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BACHELOR OF ARTS IN MULTIMEDIA STUDIES

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**WIP: A VIDEO GAME ABOUT THE CHALLENGES IN DOING SOMETHING FOR
THE FIRST TIME**

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This paper prepared by **KAYCE RACELLE G. TAMPINCO** with the title: **“WIP: A Video Game About the Challenges in Doing Something for the First Time”** is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Course.

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Biographical Sketch

Kayce Racelle G. Tampinco was born in Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia but grew up in Antipolo City, Rizal. She took BA Multimedia Studies at the University of the Philippines Open University due to her interest in storytelling through various mediums of art especially Film and Photography. During her undergraduate studies, she was able to discover and try out new things such as animation and game development. At the same time, she had the opportunity to work as a Part-Time Multimedia Designer for a marketing agency who was very supportive of her studies. Due to her experiences and interactions with the people she met these past six years, she was inspired to create this project.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
University Permission Page	ii
Acceptance Page	iii
Biographical Sketch	iv
Acknowledgment	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	vii
ABSTRACT	ix
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background	3
Objectives	5
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	6
III. METHODOLOGY	14
Pre-Production	14
Production	15
Post-Production	16
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	18
Pre-Production	18
Production	29
Post-Production	51
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56
Summary and Conclusions	56
Recommendations	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61
REFERENCES	63

List of Figures

Figure 1 Desktop Wireframe	26
Figure 2 Distraction Game Wireframe	26
Figure 3 Main Game Wireframe	26
Figure 4 Journal Wireframe	26
Figure 5 End of Day Wireframe	26
Figure 6 Menu Wireframe	26
Figure 7 Confirmation Window Wireframe	26
Figure 8 Main Game Flow Chart	27
Figure 9 Content Description	28
Figure 10 To-Do Lists for Art Assets and Coding	28
Figure 11 Desktop Wallpaper (Day)	30
Figure 12 Loading Screen Wallpaper (Night)	30
Figure 13 Desktop Icons...	31
Figure 14 Windows' Date and Time indicator...	32
Figure 15 Menu Button, Menu Window, Settings Button, and...	33
Figure 16 Confirmation Window	33
Figure 17 Music Icon	33
Figure 18 Weather Icons (Stormy, Cloudy, Sunny)	34
Figure 19 Battery Icons (33%, 66%, 99%)	34
Figure 20 Main Game's Background	35
Figure 21 Card Back Design	35
Figure 22 Photo I took at SM Mall of Asia last March 2, 2025	36
Figure 23 Oil Pastel Painting used as Journal Background	37
Figure 24 Line Art version of the Photo I Took	38

Figure 25 Image for Main Game Level 1	39
Figure 26 Smudged Colored Background for Level 2's Image	40
Figure 27 "Malayo Pa Pero Malayo Na"	40
Figure 28 "It's OK"	40
Figure 29 Image for Main Game Level 2	41
Figure 30 "Keep Going"	42
Figure 31 "You Can Do It"	42
Figure 32 Image for Main Game Level 3	42
Figure 33 Card Front Design - Action Cards	43
Figure 34 Card Front Design - Thought Cards	44
Figure 35 Distraction Game Background	44
Figure 36 Desktop	46
Figure 37 Distraction Game	46
Figure 38 Cards' Coordinates Listed Down on a Sheet	47
Figure 39 Main Game	48
Figure 40 Journal	48
Figure 41 End of Day	49
Figure 42 Script for "See You Tomorrow..." Animation	50
Figure 43 Bug Reported by a Beta-Tester	53

ABSTRACT

Video games are a form of multimedia that is typically considered for entertainment. However, apart from being a form of leisure, it can also be an opportunity to connect with other people through various meaningful narratives that allows us to explore and understand experiences and situations that acknowledges us or recognizes the circumstances that we have never been in.

This Capsule Project aims to illustrate the challenges we face whenever we want to do something for the first time through a functional video game — but without explicit narration. Instead of employing texts to tell the tale, the player will shape their own journey and get a semblance of the experience through the game's mechanics and systems that mimics what it is like to finally work on something for the first time. In this way, the player can give it their own interpretation, and perhaps it can even be a chance for reflection.

Applications and softwares utilized for this project were mainly IbisPaint for the Art and Ren'Py as the game engine. However, other softwares such as image processors, word processors, and online tools like Canva and Milanote were used as needed either to enhance, support, or ease up the game making process.

I was able to create a functional video game that relies solely on game mechanics which allowed the testers to play the game based on their own liking. However, the struggle of doing something for the first time was not clearly understood since all the testers were left confused while playing. It is important that I set clear expectations and define how I want them to be achieved. In this way, I can decide if suggestions such as adding more clues and dialogues is something that I should consider or perhaps if I should approach the story in an entirely different way.

I. INTRODUCTION

With a quick Google search, Game Development is defined as “the art of creating games and describes the design, development and release of a game. It may involve concept generation, design, build, test and release” (freeCodeCamp, 2019). Basically, Game Development is making games. It is a process that requires different skills and specialties such as programming, making art, music and sound production, writing, and even marketing. Anyone can be a game developer. However, it is understandable that there are hesitations every now and then especially if a person only specializes in one field, or in none at all.

There are several challenges that a Game Developer might encounter. Gonzalez (2024) mentioned that having game development as a career can pose a different kind of challenge unlike when it is pursued as a hobby. As they pointed out, once it becomes a job, it turns into a responsibility, and they might have to face issues related to time and finances while also going through mental burnout since you and the people you work with depend on that game. Doing game development for fun is not void of these issues, but the difference is that everything is on your own terms.

However, aside from that, I see a much bigger struggle than this which is not tied to game development alone — that is the ability to start. Bregman (2018) was able to observe that the challenging part in getting started is doing something from nothing. Sometimes, no matter how much we want it, we get stuck, we avoid it, and we procrastinate. We tend to dread the first step and even hesitate taking it. For some, that alone leads them to failure. Why are we prone to this? Desai (2021) mentioned that humans love to overthink. It is our nature to avoid danger and we tend to overanalyze if the benefits even outweigh the risks. Furthermore, we fear

failure and there is a tendency that we fall for a “go big or go home” mindset. We desire to achieve something huge immediately which does not happen most of the time. Hence, we are doomed to fail. Once that happens, we get discouraged and it is inevitable that we just stop pursuing it. Aside from that, Brown (2014) also pointed out that being perceived as irresponsible or foolish might even be more daunting than failing. Thus, we wait for the perfect moment — a trap that we can also find ourselves in. Brown also explained that for some, “life gets in the way.” Feeling like we need to have all the resources might cause us to delay our endeavors. Our physical or mental wellbeing can also be a valid reason for setting goals aside. Exhaustion, anxiety, apathy, perfectionism, or even conditions such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can affect our ability to start (Ellis, 2022).

Understandably, some reasons are beyond our control and require intervention beyond our personal motivations. However, as Bregman concluded, in some cases getting started, or “transitioning” in particular, is a skill that we need to develop. Sometimes we just need to do it despite all the hesitations we have. Thus, this project aims to convey this message not just through the game itself, but also by my embodiment of it as I make my first game — hopefully inspiring those who see this paper to do the same.

BACKGROUND

Ever since, I have always wanted to tell stories. I was drawn to the idea that we can convey messages, capture hearts, create worlds, and bring ourselves in situations that we probably will never be in through narrative. Nothing is impossible in stories — unless the writer says so. I was never really a writer, though I enjoy writing stories when the opportunity presents itself. I used to express emotions and tell tales through poetry as well.

When I was in high school, doing the video projects we had and seeing my classmates' amazing outputs, along with my innate love for movies, made me realize that I want to dabble in Film. Then life led me to this college program — Multimedia Studies. Admittedly, my inclination to pursue Film was one of the reasons behind choosing this path. However, I soon realized that filmmaking requires a lot of things: time, resources, and most importantly passion which I am not sure if I even have. Indeed, it is possible to make a film out of anything that I have right now, but I started to become unsure if Film is the best medium for me due to a couple of other reasons. After all, I just want to tell stories.

Then I joined a game development organization in UP Diliman with a friend. I never had any formal exposure to this field before joining and I was amazed. That is when I realized that perhaps I can tell stories through games and even allow the audience to interact with it and choose their own paths. It has been almost three years since, but I have never made a game despite my desire to do so. I only made a Game Design Document (GDD) as a collaborative project with my orgmates, but I never made a GDD on my own nor a working prototype even with a group. I had a lot of reasons, but mainly it is my lack of skills. I am not an artist nor a musician, and

programming is my weakness. I can write, but I am aware that what I can do is still not enough. In addition, I often suffer from writer's block which can be discouraging.

I decided to finally take my first step through this Capsule Project by making one video game about the challenges of getting started and the advice that we usually hear when we talk about it such as:

- There is no better time to start than now despite one's lacking
- It is alright to not do things perfectly especially at first
- It will be hard, but we can always try again tomorrow
- Just do it

These were communicated through the gameplay itself, although it is likely that the player will have a different interpretation of it since it all depends on their experience and how they reacted to the game. Furthermore, I wanted to personally prove how possible it is to make a game despite my hesitations. In this way, if this project turns out to be successful, it will hopefully encourage people like me who are hesitant to take the first step in whatever endeavor they would like to pursue. Hence, this project is all about making a game for the first time to tell a story about overcoming personal barriers when pursuing a goal for the first time.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this project is to create a functional video game about the struggle of starting or doing something for the first time. The importance of persistence despite hesitations, doubts, and distractions will be emphasized — highlighting that these challenges are part of the process. This will be done solely through game mechanics and systems that exemplifies this experience — allowing the player to reflect on their own encounters with trial, error, and resilience.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Stories in games can be approached in different ways. Visual Novels are story-based games wherein a block of text is utilized to narrate the tale just like in a typical novel but with an accompanying image or animation. The visuals may be composed of a background image, a foreground, and one or more character sprites. Then there are Adventure Games which can be described as a cinematic experience but with more freedom since the player can interact with the world that the protagonist is in and solve their character's problems themselves. Some even give the player the privilege to change their character's destiny with the choices they are making if there are multiple endings. These are very basic descriptions of each genre, and it can be argued that the lines defining each kind are quite blurry especially since some developers are combining mechanics to create a more meaningful game. For instance, Role-Playing Games (RPGs) can be confused with Adventure Games since they are quite similar in nature with the player having the freedom to interact with the game's world, make choices, and having to face tribulations to move the story forward. The difference is, character progression is also vital in RPGs. Therefore, there are tasks in the game that are focused on the character's improvement which can be done in different ways such as fighting battles or collecting items.

For my game, I was leaning towards creating a Visual Novel due to my familiarity with the genre and in how it gets developed. However, I wanted it to be more interactive than the usual game under that genre wherein the player will just be clicking buttons to progress. After scouring the web for a bit, I have compiled a list of games that I gained inspiration from or is similar to the concept I had in mind. They are categorized below according to their relevance to my project.

