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From page to play: exploring interactive fiction to boost reading and writing skills in the EFL classroom

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Key points

- **What is this?** An eight-page zine, including names of online interactive fiction (IF) games and activities EFL teachers can use to work on reading and writing skills with their English language students.
- **Why did you make it?** Since the spring semester of 2024 I use IF with my upper-intermediate students to improve reading and writing skills. I want to share the games and activities I use and encourage colleagues to use IF in the classroom; the zine includes everything they need to get started, making it easier to bring IF into their teaching.
- **Who is it for?** Teachers who would like to work on reading and writing skills in a ludic way and who are not familiar with IF and/or may be reluctant to use IF with their students.
- **What's next?** Convincing my superiors to let me take this further and teach it as a full, semester-long course on its own.

Tweet synopsis

Make working on close reading skills and improving writing skills fun for your students by using interactive fiction (IF) and related language activities in the classroom.

#DGBLL #digital literacy #EFL #GBLT #IF #LLP #zine

View at the LLP Playground:

<https://www.llpjournal.org/2026/07/07/van-der-velden-interactive-fiction-zine.html>

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What is it?

This 8-page zine serves as a beginner's guide for EFL teachers, introducing them to the use of Interactive Fiction (IF) in the classroom. It is a practical tool to guide EFL teachers in incorporating IF into their lessons for a richer, more engaging language learning experience. The zine can be downloaded from itch.io (see also Figure 1).

The zine features a range of IF games categorized by both language levels (A2, B1, and B2) and students' experience with IF (novice and experienced). This organization ensures that teachers can easily select games that match their students' language proficiency and familiarity with this genre. The selection and categorization are based on my own experience exploring these games and, for many of them, using them in the classroom with my students, which allowed me to assess their accessibility and pedagogical value in real teaching contexts. However, further testing and evaluation may be necessary to ensure that the level placements and classifications are appropriate across different learner profiles.

Alongside the games, the zine includes suggestions for pre-play vocabulary activities to prepare students for the language they will encounter during gameplay. It also includes suggestions for post-play activities, focusing on language knowledge, reading and writing. Teachers are encouraged to create their own exercises based on the content of the selected game, allowing for a customized approach, which helps develop and reinforce students' language skills. However, while the zine primarily focuses on reading and writing activities around IF, this does not imply that IF cannot also support listening and speaking development in the classroom. For example, teachers could use IF as a prompt for oral storytelling, group discussions, role-plays, or audio-based responses. That said, exploring these possibilities is beyond the scope of this zine, which focuses specifically on developing reading and writing skills through activities built around IF.

The structure of the zine offers flexibility, empowering teachers to adapt activities to their classroom needs while promoting student engagement through interactive learning.

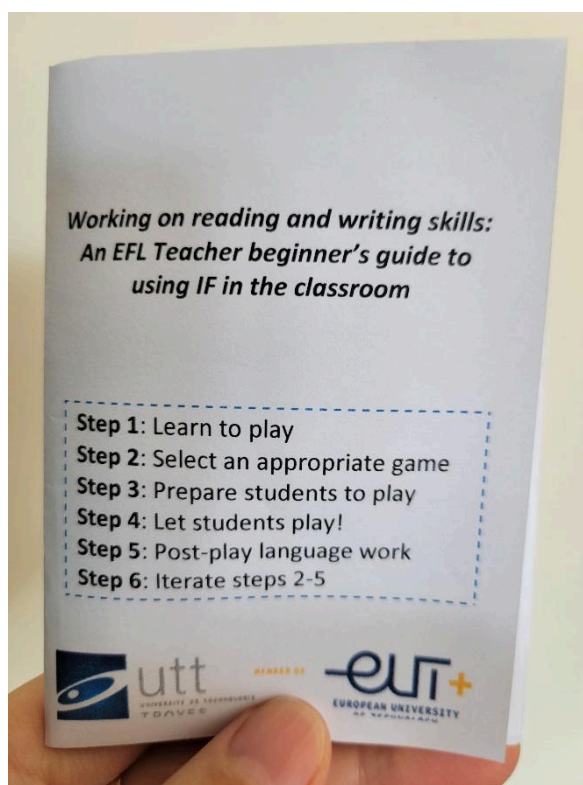


Figure 1 The front cover of the zine.

What is interactive fiction?

IF is a form of storytelling in which readers or players actively influence the progression of a narrative. In its digital form, it is often encountered as a video game genre in which the story is told through text, and the player interacts with it by making choices or typing commands (see Figure 2). While IF is not limited to digital media and can also exist in analogue formats such as *choose-your-own-adventure* books, the zine exclusively includes digital IF games. In contrast to visual novels, which typically rely more heavily on visual presentation and often involve more limited forms of interaction, IF places greater emphasis on textual engagement and player agency. By combining reading, decision-making, and imagination, IF offers a unique and engaging way to experience a story.

Some IF games are parser-based, meaning that players use simple typed instructions, such as “go north”, “open door” or “take key” to progress in the game. Other IF games are choice-based, requiring players to click on options to decide what happens next. These decisions can change the story’s direction and lead to different outcomes. An example of a parser-based game is *9:05* by Adam Cadre (2000). This short, beginner-friendly game uses simple language and everyday actions to create a surprising and memorable experience. For a choice-based alternative, *The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo* by Michael Lutz (2014) offers an accessible and engaging narrative, blending IF with a nostalgic exploration of gaming culture.

