Narrative Design: How a Developmental Editor Can Use Their Skills to Improve Digital Narratives

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Abstract: Digital narratives, such as those in interactive fiction and video games, are becoming increasingly complicated and prolific. These narratives are radically different from the traditional narratives (specifically novels) that developmental editors (DE) usually edit. The aim of this research paper is to examine a DE's role in the creation and refinement of digital narratives. Topics include: What is developmental editing? How do narrative forms influence video game creation and editing? How can a DE use their traditional skill set to help shape a digital narrative? What skills will a DE need to successfully edit a digital work? How will an edit of a digital work differ from a traditional work, and what will the editing process and workflow look like?

Keywords: editing, editors, developmental editing, narratives, digital narratives, narrative design, interactivity, interactive fiction, visual novels, video games, gameplay

Introduction:

Video games have come a long way since the days of the arcades. While the early days of gaming focused solely on creating a gameplay experience, technological advances now allow for a sophisticated interaction between gameplay, story and player. While gameplay has been and will always remain king, many of today's games are either driven by their stories or created by players through choice and interactivity within a narrative framework.

Metacritic's list of the top 100 best games of all time currently includes entries from *The Legend of Zelda*, *Bioshock*, *Mass Effect*, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Uncharted*, *The Elder Scrolls*, and *Metal Gear Solid* series (Metacritic, n.d.). Video game websites Polygon (Polygon 2017) and IGN (IGN, n.d.) included many of the same series in their respective top 100 lists. These lists include a wide variety of games with vastly different styles of play. More importantly, it demonstrates that players enjoy games with different levels of story.

Writers of all disciplines are edited for clarity and consistency, but those who write stories often employ a developmental editor to assist with the story's development. A developmental editor who wishes to edit a video game narrative will encounter several unique obstacles during the process. Video games, like every narrative form, benefit from developmental editing, but interactivity and player choice directly impact how a video game narrative is created, expressed, experienced, and refined. Fortunately, similarities in narrative forms allow for some editing philosophies to bridge the traditional-digital narrative gap.

Developmental editing

While copyediting exclusively deals with issues pertaining to grammar, spelling, consistency, and style, developmental editing focuses on content: the structure, narrative, and language of a written work. Developmental editors specifically focus on the story and the storytelling; that is, the manner in which the story is told.

While "written" work is specified in this description, developmental editing can be applied to any narrative form. Different industries use different professional titles for such work. The title of "developmental editor" isn't always used in the publishing world either. Consulting Editor Alan Rinzler said that such editorial work might fall to those with titles such as "senior editor, executive editor, [and] editor-in-chief" (Rinzler 2012). This role is often performed by a writer or producer in television and film production.

According to author and developmental editor Scott Norton, "The DE's role can manifest in a number of ways. Some "big picture" editors provide broad direction by helping the author to form a vision for the book, then coaching the author chapter by chapter to ensure that the vision is successfully executed. Others get their hands dirty with the prose itself, suggesting rewrites at the chapter, section, paragraph, and sentence levels" (Norton, n.d.). As Norton demonstrates, the role of a DE can vary wildly between projects. The editorial process is entirely dependent upon the author's desires, the work's quality, and the breadth of issues unearthed during the edit.

Despite variations, a DE will "offer specific suggestions about the core intentions and goals of the book, the underlying premise, the story, character development, use of dialogue and sensory description, the polish, narrative voice, pacing, style, language—the craft and literary art of the book" (Rinzler 2012). There's no specific method an

editor must follow to perform a developmental edit; however, at the very least, the editor will analyze the narrative as a whole and then deconstruct it into its smallest parts. Narrative deficits are compiled and reported to the author in the form of an editorial note. The editor must also propose solutions to these deficits.

Developmental editing is highly collaborative between the author and editor. The author invites the editor into the world they've created, the editor uses their experience to improve that world, and the end result is ideally a stronger narrative. This philosophy and process is applicable to digital narratives, but it includes additional considerations based on narrative variations.