A. Inspiration for Game Execution

a. Interactive Story

My first consideration for this project was I want to tell a story. However, I did not want it to be simply composed of text and some visuals. I wanted it to be more of a “Show don’t tell” both in writing style and execution. At the least, I wanted it to be immersive. An example of this would be “The Boat” by Nam Le which was adapted by Matt Huynh into an Interactive Graphic Novel in 2015. It tells the story of a refugee’s escape and their arduous journey during the Vietnam War. Through the use of sound effects, movement, and even the choice of black and white as the only colors in this adaptation, it was able to help convey the themes and emotions of the story.

b. With Mini Games

“Until Then” is a Filipino-made adventure game by Polychroma Games released last June 25, 2024 (Hermanson, 2024). The game tackles the beauty of family and friendship, the cruelty of time, the consequences of our actions, and the tragedy of life. Filipino culture was greatly ingrained in it. Some mini-games were experiences that most Filipinos can probably relate to such as passing coins when riding a Jeepney, piercing fried Fishballs in boiling oil, and enjoying Karaoke. The places introduced also reeks of familiarity — from the train stations, the mall, to the homes that each of them lived in.

One of the games that I had in mind as I settled on this project is “Every Time You Blink” by robobarbie, destini island, and allie vera released last 2022. It is a short story about two friends who needed to sort out their relationship as they moved in to a new place. Although the creators labelled it as a puzzle, the story is its main attraction. What I like about this game is that everything about it caters to the

narrative. Each puzzle is a clue — making it easy to decipher the entire story even if they did not directly tell us about it. Furthermore, the 10-second duration of each mini-game successfully simulated the intervals between every blink. Personally, I was able to feel the tension, pressure, and what it was like to have so many thoughts in one's mind while in that kind of situation.

c. Story through Game Mechanics and System

“It’s a(door)able” is a 1-minute game by Nicky Case in 2015 which might look like the usual puzzle game at first, but once all the doors are unlocked, a literal message would be revealed. Its appearance would depend on how the player moves to retrieve the key and unlock the doors. Another project by Nicky Case last 2016 is called “We Become What We Behold” which portrays how the media can manipulate people and create consequences. The game does not contain any dialogue. Instead, the player will just hover their mouse pointer, that replicates a camera, over their chosen person or people and once they click on a certain area, it will be captured and displayed on a television screen found at the middle which contains a short commentary about what was displayed. Whatever was shown on the screen will then be seen by other people who were watching the TV and would elicit specific reactions. It only has one ending which might be a choice made not just to create more impact but also to imitate how it really goes in real life.

Another game that is similar to “We Become What We Behold” is “Duloga” by another local game developer named Snack. Using a reverse space shooter format, it was able to portray how revolting the Extrajudicial Killings (EJKs) were during the Duterte regime in the Philippines and how anyone can be a victim including us. There was barely any text or dialogues in it apart from the instructions, the short remarks, and the names displayed after every night which was enough to give me

the context. The sparse amount of text also amplifies the message of the game and makes it more disturbing.

“Loneliness” by Jordan Magnuson released in 2010 is another short game wherein the player controls a square and as they move forward, they have the option to approach other fellow squares. Just like “Duloga,” it is clear that the intention is to communicate something that is best shown rather than told. It is a short journey that portrays what it is like to be alone, and it can make you feel how discouraging it could be. As Extra Credits (2012b) pointed out, “Loneliness” can reveal who we are due to the freedom of choice that it provides: do we approach other squares or do we just continue moving forward?

“Passage” by Jason Rohrer released last 2007 is a game that encapsulates a lifetime in just 5-minutes. As Jason himself explained, there are no rules in the game — the player is free to do whatever they please. However, no matter what you do, the game will end with the character’s death after 5 minutes. The entire game, from its narrative to its design, is dedicated to one question which Jason also mentioned: life is short, what will you do with it?

Apart from the aforementioned games, a deleted user started a thread on Reddit last 2019 that discussed different games which harnessed the game mechanics as a medium to tell the story. These are some of the games that were mentioned by different people:

- A boy who aims to save his little sister is the premise of the puzzle-platformer game called “Limbo” released by Playdead in 2011 (Playdead, 2011; Saas, 2011). According to Saas, there is no text in the game. Rather, the interpretation depends on how the player perceives the journey with the puzzles, the grainy monochrome visuals, and the music.

- “Missile Command,” made by Devid Theurer in 1980, is an arcade game that lets the player experience what it feels like to defend six cities from a nuclear strike using limited resources (Extra Credit, 2012a). As Extra Credits explained, the gameplay itself demonstrated the moral dilemma and pressure that comes with defending multiple cities while a barrage of attacks threatens even the only line of defense that you have. Choices must be made, and as the game illustrated, there is no way to win that kind of war.
- “Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons” by Starbreeze AB last 2013 is a game that was often mentioned in the Reddit thread I referenced. Sliva’s (2013) review even mentioned that its “charm lies in its keen skill at nonverbal storytelling” since the story that will unfold depends on how and if the player interacts with the environment and the people. SpasticFeedback (2019) pointed out that being able to control the two characters simultaneously plays a key role in understanding the game’s narrative.
- SpasticFeedback also mentioned Ico as an example of storytelling through game mechanics with the “hand-holding button” being essential to “impart things to the narrative that are essential to the story they are trying to tell.” Adrian (n.d.) explains that the game leans on the concept of “actions speak louder than words” by having two main characters that speak different languages.

According to Extra Credits’ (2012c) second video on Mechanics as Metaphor, a game that tells its story through the mechanics “allows the player to explore it” rather than just being told about it. In order to make this concept possible, Extra Credits mentioned four conditions. First is that the “designer must set boundaries for experience.” The intention behind the game must be clear from the beginning of its

development. In that way, every aspect of it would be focused on painting that picture and it would be easier to decide if something is worth adding. Second is that the developer should have confidence in their players that they will be able to decipher the message being unveiled and the experience they are intended to have without spoon feeding it. Third, using mechanics as a storyteller thrives in having no objective which allows the player to play the game however they want to and have personal interpretations based on what they went through. Lastly, Extra Credits explained that players also need to “start thinking about mechanics as metaphors” for creators to consider it as an alternative way aside from straightforward storytelling.

B. Similar Games in Terms of Story

a. About Struggles

“Celeste” by Maddy Makes Games Inc. and Extremely OK Games, LTD. released a platformer in 2018 wherein the main character aims to climb a mountain as she fights the one thing that is holding her back: her anxiety. Another game that tackles Anxiety is a “psychological romance Visual Novel” called “Mind Mind Mind” by Chattercap produced last 2024 where it takes the form of a ghost who has been with the main character since childhood. Nicky Case also had “Adventures with Anxiety!” in 2019 wherein the player gets to play as Anxiety itself. The goal is to “protect” the human it was attached to. The interactive story was able to demonstrate how Anxiety works and why it does so even in our day-to-day lives and then suggested a way to manage it.

In the same vein, “Omori” by OMOCAT, LLC released last 2020 is a well-known psychological horror game that broaches mental illness. “Cry of Fear” by Team Psykskallar produced in 2013 is another horror game that deals with mental

illness. “Fran Bow” by Killmonday Games AB released in 2015 also has the same themes, but this time it is done from the eyes of a child who witnessed a traumatic event. Likewise, “The Cat Lady” by Harvester Games produced in 2012 is about a lonely 40-year old woman who struggles with depression.

b. Something Personal

Just like other forms of media, art, and literature, games can serve as a medium to tell personal stories.

“The Beginner’s Guide” by Davey Wreden is an adventure game about what it is like to be a game developer, or an artist in general, as it explores the various games presented in the story and the connection and conflicts between the two developers in the game named Davey and Coda (Podgorski, 2021).

On the other hand, “That Dragon, Cancer” is a personal piece developed by Numinous Games in 2016 that commemorates the life of their son who passed away at a young age due to cancer. Alx Preston who suffers from Congenital Heart Disease released the adventure game “Hyper Light Drifter” in 2016 wherein the main character searches for a cure for their own deadly disease amidst a disordered world (Vice, 2016). Meanwhile, “Tales of Kenzera: ZAU” produced in 2024 was a product of Abubakar Salim’s grief over the death of his father who loved games just like him (thegameawards, 2023).

Nicky Case had another project in 2014, which they described as very personal, called the “Coming Out Simulator” — a “semi-fictional” depiction of the night they came out as queer to their Asian parents. David Wehle’s first game in 2015 is called “Home is Where One Starts” which is a walking simulator inspired by his childhood memories (Wehle, 2020).

After going through these references, I have decided to create a game that tells the story through gameplay just like what some of the aforementioned games have achieved. This was done mostly through the player's freedom to explore the game environment without being instructed on what they should do every step of the way, and without explicit description of what happened and what will happen.

III. METHODOLOGY

PRE-PRODUCTION

- Preparation

Before I make the game, I will need to at least familiarize myself with the software that I will utilize and the basic know-hows in each field that I dabbled in — particularly art and programming since these are not my forte. Furthermore, it is imperative to plan ahead since this is a long process with details that I might miss. Although challenges and revisions are inevitable, having a plan will help me weigh options and become more efficient.

- In order to create my game, I decided to use Ren'Py as my Game Engine. It is beginner-friendly and is commonly used for Visual Novels. I find it suitable for me since it seems like it would give me enough flexibility as a coding engine. At the same time, it is known for being easy to learn since it utilizes Python as its Programming Language. Its community is also pretty active which gives me assurance that I can reach out to someone if ever I need help. I will go through some guides to familiarize myself with Ren'Py and how it works. I will also look for tutorials that will help me build my game.
- As for the art assets, I chose IbisPaint as my primary tool since I already used it multiple times. However, I also have Canva and other image processing tools available if ever I need it.
 - I have chosen Pixel Art as the main visual style of the game. I have never created anything in this style before, that is why I need to go through a few guides and references to understand it. I thought it was suitable for me since it dealt with pixels which

made it more structured than other styles, but at the same time, it still has enough flexibility for me to be as creative as I want. I prefer having that kind of “limitation” as I tend to struggle with the freedom that other art styles have.

- Alongside Pixel Art, I have also decided to incorporate Photography and Oil Pastel Painting in my project. This is to give important visuals some contrast that will subtly emphasize them from the rest of the game.
- Draft my initial plan and the story I had in mind in a word processing software.
- Once the story has been hashed out, Once the story has been hashed out, do some preparations for the art assets such as generating a wireframe that will aid in visualizing the overall look of the game, producing rough sketches if needed especially for unique assets that are not found in real life, gathering references if needed, planning what pictures to take and capturing them, and preparing all the materials needed such as the pastels and the appropriate paper for that kind of artwork.
- I will list down all the necessary art assets for the game. I will be considering the scale of each object and visualize how they will look (i.e. if I should imitate how it looks in real life or perhaps conceptualize a theme that will match my game’s story).

PRODUCTION

Once I am done with the preparations, I shall proceed to the main phase which is to make the game. Initial plans might get adjusted or discarded depending

on the circumstances such as time constraints and prevailing conditions. What best aligns with the overall objective of this project should also be prioritized. It would be preferable that I proceed with these steps sequentially.

- Finalize and proofread the story, especially the dialogues and text that will appear in the game — if there is any.
- Creation of Art Assets
 - Create all art assets based on the wireframe and sketch.
 - Compile all the images and conduct the necessary post-processing edits needed.
 - Ensure that all assets are visually aligned with the story and with one another.
- Building the Game
 - The game will contain at least 2 games. Therefore, coding the game will follow this progression:
 1. Code the main game
 2. Code the mini game/s
 3. Proofread and debug the code
- Put everything together
 - Although this is something that I will be technically doing while I code, this will include putting remaining elements, such as the last completed art assets, to complete the project.

POST-PRODUCTION

- Personally test the game and ensure that it is functional. Resolve issues if there are any.
- Ask other people to playtest it. Take note of bugs and areas for improvement.