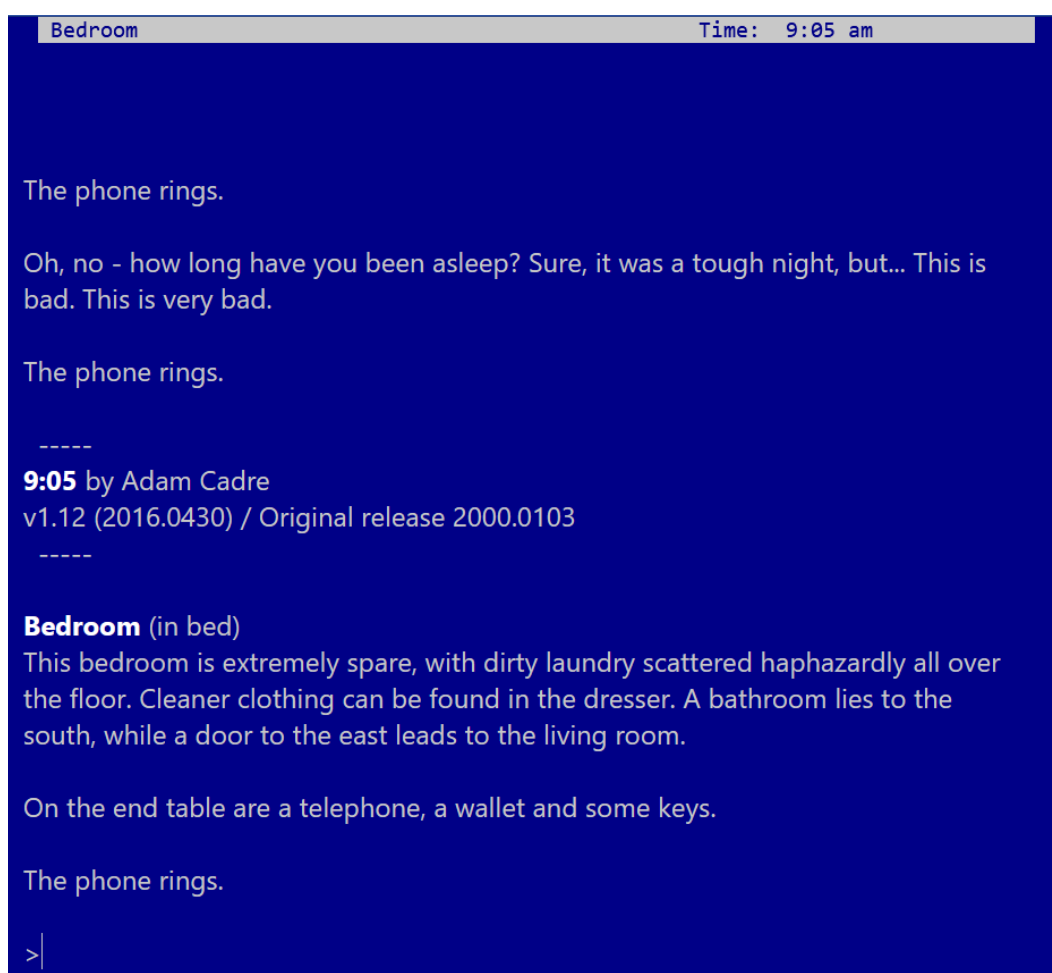


Figure 2 Screenshot from the parser-based game *9:05*

There are also hybrid games that combine elements of both, allowing players to make customized decisions through a mix of clickable options and simplified input. A good example is *Detectiveland* by Robin Johnson (2016) (Figure 3), which uses a point-and-click interface that mimics the logic of traditional parser commands. Instead of typing, players select verbs and objects from menus to interact with the game world, making it much more approachable for those unfamiliar with IF. This format reduces the cognitive load of figuring out syntax while still promoting the language use typical of parser-based games.

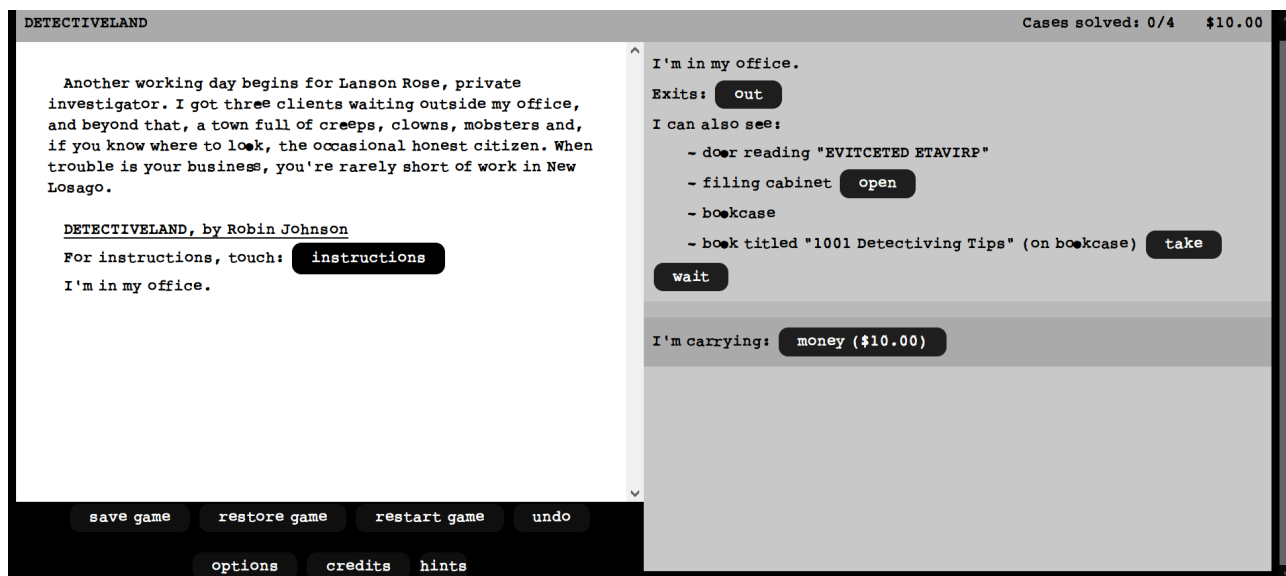


Figure 3 Screenshot from *Detectiveland*

Additionally, some games also use inventory management or puzzle-solving mechanics, where the player must find and use items to progress, similar to traditional point-and-click adventure games. An example of such a game is *It is Pitch Black* by Caelyn Sandel (2014). This game requires the player to explore the environment and interact with objects in order to find a way out of an abandoned store. Other games are more focused on narrative exploration or atmosphere (as in *The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo*), with little to no interaction beyond reading and making choices. These games often prioritize mood, pacing, and player interpretation over complex mechanics (Figure 4).