Definitions and narrative forms

It's important to note a distinction between story and narrative. These terms are often interchangeable within the publishing and gaming industries. Their definitions can even vary between companies and teams. Thomas Grip, creative director at Frictional Games, developed a definition that's useful for his team and this discussion, "At its most fundamental level, the narrative is what happens as you play the game over a longer period. It is basically the totality of the experience; something that happens when all elements are taken together: gameplay, dialog, notes, setting, graphics etc.; the player's subjective journey through the game" (Grip 2014).

This definition is useful because it demonstrates that a game narrative isn't simply the written content that appears in a game. This is because story elements are communicated through various kinds of media and feedback. Narrative Designer David

Kuelz said that "any and every aspect of the game is a vehicle for storytelling, and all of those different elements *combined* create the *whole* [narrative]" (Kuelz, n.d.).

Story and gameplay, despite intersecting to create the narrative, have their own general definitions as well. Gameplay is ambiguous, but it's essentially the result of a player interacting with objects in a rule-based game space. Story includes characters, setting, and plot elements. Narrative Designer Edwin McRae summed up these concepts best when he said "Gameplay is what we do. Story is why we do it" (McRae 2018).

Much like the narratives seen in literature and other types of media, not all game narratives are equal. Different narrative forms require different writing and editing approaches. Narrative forms also suffer from definitional ambiguity, which makes understanding the similarities and differences in such forms even more important. The examples and narrative forms described below are by no means exhaustive.

There are three kinds of games that benefit the most from editorial intervention: games with linear narratives that govern gameplay; games with non-linear narratives that allow for player agency; and games with player-driven stories. Of course, these aren't finite categories either; it's easy for the lines to blur between them, but for our purposes, it's easier to analyze each if they're separated.

Linear narratives

Games with linear narratives are primarily concerned with telling those narratives. These games borrow cinematic elements from film to help express the story. This can often take the form of non-interactive cutscenes in which the player simply watches. The

narrative often switches between what feels like two separate game modes: playing and watching. Prominent examples include the *Uncharted* series and the *Resident Evil* series.

In *Uncharted,* the player controls Nathan Drake as he explores a variety of ruins and fights countless mercenaries. Each new location has a specific objective that must be accomplished before the player is allowed access to the next location. Evan Skolnick (2014), in his book *Video Game Storytelling*, specified that "every player's Nathan Drake will look exactly the same, go to identical locations, and fight the same enemies for the same in-story reasons" (120). This is because the game's story controls where the player goes and ultimately what they can do. This type of storytelling most closely resembles film and literature.

The same is true in *Resident Evil.* For instance, in *Resident Evil 4,* Leon investigates a village and a castle in the Spanish countryside while trying to rescue the president's daughter. Exploration is minimal here because the game directs players from scene to scene and goal to goal. Leon can't go off the beaten path because that would undermine the story. Like *Uncharted*, the game is concerned with telling a specific story, and the gameplay is structured to focus on that story. The story's pacing would also be negatively affected if players spent a good deal of time aimlessly wandering the countryside.

While games such as *Uncharted* and *Resident Evil* are primarily interested in telling a specific story, the player is still in charge of how they accomplish the tasks laid out for them. In *Uncharted*, the player could decide to stealthy sneak through an area or they could rush in, guns blazing. In *Resident Evil 4*, the player could prioritize physical

attacks to conserve ammo or they could lay waste to the infected villagers with a grenade launcher. While the player has plenty of options for how to complete the task at hand, the task itself must still be completed. The manner in which that task is completed is unlikely to matter to the overall narrative.

Works of interactive fiction such as visual novels and graphic adventure games with branching narratives also fit this category. This is because they feature limited player agency. Despite how their narratives branch, the story is still completely scripted. The gameplay is actually more akin to reading a *Choose Your Own Adventure* novel. The story branches based on specific moments in which the player is allowed to choose between several options, but the player is more accurately described as a reader because the gameplay is reading.