- Provide a synopsis that will give the playtesters a clue on what the game is about, but do not give any explicit directions or narrative. Check if the desired message of the game was clear. Otherwise, apply the necessary revisions based on the feedback provided.

As what I have emphasized beforehand, changes can still be made as I proceed with the game development process especially after the idea and story is finalized depending on what is best for the project.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PRE-PRODUCTION

Story Writing

I thought programming would be the most challenging step as I develop this game. However, my struggle as I started this project has proven me wrong. I had a hard time coming up with a concrete idea on what I want this game to be like. There are some things that were clear to me, namely:

- I wanted to tell a story, but I did not want it to be *like* a story.
 - As I mentioned earlier, I wanted to refrain from utilizing texts to move the story forward and to describe anything. At the least, only dialogues and vague clues like journal entries will be included.
 - It will be about wanting or needing to do something, a goal or a dream, but the main character cannot do it easily due to various reasons. The reasons will be represented and not told.
- The game's setting or environment will be a computer desktop.
- There will be at least two mini-games.
 - One will serve as the “main” game that will tell the story or the message that I want to deliver. I was thinking of using a puzzle game for this. The idea is that this mini-game should be extremely difficult at first making it tempting to give up. It will get easier as time goes on — just like how it works in real life when starting something out.
 - The other mini-game will serve as the “distraction” from the main game. This will be a memory card matching game wherein the images on the cards will be photos that symbolizes what usually hinders people from pursuing something or text clues that will nudge them into quitting this

game. Unlike the main game, I plan to make this one easier and maybe even addicting. If possible to code, I also plan to make this game endless; it is up to the player when and if they will quit the game. I am planning to have its desktop icon resemble a social media application.

- I am also considering adding a “Notes app” which will serve as the main character’s journal. Its content will depend on the player’s actions. This will not be detailed, but its purpose is to provide some context and structure on what the game is about.

Despite these ideas, I still had a hard time moving forward with this game because of one dilemma: how do I tie all of these together and make a compelling game worth playing? At that moment, it did not present any challenges to the player. Furthermore, how will I ensure that these elements will impart some message or story to the player?

I got stuck in this phase for a long time which is frustrating because the only way to move forward is for me to smoothen out the game’s concept. Once that is clear to me, I know I can finally gain momentum on this project.

I decided to discuss it with one of my friends because that usually helps me when I get stuck. While I was explaining it, I realized what my problem was: I had not thought of my game’s limitations that would give it some weight.

I wanted to portray what it is like to get distracted, hesitate, or to procrastinate in taking the first step in doing something. But what would it mean for the player? How would I make the experience meaningful for them?

Going back to the references I cited earlier in this paper, Extra Credits (2012c) mentioned that games that tell their story through its mechanics has four conditions:

1. The “designer must set boundaries for experience.”
2. Game developers should be confident that the player will understand their intention.
3. There should be no objective so that the players can explore on their own and create their personal interpretations.
4. The players need to “start thinking about mechanics as metaphors”

I want to emphasize number one. I realized I needed to place some boundaries on my game. The players should be allowed to do anything they want whenever they want, but it should still be within a specific limit. At the same time, although Extra Credits said that an objective should not exist, I thought I should not take that as it is. Perhaps, I can set an explicit goal that is not too restrictive. Otherwise, the player might just wander endlessly in the game and even give up on it out of frustration due to lack of direction.

With those in mind, I thought, “why is it bad to delay getting started on our goals anyway?” The answer is: because time flies. No matter what we do or do not do, time will keep on going. That made me realize that the best limitation for my game is time. Hence, I came up with this final plan and story:

- Game context and objective: The main character has decided that this is it. This is the day that they will start doing what they have wanted to do all this time. Their goal is to accomplish this project in just 3 days.
 - Each day will only last for 10 minutes.

- Initially, the idea was to have 7 days since having a week makes more sense. However, it feels excessive to have a minimum of 70 minutes of gameplay especially since the activities are repetitive.
- Main Mini-Game: The number of levels for this game is always equal to how many days the game has since each day has its own level. As of the moment, it has 3 days, thus there will be 3 levels.
 - Contrary to what is usually done, the first level will be the hardest then the succeeding levels will be easier. This is to cement the message that “things will get easier as long as we continuously do it every day.”
 - The main game will also have its own timer. Less time will be given in each level.
 - The number of puzzle pieces will also get reduced in each level.
 - There are two endings only:
 1. If the player has successfully finished this main game after 3 days, then they will be congratulated for finishing the project as planned.
 2. If the player fails to complete at least one level, it does not mean they have failed the game. After the last day, they will be encouraged to try again and they can play the game again to establish the message that we can keep on trying.
 - a. The player cannot repeat a day. They can only replay the game after the last day.
 - i. If the player fails to complete the main game assigned on a certain day, that day’s equivalent level will be carried over to the next day because

the player cannot move on to the next level without accomplishing their current one. Only the days will be progressing. Hence, the player can have more than one level for their main game each day. On the last day, it is possible to have all the levels if they failed to finish it during the previous days. Despite this, the player can still finish the game successfully as long as they complete all the main game levels before the last day ends.

- This game can only be accessed through the “WIP” file. “WIP” stands for Work-in-Progress. I used it as the “file name” since it is a common abbreviation used for projects.
- Secondary Mini-Game: This will serve as the “distraction.” It is a Memory Card game wherein the player needs to match 2 identical cards.
 - The player can play this multiple times.
 - This game does not hold any weight on the game’s ending. However, the 10-minute timer for each day will continue running during this game.
 - All the applications, files, and folders found in the desktop will lead to this game except for the file called “WIP” and the application called “Journal.”
 - There will be 2 kinds of cards:
 - Thought Cards

- This kind of card will contain a word, or a phrase at most, that mimics a person's thoughts when they get distracted while completing a task.
- It will also serve as a clue that they should not be playing this game in the first place and hopefully nudge them back to the main game before the day ends.
- Since these cards will appear in random order, numbers will be found at the lower right corner of each card to help the player figure out how the words are arranged to form a sentence. Each sentence has an assigned number, and each word in that sentence is assigned with another number. For example, if sentence number one is "I cannot do this anymore," then each word will be assigned with the following numbers: I = 1, cannot = 2, do = 3, this = 4, and anymore = 5. Hence, these will be the numbers found at the lower right corner of each card:
 - I: 1-1
 - Cannot: 1-2
 - Do: 1-3
 - This: 1-4
 - Anymore: 1-5
- These thought cards can also serve as another "distraction" since if it catches the player's curiosity and they found out what needs to be done, they can play the

memory game multiple times just to decode this. It is like a game within a game.

- Action Cards
 - These cards will display images or icons that symbolize the things we are typically distracted with.
 - These things might also be related to what we normally see in social media since scrolling through these sites is a common escape due to its accessibility.
- Aside from the two mini-games, a journal will be included.
 - This will not be a game, but rather it will be an empty page where the player can write anything.
 - Initially, I wanted this to be predetermined already while still making it interactive by giving the player the choice on how the main character will respond — like a visual novel. However, no matter what the player chooses, the tone of the journal entry will always be the same just like my experience in robobarbie’s “Every Time You Blink.” I decided not to pursue this because having these “journal entries” might dictate what the player should feel rather than giving them the freedom to experience the game with their own thoughts and emotions.
 - This can be accessed in the game’s desktop through the application called “Journal.”
- Other details:
 - Once a day ends, a loading screen will appear with the words “See you tomorrow...” on it.

- Once the player finishes the level assigned for the day, the day will automatically end.
- The player can choose to proceed to the next day, for whatever reason, through a button found on the Menu window.
- As much as possible, every aspect of the game will be made with intention — it will either directly point to the message that I want to convey or be a medium to direct the player towards it.

Planning

- Wireframe
 - I created a wireframe to help me visualize the overall look of each scene and the specific positions of the icons, buttons, and images.
 - I went for a 1920 x 1080 pixel canvas since this is also the dimension of my game. In this way, I was able to use this as reference when I scaled my assets and set their exact position on the screen.
 - There are five (5) main pages in my game, namely: the Desktop (Figure 1), the Distraction Game (Figure 2), the Main Game (Figure 3), the Journal (Figure 4), and the transition scene (Figure 5) which I also refer to as End of Day (EOD).
 - I also created a wireframe for the “Menu” screen (Figure 6) which is just a small frame at the lower left corner. This helped me decide on how I want it to look, how big it should be without it looking awkward, and what the player can find there.
 - I also created a wireframe for the pop-up confirmation screen (Figure 7) just in case there is something needed there. Thankfully, this type of

screen is already built-in in Ren'Py and all I need to do is revise the contents.

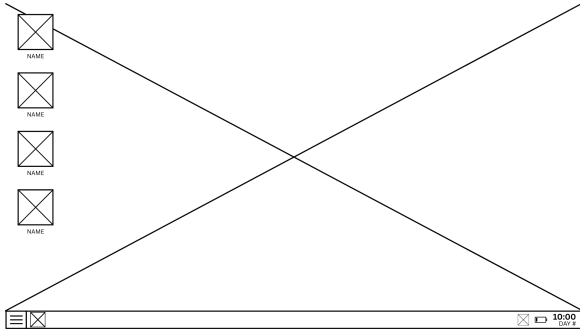


Figure 1. Desktop Wireframe.