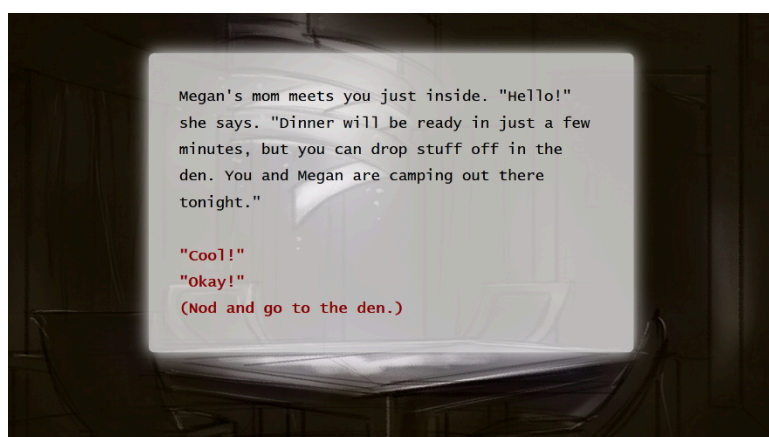


Figure 4 Screenshot from the choice-based game *The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo*

For newcomers to the genre, it is often easier to start with choice-based games, which typically require less effort to engage with. These games allow players to make decisions by clicking on options, so there is no need to worry about complex typing or interpreting commands. For language learners, choice-based games are especially helpful, as they provide a more accessible entry point without the initial frustration that can come from parser-based games. That said, there are also some excellent beginner-friendly parser-based

games available. These often include integrated hint systems as in *Bronze* (Short, 2006) or simpler commands as in *Snack Time!* (Hardy the Bulldog & Choba, 2008), making them easier for newcomers to navigate and enjoy. Once a player becomes familiar with the IF format, they can gradually move on to more complex parser-based games, where they can enjoy a deeper level of interaction and storytelling.

From a pedagogical perspective, simpler IF games can play an important role in structuring learners' progression with the genre. Beginning with choice-based games or beginner-friendly parser-based games allows students to focus on understanding narrative conventions and basic interaction without being overwhelmed by linguistic or technical complexity. As learners gain familiarity with these conventions, teachers can then introduce games that require more precise input, denser reading, or more complex problem-solving. By starting with less demanding forms of interaction and gradually increasing linguistic and procedural complexity, teachers can help learners build confidence with IF conventions before engaging with more challenging parser-based games.

Benefits of interactive fiction

IF offers many of the benefits associated with extensive reading, even when games are selected by the teacher, rather than the learner. In the context of the zine, the teacher is invited to choose games that are appropriate to their students' language level and experience with IF. While learners do not choose the material themselves, the gameplay requires them to actively participate in the narrative by making choices and exploring different story paths. This interactivity helps maintain engagement and fosters a sense of agency, which may be especially valuable for learners who are not naturally drawn to traditional reading activities (Farber, 2015). IF has also been shown to support critical reading, reading comprehension and literacy development in a flexible, student-responsive format (Desilets, 2016). It promotes digital and narrative literacies by requiring players to interpret text, make inferences, and solve problems (Kozdras, Haunstetter, & King, 2006). Additionally, the dynamic between reading and writing in parser-based IF has been noted as a valuable pedagogical element (Sloane, 1991). These features align with the pedagogy of multiliteracies, which emphasizes the development of diverse literacy practices across modalities and contexts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Digital games can serve as powerful tools for teaching both language and literacy when educators guide students through meaningful interaction with game-based texts (deHaan, 2022). Together, these aspects support the idea that IF can create meaningful and motivating reading experiences, even within a structured classroom environment where the game choice is guided by the teacher.

[...] interactivity helps maintain engagement and fosters a sense of agency, which can be particularly effective for motivating reluctant readers.

While extensive reading traditionally emphasizes learner choice and self-selected materials, the approach adopted in this zine is necessarily more guided. The comparison is therefore not intended to suggest that classroom-based IF replaces extensive reading, but rather to highlight how IF can share some of its motivational and linguistic benefits, particularly for learners who are otherwise reluctant to read. Research on extensive reading has consistently linked sustained, engaging reading to gains in vocabulary development and language proficiency, even over relatively short periods of time (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Liu & Zhang, 2018). From this perspective, teacher-selected IF can function as an entry point, introducing students to sustained, self-motivated reading through interactive narratives. While the zine focuses on short games that can be completed within a single session, the underlying pedagogical aim is to foster positive reading experiences that may create the conditions for later language development, and potentially encourage some learners to explore IF independently over time.

The diagram below (Figure 6) illustrates the overlap between extensive reading and IF with regard to reading-related benefits. While extensive reading embeds these conditions by design, IF can recreate many of them when games are carefully selected and pedagogically framed.