Graphic adventure games are slightly different in that they feature more interactivity. In the *Ace Attorney* series, for example, players assume the role of a defense attorney and must examine crime scenes and interrogate witnesses. The narrative doesn't branch, but instead of simply reading the narrative, the player is also tasked with solving it; however, the game's story, and not the gameplay, is still the focus. Escape-the-room graphic adventure games such as *Virtue's Last Reward* combine branching narratives and puzzle solving. Due to being trapped in a room, the player is tasked with using the environment to escape, which also aids them in solving the story.

Non-linear narratives

Non-linear narratives are much more complex because of player agency. These games typically feature open world designs and allow players to interact with the main story as

they see fit. Notable examples are the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* series, the *Grand Theft Auto* series, the *Assassin's Creed* series, and *The Legend of Zelda* series, but there are many, many more in most game genres.

Part of what makes non-linear games complex is their open-world design. Not all open-world designed games have non-linear stories; however, the two are frequently found together. All of the aforementioned examples take place in worlds that are designed with less structure and more player freedom. Writing for Ars Technica, writer Richard Moss said of open-world design, "But to really classify a game as open world, it's got to be about freedom. There should be a sense that, within the rules of the game world, you can do anything at any time while freely moving about the space. It's essential for true open-world games to offer the freedom to decide *when* to do things, which by extension means a freedom to do things other than moving on to the next main story beat" (Moss 2017). Less structure means fewer rules, which in turn means fewer scripted events for the narrative and less developer control overall.

Many non-linear, open-world games use a quest-based structure to give players guidance. These quests can be almost about anything and involve almost any activity that fits with the gameplay and story. Some games split main quests, which are generally related to major plot goals, and side quests into separate menus so players can pick and choose what they want to pursue and when.

Quests aren't simply little fetch requests devoid of meaning—at least, they shouldn't be. In *Understanding Video Games*, the authors said that quests combine structure, action, and purpose all into one:

Quests are a way of structuring the events that constitute a game, as they manifest causality at two levels. On a semantic level, quests demonstrate how and why a player's actions are connected to each other and to the end of the game's story; on a structural level, quests embody the cause-and-effect relationship between a plan of action and its results, or between the interaction of objects and events. These two levels can be perceived by both the player and the designer, and if the quests are well built, they enhance a player's emotional engagement. Ideally, quests are the glue which holds world, rules and themes together in a meaningful way (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2013, 207).

The developers of games that heavily rely on a quest-based structure must ensure that their quests are meaningful and entertaining. Quests should essentially function as mini stories within the larger narrative framework.

The key difference between a linear and non-linear narrative is how that narrative is formed. Linear narratives are formed by the player interacting with scripted story elements, but in a non-linear narrative, the player chooses many of the story elements. This freedom to choose means that the player's experience—and their story—can take many different forms within the same game.

Player stories

The narrative duality that occurs in video games is one of the complexities that influences how story elements are created, implemented and edited. Skolnick recognized that "Most games that incorporate any kind of storytelling include, to one degree or another, two narratives running in parallel. There is the game story—

predefined by the developers to be the same for every player who experiences it. And there is the player story—the narrative unique to each player based on choices she's made or things that just happened to occur via the various interactions of game systems with each other and the player's actions" (119). Player stories, sometimes known as emergent narratives, arise in all of the aforementioned examples but in varying degrees and for different reasons.

In *Uncharted* and *Resident Evil*, player stories are likely to arise in the moments that are unscripted. This is likely to occur when the player encounters a more open area full of enemies. The developers loosen their grasp in these moments and present the player with a specific task, but they don't give the player the answer. The player's action becomes the player's story because they have the freedom to approach the task at hand however they see fit.

