



A Beginner's Guide to Digital Fiction

What is digital fiction?

Digital fiction (also known as electronic literature) is written for and read from a computer and uses the capabilities of the computer for literary effect. Some digital fictions contain sound effects, images, film, hyperlinks, or mini-games. Therefore, rather than existing as a digital version of a print text (like an e-book), digital fictions would lose something if they were printed out. Also unlike e-books, in which the reader moves from one page to another in a linear fashion, in many digital fictions, the reader has a role in constructing the narrative, either by selecting hyperlinks or by controlling a character's journey through the fictional world. Digital fictions therefore require that the reader interacts with them throughout the reading experience.

There are many different types of digital fiction, including hypertext fiction (on and off the Web); kinetic literature (produced using Flash software); App-fiction (for tablets and smartphones); Interactive Fiction (text-based adventure games); fiction written online (e.g. via Twitter, emails, blogs, etc.); collaborative writing projects that allow readers to contribute to the story; and videogames that have a literary component.

Perhaps you aren't sure whether you want to read fiction from a computer. Perhaps you're worried that you haven't read anything like this before. It's true that reading digital fiction is a very different experience to reading fiction in print, but it can be just as enjoyable. You need to think about how the pictures, sounds and words work together to understand the story. The more you read, the more you will get used to the new experience.

As with print books, we don't all like the same kind of digital fiction, so we've recommended all different kinds of digital fiction below. We've split them into genres and indicated how much interactivity is required in each. We've also mentioned what age groups the fictions are suitable for. Try a few out and see which you like best.

You will need to use earphones to read most of these texts. As a bonus, all of the Web-based digital fictions listed below can be read for free!

Short Fiction

[Flight Paths](#) by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph is a linear story which uses images, sounds and text to tell the story of Jacob, an immigrant trying to reach England from Pakistan. It is told over several episodes, each of which is fairly short.

[City Fish](#) by J. R. Carpenter follows a Canadian girl named Lynne, who feels isolated and disconnected from both of her homes: the rural fishing village of Brooklyn, Nova Scotia (Canada) and the urban Queens, New York (USA). It uses text, image, sound and film and is quite straightforward to navigate.

[Loss of Grasp](#) by Serge Bouchardon and Vincent Volckaert can be read in English, French, Spanish and Italian. It follows a man who feels he is losing control of his life, relationships and self. It uses image, text and sound. If you have a web-cam on your computer, there's an interesting twist at the end!

Longer Texts

[10:01](#) by Lance Olsen and Tim Guthrie is a text that centres on what goes through the minds of the audience in a cinema at the Mall of America ten minutes and one second before the film starts. After the introduction (which you can skip via the top-right of the screen), click the question mark for an overview of how to navigate the text. This text uses image, sound, text and also hyperlinks to other websites. (Please note that there are some adult themes in this text.)

[24 Hours with Someone You Know](#) by Philippa J Burne follows a character referred to only by 'you'. From the beginning, you have to make choices about where 'you' will go and who 'you' will speak to. It is largely text-based and fairly easy to navigate using the hyperlinks.

Local Writers

[Underbelly](#) by Christine Wilks, who is based in Leeds, is an interactive story about a woman sculptor, carving on the site of a former colliery in the north of England, now landscaped into a country park. It largely uses oral storytelling as well as film and image.

[Fitting the Pattern](#) by Christine Wilks is an interactive, non-linear memoir in which the narrator explores her relationship with her dressmaking mother. To read, select one of the dressmaking tools and follow the pattern to reveal text.

Crime / Thriller Fiction

[Clues](#) by Robert Kendall is, on the face of it, an interactive whodunit, but it is actually both a standard detective thriller and also a self-referential text about digital writing. It uses text, image and sound. Read and find out who's murdered whom, and what this text is really about!

[Nightingale's Playground](#) by Andy Campbell and Judi Alston is told partly through a 3D game-like application. Schoolboy Carl lives with his grandmother on an anonymous housing estate and spends his time hanging out with Alex, an oddball kid obsessed with video games. But when Alex disappears for no apparent reason, things begin to change: Carl's grandmother hides weird objects in her sideboard, his homework reveals frightening messages, and none of his friends - it seems - even remember who Alex was in the first place.

Collaborative Fiction

[Letter to an Unknown Soldier](#) by Kate Pullinger is a project based on a statue that stands in Paddington Station in London. Pullinger invited individuals to write the letter they imagined him carrying and the results are collated on the website.

App-Fiction (for use on tablets and smartphones)

[David Morris' Frankenstein](#) is an interactive novel in which the reader acts as Frankenstein's confidant, guide and conscience. Throughout the narrative readers must choose how they would like Frankenstein to proceed, and are allowed to explore the dark, mysterious world in which the original story is set.

[Eerie Estate Agent](#) by Gavin Inglis places the reader in this supernatural story by asking them to make choices about where 'you' will go and who 'you' will speak to. Eerie occurrences may influence your fate!

[Sorcery!](#) by Steve Jackson is an interactive adventure in a world of monsters, traps, and magic in which every step of the adventure is yours to decide. In this text, there is an emphasis on gameplay (e.g. combat skills) as opposed to literary interpretation as you navigate your chosen character through the fictional world.

Children/Younger Readers

[Inanimate Alice](#) by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph is perhaps the most well-known digital fiction. It follows Alice as she tries to make sense of the world she lives in. There are currently four episodes, following Alice living in various different towns and countries from aged 6 to 14. It can be read in English, Italian, Spanish, French and German. Resources for adults using this text with younger readers can be found on the website in the 'Teach with Alice' section.

[The Winter House](#) by Naomi Alderman is a murder mystery style text, but its focus is on women and education, and women's rights generally, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The story includes game-like interactive elements but is otherwise a linear narrative. Resources for adults using this text with younger readers can be found on the website in the 'About' section.