very different paces and the game should be able to still deliver the story consistently and must feel natural to the player. If the player isn't given enough freedom or worse, some amount of freedom is taken away, the game becomes a very boring "hand-held" experience, especially while solving puzzles. In detective games, the player is told what clues are important and what aren't, which isn't letting the player use their mind to solve the puzzle and in turn, fails to have a "eureka" moment giving the player positive feedback to keep them going.

This would also mean increasing the difficulty for the more casual gamers. They might even feel stuck and lost without a clue of what they're supposed to be doing. Finding the right balance between difficulty, pacing and fun are hard to come across. This could be solved by having difficulty modes which are the most basic and simple way of implementing this.

Another way of making sure that the player doesn't feel lost is by responding to the way the player interacts with the game. This is usually done by using natural prompts to give the player a nudge towards the objectives or help the player if they're lost. These prompts include in-game characters, sound cues, and events happening to draw the player's attention to certain locations. Another way to have fun gameplay and eliminate the hand-help experience is by using invisible choices where the payer doesn't know that his actions will affect certain elements of gameplay, but certain variables and player actions will be monitored and the game responds to it. This makes the game more dynamic and has a personalized feel.

Clara Fernández-Vara[1], an expert in adventure game analysis points out that puzzles in adventure games are frequently integrated into the narrative events, and the game story is advanced through puzzle solving, she further defines these types of puzzles as "Narrative puzzles". Using invisible choices along with having natural prompts to moderate difficulty according to the play style and using them to solve and dictate Narrative Puzzles would make a fun and immersive experience.

The games that inspire me to take such an approach and the ones I will study more are What Remains of Edith Finch, Return of the Obra Dinn, Firewatch and Disco Elysium.

2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

Please list and summarise the key sources of knowledge that you are reading as you develop your research. You should identify **a minimum of 10 sources**. These should be presented as a numbered or bulleted list, with a view to developing this reading into a full literature review for your Honours Project write up in semester two. Sources should be **authoritative sources** only, which can include relevant theory texts, practical textbooks, published research papers, R&D outputs disseminated by industry/practitioners, practitioner/professional talks, etc.

It is recommended that this should be outlined in approximately two to three pages expanding the box below. Full references for all sources are requested at the end of the proposal.

- Fernández-Vara, C. 2014a. Introduction to Game Analysis. New York, NY, USA: Routledge.
- Exploring the Role of Narrative
Puzzles in Game Storytelling DiGRA '19 - Proceedings of the 2019 DiGRA International Conference: Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo-Mix.
- Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment
Göbel, S., Malkewitz, R. and Iurgel, I. (2006) Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment Third International Conference, TIDSE 2006, Darmstadt, Germany, December 4-6, 2006, Proceedings. 1st ed. 2006.
- Storytelling for Interactive Digital Media and Video Games
Zeman, N. B., & ProQuest. (2017). Storytelling for interactive digital media and video games. Taylor & Francis.
- Narrative Game Mechanics Teun Dubbelman
Badoni, Pankaj & Katal, Avita & Reddy, M. & Bhargava, Mudit. (2022). Graphics vs Gameplay: A Comparative Analysis in Gaming. 1-8.
10.1109/CONIT55038.2022.9847843.
- The Art of Game Design
Schell, J. (2019). The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses, Third Edition (3rd ed.). A K Peters/CRC Press.
- Game Maker's Toolkit - The Power of Invisible Choices
- GDC - Interactive Story Without Challenge Mechanics: The Design of Firewatch
- GDC - Writing 'Nothing': Storytelling with Unsaid Words and Unreliable Narrators

- GDC - Designing Radically Non-Linear Single Player Levels
- GDC - Sparking Curiosity-Driven Exploration Through Narrative in 'Outer Wilds'

3. AIM & OBJECTIVES

Identify the project aim and objectives. This is where you extend from your research premise and research context to define more clearly what your project will be about.

AIM

What is the aim of your research? This should be a general statement of what you hope your research will achieve.

A detailed analysis of methods to implement interactive game play around a pre-determined narrative by exploring the interplay between narrative and game design and the creation of “narrative puzzles” for a game prototype.

OBJECTIVES

List the main objectives of your research in order. The objectives should represent the major actions of your research, which will enable you to achieve the above aim. It is recommended that projects should have a maximum of five objectives.

