

# CYOA Writer's Guide

Version 1.0 - 10/1/07

(Note to STS - please consult Penguin Design Doc for current version. Do not use this document except for export to PDF for writers)

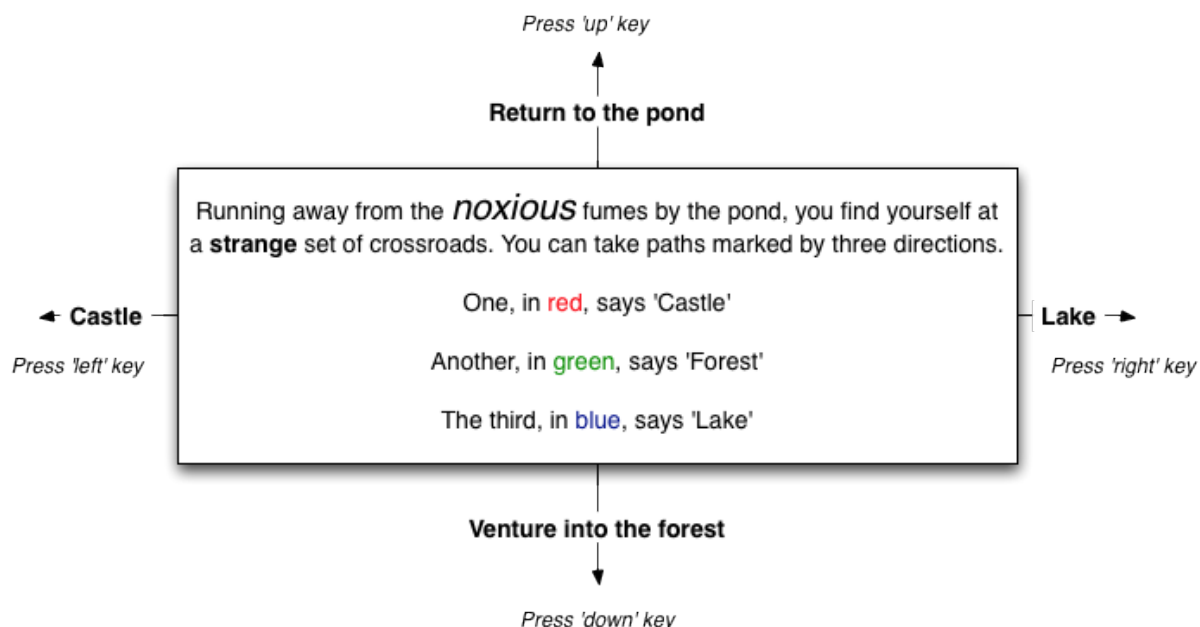
## Background

Equal parts *Choose Your Own Adventure* (CYOA), text adventure, and fantasy game, readers navigate this chapter's paragraphs, choosing what branch to read next, by their keyboard's arrow keys. This gives readers the feeling of agency and exploration, but instead of simply exploring a map or a world, they're exploring a story. Additional game-like elements such as requiring readers to backtrack to obtain a 'key' from a previous paragraph, or seeing the story change upon backtracking, will further increase readers' immersion.

## Structure

The story should be structured in a similar but not identical way to a traditional CYOA story. This means that the story will be split up into short, interlinked chapters of up to 150 words. Only one chapter will be displayed on the screen at a time. All chapters will have at least one link (to the previous chapter), and up to four links, corresponding to up, down, left and right.

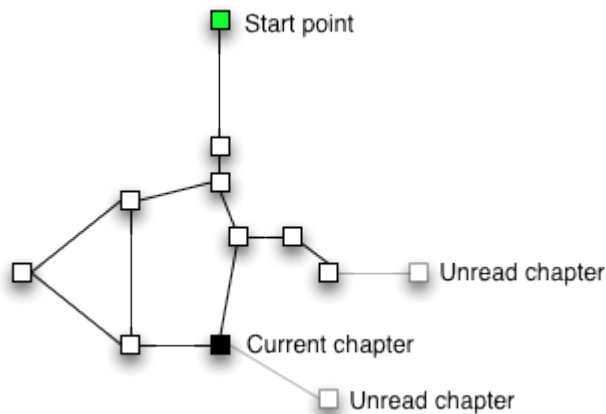
Readers will navigate chapters not by clicking links, but by pressing the four cursor keys (up, down, left and right). Pressing these keys will make the relevant chapter quickly scroll into view.



