

# Interactive Storytelling Spring 2015

T 100-930p SOC 003

Dr. Meghan Dougherty  
mdougherty@luc.edu

SOC 223D  
Office Hours TR 4:00-6:00p



exploding dog

## Course Description

This course experiments with interactive stories - computer-mediated “Choose Your Own Adventures.” The author presents the beginning, and the reader types in commands to unfold the story. The author designs a storyworld. The reader makes decisions, solves puzzles, overcomes obstacles, and explores story elements to determine their own path through to multiple possible endings.

This production course experiments with adopting different interactive fiction platforms for telling non-fiction stories. Students will learn a wide range of digital-era competencies: hypertext, interactive journalism, interactive fiction, text adventure games, game strategy, and participatory narratives. Students will develop and research a story idea, learn to code in several programming languages, learn some basic theories in gaming, interactivity, and narrative to apply to practices in storytelling, and build their own interactive story-game.

Learning outcomes—Students will:

- Build their own interactive (non)fiction story-games
- Learn to code in different languages
- Practice writing in different genres
- Learn basic game, interactivity, and narrative theories
- Critically apply game, interactivity, and narrative theories to digital storytelling practices
- Critically play/read narrative games

## Required Books

Bogost, *How To Do Things with Video Games*  
Anthropy, *Rise of the VideoGame Zinesters*  
Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages*  
Clark & Anthropy, *A Game Designer's Vocabulary*  
Reed, *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7* (Optional)

**Plus additional readings linked from the course schedule:**

[course readings.wordpress.com](http://course readings.wordpress.com) password: COMM 371

**Schedule**

<b>week one</b>	<b>T J13</b>	<b>Introductions</b>	
<b>week two</b>	<b>T J20</b>	<b>DIY Games Culture</b>	
<b>week three</b>	<b>T J27</b>	<b>Hypertext versus Books</b>	
<b>week four</b>	<b>T F03</b>	<b>Interactive Fiction and non-Fiction</b>	
		<b>DUE: Review #1: Twine</b>	
<b>week five</b>	<b>T F10</b>	<b>Doing Things With Games</b>	
<b>week six</b>	<b>T F17</b>	<b>Writing Vocabulary</b>	
		<b>DUE: Twine 1</b>	
<b>week seven</b>	<b>T F24</b>	<b>Game Vocabulary</b>	
		<b>DUE: Review #2: Interactive Fiction</b>	
<b>week eight</b>	<b>T M03</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>	
<b>week nine</b>	<b>T M10</b>	<b>Hyper/Comics</b>	
		<b>Due: Twine 2</b>	
<b>week ten</b>	<b>T M17</b>	<b>Workshop</b>	
<b>week eleven</b>	<b>T M24</b>	<b>Workshop</b>	
		<b>DUE: Review #3: Story/Game of your choice</b>	
<b>week twelve</b>	<b>T M31</b>	<b>Workshop</b>	
<b>week thirteen</b>	<b>T A07</b>	<b>Workshop</b>	
<b>week fourteen</b>	<b>T A14</b>	<b>Presentations</b>	
<b>week fifteen</b>	<b>T A21</b>	<b>Presentations</b>	<b>Inform Story/Game DUE 1 May at 12:00pm</b>

## Assignments

### **Reading Responses** (50 pts)

Choose a week of readings from the schedule. Post a thoughtful 1000-1500 word response essay to the readings for your chosen week on Medium.com. Expect to help lead class in discussion.

### **Story/Game Reviews** (25 pts each)

Write three thoughtful 500 word story/game reviews during the semester. The Post your essays on [medium.com](http://medium.com). Include a link to the story/game.

Review #1:

*DUE 03 February*

Write a review of a Twine story announced in class.

Review #2:

*DUE 24 February*

Write a review of an Interactive Fiction Story/Game announced in class.

Review #3:

*DUE 24 March*

Write a review of a Twine Story, and IF Story/Game, or a Hypercomic of your choice.

### **Twine 1 & 2** (50 pts each)

***DUE 17 February***

***DUE 10 March***

Build *two* stories in Twine. Submit your files to the shared class folder on Box.com.

Twine is a free program for creating hypertext art. Twine stories are made from linked passages. The reader makes choices throughout the story to develop character, plot, etc. The goal of these two projects is to explore the role of choice and consequence in a branching narrative. Try to find a way to make the links meaningful in a way that compels the reader to do something other than exhaustively search all the branches.