In Skolnick's opinion: "Of course, these player stories are only of a moment-to-moment nature, and don't extend into the rest of the narrative or even change anything about the next mission. Once the combat and/or traversal climbing ends and a transitional cutscene begins, the game snaps right back to the linear game story, which is identical for all players. The player is powerless to have any effect on how things turn out" (120). These moments are typically more rare in games with linear narratives because those games are specifically focused on telling their own stories. Player stories that do occur in these circumstances are likely to be brief, inconsequential, and ephemeral.

The same is true of interactive fiction. By virtue of its structure, interactive fiction doesn't allow for much, if any, player agency. At most, players can pick different

dialogue choices or possibly tackle a series of puzzles in a different order; however, because the structure and story are firmly scripted (even branches are scripted), player stories are unlikely to arise. Just like reading a novel, the player's/reader's interaction is limited to switching pages.

Games with non-linear narratives are far more likely to elicit a player story due to player agency in an open-world environment. An examination of *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* helps demonstrate this point. Its quest structure is divided into main quests, shrine quests, and side quests. Main quests include the game's major plot points. They represent the core narrative. Shrine quests are specific challenges that reward players with items and stat upgrades. A large number of these shrines must be completed if the player wishes to earn the legendary Master Sword. Side quests reward the player with items, weapons, and Rupees (money). Examples include fetching blue fire to reactivate an ancient robot, confronting a demonic statue, and photographing a statue lost in time.

While only the main quest to defeat Ganon must be completed to finish the game, the majority of the other quests are technically skippable. Shrine quests are also skippable, but skipping too many also increases the game's difficulty by keeping the player's health and stamina low. Side quests are completely optional but often reward the player with useful items. For example, reactivating the ancient robot allows the player to forge ancient equipment, which is useful in fending off the game's robotic guardians, enemies who are often relentless and lethal.

While main quests and side quests are directly connected to the story's main goal, side quests aren't. However, side quests still contribute to world building and help

the player learn more about the world they're exploring: its history, its locations, its features. It gives them another reason for playing (rewards) and helps build the narrative. In *Breath of the Wild*, the player's story is created by the quests they choose to undertake within the narrative framework designed by the developers. Open world games emphasize exploration and story creation, and stories are created through exploration and interaction, so it stands to reason that their worlds are just as important —arguably more so—than the scripted story elements.

One of the issues in non-linear narratives and player stories is that freedom is still an illusion. It's a restriction inherent to the medium. At some point, "no matter how many options and interactions you add to a game, how many conversation topics and lines of dialog you write, and how many areas you create, there will always be things that the player can't do or say and places he or she can't go" (Lebowitz et al. 2011, 235). Only so many experiences can be programmed and designed, and at some point, it just becomes impossible to try to predict every action a player might want to take—at least at this point in time. Advanced AI sometime down the road might provide a solution.

As an example, games that are story-focused usually prevent the player from killing off important characters; however, some games such as *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (and the *Elder Scrolls* series as a whole) actually permit the player to do exactly that:

> …Morrowind allows the player to kill any character in the game, no matter how important that character may be to the main plot. In this way, it's actually possible to render the main plot impossible to complete. Fortunately, there are a

few safeguards in place to reduce the chances of this happening. Killing an important NPC causes the game to display a warning message, citing that the player should reload the game from his or her last safe. And as long as the player didn't kill one specific NPC, there's an alternative way for him or her to rejoin and complete the main plot, regardless of how many other important character the player killed, though this alternative path is risky and rather difficult to find (Lebowitz et al. 2011, 223).

This is an incredible achievement in player agency and storytelling; however, there must be consequences—both narrative and gameplay—for those actions, which means the developers have to plan for what happens after those events take place.

As *Dragon Age* lead writer David Gaider said, "Every possible branch needs to be written and fully realised, even if not every player sees it, and thus any game which allows for a lot of player choice becomes a much more expensive proposition for a developer" (Chapple 2014). This means that developers are frequently creating content that many players might not even see. It's one of the downsides of a non-linear storytelling structure.