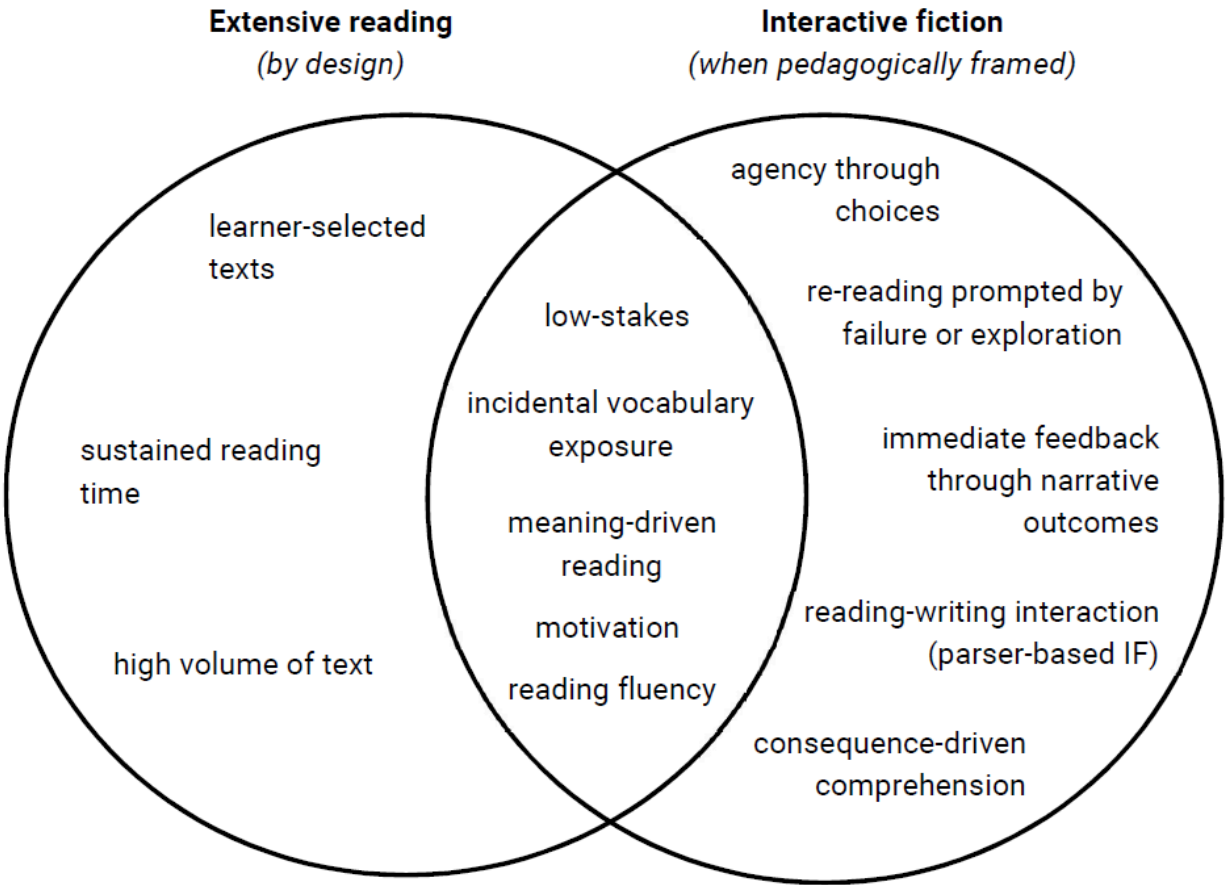


Figure 6 Overlapping pedagogical benefits of extensive reading and interactive fiction

Expanding on these motivational and multiliteracy benefits, IF also supports core language gains, particularly vocabulary growth and the consolidation of grammatical structures. Evidence from IF-specific and broader game-based learning research reports gains in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and engagement when learners work with interactive narratives (Nagai & York, 2021), and shows that interactivity can enhance vocabulary recall by requiring timely comprehension and response (deHaan, Reed, & Kuwanda, 2010). Within IF games, target items are embedded in meaningful contexts and accurate interpretation is necessary for progress, which promotes repeated, purposeful exposure and attention to form (Cornillie & Van der Veken, 2025).

IF immerses learners in narrative-driven environments where understanding the text is essential to making progress. Because players must read carefully to interpret clues, make choices, and solve problems, they encounter vocabulary repeatedly and in meaningful contexts. This repeated exposure to language during gameplay can support vocabulary development and retention (Palmberg, 1988; Nagai & York, 2021). Studies comparing linear and interactive fiction indicate that IF can lead to higher engagement and improved vocabulary acquisition, as learners are more motivated to understand language when it directly impacts the outcome of the story (deHaan, Reed, & Kuwanda, 2010; Nagai & York, 2021).

Grammar structures also benefit from the interactive nature of IF. Players must interpret and sometimes produce language that uses specific grammatical forms (such as conditionals for decision-making,

imperative verbs for commands, or tense shifts in narration) in order to proceed. For example, in choice-based games such as *Choice of the Dragon* (Fabulich & Strong-Morse 2010), players must constantly evaluate possible outcomes before selecting an option. From the very beginning of the game, players interpret different possible actions and anticipate their consequences, engaging in implicit conditional reasoning as they choose how to respond (Figure 7). This process encourages learners to think about hypothetical situations and possible outcomes, even when these structures are implicit rather than explicitly marked. In parser-based games such as *The Dreamhold* (Figure 8), players must produce accurate imperative structures (e.g., *look at floor, examine gap, go east*) in order to interact with the environment, creating a direct link between grammatical form and communicative success (Plotkin, 2004). This situates grammar in an authentic communicative context rather than isolated drills, which can help learners notice and internalise patterns more effectively (Pereira, 2014; Cornillie & Van der Veken, 2025). As Desilets (2016) notes, the requirement to read and respond to text within the constraints of a game encourages learners to pay close attention to the language of the text, in order to progress through the narrative. Over time, this active engagement with grammar in meaningful contexts can lead to better retention and transfer to other language tasks.