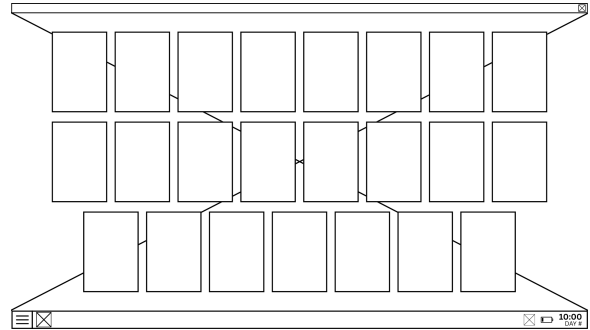


Figure 2. Distraction Game Wireframe

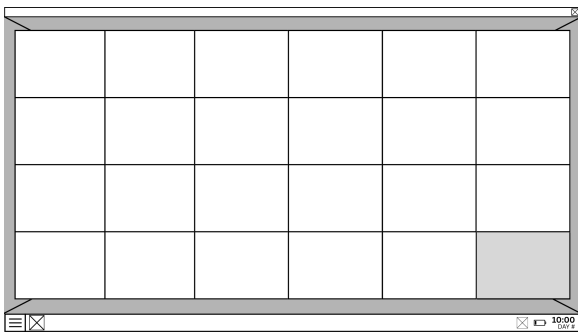


Figure 3. Main Game Wireframe

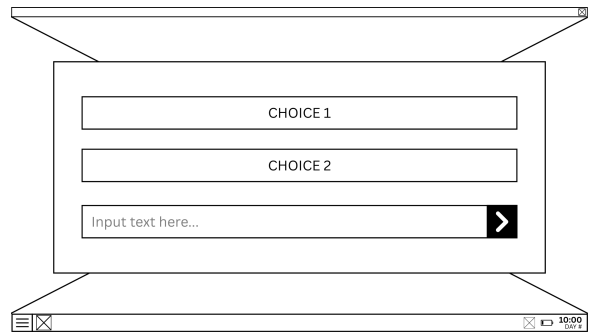


Figure 4. Journal Wireframe

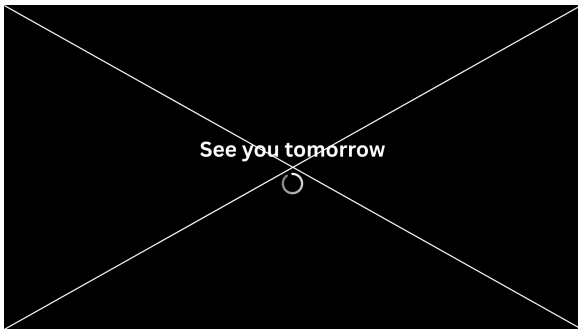


Figure 5. End of Day Wireframe

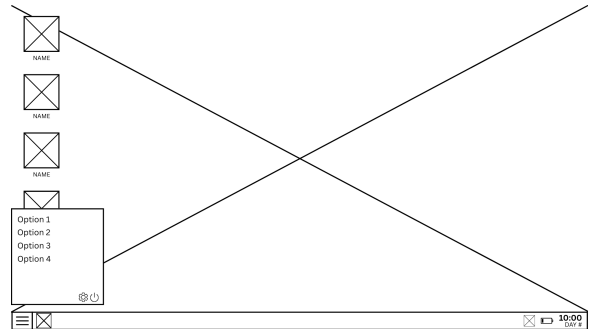


Figure 6. Menu Window Wireframe

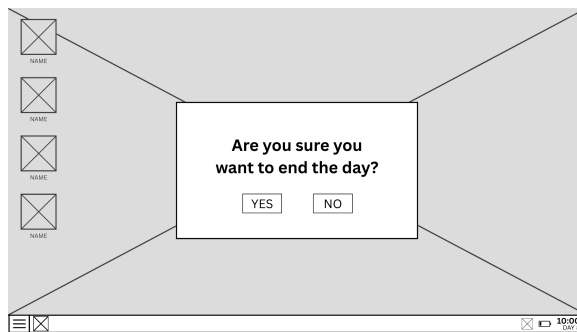


Figure 7. Confirmation Window Wireframe

Utilizing a Note-taking Application

Initially, I was just writing all these things down on my phone which can be confusing since these ideas and thoughts cannot be organized linearly — making it burdensome to go back and forth which I often need to do. Hence, I used Milanote, which is still a note-taking application, but this time in the form of a canvas or board. This gave me the freedom to create lists, notes, charts, and organize them according to what I deem best.

- Flow Chart

I made a Flow Chart (Figure 8) that illustrates the flow of the game depending on whether or not the player has successfully completed each level.

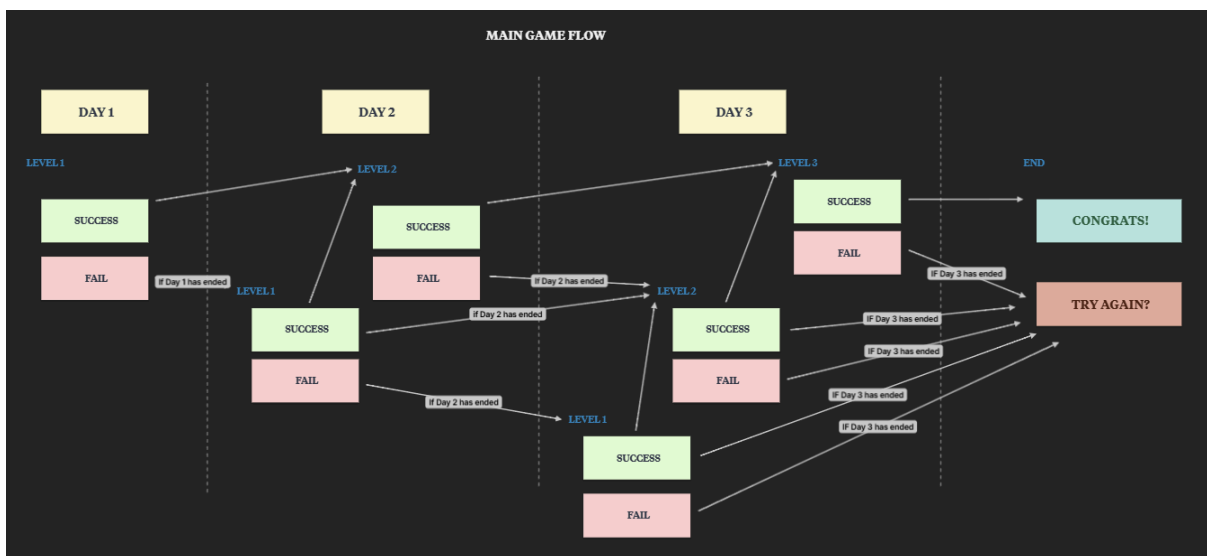


Figure 8. Main Game Flow Chart

- Content Description

With the help of the wireframes I made, I was able to break down each page and make decisions on how I want each one of them to look while still taking the theme into account. Samples of this can be found in Figure 9.

Desktop	Distraction Mini-Game	Main Mini-Game
<p>1. Applications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Recycle Bin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. function: leads to "distraction" game. ii. Icon: mesh bin (pixel) iii. name: "bin" - to avoid negative connotations b. Journal (optional) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. function: leads to the journal where the player can see the reflection, reaction, or thoughts on what happened during the previous day. Player <i>might</i> also be able to input their own thoughts instead. ii. icon: notepad or pen or lightbulb (pixel) iii. name: "notes" - to avoid giving the player any initial impression c. Social Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. function: leads to "distraction" game. ii. icon: chat bubble with heart at the middle (pixel) iii. name: "chattergram" d. Reels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. function: leads to "distraction" game. ii. icon: heart with play button at the middle (pixel) iii. name: "nuggets" e. Project file <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. function: leads to main game. ii. icon: blank paper or white square (pixel) iii. name: "project" <p>2. Wallpaper (Background Design)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Shades of orange and yellow to denote morning/afternoon b. parallel with end of day loading screen c. pixel art 	<p>1. Background Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Multiple images on top of each other with varying opacity and colors. <p>2. Cards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Back Design (Pixel Art) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Option 1: Cloud texture (blue + gray, or purple + pink) ii. Option 2: Question mark on black bg iii. Option 3: Option 1 + Option 2 b. Front Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Icons (Pixel Art) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Broom - Clean 2. Cookies - Eat 3. Tea - Chat/read/socmed scrolling 4. Controller- Playing games 5. Music Note - listening to music 6. Bed - Sleep 7. Something - Cook 8. Phone w/ play button - Watching videos ii. Words/Phrases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 1 2. 2 3. 3 4. 4 c. Amount: 24 cards per "round" (12 pairs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. If it is possible to have one card remain while all the other cards get matched per "round," there will be 11 pairs + 1 card per set. ii. If it is not possible to have one remaining card during each "round," then there will be 12 pairs. 	<p>1. Background Design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Option 1: Plain black (Pixel art), cloud texture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. If Option 1 or 3 was chosen for the back design of the Distraction Game's Card, this will parallel to its design b. Option 2: Plain white (Pixel art), cloud texture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. If Option 1 or 3 was chosen for the back design of the Distraction Game's Card, this will parallel to its design <p>2. Concept</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Initially, I was planning to make this a sliding puzzle, but I think I will just settle on a Jigsaw Puzzle since it seems easier to code — or at least there are more references for it. i. What matters is that the idea behind it stays the same: I want the player to feel like they are forming or building something. An advantage that the sliding puzzle has is that I think it is more challenging to solve. But I'll just adjust. <p>3. Puzzle Designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. One image will be used for all three days, but they will all be colored differently. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Day 1: Black and white <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Made using IbisPaint but with Oil Pastel effect. 2. Abstract ii. Day 2: Colorful <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will print the image and color it using Oil Pastel. 2. Still a bit abstract but less than Day 1's 3. Use rndom colors 4. Add some doodles as well? iii. Day 3: Choose a palette depending on the chosen image <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will print the image and color it using Oil Pastel. 2. It will still not look like the original image. 3. Coloring outside the lines.

Figure 9. Content Description

- To-Do Lists

Based on the content description I wrote for each page, I was able to come up with a to-do list for all the art assets I need to make and all the things I need to code (Figure 10).

ART TO-DO 4 cards	CODING TO-DO 8 cards
<p>PIXEL ART</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Battery Percentage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 33% <input type="checkbox"/> 66% <input type="checkbox"/> 99% <input type="checkbox"/> Weather Icon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Night or Stormy <input type="checkbox"/> Dawn or Cloudy <input type="checkbox"/> Morning or Sunny <input type="checkbox"/> Icons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Music <input type="checkbox"/> Settings button <input type="checkbox"/> Power button <input type="checkbox"/> "X" button (close button) <input type="checkbox"/> "Logos" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Chat bubble w/ heart at the middle (socmed) <input type="checkbox"/> Heart w/ play button at the mid (reels) <input type="checkbox"/> Blank paper or white square (project) <input type="checkbox"/> Trash Bin (Recycle Bin) <input type="checkbox"/> Thought bubble Pen (Journal) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wallpapers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Desktop Wallpaper (orange & yellow) 	<p>DESKTOP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Wallpaper <input type="checkbox"/> Desktop Icons <p>TASKBAR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Timer <input type="checkbox"/> Day # <input type="checkbox"/> Battery <input type="checkbox"/> Weather Icon <input type="checkbox"/> Menu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All Desktop icons small ver <input type="checkbox"/> Settings/Preferences button <input type="checkbox"/> EOD button <input type="checkbox"/> Music <p>CONDITIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 10-min timer per day <p>EOD CONFIRMATION SCREEN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are you sure? <p>LOADING SCREEN (EOD)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wallpaper

Figure 10. To-Do Lists for Art Assets and Coding

PRODUCTION

Making the Art Assets

In creating the assets, I decided to focus on one art style first before proceeding to the next one. I started with the assets that were illustrated as Pixel Art.

- Pixel Art

The majority of the visuals in my game were drawn in this artstyle, namely the wallpapers, the buttons, the card background design, and the icons. For the dimensions, I chose the smallest possible size that still gave me enough pixels to make it look the way I want it to, and without overwhelming me as a beginner. This was 32 x 32 pixels for the icons and 64 x 36 pixels for the wallpapers and background. Later on, after making these assets, I had to increase their size otherwise it would look too small on a 1920 x 1080 pixel screen. I used the wireframe as a basis on how big the increase should be then I just adjusted them if they look too big or small on the game itself.

- Wallpapers

There are only two (2) “wallpapers” used in the game, one for the desktop and another for the loading screen or EOD. I called them wallpapers because that is how we usually refer to them in real life computers. Although they can also be called backgrounds, I will refer to them as wallpapers to avoid confusion. The loading screen is also called a lock screen, while the desktop wallpaper can sometimes be referred to as the home screen — but usually just in smartphone devices.

Since the concept consists of having three days, I thought it would be nice if the wallpapers represented morning and night. The beginning of the day will be

bright, and once it ends it will be dark. Therefore, I used a yellow and orange palette for the desktop wallpaper (Figure 11) and dark shades of blue for the EOD screen (Figure 12). I created the morning version first then just duplicated the exact same pixels and changed them to blue to give it a smooth transition whenever it shifts from morning to night just like the real sky.