You may use one or both of these Twine assignments as sketches for elements in your Inform story/game.

For Advanced Resources to customize your Twine story, please see The Electronic Media Studio's post; "Hello Twine!" <http://cmuems.com/2014c/twine/>

Your story/game will be graded on 3 factors:

#### Functionality

Does the story work? There should not be syntax errors such that the game will crash in the middle of execution.

#### Design

Is the game fun/interesting/educational? Is there good game balance (i.e., not too easy, not too hard)? Is there a lot of repetition (which is a bad thing)?

Style - Spelling and grammar counts; use comments in your code to make notes on your work

**Inform Project** (100 pts)

***DUE 1 May 12:00 pm***

Build an Interactive Fiction Story/Game with Inform 7. Submit your files to the shared class folder on Box.com.

Interactive fiction is a genre of text-based games that provides an immersive story. In interactive fiction games, challenges and puzzles are typically solved conceptually by lateral thinking with discrete and limited choices. The world is essentially a mathematical graph where each node in the graph is a separate scene. Unfortunately, players can be dead on arrival, or loop around the world with no end. Writing a good interactive game requires planning the entire game world and the story before actual coding of the game. In this assignment, you will write an interactive fiction story/game using Inform 7, one of the most popular languages for writing interactive fiction. Your story/game must tell a kind of advocacy story - it need not be strictly non-fiction, but it must address a topic of social justice in some way.

Your story/game will be graded on 5 factors:

**Basics**

Your game must...

...Have at least 10 rooms

...Use at least 3 doors

...Have at least 5 characters, which includes animals, that can be interacted with

...Have at least 5 things (or props) that can be interacted with.

...Have at least one way to win the game

...Use scoring in some capacity

...Use at least one custom action (i.e., a verb)

**Functionality**

Does the game work? There should not be syntax errors such that the game will crash in the middle of execution.

**Complexity**

The deeper the game, the better. *Depth* can be defined with regard to the breadth and scope of the story having many rooms and many objects to interact with, OR it could be defined with regard to the meaning or empathy elicited by the story. A *deep* story need not be lengthy in play or execution.

**Design**

Is the game fun? Is there good game balance (i.e., not too easy, not too hard)? Is there a lot of repetition (which is a bad thing)?

Style - Spelling and grammar counts; use comments in your code to make notes on your work

**Project Presentation** (25 pts)

Present your project to class.

**Total 300 points**

### **Attendance/Lateness**

Attendance counts. Missed work cannot be made up or excused except in the case of severe illness, death in the family, or religious holiday - these absences must be documented if you'd like to make up missed work.

### **Classroom Citizenship**

Students are expected to respect each other. When you enter a classroom, you are a member of a cohort - a community of learning. Your success depends on your neighbors' success. Learning is a collaborative effort - understanding is co-produced. Strive to do better on your own, but also strive to help your classmates to elevate the level of conversation in the classroom.

### **Technology in the Classroom**

Use of technology in the classroom is encouraged! Bring laptops, smartphones, tablets, etc. Use note-taking software; use bibliographic software; use the Internet. Take your discussion, questions, exploration online - look up definitions and more information as we discuss and share that with the class. With a wifi connection you have a world of resources to help you learn - use them! Using technology is a privilege - **do not take advantage of this privilege**. The presence of technology in the classroom does not give you an excuse to be physically present in the room but intellectually absent. Technology can be a distraction to you, me and your classmates. Learn to make choices about your own media use. Give yourself a break from the always-on mentality of today's new media landscape! Let this class be the one time you are allowed to turn off.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Any student that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Plagiarism in your work will result in a minimum of a failing grade for that assignment. It is dishonest to borrow text, images, or videos from the Web without crediting the original creator or the site from which you borrowed the work. It is also dishonest to turn in the same work for two classes, to turn in a paper you have not written yourself; or to copy from another student or use a "cheat sheet" during an exam.

### **Late work/ Lost work**

Late work will not be accepted. Extensions will not be granted. Incompletes will not be assigned. Make-up work will not be assigned unless pre-arranged, or due to an authorized documented absence. If you anticipate you will miss an assignment, please discuss it with the professor early in the semester to arrange an alternative.

**If you have questions or concerns, please see me before there is a problem!**