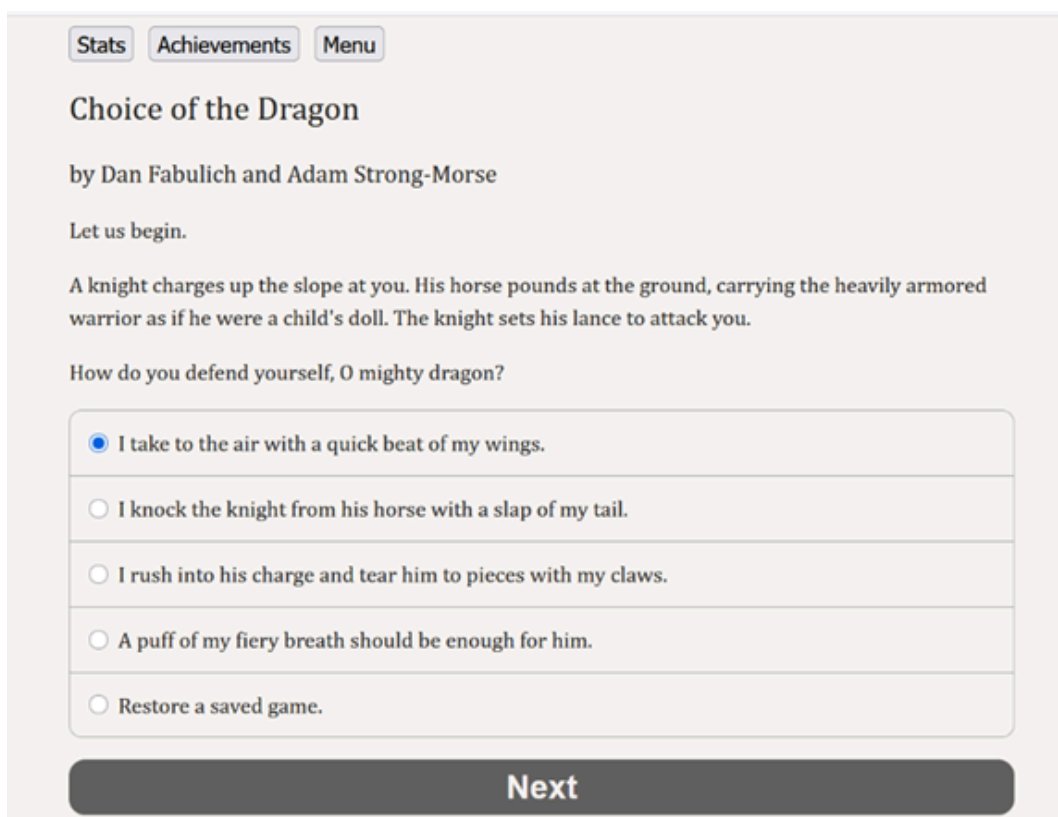


Figure 7 Opening scene from *Choice of the Dragon*, where players need to evaluate different possible responses and their potential outcomes



Figure 8 Opening scene from *The Dreamhold*, where players use imperative commands to interact with the environment and progress in the game

IF also provides valuable opportunities for developing writing skills in the EFL classroom. Because IF narratives are branching and often require players to make choices, they create opportunities for writing activities, such as summarizing events, recording decisions, or imagining alternative outcomes. This engagement encourages students to actively use language and practice sentence-level grammar in context, reinforcing structures they encounter while reading (Pereira, 2014). Moreover, IF can serve as a stimulus for creative writing tasks and other forms of learner text production, encouraging students to engage with narrative structures and express their ideas in meaningful contexts, thereby supporting both expressive and analytical skills (Bacalja, 2023). For example, learners might write reviews, keep in-game journals, or create branching scenarios based on the stories they play. Research on digital game-based learning also shows that transferring narrative elements from games into writing tasks can enhance student creativity and engagement in EFL contexts (Lee, 2019). Similarly, work on interactive fan fiction highlights how learners' existing interests in games and popular media can serve as powerful motivational drivers for collaborative and creative IF writing (Cornillie et al., 2021). By embedding writing in a meaningful, narrative-driven context, IF motivates students to produce language actively, rather than passively consuming text, helping them consolidate linguistic knowledge through authentic, personalized practice.

In addition to supporting vocabulary, grammar, and writing development, IF promotes learner autonomy by placing students in an active role within the narrative. Because learners make decisions that influence the plot and outcome, they play an active role in the progression of the narrative, encouraging greater involvement with the text (Granade, 2010b). This active participation contrasts with traditional linear texts, where readers follow a fixed path, and promotes self-directed decision-making in language use (York, 2023).

In addition to supporting vocabulary, grammar and writing development, IF promotes learner autonomy by placing students in an active role within the narrative.

The autonomy afforded by IF can also enhance motivation and engagement, key factors in effective language learning. By allowing learners to make choices and actively participate in the unfolding narrative, IF encourages greater involvement with the learning task (Bacalja, 2023). This sense of agency supports learners in developing strategies for understanding and producing language independently, helping them develop confidence and skills they can transfer beyond the classroom context (York, 2020).

IF also provides learners with a safe space for experimentation. By allowing students to make choices that influence the narrative and explore multiple story paths, IF creates an environment where mistakes carry no real-world consequences, encouraging risk-taking and experimentation with language (York, 2023). Learners can test out new vocabulary and grammar structures in context, adjust their responses based on feedback from the game, and explore alternative strategies for solving narrative problems. This low-stakes setting not only builds confidence but also promotes flexible and creative language use, reinforcing the development of skills that can transfer beyond the classroom. In this way, the interactive and exploratory nature of IF complements its benefits for autonomy, motivation, and language acquisition.

Moreover, IF's combination of narrative immersion and player-driven interaction provides a rich environment for active language use. Students can use vocabulary and grammar structures in context, observe the results of their choices, and adjust their responses accordingly, promoting autonomous reflection and problem-solving in language learning (Reinders, 2017; York, 2023). To facilitate this, teachers can initially play the game as a whole class, projecting it on a whiteboard, or let students work in pairs, discussing choices and taking turns at the keyboard, an approach also discussed in teacher blogs and classroom-focussed resources on game-based and interactive learning (Fallon, 2026). Online platforms, such as Discord, can also be used for students to share hints or discoveries with peers. Depending on students' comfort and experience, teachers can gradually reduce support and allow more independent gameplay, preparing learners to engage autonomously with texts in future contexts.