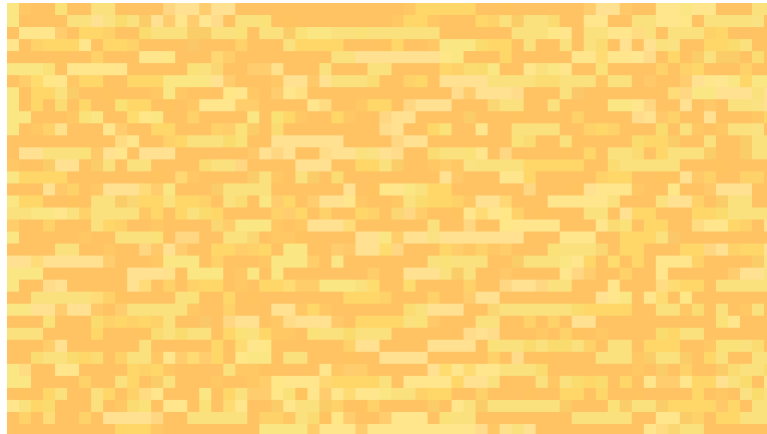


Figure 11. Desktop Wallpaper (Day)

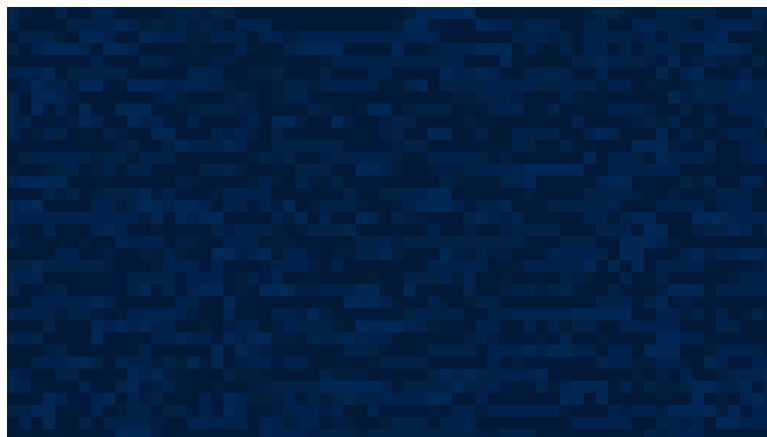


Figure 12. Loading Screen Wallpaper (Night)

- Desktop Icons

There are five (5) icons found in the desktop that represent different real life applications, files, and folders. Some of them can also be found in the Menu, but the icons found there are just a smaller version of what I have on the desktop.

1. Bin (Figure 13) - looks like a mesh bin and mimics a desktop's Recycle Bin. This leads the player to the distraction game because it was meant to represent our tendency to organize things, such as our computer files, whenever we want to do something aside from our current task.
2. Journal (Figure 13) - its icon is drawn as a pen with a short scribble to indicate that this is a space where the player can write anything. I applied blue as the main color since it represents what we desire to have whenever we vent through writing — calmness and peace.
3. Chatter (Figure 13) - looks like a chat bubble with a heart inside to portray messaging applications which can also serve as a distraction. Thus, it will lead the player to the distraction game.
4. Scrolls (Figure 13) - meant to represent social media especially those that support short-form videos since they can cause distraction especially when someone is procrastinating. The icon looks like an eye in the shape of a heart to symbolize how addicting the reels can be. It also leads the player to the distraction game.
5. WIP (Figure 13) - means “Work in Progress.” It looks like a white square box to emulate a canvas since this is the icon that leads to the main game — the “project” that the player should “finish.”



Figure 13. Desktop Icons for the Bin, Journal, Chatter, Scrolls, and WIP (organized in order).

- Taskbar Icons

There are five (5) icons on the game's taskbar, two of them are on the left and the rest are on the right together with the time, which shows the 10-minute countdown per day, and the day, which indicates on what day the player is now in. Both the time and the day are on the furthest right. They are arranged similarly to how it is done in a Windows taskbar (Figure 14).

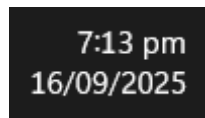


Figure 14. Windows' Date and Time indicator found at the Taskbar.

1. Menu button (Figure 15) - looks like a regular hamburger button. Once clicked, the player will see Chatter, Journal, and Scrolls organized in a list alphabetically. At the bottom right corner of this small frame, the player will find the "Settings" and "Shut Down" buttons (Figure 15). This small menu aims to imitate a Windows desktop "Start" menu.
 - a. Settings (Figure 15) - leads the player to the game's preferences window.
 - b. Shut Down (Figure 15) - once clicked, a confirmation window (Figure 16) will appear asking if the player really wants to proceed to the next day. If they choose "Yes", they will be led to the loading or EOD screen and then they will proceed to the next day. If they choose "No," then they will return to the game's desktop.

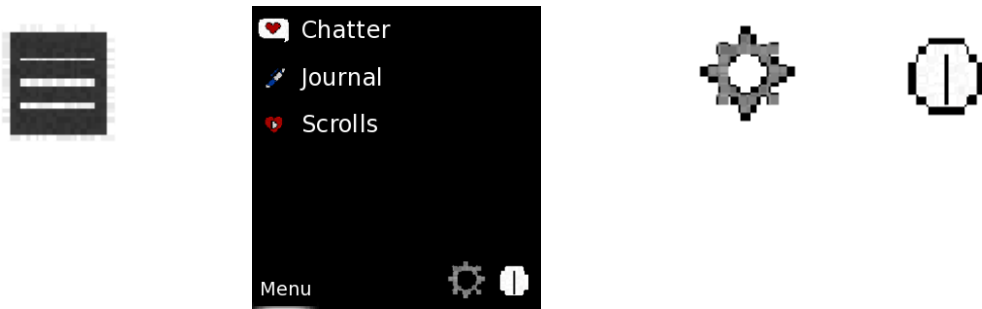


Figure 15. Menu Button, Menu Window, Settings Button, and Shutdown Button (organized in order).

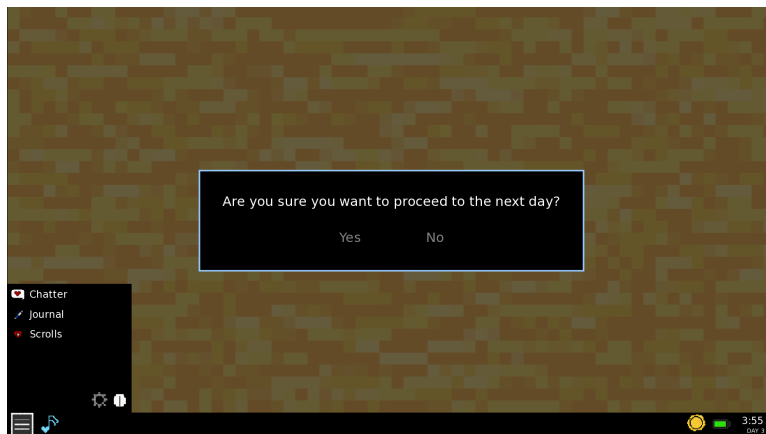


Figure 16. Confirmation Window



Figure 17. Music Icon

2. Music (Figure 17) - drawn as a musical note to symbolize music streaming applications. Listening to music can help some people focus. Sometimes, it also serves as a “background noise” that makes an activity more interesting. At the least, it drowns out the unnecessary noise. However, in this game, it is also considered as a distraction. Hence, this will also lead the player to the distraction game if they click it.
3. Weather icon - instead of displaying real-time weather, this was placed to carry a message. There is one weather icon assigned for each day: Stormy

for Day 1, Cloudy for Day 2, and Sunny for Day 3 (Figure 18). The “weather” does not rely on the main game’s results because it implies that no matter what, as long as we keep on showing up, things will get better and easier.



Figure 18. Weather Icons (Stormy, Cloudy, Sunny)

4. Battery icon - although it imitates a device’s battery power indicator, its purpose in the game is different. Just like the weather icon, the battery icon is different per day and it does not rely on the results of the main game. The battery is on 33% during the first day, 66% during the second day, and 99% during the third day which symbolizes progress (Figure 19).



Figure 19. Battery Icons (33%, 66%, 99%)

- Card Design and Main Game Background

I created the same image (Figure 20) for the main game’s background and the card background design because the “project” and the “distractions” are both thoughts that occupy our mind. However, usually, only one of them can be processed at a time. My goal is to make the main game look exactly like how one card from the distraction game looks to emphasize this message. I used light and pastel colors, mostly blue and white, to make it look comforting and not overwhelming. For the card design, I just had to change its orientation from horizontal to vertical, and then add a

question mark to indicate that it is the back of the card (Figure 21). The design for the front of the card will be discussed later in this paper.



Figure 20. Main Game's Background



Figure 21. Card Back Design

- Photography and Oil Pastel Painting

Before I started developing my game, I wanted it to contain some Mixed Media artwork. Due to my interest in Photography, I chose this artform and opted to pair it with a material that is commonly mixed with it: Oil Pastel. However, things did not go as planned. Instead of mixing the two together, I decided to “cover” the images with Oil Pastel. It will be covered with specific colors depending on the level. Level 1 is black and white, Level 2 will be too colorful, and Level 3 was supposed to have a clear palette and should look like the original image. This symbolizes how ideas, plans, and goals are usually abstract, messy, or even boring at first as we figure out how to move forward. But as we progress, things will start to make sense and the “picture” will be clearer.

- Photography

Initially, my plan was to photograph something specific for this project and then use it as the image for the main game’s puzzle. However, I had a hard time conceptualizing a theme. At the same time, due to time constraints, I cannot devise anything extravagant and dwell on this detail for too long. Instead of shooting, I

decided to go through my gallery and choose an existing photo I have. Then, I found this:



Figure 22. Photo I took at SM Mall of Asia last March 2, 2025.

This is a photo I took at the SM Mall of Asia last March 2, 2025 while I was standing in front of the SMX Convention Center after an event. I remember liking the view because it was quite beautiful to see people appearing and disappearing from the edges of the window. There is something about the transience of it that makes it meaningful for me. However, I can recall feeling frustrated because I cannot capture it properly using my phone. I was so close to deleting it, but I still chose to keep it mostly as a remembrance. Yet, upon seeing it now, I realized that it was the perfect photo for my puzzle. It seems to symbolize a person walking towards the unknown and it was like they were surrounded by these marks or they were leaving these marks behind. Hence, I went for that concept.

- Oil Pastel Painting

Since I wanted to employ Mixed Media Art, my idea at first was to print out the pictures that I have and then enhance it with Oil Pastel. I have not worked with Oil Pastel for quite a while, which is why I decided to try it out first.

For the background of the Journal page, I got inspired by a 2012 post by Wysdom wherein they randomly applied their oil pastels on their art journal to use as a background for the mementos she will put from their trip. Her husband even told her that she acted like a kid with crayons. I loved how freeing that experience was like for them, so I decided to try it out too. It was perfect for an experimental piece too. I had to scrap my first try because I did not like how it looked. The colors I picked did not match well and they turned brown when I blended them which is not pleasing to the eyes. Here is the result of my second attempt:



Figure 23. Oil Pastel Painting used as Journal Background.

Although I had fun coloring and blending, I realized it was not practical for this project. Since I am not an expert yet, I had a hard time controlling my strokes. Blending was not easy either since it took some time to smudge them. If ever the colors do not go well together, I have to start from scratch. Most of all, even if this piece was just me coloring at random areas, the process was too lengthy. I had to let this go due to time constraints. That is why, I decided to go for a more convenient alternative: Digital Oil Pastel Painting.