Another consideration in the creation of player stories is that they are highly personal. This is a function of player agency in a world of options. Skolnick summarized the difference between crafted stories and player stories as such: "Game stories, being crafted and refined, are more likely to hit at least a certain bar of emotional impact, while player stories, by their very nature, can and will be all over the map—from incoherent and eminently forgettable to transcendent and indescribably thrilling" (127). If a game relies on player stories, the developers must ensure that they've created a world

complex enough to facilitate the creation of such stories and emotions. That world must also be interesting enough to inspire players to explore it.

For games with narratives, regardless of narrative type, developers strive to create a clear connection between gameplay and story. According to the writers of *Slay the Dragon: Writing Great Video Games*, "In the strictest sense, gameplay doesn't need story, but story, context, justification, lore, metaphor, setting, and mood all help to bring the gameplay closer to the player, and the player closer to the gameplay" (Bryant et al. 2015, 59). In a traditional narrative, the story is weakened when a character performs an action that doesn't align with their characterization. The same is true in gaming narratives: the story and the gameplay can suffer if there's a gap between the two, and players might notice it. Whether or not they're bothered by it is a different consideration.

Ludonarrative Dissonance

Ludonarrative dissonance is defined as "an uncomfortable contradiction or disconnect between the player, the game design, and/or the narrative elements" (Skolnick 2014, 39). A prominent example occurs in many RPGs when an important character is killed off in a cutscene. In many RPGs, the player can revive a dead character through items or magic, so resurrecting a dead character isn't particularly difficult; however, the player is completely powerless when a character dies in a cutscene. It's unsatisfying, but this situation is somewhat rectified by realizing that revival items and magic are for the player and not the story.

Ludonarrative dissonance can even occur in critically acclaimed games. "Take the globe-hopping, characterful tales of archaeological adventure spun by the

Uncharted series and marry them with the fact that the body count racked up by chisel-jawed charismatic frontman Nathan Drake must now rank somewhere in the thousands" (Howitt 2014). The shooter aspect of the game doesn't entirely fit with Drake's character or his archeological pursuits; however, it might also get away with it because it's an action game. Much like in action movies, it's much easier to accept outlandish behaviors and situations if they're a staple of the genre. No one seriously questions *Die Hard*'s John McClane because part of what makes the experience enjoyable is that obvious disconnect between story and reality.

Any form of ludonarrative dissonance is a concern for developers, but the extent to which they should worry about it varies between game and between genres. It can also be used to great effect if the goal is to make the player feel uncomfortable. Video games constantly push at the boundaries of believability through their designs and story worlds (some games emphasize pushing those boundaries), but even players have their limits. When believability is broken, whether that be through cutscenes or a disparity between story, gameplay, and player, immersion can be broken, and when that happens, the game will suffer for it.

The previous exploration of narrative forms and interactivity is useful in understanding how to edit video game narratives because it demonstrates the complexities inherent to game design. Unlike writing a traditional narrative with a three act structure, there is a near-endless list of variables, concerns, and considerations involved in the creation of any video game. Even if the gameplay and story elements are simultaneously designed, someone still has to ensure they properly align with each other.

Narrative design and editing

Most storytelling forms—plays, tv shows, movies, comics, novels, etc.—begin with the story. Gaming is unique in that the opposite is true. "A new game almost always begins with a decision on genre, followed by a concept within that genre. At this formative stage, few if any specific narrative elements are yet determined" (Skolnick 2014, 115). This is not a rule, and it's quite common for gameplay to influence story and for story to influence gameplay. The relationship between story, gameplay, and player is complicated; it's entirely expected that the role of the narrative designer is beginning to flourish because of it.