Beyond the pedagogical benefits, IF also offers practical advantages that make it accessible and easy to implement in a variety of classroom contexts. Most IF games are freely available online, including all titles featured in the zine, which ensures they are accessible even in low-resource educational contexts. Teachers can easily find such games through platforms such as the Interactive Fiction Database (IFDB), which provides searchable lists, reviews, and links to playable titles, independent distribution platforms such as itch.io, where many authors share browser-based and downloadable IF, and the Interactive Fiction Archive (2024), which preserves a large collection of games, development tools, and community resources related to the history and practice of IF. Contrary to many commercial language-learning tools or mainstream video games, IF games often come at no cost, removing financial barriers for both teachers and students. This affordability makes IF particularly attractive for institutions with limited educational budgets. By only including free games and providing QR codes linking directly to these platforms, the zine aims to support this accessibility and make it easier for all teachers and learners to explore IF, regardless of budget constraints.

This accessibility is further supported by the existence of freely available pedagogical resources that offer ready-to-use examples for working with interactive and narrative-based approaches, meaning that teachers are not required to invent materials entirely from scratch when first engaging with IF. Projects such as [FanTALES](#) (2025), a project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, as well as sites developed by teachers such as [IF Only](#), provide concrete classroom materials or examples that allow

teachers to explore the potential of IF with a limited initial investment of time. Such resources can be understood as stepping stones, particularly for teachers who are hesitant to commit to more open-ended design work from the outset. In this context, the zine does not aim to replace or replicate ready-made materials, but rather to support teachers in moving beyond them by selecting games and creating activities that are adapted to their own teaching contexts, learners' interests, and language levels.

In addition to being free, the IF games featured in the zine are playable directly in a web browser and thus require very little technical setup. Furthermore, since IF is essentially text-based, it does not require powerful computers like many graphics-heavy games do. This makes IF easy to access on a wide range of devices, including older computers with limited processing power. This lowers the barriers to implementation and allows teachers to integrate IF into their classroom, without needing specialized software or technical support.

Things to keep in mind when using IF in the language classroom

While IF offers substantial pedagogical benefits, it also presents challenges that teachers should anticipate and address. Many of these difficulties stem from the linguistic and cognitive demands of gameplay, as well as from students' varying familiarity with the genre (Batchelor et al., 2021; Nagai & York, 2021). Common issues include vocabulary-related challenges. While some games offer relatively limited lexical variety, others expose learners to low-frequency or archaic terms that may cause frustration (Palmborg, 1988). In parser-based IF, learners who are new to the genre may also struggle with specialised command conventions and the language expected by the parser (Pereira, 2011). Directional language ("north," "southwest") and spatial descriptions can also be challenging for learners unaccustomed to such vocabulary (Granade, 2010a).

The interactive nature of IF means that trial and error is central to progression. While trial and error can promote problem-solving and persistence, excessive challenge may also lead to frustration and disengagement for some learners (Reinders, 2017). In parser-based IF, this may occur when players repeatedly encounter unrecognised commands or narrative dead ends. In addition, the reading density and cognitive load of IF can be high, especially when long descriptive passages are paired with puzzle-solving. For some learners, particularly those who are less confident typists, the need to enter precise commands can create an extra barrier to engagement. However, classroom experience suggests that this difficulty often becomes less of an issue, since many parser-based commands are short and repetitive (e.g., *open door*, *take key*), which can reduce the typing load over time and help students gain confidence. In addition, many games allow commonly used commands to be abbreviated to a single letter (e.g. *i* for *inventory*, *l* for *look*; see Figure 7), further reducing typing demands and supporting accessibility for learners with limited keyboard skills. Moreover, the increasing use of mobile devices may make short bursts of thumb-based typing more accessible for some learners, although further research is needed to explore this issue in greater depth.

These challenges are not insurmountable. In practice, many of the difficulties discussed above, including typing demands, cognitive load, and trial-and-error fatigue, can be reduced through thoughtful pedagogical design. Careful game selection is the most effective first step toward addressing them (Batchelor et al., 2021). Teachers should consider their students' proficiency levels, interests, and familiarity with game conventions when choosing titles, aiming for a balance between linguistic accessibility and engaging gameplay. Pre-teaching key vocabulary, modelling common commands, and providing a brief orientation to the game's mechanics can help reduce initial frustration among learners who are unfamiliar with parser-based games (Desilets, 2016; Pereira, 2014). If a game contains particularly dense text or specialised vocabulary, supplementary glossaries, guided reading questions, or collaborative play can help manage cognitive load. Creating a classroom atmosphere that encourages experimentation, mistakes, and persistence can further support students and help them approach the game with confidence (York, 2023).

Teachers should consider their students' proficiency levels, interests, and familiarity with game conventions when choosing titles, aiming for a balance between linguistic accessibility and engaging gameplay.

By acknowledging and addressing these potential barriers, teachers can ensure that IF remains an engaging and productive learning tool rather than a source of frustration.

How to use the zine?

To support teachers who are new to using IF in the language classroom, the zine is designed as a practical guide and outlines a six-step process:

- Step 1: Learn to play
- Step 2: Select an appropriate game
- Step 3: Prepare students to play
- Step 4: Let students play!
- Step 5: Post-play language work
- Step 6: Iterate steps 2-5

These steps guide teachers from learning the basics of how parser-based games work, to selecting appropriate games for their students, preparing students through targeted pre-play activities, and supporting them during and after gameplay with tasks that build reading and writing skills, and repeating the process with new games as students gain experience.