- Digital Oil Pastel Painting

Before I decided to shift to digital, I already converted the image to a Line Art image (Figure 24) for easier coloring since I planned to cover it with Oil Pastel and the pastels were easier to use on paper with some texture. I still went with these images despite the change in medium.

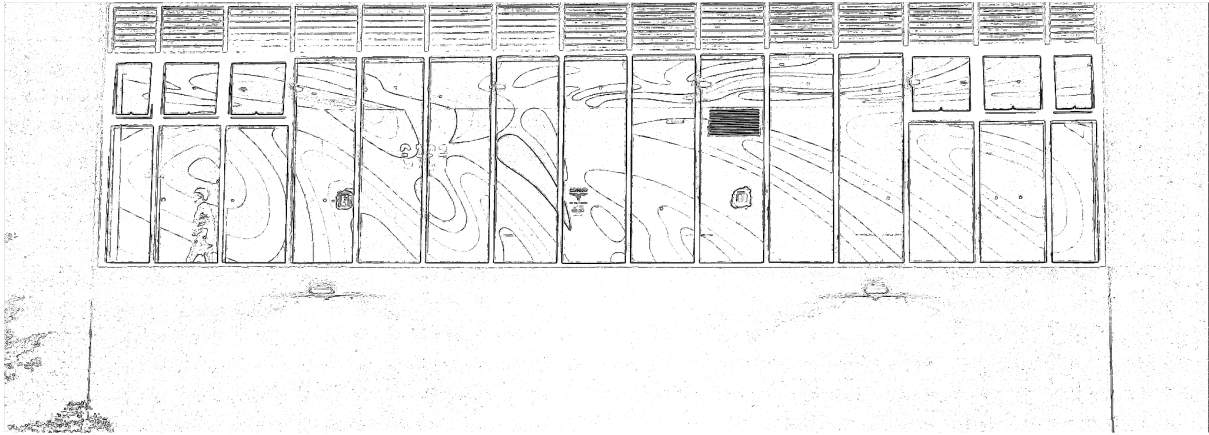


Figure 24. Line Art version of the Photo I Took.

While I was converting it to Line Art, I also cropped the image to 1850 x 896 pixels.

I was able to somehow stick with my original plan in terms of colors for each level, but I had to do minimal changes for Level 2 and 3.

For Level 1, I just used black and white to symbolize how dark and messy things can be at the beginning. I traced the original image with both colors in different layers then also drew random doodles. Since it is the first puzzle, there should not be too many obvious strokes that go across multiple puzzle pieces to make it a bit more challenging. Smudging the piece afterwards made this more achievable. The person shaded with white can be interpreted in different ways. But for me, it was meant to show that despite all the mess, they still have that light in them which they may or may not see.



Figure 25. Image for Main Game Level 1

For Level 2, I still utilized a variety of colors for the first layer as planned. I traced the patterns first found in the image using different colors to give it some form, then I filled the remaining space randomly with the same colors. Lastly, I smudged the strokes to blend them all together (Figure 26). But afterwards, I covered that layer with two other layers which were fully shaded with black oil pastel. Then using a thin eraser tool, I wrote the statement "Malayo pa pero malayo na" on the first layer (Figure 27). Meanwhile, on the second black layer, I traced and erased the patterns found on the image itself, and then wrote the word "It's OK" using a thicker eraser tool (Figure 28). I experimented with different variations of these steps, but I ended up with this. It produced an image that is still mostly black, but now with streaks of colors. For me, this portrays what lies within despite the mess. The person walking was still highlighted in white to symbolize that they are still the same person in the first image who were surrounded by darkness. But this time, things are starting to make more sense, things are taking form, colors begin to appear in their life. Perhaps, things are not too bad.

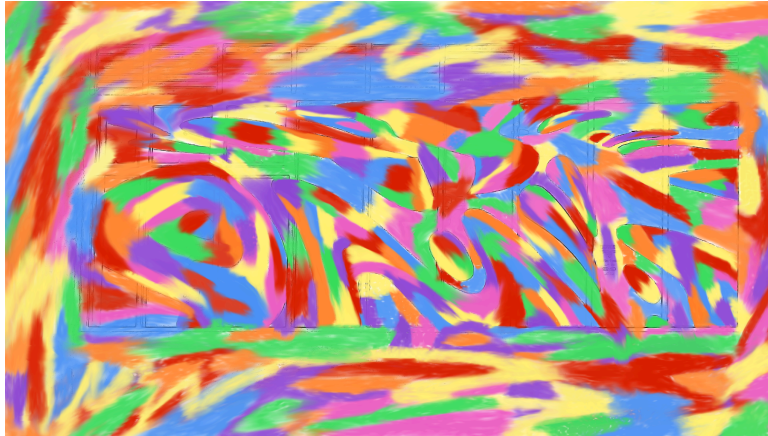


Figure 26. Smudged Colored Background for Level 2's Image.

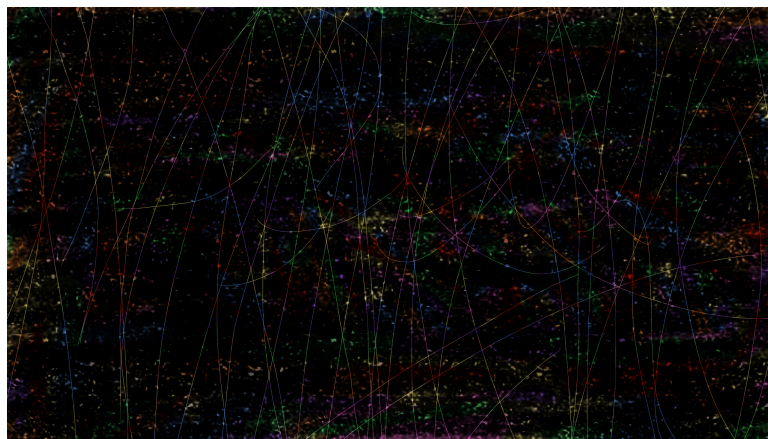


Figure 27. "Malayo Pa Pero Malayo Na"



Figure 28. "It's Ok"

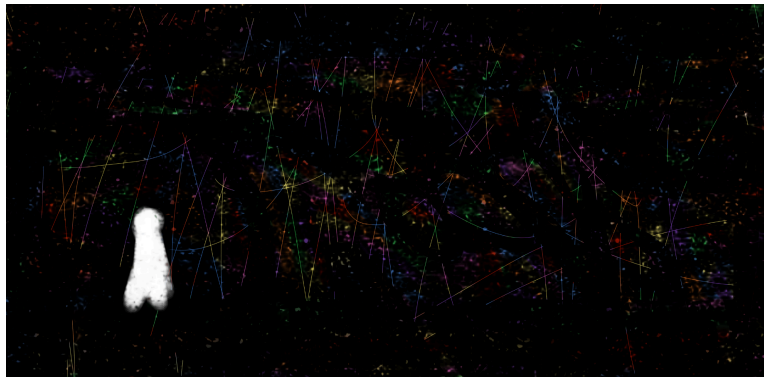


Figure 29. Image for Main Game Level 2

Lastly, instead of utilizing a single palette as planned for Level 3, I used the same colors I have in the image for Level 2. But this time, I changed the way I shaded the patterns found on the image. I did not trace the shapes with random colors. Rather, I assigned a color for each one of them. Just like the image for Level 2, I also added two layers of black and then used the eraser tool to write the phrases “keep going” (Figure 30) and “you can do it” (Figure 31) — one for each layer. Contrary to the previous images though, the colored patterns are now on top of the black layers. This is the closest version to the real image, signifying what is possible when we show up and do something consistently. Just like the previous two, this is open to interpretation, but for me, it is like embracing the darkness, the messiness and finally creating something — making progress.

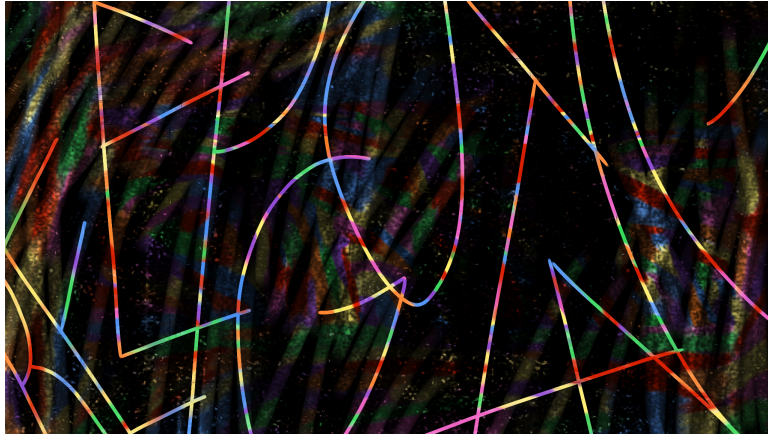


Figure 30. "Keep Going"

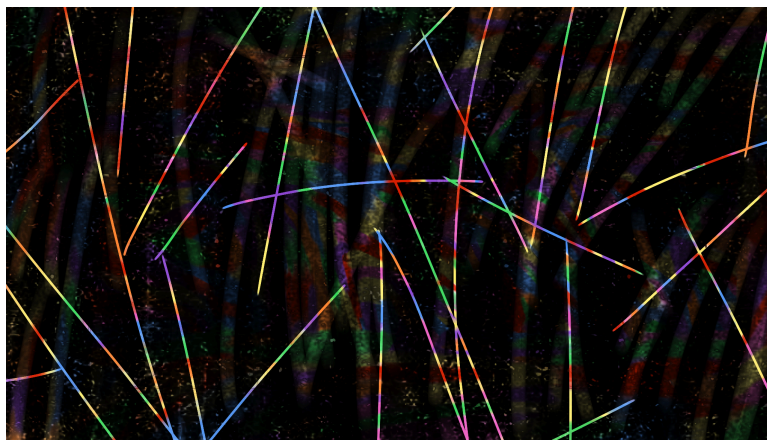


Figure 31. "You Can Do It"



Figure 32. Image for Main Game Level 3

- Other Art Assets

Aside from Pixel Art, Photography, and Digital Oil Pastel Painting, I had to use Canva and another Image Processing Software for the distraction game's front card design and the background used on that game's page.

- Card Front Design

The Action Cards exist to represent the usual distractions we have whenever we delay getting started such as listening to music, gaming, cooking, cleaning, memes, etc. I used copyright-free images to represent these and edited them to make them look like a watercolor painting to achieve a dreamy look to represent their transience as a “task” and since they represent what the player’s mind is currently occupied with — distractions. Then I just placed the images on top of the pastel blue pixel background I created earlier and adjusted their opacity to make it look like it is blending with the background. I added a thin outline to the card itself, for both the back and front design, and added a shadow below to ensure that it will not get swallowed by the game’s light colored background. Lastly, I added an almost transparent version of the light blue pixel image on top to ensure that the watercolor images will not pop-up too much.