Narrative Designer Stephen Dinehart first coined the term "narrative designer" in a job description he wrote in 2006 for game developer and publisher THQ, "The Narrative Designer will focus on ensuring that the key elements of the player experience associated with story and storytelling devices, script and speech are dynamic, exciting, and compelling" (Dinehart 2011). The narrative designer ensures a quality narrative experience is born from the combination of gameplay, story, and player interaction.

Mass Effect 3 makes the complexities inherent to designing such an experience painfully obvious. According to a 2014 article by Polygon, *Mass Effect 3* has more than 600 variables in it. These variables include character interactions, encounters, romances, and a plethora of other player activities. Even actions that aren't taken are recorded so the game can respond appropriately to the player's actions (Lien *2014*). Player choices also carry over from *Mass Effect 2,* which adds another layer of complexity because the designers are concerned about multiple games.

BioWare editor Cameron Harris said an editor's role is to improve a game's writing. "We make writing better, both narrative writing, dialog, cutscenes, books in the game, and also technical writing like user interface text, item descriptions, power descriptions, menu options, and also ancillary products like Dark Horse tie-in comics and art books, because we have all the fiction in our heads" (Lien 2014). Much like with a traditional narrative, a video game editor must know the world inside and out.

Dragon Age: Inquisition (also by BioWare) lead editor Karin Weekes described her job duties as such:

> BioWare's editor positions are pretty multifaceted. I edit game dialogue–proof, voice and plot consistency, and IP accuracy. I liaise with our voice-over and localization departments: let those teams know when dialogue is ready for recording/translating; record pronunciation guides for the new terms we make up, answer questions from VO directors during recording sessions and from the EA translating team in Madrid (our games are generally recorded in 6 languages). I also back up our marketing department to provide IP and character information as needed for various publicity and ancillary products (like strategy guides and art books). And documentation for all kinds of game details (Priestly 2011).

While Harris and Weekes' jobs include more duties than that of a traditional developmental editor, the key aspects of their jobs are the same: ensuring the narrative is the strongest it can be by diagnosing and fixing narrative errors. While developers might hire copyeditors for a grammar check, the work of editors such as Harris and Weekes is much more in line with developmental editing.

The narrative designers at Big Fish Games are involved with game development from the game concept's inception. "Our job is to critique the concept drafts along with Big Fish producers, who work directly with developers to make their concepts as strong as they can be. We look for great story lines that work for a game—so not just any story will do. You can't take a novel and shoehorn it into the structure of a game," said Narrative Designer Lisa Brunette (2014). Their narrative designers weigh in again at the game design document (GDD) phase. The GDD is a comprehensive living document that explains the game's story and gameplay. It can also include complex technical information about the game's engine, marketing information, and any other pertinent information about the game (Ryan 1999). At this stage, they examine how the story has developed and how well it aligns with the gameplay.

Big Fish narrative designers also perform copyedits and rewrites; create characterization, humor, and drama; edit and write dialogue; clean up tutorial messages and spice up achievements, collectibles, and item names. They also assist the game guide writers in the creation of strategy guides for their games. A Big Fish narrative designer's exact duties may change from project to project, but "[Narrative designers do] whatever it takes to bring you a great game story experience," said Brunette (2014).

Charles Taylor, the narrative designer for *Dragons: Rise of Berk*, has a slightly different job. *Dragons* is set in the animated world of *How to Train Your Dragon,* which means the game is a licensed property. "I write scripts, conceptualise in-game assets and find organic ways to tie them to our features and updates. My favourite aspect of my work is creating new dragons. I write most of the in-game promotional material for them, allowing me to communicate my vision directly to our players," said Taylor

(Suckley 2017). Part of Taylor's job is ensuring the development team's designs accurately reflect the world established in the movie. This requires knowing the brand and its lore.