Step 1: Learn to play

On the first two pages of the zine, teachers can find a strategy guide with a list of verbs commonly used in IF and basic command structures. The guide was created by IF author Andrew Plotkin (2010) and can also be downloaded as a [pdf](#) directly from the *People's Republic of Interactive Fiction*. It is intended to lower the barrier for teachers and students who are unfamiliar with parser-based IF (Figure 9). Parser-based games can be challenging for newcomers because they require players to understand specific command structures and conventions. In addition, unfamiliarity with video game conventions can discourage some teachers from experimenting with digital game-based language learning (Pereira, 2013). To address these challenges, the first two pages of the zine include Plotkin's guide. Including the guide on the first two pages of the zine helps ensure teachers can guide their students effectively from the very beginning.

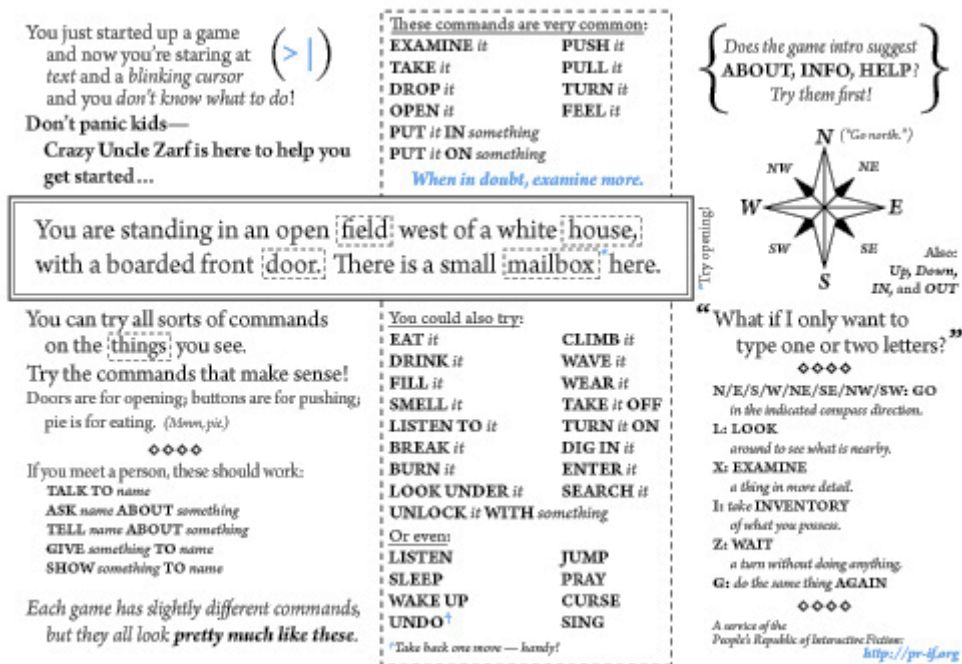


Figure 9 Strategy guide written by Andrew Plotkin

However, the zine is flexible: teachers may choose to skip this step initially and begin with a choice-based game instead. These games do not require typed input and are often easier to navigate for both teachers and learners unfamiliar with IF. Starting with a choice-based format can help build confidence and provide an accessible introduction to IF before moving on to parser-based games at a later stage.

Step 2: Select an appropriate game

Once teachers are familiar with the basic mechanics of IF, they can move on to selecting a game suggested in the zine for classroom use. It is essential that they play the game themselves first to ensure it aligns with their students' language level and learning objectives, such as specific grammar or vocabulary targets. Playing the game in advance also allows teachers to anticipate potential difficulties students may face and prepare appropriate hints or guidance to support them if they become 'stuck' during gameplay (Figure 10).

Step 2: Select an appropriate game

NOVICE

A2
The tiniest room (2)
You are a chef! (Dan Shiovitz) (1)
Snack time! (Renee Choba) (1)

B1
9:05 (Adam Cadre) (1)(2)(3)
Bronze (Emily Short) (1)
Detectiveland (Robin Johnson) (1)(2)
Excalibur, sword of Kings (Adventuron) (2)
Help! My vacuum cleaner is broken!
 (Admiral Jota) (1)
It is pitch black (Caelyn Sandel) (1)
The uncle who works for Nintendo
 (Michael Lutz) (2)

B2
A dark room (Michael Townsend) (3)
Choice of the dragon (ChoiceScript)
 (1)(3)
Glass (Emily Short) (1)
The wizard sniffer (Buster Hudson) (1)

EXPERIENCED

B1
Aayela (Magnus Olsson) (1)
Shade (Andrew Plotkin) (1)
The dreamhold (Andrew Plotkin) (1)(3)
The space under the window (Andrew Plotkin) (1)

B2
A day for fresh sushi (Emily Short) (1)
Lime Ergot (Caleb Wilson) (1)(2)
Photopia (Adam Cadre) (1)(3)
Violet (Jeremy Freese) (1)(3)
When in Rome #1 & #2 (Emily Short) (1)

① ifdb.org
 ② itch.io
 ③ author's website




Figure 10 Game choices in the zine

When using IF in the classroom, it is important for teachers to select games carefully. Not all IF games are equally well suited to pedagogical use, and factors such as length, complexity, and content should be considered (Batchelor et al., 2021). To ensure that students have a positive and productive experience, the games included in this zine have been selected with classroom constraints in mind. All featured games can be completed in 5 to 30 minutes, allowing enough time within a 1-hour lesson for pre-play activities, gameplay, and a follow-up task. This structure helps prepare students for the themes or language they will encounter, keeps gameplay manageable, and provides an opportunity to reinforce or extend learning afterwards. Shorter games are not only easier to fit into a single class period, but they also help prevent frustration that may arise from overly complex or time-consuming narratives. Choosing concise, accessible games makes it easier for teachers to implement IF activities without sacrificing other lesson objectives or overwhelming learners.