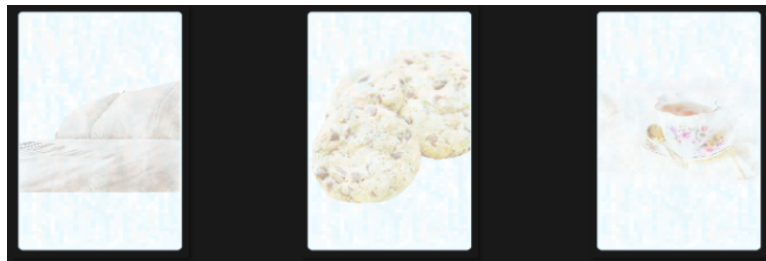


Figure 33. Card Front Design - Action Cards

Meanwhile, here are the statements used for the Thought Cards:

1. Can I do this?
2. I'm not ready yet.
3. Maybe later.
4. This is not the time.
5. I wanna give up

I used Canva’s “Love Bytes” typeface and placed these texts at the center of the card. On the other hand, I used Canva’s “Scr-N Five Tight” typeface for the numbers at the bottom right corner of the card. Then just like with the Action Cards, I placed a subtle version of the light blue pixel image on top, an outline on the cards itself, and a shadow. Each card is 185 x 268 pixels big.



Figure 34. Card Front Design - Thought Cards

- Distraction Game Background

Once again, I utilized Canva to make this. What I tried to achieve is a “dreamy” collage that showcases the distractions we normally have. Its dimensions are 1920 x 1080 pixels.



Figure 35. Distraction Game Background

Building the Game

After I created all the art assets, it is now time to build the game in Ren'Py. I referred to various forums, tutorials, and the Ren'Py Documentation as I coded this. Whenever I encountered concepts or errors that I still did not get despite going through those references, I utilized Artificial Intelligence (AI) to better understand them and to check potential troubleshooting options. I still cross-referenced the explanations I got though to ensure that what it gave me is accurate. The wireframes I made were beneficial throughout this process as it provided me insight on how I should organize every element in the code.

1. Building the main structure of my game

The first thing I did was create the “desktop” of my game and place all the elements found in it: the Desktop applications which will lead the player to the mini-game, the taskbar and its icons, the wallpaper, and the timer. Initially, the background of my taskbar was generated by coding a colored bar in Ren'Py. However, it got in conflict with the other elements, so I had to create a plain black image instead and just apply it as a picture. I had trouble with the 10-minute timer of the game since the screen keeps on refreshing whenever I click on anything except for the buttons. When this happened, the timer would restart which made it useless since the game relies on this timer. After experimenting with different things based on various forums that discussed problems similar to this, I found out through noeinan's 2015 forum post that the solution is to “call” a screen in the label where this is found since this will automatically pause everything unless the player does something to “return.” This worked perfectly.

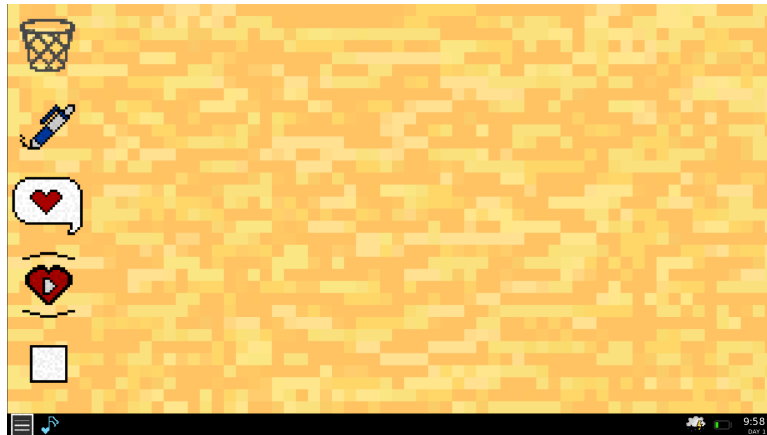


Figure 36. Desktop

2. Building the Distraction Game



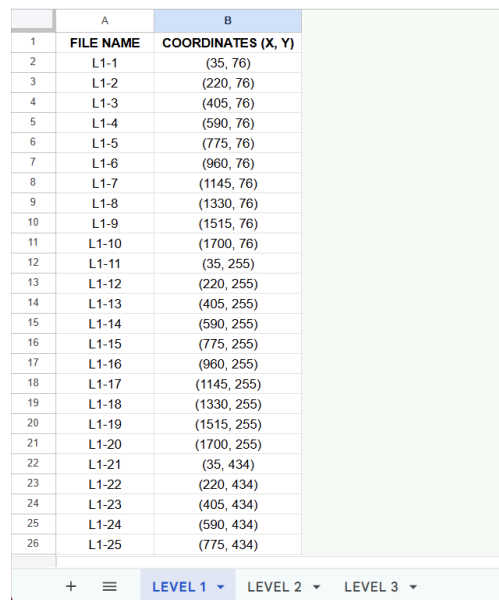
Figure 37. Distraction Game

I decided to code this first since I only have to do this once unlike the main game which I have to code three times. I used the “Ren’Py Memory card Mini-game Tutorial” by `__ess__` Ren’Py Tutorials posted last 2023 as the main basis of my code and then just tweaked it based on my needs. I was able to follow it without any issues, but at first, the cards were too huge that they occupied the entire screen. I found out that the cards’ dimensions increased unintentionally when I exported them. Hence, I had to export them again in the right size. However, it still was not working properly because all the cards were stacked on top of each other at the upper left corner of the screen. I later found out that the only issue is that I was not able to

indent a block of code. Coding this game reminded me of the importance of proper indentations, spelling, and consistency because otherwise the game can crash or not work properly.

3. Building the Main Game

Just like what I did with the distraction game, I also followed another tutorial by [__ess__Ren'Py Tutorials](#) posted last 2023 entitled “Using Drag & Drop to Reassemble Pieces of A Page - Ren'Py Mini-game Tutorial” and adjusted it accordingly. Before everything though, I had to slice each image into their corresponding pieces. There are 50 pieces for Level 1, 28 pieces for Level 2, and 15 pieces for Level 3. Instead of cutting them into the shape of a jigsaw, I went for rectangles and squares instead of cutting them like a jigsaw puzzle to make it a bit more challenging for the player. I also had to identify the position of each puzzle piece vis-à-vis the game screen since that was essential in the code.



	A	B
1	FILE NAME	COORDINATES (X, Y)
2	L1-1	(35, 76)
3	L1-2	(220, 76)
4	L1-3	(405, 76)
5	L1-4	(590, 76)
6	L1-5	(775, 76)
7	L1-6	(960, 76)
8	L1-7	(1145, 76)
9	L1-8	(1330, 76)
10	L1-9	(1515, 76)
11	L1-10	(1700, 76)
12	L1-11	(35, 255)
13	L1-12	(220, 255)
14	L1-13	(405, 255)
15	L1-14	(590, 255)
16	L1-15	(775, 255)
17	L1-16	(960, 255)
18	L1-17	(1145, 255)
19	L1-18	(1330, 255)
20	L1-19	(1515, 255)
21	L1-20	(1700, 255)
22	L1-21	(35, 434)
23	L1-22	(220, 434)
24	L1-23	(405, 434)
25	L1-24	(590, 434)
26	L1-25	(775, 434)

Figure 38. Cards' Coordinates Listed Down on a Sheet

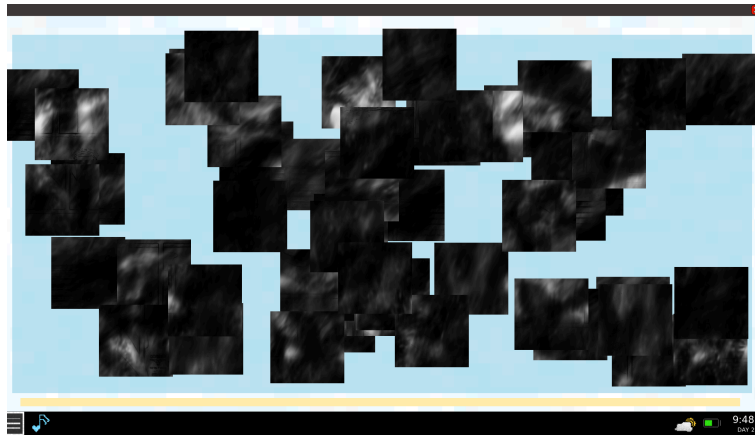


Figure 39. Main Game

I also added another timer for this game which varies per level. Level 1 has 5 minutes, Level 2 has 3 minutes, and Level 3 has 1 minute. Once the timer is up and they are not finished with the puzzle, the player goes back to the desktop and they have the option to play again or wander around as long as the day has not reached 10 minutes yet. If the player decides to play again, they have to start from scratch again for that level. If the player finishes the level, I added another screen where they can see the puzzle they solved in full. If the level they finish corresponds to the current day they are in, they will be led to the next day once they leave the main game or once the 10-minute timer runs out — whichever comes first.

4. Building the Journal



Figure 40. Journal

At first, I wanted to apply the same code suggested to cyandine when they asked for help in Lemma Soft Forums last 2017 wherein the player can input their notes on a different screen, but I cannot make it work according to how I want it to. Hence, I just combined everything in one screen (Figure 40). The use of persistent data played a huge role in employing this Journal. The final look of the Journal, as seen in Figure 40, looks very different from what I have planned in the wireframe because my original idea is that the journal is already pre-determined and the player will just choose what resonates the most with them. The dialogues were supposed to exist to guide the users in the game, but I scrapped this idea while I was coding the game because I was worried that I would make the game's context too obvious for the player.

5. End of Day (EOD) Transition Screen

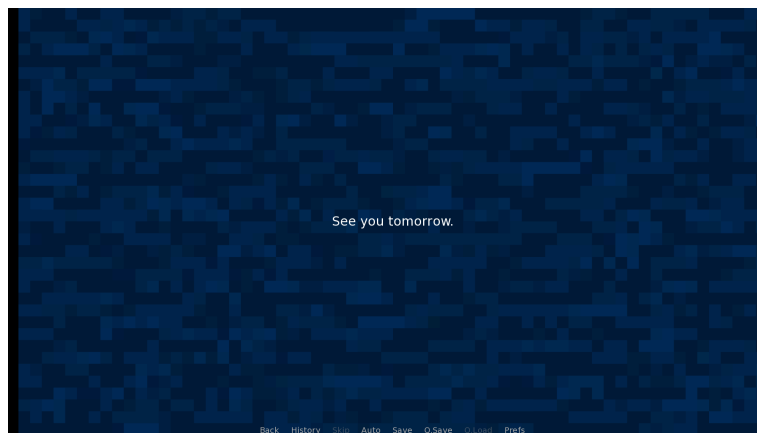


Figure 41. End of Day

Aside from the dark blue pixel art wallpaper I created earlier, I wanted to put a loading screen indicator in the form of the text “See you tomorrow...” by making the three dots flicker in a consecutive manner. I decided to make the animation manually by putting a pause in between “See you tomorrow,” “See you tomorrow..”, and “See you tomorrow...” and have it repeat a couple of times.

```
label next_day:
  call hide_all from _call_hide_all

  scene bg_night with fade

  show text "See you tomorrow."
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow.." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow..." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow.." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow..." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow.." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  show text "See you tomorrow..." with ease
  with Pause(1)

  hide text

  return
```

Figure 42. Script for “See You Tomorrow...” Animation

6. Putting them all together

Finally, after coding each game and screens, it was time to ensure that each one of them were smoothly working together. As I was doing this, I had to remember the core mechanics of the game: the player needs to finish the assigned level for each day. There were times when I needed to go back to the previous scripts I made due to various reasons such as the main game not restarting properly or certain buttons not working as intended. Placing the scripts for each aspect of the game in different files was beneficial because it made it easier to peruse the code and identify issues.