Taylor suggested that those who are interested in narrative design shouldn't necessarily focus on game design. "I would recommend Creative Writing. You should brush up on intermediate game design, but even then, know that you'll have game designers who, in my experience, take great pride in their work. Focus your efforts on knowing how to take their work and translate it to something that naturally fits with your brand and your story" (Suckley 2017). Part of that design philosophy reflects game design as a whole: it's (with a few exception such as indie development), a team effort.

Part of the reason that narrative design and editing have yet to take the game industry by storm is the same problem developmental editors encounter in the publishing world: unclear definitions. "When you say, 'I'm an artist' or 'I'm a programmer,' you have an immediate concept of what that person does in the industry. If you say 'I'm an editor,' well, they're kind of like a writer, but they're not because they don't really write, they just look at it, and it just doesn't sound great when you pitch it in your head like that" said Diandra Lasrado, an editor for Carbine Studios (Lien 2014). The duties of a writer or an editor can often fall to other team members who may or may not be qualified.

Narrative designers and editors have specialized roles that—much like other positions—should be fulfilled by those who are actually qualified to perform them. A lead designer or creative director could be intimately familiar with the narrative, but that's not always true, especially if they work on multiple games. They also have their own

specialized duties. A lead writer might possess editing skills, but their familiarity with the story would weaken their effectiveness. Some editing duties naturally fall to the quality assurance team, but there's no guarantee that any of those team members are editorially equipped to undertake a narrative edit (Freed 2013).

Narrative design software

Writers, editors, and narrative designers use a variety of software in their professions. Word processors and screenplay writing programs such as Final Draft and Celtx are useful for writing cinematic scenes. Spreadsheet programs such as Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets are more useful for writing game dialogue. Chat Mapper and Articy:draft are geared toward narrative and content designers (Bryant et al. 2015, 184). These two programs in particular combine aspects of the previously mentioned programs and incorporate additional features.

Chat Mapper uses a "non-linear branching tree graph" to help users visualize the connections and branches in non-linear dialogue (Twine can also do this, but it's more focused on interactive fiction than video games). It also allows users to set conditions to determine which dialogue choices are available to the player based on the player's previous choices. A conversation simulator helps users test and debug their game's dialogue tree by presenting it as a complete game. Users can also use Chat Mapper to create screenplays for voice actors (Chat Mapper, n.d.).

Articy:draft offers many of the features of Chat Mapper, but it also includes a game object database and a location editor. The game object database is used to create items and characters, while the location editor is used to design maps. The key

selling point of Articy:draft is that all of its content can be exported into the Unity game engine (Articy:draft, n.d.). Unity is used by development teams of all sizes and for all genres of games.

Is it necessary for a developmental editor to know one of these programs to succeed? Not necessarily. Narrative Designer Anna Megill said writers and designers typically use proprietary game-writing programs along with some of the aforementioned programs (Megill 2017). Familiarity with these programs might not be required; however, demonstrating familiarity also shows technical aptitude. Writing and editing abilities are essential to the role, but any sort of technical ability is also a boon.

Conclusion

A developmental editor can indeed use their skills to improve a digital narrative's quality, but the specific skill set required to undertake that endeavor can change between projects. The chasm between traditional narrative and digital narrative is staggering: interactivity and player choice create a near-infinite number of variables—both gameplay and story—that not every editor can handle.

Traditional editors who wish to make the jump into editing digital narratives or into narrative design might best be served by starting with interactive fiction, indie games, and games with linear narratives. Interactive fiction has the least amount of interactivity and, despite its branching structure, most resembles traditional narratives. Indie games, generally speaking, are smaller and require fewer resources than AAA titles. Linear narratives are a step up in complexity over interactive fiction, but the story is still a prominent focus.

    While the goals of the two professions are similar, narrative design is inarguably more complex. A narrative designer must understand the connection between story, gameplay, and the player. They must also understand how player action contributes to the creation of story elements and how every single component of a game's design contributes to the narrative. This is the key difference between traditional and digital narratives: interactivity creates meaning. The player is the story's protagonist, and the narrative is their life.

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