TEACHING TIP
 Before introducing an IF game to students, **take the time to play it yourself**. Exploring it on your own allows you to grasp the gameplay, foresee possible hurdles, and choose activities that match your objectives, so you can guide students with confidence and keep the focus on learning outcomes.


Step 3: Prepare students to play

Step 3: Suggested pre-play activities

Vocabulary

- Crossword ⑤
- Dobble ⑥
- Gapfill text (wordbank)
- Pictionary
- Taboo ⑦
- Vocabulary bingo ④
- Vocabulary match-up ⑤
- Word search ⑤

④ Online Bingo card generator
⑤ Teacher's corner
⑥ Online Dobble generator
⑦ Online Taboo generator



After selecting a suitable game, it is important to prepare students before they begin playing (Figure 11). This step helps ensure they have the language tools they need to engage with the game confidently and successfully. Research suggests that pre-teaching vocabulary and introducing key game mechanics can improve comprehension and reduce learner frustration (Granade, 2010b; Pereira, 2014). In the context of IF, this may involve demonstrating common commands, explaining the game interface, and familiarising learners with the conventions of the game before play begins (Desilets, 2016). Providing learners with this scaffolding also helps them focus on the game's language and content rather than struggling with unfamiliar structures or unclear objectives. Outlining the learning goals and how gameplay supports them has been found to enhance both motivation and language development (deHaan, 2019). Moreover, creating a safe and supportive classroom space for gameplay, where students feel comfortable making choices and exploring the narrative, can further increase engagement and motivation (York, 2023). In addition, teachers can leverage IF's immersive, narrative-driven nature to foster intrinsic motivation, as the combination of narrative engagement, learner choice, and problem-solving can encourage deeper involvement with the learning task (Bacalja, 2023; York, 2023). Such preparation ensures students are not only ready to play, but also equipped to maximize the

Figure 11 Step 3, as shown in the zine

linguistic and cognitive benefits the game can offer.

To support comprehension and reduce in-game frustration, the zine includes suggestions for pre-play activities. These activities focus on scaffolding key vocabulary that students will encounter in the game. This preparation helps learners become more comfortable with the game's language and mechanics, allowing them to focus on story engagement and language use rather than decoding unfamiliar terms.

[...] preparation ensures students are not only ready to play, but also positioned to maximize the linguistic and cognitive benefits the game can offer.

Step 4: Let students play!

Once preparation is complete, students play the selected game. This step emphasizes the immersive and interactive nature of the medium. Because students actively make choices and interpret text-based feedback, gameplay itself becomes a language learning task. Teachers can determine whether students play individually, in pairs, or in small groups, depending on the class context and learner needs. For example, projecting the game onto a white screen for whole-class play allows the teacher to model strategies, guide decision-making, and address comprehension difficulties in real time (deHaan & York, 2025). Whole-class discussion around IF can also provide opportunities for teachers to guide language-focused reflection and assess learners' understanding (Holdstock, 2022). Pair work encourages negotiation of meaning as students discuss their next moves and take turns at the keyboard, while an online space such as a dedicated Discord server can extend collaboration beyond the classroom by enabling learners to exchange hints and discoveries. As students become more comfortable with the game's mechanics and language, teachers can gradually reduce support and give them greater autonomy, allowing learners to take increasing ownership of their learning, while continuing to engage confidently with the game.

Following gameplay, teachers can guide students through post-play activities that build on the vocabulary and structures encountered in the game, while encouraging creative or reflective use of language.

Step 5: Post-play language work

Step 5: Suggested post-play activities

Grammar and language knowledge

- Conditionals
- Modal verbs
- Open cloze
- Reported speech
- Word-building

Reading

- Articles about the game
- Replay
- Summaries of the game
- Text reconstruction

Writing

- Alternative ending
- Collaborative story writing
- Character description
- Error correction (use of AI tools)
- Prompt engineering (AI images)
- Reflection journal
- Review of the game
- Summary of the game or play through
- Twine game jam

After gameplay, teachers can select from a variety of suggested post-play activities designed to reinforce and extend language learning. These include grammar, reading, and writing tasks anchored in the game's content. Suggestions range from creative writing (such as alternate endings or journal entries) to analytical or reflective work (such as writing a review or article about the game). These tasks give students the opportunity to reuse and extend the vocabulary and structures encountered during play in meaningful, personalized ways (Figure 12).

Post-play work is important because it turns the engaging context of the game into a purposeful learning opportunity. Farber (2015) describes this as moving beyond "just for fun" to meaningful classroom practice. By building activities around in-game content, teachers can reinforce vocabulary and grammar in a context students have experienced firsthand, increasing relevance and motivation. In addition, Desilets (2016) emphasizes the importance of follow-up activities that encourage learners to reflect on and engage more deeply with the text. Finally, deHaan (2019) highlights that reflective and creative

Figure 12 Step 5, as shown in the zine

post-play tasks, such as written reflections or other activities based on gameplay experiences, provide opportunities for deeper literacy development, helping learners draw connections between gameplay and language use.

Together, these perspectives show that well-designed post-play activities maximize the learning profit of gameplay, encourage consolidation of language through meaningful reuse, and reinforce the view that playing IF in class is a serious and valuable pedagogical practice.

Conclusion

IF offers a range of benefits for language learning, including promoting vocabulary and grammar development, supporting writing skills, and fostering learner autonomy and motivation. By engaging students in active, narrative-driven gameplay, IF creates opportunities for meaningful and personalized language practice.

The zine provides teachers with a structured way to integrate IF into the classroom, offering carefully selected, accessible games and practical suggestions for pre-play activities and scaffolding. It helps teachers guide students through gameplay while maximizing linguistic and cognitive benefits.

Teachers are encouraged to explore the games themselves, adapt activities to their students' needs, and gradually foster independent play. With thoughtful implementation, IF can become a highly engaging and effective tool for language teaching, offering both teachers and students a rewarding classroom experience.

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