

CM 148 Interactive Storytelling Course Syllabus

Summer 2022
Prof. Daniel Shapiro

This course examines the theory and technology of interactive storytelling with a focus on interactive storytelling in games. In the first half of the class, we develop a theoretical and critical vocabulary for thinking about interactive storytelling by asking three questions: What is narrative (or story)? What is interaction? What is interactive storytelling? The second half of the course explores a variety of technical and design approaches to interactive storytelling with a focus on innovative techniques for creating story systems. Students will have the opportunity to create their own interactive story using the narrative scripting language, Ink.

At the end of this course students should be able to: 1) knowledgeably discuss ways that storytelling and interaction can combine, 2) understand a variety of technical and design approaches for developing interactive stories, and 3) author and play a sizable interactive story of their own design.

Technical Requirements and Resources

I will be teaching this course synchronously online. The sessions will be recorded and posted after each class. I have found that teaching online offers several pluses: not getting Covid, convenience and location independence for students (especially during summer), and increased ease of interaction for some. On the downside, online instruction can decrease class liveliness. For that reason, I employ discussion sessions as well as non-graded polls and quizzes during class, and I ask students to keep their videos on during class sessions if at all possible. That last has a side benefit for me; it lets me speak to actual people vs lecturing into the void.

For Summer 2022 we will use Zoom for lectures and Canvas for assignments. Q&A will be on Slack and Canvas.

There is no textbook for the class. I will mention a number of books as reference material, assign a few technical articles as reading material, and discuss many games. Students are encouraged to buy, download, and play those games, although viewing playthroughs and trailers will generally be sufficient to answer the questions posed in assignments.

Technical Requirements

To participate in this course, students will need the following:

- Broadband internet access with bandwidth sufficient to support streaming video.
- A computer with the technical requirements to run contemporary computer games and languages.
- A computer with a webcam. The webcam facilitates small group interactions (in zoom break out rooms) as well as interactions during instructor office hours.

Grading

Grades will be based on weekly assignments, a midterm and a final project, all of which will be done over Canvas.

Weekly assignments: 40% (~6% each for 7 weeks)

Midterm: 30%

Final project: 30%

Graded weekly assignments will start with the second week of the class. They focus on Q&A surrounding lecture material, although several will require downloading and playing games, and experimenting with interactive storytelling engines.

The midterm will be take-home, assigned on a Wednesday and due on Monday.

There is no final exam. The final project (composing an interactive story in Ink) will be done in teams of 4 and presented during the last week of class. Students will be required to play and evaluate each other's games.

We will announce a few extra credit readings with associated Q&A as the course progresses.

Late policy: Weekly assignments will typically be given on Wednesday and due the following Wednesday at midnight. This gives the Friday class period for students to ask questions about the assignment, and the Monday class period for me to go over questions in case there is any confusion. Assignments will be accepted late, but with a 15% penalty.