POST-PRODUCTION

Beta-Testing

After I personally tested the game multiple times and resolved the problems I met, I asked three (3) people to play my game. I gave them some context on what the game is about through a synopsis: This is it. This is the day that you'll finally start working on that project that you've been planning for a long time. You've decided that for now, you'll try to make progress for 3 straight days. How will it go?

These were the questions I asked them once they were done:

1. How did you feel while playing the game?
2. What was your experience like while playing the game?
3. What do you think is the point of the game?
4. Did you finish the game? What happened at the end?
5. Did you encounter any technical issues?

Here is a summary of the answers I got for each question:

1. How did you feel while playing the game?

All of them felt confused while playing the game. One of them even asked me what they should click first because I did not provide any clear instructions. I had to tell them to take note of the synopsis that I provided which gave them clarity on what they should do. They even claimed that they felt inspired after their realization. Despite the confusion, another tester also said that they find the game intriguing due to the interesting set-up and found the mini-games cool. However, they all mentioned that a hint would be nice since they really did not know where to start.

- I would just like to note that after I got feedback from the first beta-tester, I decided to change the main game's label from "WIP" to "Project" to make it clear that it is the main game as the synopsis implied. It was my mistake to assume that "WIP" or "Work-in Progress" was a common abbreviation used by many. Due to this assumption, the first player did not know throughout the game that it was the main game and it was part of the reason why they did not pay too much attention to it.

2. What was your experience like while playing the game?

One of the players commented that it made them feel nostalgic as it reminded them of the times they played games such as Solitaire on their computer. Meanwhile, other players explained that they explored the game at first — but they did it differently. The first tester just went with the flow of the game, played both the main game and distraction game, and tried to figure out what it all meant. Meanwhile, the other tester just clicked buttons out of confusion, but once they realized that they needed to finish the "project" they started playing the main game which they found tricky.

3. What do you think is the point of the game?

The first tester said it was probably about focus, although I later discovered that I have briefly mentioned the concept of my game before which might have affected their response. The second tester guessed that what matters is that the puzzle gets solved and perhaps even decipher what the puzzles mean before the third day ends. Lastly, the third tester guessed that the game is all about "forcing" the

player to finish something within a timeframe to make them realize that they have the potential to finish tasks within a timeframe.

4. Did you finish the game? What happened at the end?

They all finished the game, but none of them finished any level. The first tester did not play the main game at all and focused on the distraction game, while the second and third testers failed to finish the first puzzle.

5. Did you encounter any technical issues?

The first tester did not report any issues, but they mentioned that they thought the music note found at the taskbar would give the game some music. The second tester reported that while they were playing the distraction game, it suddenly froze then an error page would appear. Unfortunately, they were not able to take a screenshot of the problem and I cannot identify what caused this problem for them. The third tester pointed out that they cannot quit the game if they are in the “Log in” screen (Figure 43).

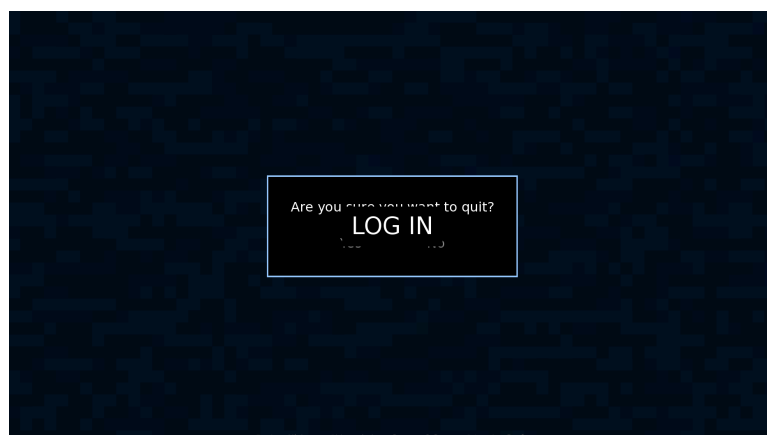


Figure 43. Bug Reported by a Beta-Tester

Once I gathered their responses, I explained the concept to them and explained the reason behind each detail in the game. Afterwards, I sent them the following follow-up questions:

1. Do you have any comments or suggestions on how I can better get this message across?
2. Do you have any comments or suggestions on the game in general?

Here is a summarized version of their responses:

3. Do you have any comments or suggestions on how I can better get this message across?
 - Add music and sound effects to make it more interesting, satisfying, and immersive.
 - Add subtle hints through the game's environment like putting sticky notes with short commentaries or having a to-do list in the journal. A tutorial before the game, a video explanation after the player successfully completes the game, or clues that get revealed whenever a player fails were also suggested. Indicating what type of game it is in the synopsis was also recommended.
 - Make the puzzles more interesting and colorful. At the same time, make sure it is accessible even for people with visual impairments.
 - Find a way to tell the player that the project is the main game. One of the testers thought the distraction game was part of the "project."
4. Do you have any comments or suggestions on the game in general?

The testers just reiterated the suggestions they gave on the first follow-up question. One of them gave emphasis on making it more immersive by adding at

least some sound effects and “personalizing” the environment by making it dynamic according to what day it is, what is going on so far with the game, and by using them to give the players some subtle clues.

Other comments and suggestions they mentioned during our conversation about the game which are worth noting are:

- The first puzzle was not interesting for one of the testers because it was too sad and “emo.”
- They are not interested in the game in general because they are not the type to keep on trying even if
- One of the testers did not notice the main game’s timer immediately.
- To lengthen the main game’s time limit.
- Add dialogues such as monologues popping-up whenever the player matches a card in the distraction game to hint that they are getting distracted.
- Matching the desktop wallpaper’s design with the weather icon on the taskbar.

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary and Conclusions

I was able to successfully create my first functional video game that not only utilizes game mechanics to tell a story, but was also able to emphasize the importance of understanding user experience and expectations during the game development process.

As I was creating my game, I had a lot of ideas on how I can potentially convey what it is like to get started and the challenges that come with it. I made sure that every detail in the game pointed to it — from the taskbar icons that symbolizes progress, the images used in the main puzzle that had hidden encouraging statements written on it, the distraction game that was supposed to be addicting and the main game that was supposed to be challenging, to the 10-minute timer. However, I have forgotten to put myself in the shoes of a player who has no idea about the concept of the game. Due to this, all the testers were left confused as they played the game and it was unclear if they were really able to experience it the way it was intended to.

Choosing not to utilize dialogue and narration to tell a story indeed gave the testers an opportunity to explore and do whatever they pleased. One chose to just play the distraction game, while the rest played the game either out of curiosity or in hopes to accomplish something. However, the agenda of the game was unclear to them — what they should or should not do and why. This presented the limitations or the challenge in using game mechanics as the “narrator” — the player and how they would view the game. As *Extra Credits* (2012c) said, it is vital that the players

understand how they should perceive the game. That it is a “metaphor” of a scenario that I want them to experience.

Therefore, it must be remembered that Game Development is a collaborative process not just between different fields in creating the game, but also between the developers and the players themselves. The creator’s vision must meet halfway with the player’s assumption otherwise there will be miscommunication or disappointment. No matter how much meaning I try to incorporate in each detail of the game, they will not matter if the player does not get it.

Storytelling through game mechanics alone was harder than I thought. All the testers asked for some hints and instructions to make the game’s intention and direction clearer. However, I felt conflicted as I was receiving this feedback because doing that will set the tone of the game. It will give the player an idea on what to feel and what they must do to “win” the game. For me, that defeated the purpose of a game whose storytelling relies on the player’s experience. Yet, at the same time, I do not want the player to just feel confused all throughout because they will not get the point either if they just wander around aimlessly. I was just simulating a real life situation in the first place. Providing a sufficient amount of context might be something that I should consider. Yet, the question is how much should I give away? Is there such a thing as “too much context” wherein my game is no longer considered as a medium that allows the player to define and experience their journey and interpret it on their own?

Perhaps at the end, what matters is the outcome that I want to achieve. I must set clear expectations for my game. What do I want to happen? Do I want the players to decode the game’s story or do I want them to feel what it is like by

experiencing it even if they do not know or understand what exactly they were experiencing? The results of the beta-test revealed that at the moment, it leans on the latter. One of the testers knew that they needed to finish the “project,” and that elicited thoughts and emotions brought by that kind of “pressure.” They even told me that they felt competitive and they wanted to finish the puzzle. Meanwhile, another tester said that they thought the game is all about making the player do something for them to realize their potential. Feeling “forced” was a valid response since the “project” in the game is not something they needed or wanted to do. However, the game experience might nudge them in the right direction as they deal with their real life goals and tasks. Another observation or result worth noting is that none of the players were able to finish the first puzzle. Even I have not finished Level 1’s puzzle within the given timeframe despite knowing what the image looks like and attempting multiple times. I need to decide if I wanted to make it impossible, or just hard enough for the player to respond to it accordingly. Although it helped in accurately capturing how difficult it is to get started in real life, it is still a game at the end of the day. Furthermore, I want to give the players a sense of fulfillment because that will also help strengthen the message of the game. Why should we get started in our endeavors despite the challenges? It is because of the outcome. The only way to make the players realize that is for them to finish the game and feel that relief after all the frustration and confusion. To achieve that, do I need the player to understand the game’s story? Not completely, but I believe that a bit of awareness would help. Going back to another tip that Extra Credit (2012c) mentioned, as a developer I must set limits to the experience. I did set one for the mechanics itself, but it was not enough to define the experience that I want them to have. I do think finding the right amount of clues to give is the key.

I wanted the game to be immersive — to show rather than tell. Achieving that means that it is not as simple as writing a story and letting the players read it. I approached the process as a writer and not as a game developer. This project taught me that the player's experience is intricately woven in a game's mechanics and narrative. It keeps the game together, and without it, the game would be meaningless perhaps not for me, but for everyone else. The player's reception is the one thing that I cannot dictate as a developer because even a well laid out story can still be interpreted differently. However, I can still try to shape their experience and lead them to the desired outcome while still giving them the freedom to explore and discover things on their own. The game's success is all about having a definite expectation and purpose, and being clear on how you want them to be met and understood. I asked earlier if there is such a thing as "too much context," and in hindsight it is actually up to me. That is the beauty of storytelling anyway — the world is my oyster. As for this game, I do think that I am already in the right direction, but there is still a lot of room for improvement. I believe I was successful in giving the players the freedom to experience the game on their own, but the story was just not clearly told.

Recommendations

If ever I choose to further pursue this project, I can consider the following recommendations:

1. Change the images of the puzzle into something more interesting.
2. Adjust Level 1's difficulty.
3. Make the environment more immersive by adding sound effects at least whenever the player interacts with elements such as buttons, cards, and puzzle pieces, and by matching the desktop wallpaper with the weather icon as recommended by the testers.
4. Adjust the time limit for each level. I might also need to add more time to the game itself instead of having 10 minutes only.
5. Add subtle clues as what the testers have suggested such as adding short monologues when cards get matched in the distraction game, adding a to-do list or character reflection in the journal, and putting sticky on the desktop.
6. Indicate what type of game it is in the synopsis as advised by another tester to make it less confusing.

I should also consider user accessibility in designing my output. Furthermore, I should go back to the drawing board and clearly define what my expectations are and how I want it to be achieved.

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