Unlike traditional CYOAs, the story need not *necessarily* have a branching narrative - that is, one which has multiple, exclusive branches and endings. Instead, the story could tell a single tale, where a full understanding of which comes from exploring the different side-plots and areas. This could be done [Rashomon](#)-style, for example. Separate

branches may also converge onto the same chapter (but only such that a chapter has at most four links).

As readers explore the chapters, they will be added to a minimap in the corner of the screen. This minimap will also show any links from chapters that have not yet been taken, making it very easy for readers to backtrack to explore all branches. The minimap offers interesting possibilities in making the physical structure of the chapters relate to the story, or form a shape, as the length and angle of the links between chapters can both vary. However, links can only originate from the cardinal directions of each chapter's 'box' and there cannot be more than one link from a single direction.



There is no reason why the direction that readers 'move' between chapters should correspond to physical directions, or indeed any movement at all (e.g. traditional CYOA decision points usually do not involve any movement). However, this story structure blends both CYOAs and dungeon adventures, meaning that having reader movements correspond both to directions and to decisions could be mixing metaphors to the point of confusion and disorientation. Then again, that might just be part of the fun.

## Technical Features

Please note that all of the features listed here are only suggested - feel free to use all, some or none of them.

### *Triggers*

The content of chapters may alter based on the readers' actions and explorations through other chapters. For example, when a reader reaches Chapter 16, and then backtracks to Chapter 5 again, Chapter 5 (and other chapters) may display different text; in other words, reaching any particular chapter may trigger changes in other chapters. Triggers may not, however, change the links between chapters (i.e. add or remove links/chapters).

The reader could be made to be aware that they had gone backwards in a linear narrative; for example, the first viewing of a particular chapter might read - "I gazed longingly at the beautiful princess as she was dragged out of the room through the doorway." After reading a few other chapters, the reader may return to that chapter, which on its second reading now says, "I struggled to ignore the sight of my beloved princess being dragged away and ran to the window to see which carriage the Sultan would arrive in".

It is worth noting that while triggers offer a tremendous amount of flexibility, using them for complex actions (e.g. actually allowing the readers to perform actions within the story) or significant changes in the story will require large amounts of alternate chapters to be written. Therefore, triggers should probably be used sparingly and simply.

#### *Appearance, images, video and fonts*

Chapters may include different fonts, text sizes, colours, formatting (e.g. bold, italics, underlining) and positioning. They may also include invisible text (text the same colour as the background, that can only be seen by selecting it) and revealed text (text that appears when you click on a word). You may also include images, sound and video; it will be difficult to create anything complex (solely for time and resource reasons), although feel free to supply your own.

Chapters will be displayed as boxes on the screen; the background colour and outline may be customised (although bear in mind the legibility of the text - i.e. a dark grey background with black text is a bad idea).