1	How can we design puzzles around key story events and give players enough freedom without making it a handheld experience?
2	Does a unique gameplay experience in each chapter of the story add to the novelty of the experience?
3	How can you alter player experience based on their prior interactions without changing the overarching narrative?
4	How to create a fail state for stories central to the gameplay?

4. RESEARCH METHODS

In this section you are asked to describe the research method or methods you will use to meet your objectives outlined in section 3. How you describe your research method(s) should clearly link back to the objectives you have listed in the previous section.

It is expected that your research methods(s) will be informed by the type of project you have identified, i.e. artistic research, design research, technical research, user research, or critical research. Please refer to the lecture series before completing this section.

It is recommended that this should be outlined in no more than two pages expanding the box below.

- How can we design puzzles around key story events and give players enough freedom without making it a handheld experience?

Games such as “What remains of Edith Finch”, “Disco Elysium”, “Firewatch” and “Return of the Obra Dinn” are the sources of inspiration for the game I’m trying to make. So going through the talks by these developers, game designers and narrative designers working on the game will give me some ideas of what their thought process was when they were working on the game, the issues they’ve faced and ways they’ve solved it either technical or design based. Also going through various reviews by people who’ve played the game and critiques would help get another perspective on these games by seeing what the audience thinks was bad/ good.

- Does a unique gameplay experience in each chapter of the story add to the novelty of the experience?

In “What Remains of Edith Finch”, playing a part in the life of each character feels like a new experience and makes the story more engaging. It adds different ways to move or to take the form of another subject to make us go through the story from another perspective. Similarly, in “It Takes Two” which is a co-op game, every location has different ways to solve puzzles by using the level design and alternating between the players helping each other to solve puzzles. This makes for exciting gameplay and the player doesn’t know what to expect next peaking their curiosity.

- How can you alter player experience based on their prior interactions without changing the overarching narrative?

This is one of the more complicated questions since I’m bound by the story and cannot have branching dialogues like other games do. Nor can I have a stats system which would change the players interaction completely because the story is linear and I’m trying to deliver an experience. Some ways I will explore are dynamic difficulty adjustments which won’t make a

drastic impact on the story but make things easier for some players. Few dialogues for actions performed by players by just changing the main dialogue. This could add replayability value to the game. Personalization of the player character will also be explored.

- How to create a fail state for stories central to the gameplay?

We're trying to tell a story and the player doesn't fail according to the story. And it wouldn't be a game, or a fun one if it wasn't challenging enough to kill the player. Some games add abilities to heal oneself whereas other games play around with the difficulty level. Having multiple ending is another way of going about it because even though we have a linear story, we still give the player some control over their character and it should feel like it. Another method would be by having a soft fail state where the player is allowed to continue but with the bare minimum resources needed.

5. ETHICS

In this section you are asked to explain what ethical issues your project may raise and what mitigations you may need to consider. You should briefly summarise the potential issues and mitigations and outline any involvement your project may have with participants. Tell us who the participants are, how they would be involved, and what they'd be asked to do. If your proposed research will involve collecting data from these participants, explain what this data will be and identify any ethical issues related to this data.

It is recommended that this should be outlined in no more than one page using the box below but expand to a 2nd page if your project is complex.

- intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language
PEGI 18
- Storylines or representations of traumatic experience
- It will represent people of ethnicity and religion.
- It will not depict real-world spaces even though it's based in New York.
- Working with a team of 3, a narrative designer, games designer, game developer, and level designer. Based on their role, work will be mentioned in the credits of the game. As well as there being a commit history for every change.
- We are using free asset packs, sounds, and default packages and creating original assets.
- We will be asking peers, family, or friends to playtest the game and collect verbal feedback which will be used to improve the game overall.
- We will be working on our desktops/ laptops from our own homes with our own resources and on our own time. Regular meetups/ calls will be held to discuss and work on the game. Progress will be kept track of and assigned using project management tools.

6. HONOURS PROJECT DELIVERY

In this final section you are asked to outline how you plan to manage and deliver the Honours Project. This is a critical section of the Learning Contract as it forms the agreement with your supervisor on what it is you intend to submit as your evidence of achievement, both in terms of the practical deliverables and the project report.

DELIVERABLES

List what you plan to submit as the final Honours Project. Your focus should be on the final artefact(s), e.g. an animation or film (giving approximate length), a game prototype (suggesting how it is presented, e.g. as Windows .exe), a concept artbook (size, approximate length, content), a showreel of VFX work, etc. Supplementary to this you may identify what other evidence you will submit in support, e.g. a full portfolio, design documentation, gameplay trailer etc.

