

Write Your Own Choose Your Own Adventure

**By Mike Madigan - Director, Five Clover Films
Detroit, Michigan**

www.fivecloverfilms.com

mike@fivecloverfilms.com

www.facebook.com/fivecloverfilms.com

[@fivecloverfilms](#)

Let's Make Your Own Choose Your Own Adventure!

First off... "Choose Your Own Adventure" CYOA is actually a copyrighted term. So you'll want to use another term if you're looking to post/publish and get your story out there.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choose_Your_Own_Adventure

"Define Your Destiny"

"Choose A Path"

"Pick Your Quest"

"Make Your Choice"

"What Will You Do?"

Next...we're going to talk about the strategy and behind the scenes involved in creating the adventure, we will not really delve into the actual writing process itself, as that will be more up to what your story is going to be about and what style you wish to use.

We also won't be delving into the self-publishing aspect because that's being covered in other presentations.

So, let's discuss what reinvigorated CYOA - "Bandersnatch" on Netflix

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Mirror:_Bandersnatch

And then the lawsuits that followed!

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2019/01/12/netflix-sued-by-choose-your-own-adventure-book-publisher-over-black-mirror-bandersnatch/?noredirect=on>

<https://www.tvguide.com/news/black-mirror-bandersnatch-netflix-lawsuit/>

Some other examples of "CYOA" besides the book format-

"Nightmare" the board game- on VHS!

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nightmare_\(Atmosfear_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nightmare_(Atmosfear_series))

"CYOA" DVD Series- never achieved much popularity even though DVD is a great format for these stories (probably because it takes so much to film!)

"CYOA" short film events

For purposes of our discussion, we're going to be reviewing the process to write a CYOA book with choices, vs. creating a video production or another format with all the intricacies involved.

First step- create an outline of your story: what its about, what timeframe are you in, what main locations will be a part of the story, what main characters will you encounter/interact with.

Next- decide what type of CYOA you want to create.

Do you want it to be LINEAR- as in one choice directly leads to another choice, and there can also be loops where you go back in the story?

OR do you want it to be like Bandersnatch - the choices you make will be “remembered” in the story as you go forward in your decision process.

AKA - if you at some point choose to “Grab the knife” the story changes so that you always have that knife for all your decisions that follow, should you need that to happen.

The “Bandersnatch” format means you will definitely be making a more complex story- more decision trees, more pages / more writing. It will be more difficult to do, but it will be a more “enjoyable” and “immersive” experience for your target audience.

What if I'm looking to get some ideas about what kind of story I want to create and I'm feeling stuck?

An AWESOME and totally public domain game program- **The Wonderful World of Eamon**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eamon_\(video_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eamon_(video_game))

A list of adventures, which were all distributed in the public domain, so check these out and get some inspiration!!

<http://www.eamonag.org/lists/list-master.htm>

<http://www.eamonag.org/columns/Reviews1-50.htm>

Some other areas you might look to for inspiration:

Oregon Trail

Crypt of Medea - Apple II Game

<https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/appleii/564153-crypt-of-medea/faqs/34759>

Classic Nintendo Games

Quest of the Avatar (Ultima Series)

<http://tartarus.rpgclassics.com/ultima4/>

NEXT- you'll first want to MAP, and then you're want to create your master list of pages.

DON'T START WRITING PAGES! You need your blueprint before you move forward.

First up, let's create our map:

<https://bluerenga.wordpress.com/2016/09/01/eamon-beginners-cave/>

<https://bluerenga.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/emap.pdf>

On your MAP, you may want to include what characters/monsters you might encounter in each room, and/or what objects you'll be able to pick up/use/interact with.

Your map may end up being very detailed, and you might build your lists based off of your map.

REMEMBER: before you get your page list together, get your map list together with your decision tree.

In this way, you'll always have your master map to refer back to once you start writing everything, otherwise it's going to be very easy for you to get yourself confused and lost in the process!

NEXT UP- create your list of PAGES. This will be a very detailed list!

Remember, the pages have to be numbered chronologically, HOWEVER you're going to be having your reader jump around the pages.

AKA your pages are numbered 1-2-3-4-5-6-7....

BUT that's not how your story is going to flow.

THEN- within your list of pages, decide what pages are going to go where, based on your map, and what type of decision is going to be on each page.

TYPICAL DECISIONS ON EACH PAGE:

1. Turn to the next page :)
2. Two decisions presented to the reader
3. Three decisions presented to the reader

It's probably best to not go beyond three decisions on a page, otherwise you're going to get really in the weeds as things progress.

This is where your decision of what type of story you're writing, Linear or the Bandersnatch model, will really start to apply here.

Refer back to your map as you start to list out your pages.

ALSO during this process, you'll decide where the story will LOOP or END. There has to be an endpoint for certain storylines, otherwise you're going to be having a very frustrated audience!

NOW, armed with your MAP and your list of PAGES, you're ready to start the writing process!

PERSONALLY I think it's easiest to write page by page in a linear fashion, that way you're able to go back and review what you've written, vs. jumping around a bunch of different pages and possibly getting yourself in the weeds again. But your results may vary :) Lots of great writers sharing their tools of the trade during the weekend here at Penguicon- talk to them!

NOW that you've got the basis of a CYOA story together, it's time to get some friends together and test the read out!

Some things that you're looking for:

1. Does the tree of decisions seem to make sense?
2. Does the story feel engaging to a potential audience, aka do you FEEL you're a part of the story, vs. just making random decisions to move things along.
3. Did the story feel long enough when it ended?
4. Did the loops (if they happened) happened only enough where it didn't become a frustrating experience?

MORE THAN LIKELY... after you have some test reads you'll want to go back and redo some parts of your storyline based on the feedback.

REMEMBER: It's just not the same as writing a linear story.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS?

THANK YOU!