“We don’t math. But, we do play.”
Teaching game design for Journalism

Juli James, Lecturer
University of North Texas
Half of Americans play mobile games.
“The overwhelming majority of adults play games on their smartphones” - Statista
games are an effective way to communicate an idea.

“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.” - Ben Franklin
make games, not code

{ Easy
  Engaging
  Interactive
  Mobile }
engage our audience where they are
Can You Get What You Need from the VA?

Published Aug 24, 2013

However, you aren’t the only one requesting help. 804,427 veterans are currently waiting for help from one of the 68 VA regional offices.

The Failures  The Wounded  The Women

back

HOME

THE ENDURING BATTLES FACING POST-9/11 VETERANS

READ MORE

Public Insight Network

© AMERICAN PUBLIC MEDIA
‘Can You Make it in the VA?’ puts player in the shoes of a returning veteran trying to access VA benefits with limited time and money.
‘Healthcare America’ engages young Americans in health insurance literacy.
A Game Design Tool for Journalism

- Subject/Theme/Narrative:
  - What is the game about?
- Rules:
  - What happens? When? How?
- Mechanics:
  - What does the player do?
- Message/Impact:
  - What does it mean to the player, for the story, for the world?
A Game Design Tool

Diagram:
- Narrative or “Hero Myth”
- Progression
- Secondary Mechanics
- Core Mechanic
- Revenge!
- Complete Levels
- Remove Pigs
- Fling
The Basic Game Design Cycle

Begin the cycle
1) Start: Imagine the World
2) Design: Create the World
3) Implement: Open the World
4) Playtest: Explore the World

Repeat steps 2-4 as needed

Iterate as you go
• A design will “speak” to you through iterations.
• Pay attention to what it says!
• Is it getting the gameplay clear?
• Is it improving?
• What is working, and what isn’t?
Workshop Exercise

- Work in Groups
- Roll for Inspiration
- Use the Game Design Cycle
  Design: Imagine the Game
  Implement/Playtest: Create
  Evaluate: Refine
  Implement/Playtest: Replay

Play, Design, Share
Game Design Exercise Example

Elements:

Topic: Sustainability
Verbs: Run, Bluff
Themes: Ninjas, Aliens
Adjectives: Angry, Old

How do you take your idea and make it playable?
How is it a news game?
Activities/Assignments

• Game Design Challenge: Getting started with game design
• DOPESTRONG: The mechanic is the message activity
• Table top game prototype
• Digital game prototype
Visual Engines for Game Design

• Twine https://twinery.org/
• Story Builder https://app.playablemedia.org
• RenPy https://www.renpy.org/
• Scratch https://scratch.mit.edu/
• Flowlab http://flowlab.io/
Games/Resources

• Spent https://playspent.org
• Fiscal Ship https://fiscalship.org
• Explorable Explanations http://ncase.me/
• Games for Change http://www.gamesforchange.org/play/
• JoLT Newsgame Resource https://edspace.american.edu/jolt/