

Nicole Stanford

Narrative Designer, with Experience as a Lead and Manager

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Professional Summary

As a writer, I apply an empathetic, player-first approach—believing player agency is an essential ingredient for game narrative. I firmly believe that we make an impact with the stories we tell, and I love capturing real-world experiences and emotions and weaving them into grand, exciting adventures inside fictional worlds. I also value a diverse cast of characters inside stories, and love to make sure that people can find themselves inside the stories we tell.

My expertise as a writer for games involves character-driven stories and interactive storytelling, whether that be the branching story like in role-playing games, or procedural storytelling in action and adventure. I have experience with teams both big and small, from AA to AAA, and I have a background in leadership and management work. As a leader, I fully commit myself to cross-department collaboration, as it is essential in game development. To develop a strong story, writers must work together *and* closely with game design, UX, audio, and more to craft a strong experience.

Work Experience

Narrative Manager, *Last Epoch*

Eleventh Hour Games | Remote

January 2022 – December 2023

- ❖ Led *Last Epoch*'s narrative departments – the writing team, level design team, and audio team – while handling employees' career growth via 1:1s and overseeing their sprint schedules.
- ❖ Created the project's writing style guide, overseeing it through writer's room meetings where we reviewed, gave feedback, and polished the quest text and dialogue in our game.
- ❖ Spearheaded re-developing the game's story campaign to shift it out of early access. This involved innovating the core campaign plot beat, documentation, and directing meetings where we reviewed story details, lore, quests, combat, gameplay, and character designs in preparation for the 1.0 launch.
- ❖ Supervised pre-production for future content, using internal Unity tools and wikis to set-up development.
- ❖ Served as the primary liaison for outsourced vendors responsible for voice acting and cutscenes, overseeing progress, reviewing their work, and providing necessary information.
- ❖ Managed our casting calls and auditions for voice talent, evaluating auditions and attending VO sessions.
- ❖ Worked on writing quests and dialogue using Final Draft, shaping character personality and quests in sections of the game.
- ❖ Led the storyboard development and wrote scripts for all the cinematic cutscenes.

Senior Narrative Designer, Various Projects

Hexagram IO | Remote

March 2021 – July 2021

- ❖ Served as Narrative Lead for the English localization of an overseas title, overseeing writers as we worked to refine an adventure game's story.
- ❖ Worked closely with the original development team to ensure coherence, engagement, and fidelity to the original translation's intent.
- ❖ Crafted non-linear dialogue for interactive characters featured at the 2020 World's Fair. Collaborated closely with the fair's team to align character narratives with exhibit themes, enhancing attendee experience and providing supplementary information. Ensured dialogue coherence based on each attendee, using real-world telemetry technology, to deliver a personalized, non-linear experience.

Game Writer, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic Remake*

Aspyr | Remote

April 2021 – December 2021

- ❖ Became the primary writer for certain characters and planets across the *KOTOR Remake*, writing non-linear dialogue and text that matched the themes with each setting.
- ❖ Worked closely with designers to structure quests, ensuring cohesive integration within the game's narrative framework.

- ❖ Took charge matching players' established voices, per our writing style guide, within our non-linear dialogue. As a branching story, the writing team worked to ensure that different dialogue options fit the many ways players wished to play.
- ❖ Played a key role in preserving the original vision of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, while also enhancing it for modern audiences. This required meticulous study of the original characters, storylines, and major plot points.

Narrative Designer, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines 2*

Hardsuit Labs | Seattle, WA

August 2019 – February 2021

- ❖ Designed fleshed-out characters, quests, and reactive dialogue set inside a complex world set in the World of Darkness IP.
- ❖ Collaborated with other writers, establishing a close-knit writer's room where our world and characters fit each other, as well as the style guide.
- ❖ Worked as the narrative liaison for our cross-department "Player Agency" strike team, strategizing various player approaches. Our goal was to emphasize player choice across the game's quests and content, ensuring unique playstyles were considered.
- ❖ Held voiceover auditions and attended sessions to provide direction, assuring alignment with narrative vision.
- ❖ Contributed significantly to the final act of the game, utilizing all the variables across a player's experience to deliver reactive consequences leading to the game's end.
- ❖ Designed and wrote for main characters, including characters from a faction that players could join. This included developing an optional romance route for a major character, enriching player immersion.

Quality Assurance Lead, *Crucible, Grand Tour Game, and Other Projects*

Amazon Games (Contract) | Seattle, WA

June 2018 – August 2019

- ❖ Led teams with a focus on embedded QA, overseeing scheduling, conducting 1:1s and meetings.
- ❖ Worked closely with directors and other departments to ensure timely completion and necessary support.
- ❖ Created testing documents on TestRail, providing oversight that ensured adherence to testing protocols and standards.
- ❖ Concurrently fulfilled QA Lead responsibilities while also working within Narrative Design on a canceled project:
 - Contributed to the development of narrative structures, storylines, worlds, and quest structures.
 - Demonstrated versatility in transitioning between roles, with the potential to transition from QA Lead to Narrative Designer if it had not been canceled.
 - Created the project's testing processes and optimized JIRA during early development stages.

Skills

Narrative: Dialogue for voiced characters, scriptwriting, non-linear branching, reactivity, character-driven storytelling, plot structure, worldbuilding, quest design, story bible, writing-style guides, documentation, voiceover direction, barks, in-game text, and in-engine implementation

Leadership: Team management, running 1:1s, leading meetings, conducting interviews, setting up structure and tools while in pre-production, planning agile sprints, game development pipelines, risk assessment, triage, prototyping, iteration, and fostering communication between and within teams.

Game Engine Tools: Unreal Engine 4 and 5, Unity, Twine, Final Draft, Excel, Confluence, Notion, JIRA, Click-Up, Team Foundation Server, Trello, Perforce, and GIT.

Education

Bachelor of Science Degree, Game Design, Graduated August 5th, 2016, Full Sail University

Awards: Salutatorian, Advanced Achievement Award, and Course Director Awards for Writing, Leadership, and Game Design