Game Prototype(.exe)

PROJECT REPORT FORMAT

What form of project report will you produce? This will be dictated by the type of research project you are tackling.

- ☐ **Practitioner's essay** (select if undertaking an artistic research project, 4,000 words)
- ☒ **Project postmortem** (select if undertaking a design research project, 4,000 words)
- ☐ **Technical report** (select if undertaking a technical research project, 6,000 words)
- ☐ **User research report** (select if undertaking a user research project, 6,000 words)
- ☐ **Critical essay** (select if undertaking critical research project, 8,000 words)

Briefly summarise what you think the sections of your write up will be and what will be covered.

I will start by introducing the project and explain how it is unique followed by the aim and research questions. Then I will talk about the research done on the questions by stating mechanics in existing games, reading, and watching videos by existing professionals in the industry. I will continue to talk about how and why I implemented these ideas and how it aligns with my vision for the game by answering the research questions.

TIMELINE

The Honours Project is developed over the course of one fifteen-week semester. You will have a 2-week holiday during this semester but are asked to discount this and plan based on fifteen weeks, where the submission is week fifteen.

Using the table below, briefly outline your anticipated week-to-week progress in developing your final Honours Project submission as described under Deliverables above.

Week	Activity
1	
2	
3	Changes to Chapter-1, re-iteration
4	Chapter-2 Story development
5	
6	integration of mechanics in Unity
7	Reviewing Game Mechanics and game Feel
8	Chapter 2 Gameplay Completion
9	Start of Playtesting
10	
11	Discussing gameplay possibilities in Unity
12	Reviewing game feel and mechanics
13	First 2 Levels playable and polished
14	
15	SUBMISSION

RESOURCES

Use this box to identify any resources (e.g. software, licenses, equipment, physical materials) you believe you will need to secure to complete your project. Where these are non-standard (i.e. not provided by Abertay in labs), identify how you may acquire access.

Unity Pro (Student Version)
3DS MAX (Student Version)
GitHub Pro (Student Developer Pack)
Substance Painter (Perpetual License)

8. REFERENCES

Please provide full references for all the sources identified in section 2. Use the guidance provided by the Abertay University Library pages on how to reference different source types.

1. Fernández-Vara, C. 2014a. Introduction to Game Analysis. New York, NY, USA: Routledge.
2. DiGRA '19 - Proceedings of the 2019 DiGRA International Conference: Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo-Mix.
3. Göbel, S., Malkewitz, R. and Iurgel, I. (2006) Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment Third International Conference, TIDSE 2006, Darmstadt, Germany, December 4-6, 2006, Proceedings. 1st ed. 2006.
4. Zeman, N. B., & ProQuest. (2017). Storytelling for interactive digital media and video games. Taylor & Francis.
5. Badoni, Pankaj & Katal, Avita & Reddy, M. & Bhargava, Mudit. (2022). Graphics vs Gameplay: A Comparative Analysis in Gaming. 1-8. 10.1109/CONIT55038.2022.9847843.
6. Schell, J. (2019). The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses, Third Edition (3rd ed.). A K Peters/CRC Press.

AGREEMENT


The Learning Contract agreement applies only to the agreed submission, outlined in Section 6.

It is important that both you and your supervisor have a shared understanding of what you will submit. This encompasses the practical project work and the accompanying project report.

You will need to block out Section 6 and shared this with your supervisor. It is expected that you will discuss the details with them before this is finalised. When both you and your supervisor are happy with the detail, please ask them to review and sign off the Learning Contract below.


PROJECT BRIEF

We agree that the ART410 submission will follow the Project Brief identified on page 1 (artistic research, design research, technical research, user research, or critical research)

Student signature		Date	22/02/2023
Supervisor signature	Martin Zeilinger (signed electronically)	Date	25/02/2023


DELIVERABLES

We agree that the Deliverables listed in Section 6 constitute the expected list of materials to be submitted as evidence of achievement for ART410, and that these are appropriate for the selected Project Brief.

Student signature		Date	22/02/2023
Supervisor signature	Martin Zeilinger (signed electronically)	Date	25/02/2023

PROJECT REPORT FORMAT

We agree that the Project Report Format discussed in Section 6 is aligned with the selected Project Brief, and that the plan for the structure/content of write up aligns with the stipulated word count.

Student signature		Date	22/02/2023
Supervisor signature	Martin Zeilinger (signed electronically)	Date	25/02/2023