

Game- Specific Instructions

Stat 198: Interactive Data Science and Visualization
Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) edition

<https://interactivedatascience.courses/>

Copyright A Samuel Pottinger, 2025

CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0

Afterplace

<https://afterplacegame.com/>

Minimum completion: You are absolutely welcome to go as far as you want within the game. There is a lot to learn by completing it. However, please try to get to the lighthouse in Rook.

Focus: This game is a masterclass in environmental storytelling being woven in with more traditional narrative in an open world format. As we start to move into interactivity in the rest of the class, this game has a few things it can teach us: gameplay loops, modulating emotional experience through discovery, guiding within spaces which seem to have a great deal of freedom.

Questions: Some questions to think about are below.

- What are the user loops or gameplay loops?
- How can written communication with the user serve multiple roles? Specifically, how can dialogue and signage serve both a mechanical purpose and an emotional one?
- How does the game build “vibe” of different areas outside of dialogue? What choices in visual design are influencing the user’s experience?
- How can multiple contextualizations of simple actions create complex gameplay?

Instructions: Revisit these questions after completing the game or getting to the minimum completion point. I suggest writing maybe 2 sentences per question above as a way to reflect on your experience.

Cosmic Wheel

<https://www.cosmicwheelsisterhood.com/gate>

Minimum completion: Each play-through is very short. I recommend completing the game twice but please try to at least complete it once.

Focus: This game is uniquely excellent in co-creation of experience with the user. This has a lot to tell us about how we can empower those engaging with our interactive visualizations to drive the narrative and how our reactions to them can help them see their ideas in new ways. This runs head-first into the negotiated reading we just discussed in the last lecture. It is also a fantastic option to open our minds to the possibilities of visualizations which give agency to the player / reader in guiding but not fully controlling the narrative in our work.

Questions: Some questions to think about are below

- What are the user loops or gameplay loops?
- How do the player and game respond to each other?
- To what degree does the player have agency over the narrative?
- How does the game encourage you to empathize or relate to other characters?

Instructions: Revisit these questions after completing the game or getting to the minimum completion point. I suggest writing maybe 2 sentences per question above as a way to reflect on your experience.

FTL

<https://subsetgames.com/ftl.html>

Minimum completion: Each game is actually quite short. I'd recommend trying to get through two or three play-throughs, possibly on an easier difficulty setting.

Focus: This game is an excellent demonstration of user / gameplay loops and co-creation of story with the player. This can really inform how we think about guiding a user within an interactive visualization through a complex story even as the "actions" we can take from moment to moment are very simple.

Questions: Some questions to think about are below.

- What are the user loops or gameplay loops?
- How does the game build tension if you can pause?
- What is the effect of limiting the player to a subset of content? In other words, what is the value of having content one can't reach?
- How does the game make each play-through feel unique? In other words, what level of agency does the game feel like it provides its players and why?

Instructions: Revisit these questions after completing the game or getting to the minimum completion point. I suggest writing maybe 2 sentences per question above as a way to reflect on your experience.

Papers Please

<https://papersplea.se/>

Minimum completion: There's a lot to learn by playing to an ending but, at minimum, I suggest playing until Day 14.

Focus: This game really excels in ludonarrative - exploring how the actions of a player and the narrative of the game interact. It can help us think about how the player taking an active role in the progression of narrative can create an experience beyond what the words and graphics of the game could achieve without that participation. This is a valuable perspective to have as we add interactivity into our work. This can also demonstrate how to acclimate the player to more complex gameplay over time. For us, this means exploring how a reader of a data visualization can engage with it more deeply as they become more familiar with its mechanics.

Questions: Some questions to think about are below.

- What are the user loops or gameplay loops?
- What message do the ludic elements convey?
- What is gained by having the player take action to advance the narrative?
- How does the game progressively introduce the player to more complex puzzles.

Instructions: Revisit these questions after completing the game or getting to the minimum completion point. I suggest writing maybe 2 sentences per question above as a way to reflect on your experience.

Spiritfarer

<https://thunderlotusgames.com/games/spiritfarer/>

Minimum completion: Finishing the game can offer a lot of valuable perspective. However, while I really recommend getting Alice to the door, please get Gwen to the door at minimum.

Focus: This game excels in ludonarrative and in expanding gameplay complexity. Spiritfarer's design specifically explores how to use very clear gameplay loops to reinforce the central messages of the experience through the actions of the player. It can teach us a lot about how to help the user gain fluency within systems over time so that they can build up competency to have deeper engagement with our data visualizations. However, it also offers ideas on how to frame user actions into an emotional context in addition to a mechanical one.

Questions: Some questions to think about are below.

- What are the gameplay loops or user loops?
- How does the game build the player's investment in the characters?
- How does food interact with the broader narrative and character building?
- How are characters and their asks used to advance both gameplay and narrative?

Instructions: Revisit these questions after completing the game or getting to the minimum completion point. I suggest writing maybe 2 sentences per question above as a way to reflect on your experience.

Unpacking

<https://www.unpackinggame.com/>

Minimum completion: This game is actually pretty short. I recommend trying to finish a complete playthrough.

Focus: This game excels in ludonarrative and environmental storytelling through the social expectations we apply to objects. This picks up on recent ideas from the class: how an artifact isn't just the thing itself but the social context of that thing and the user's expectations in how that thing works. Clever negotiated reading allows this game to operate almost entirely without speech even as it delivers a complex narrative. It can teach us a lot about how subtle ways in which we respond to user actions in interactive media can convey information, especially in how we satisfy or refute user expectations.

Questions: Some questions to think about are below.

- What are the gameplay loops or user loops?
- Would the game be different with dialogue?
- How does the game use solution validity to build its narrative?
- Is there a place in the game where it defied expectations to advance the narrative?

Instructions: Revisit these questions after completing the game or getting to the minimum completion point. I suggest writing maybe 2 sentences per question above as a way to reflect on your experience.