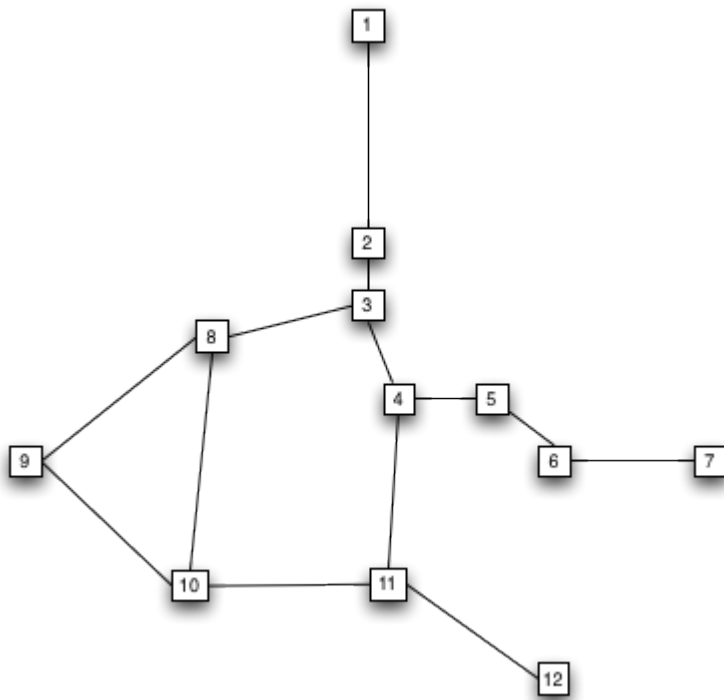
### **How to format the manuscript**

We need three documents: a map, the chapter text, and trigger descriptions.

#### *Map*

The map should show the position of all of the chapters and the links between them. Each chapter should have a unique number. Links may not cross over each other.

The map can be provided as a scanned-in drawing, or as a standard graphic or document file (e.g. GIF, JPG, BMP, PDF). You may find programs such as Microsoft Visio (Windows), Adobe Illustrator or Omnigraffle (Mac) useful for creating the map - if you use them, please provide the original file as well. However, feel free to simply draw it on paper and scan it in if that's easiest for you.



### Chapter Text

The chapter text should clearly the beginning and end of each chapter. Please provide the text either as a Microsoft Word or RTF. Feel free to use Word's text formatting and positioning features; however, please use them in a consistent manner. If you use custom fonts, please identify them at the beginning of the document.

If you would like a chapter to have a title, simply write it at the top with 'TITLE:'. If you would like all chapter numbers to be shown to readers, let us know.

Each chapter must include a description for each link to other chapters. This may be as short as one word (e.g. 'Forest') or as long as a sentence (e.g. 'Take the leafy path into the heart of the Forest'). If a chapter includes images, sound or video, please note this at the end of the chapter, with details of the file name (which should also be provided to us).

Any invisible text in a chapter should begin and end with <invisible> and </invisible> tags. Any hidden text should begin and end with <hidden> and </hidden> tags, directly after the word or phrase that you need to click on to reveal it.

If the text of a chapter changes in response to any player actions, provide the full alternate text (even if just one word is changed) directly after that chapter. For example, if chapter 9 has alternate text, provide it under the heading 'Chapter 9a'.

Example:

#### Chapter 5

Running away from the *noxious* fumes by the pond, you find yourself at a **strange** set of crossroads. You can take paths marked by three directions.

One, in **red**, says 'Castle' &lt;invisible>What sort of castle might this be?&lt;/invisible>

Another, in **green**, says 'Forest' &lt;hidden>You remember hearing about this forest somewhere before...&lt;/hidden>

The third, in **blue**, says 'Lake'

LINK TO 3: Return to the pond  
LINK TO 5: Castle  
LINK TO 6: Lake  
LINK TO 7: Venture into the forest

## Chapter 5a

TITLE: The Familiar Crossroads

Running away from the *wonderful* fumes by the pond, you find yourself at a **familiar** set of crossroads. You can take paths marked by three directions.

One, in **red**, says 'Castle' &lt;invisible>What sort of castle might this be?&lt;/invisible>

Another, in **green**, says 'Forest' &lt;hidden>You remember hearing about this forest somewhere before...&lt;/hidden>

The third, in **blue**, says 'Lake'

LINK TO 3: Run to the pond  
LINK TO 5: Castle  
LINK TO 6: Lake  
LINK TO 7: Venture into the forest

### Trigger Descriptions

Any triggers in the story should be described here. Please describe them as simply and clearly as possible. For example:

After reading Chapter 10:

Chapter 4 switches to 4a  
Chapter 5 switches to 5a  
Chapter 6 switches to 6a

After reading Chapter 5a AND 6a:

Chapter 4a switches to 4b

### Linear Form

We would like to convert this story into a text-only form that will be made available on the web and as a PDF. The structure of this story obviously makes this difficult, but if you have any suggestions on how this could be accomplished - e.g. what order in which to print the chapters, which versions to use - they would be appreciated.