



## Core Gameplay Mechanics

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# Conversations

Dialogue and gameplay in *Long Distance* is divided into many separate “conversations.” Conversations can be either private messages (PMs) between the player and a single character, or group chats (GCs) in which all characters are able to participate. Each conversation is made up of *branches*, containing messages from the characters, and *Decision Points*, where the player is given the opportunity to engage. Each conversation has a pre-set order in a sequence and a time of day where it is scheduled to occur. At the time when a conversation is scheduled to start, a notification will be sent to the player’s phone and the conversation will begin to play. Each message in each conversation has a set time in which it will be delivered - **conversations are never halted or “paused” by lack of player action** (see “Flexible Dialogue” below).

Conversations may be separate entities, but they all play in the same chat rooms - i.e. entering a PM conversation with Emma will also allow you to see the message history from the previous PM conversation you had with Emma, just like a real chat.

## Game Start & Day 1

The first time the player starts the game, they will be presented with a faux “Login” screen asking for their name, pronouns, and to confirm the current time of day. Characters will refer to the player by their name and use their pronouns throughout the story.

While most conversations in *Long Distance* will be delivered based on a realtime schedule, the first set of messages the player interacts with (directly after starting the app for the first time) will be “out of time”, meaning they will not be sent on a schedule and instead will play sequentially no matter what the time of day is. These chats are referred to as “Day 0” chats, and will consist of:

- PMs from characters, sent over the period of time when the player wasn’t logging on to the app and accompanied by relative timestamps
- Recent PMs from characters, which the player can reply to and begin a conversation
- A “Day 0” group chat, one of few group chats where all characters are present at the same time.

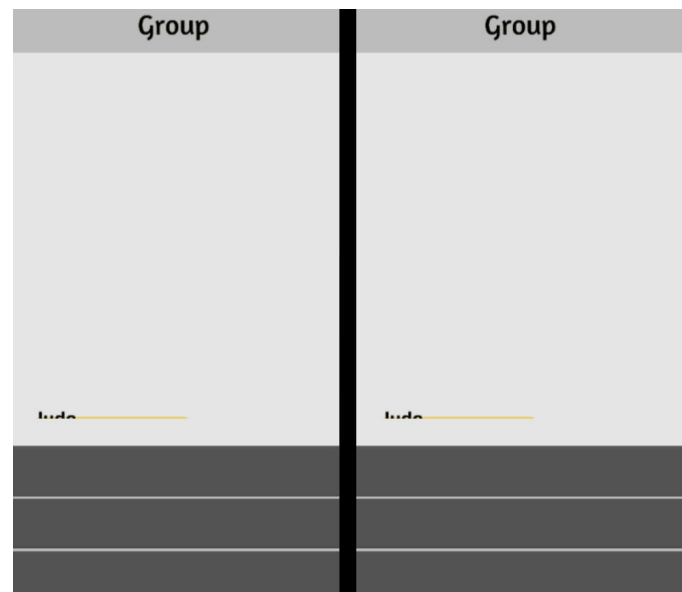
In Bailey’s Day 0 private message, the player is linked to a BuzzFeed-style personality quiz that will allow them to explore what kind of player character they want to be by answering fun questions. The results of this quiz will also determine their starting relationship values with other characters (see “Friendship Score” below).

## Decision Points

Most conversations begin with the player receiving messages from the characters. At predetermined points in the conversation, Decision Points will begin, allowing the player to reply & participate in conversations by choosing from 2 to 3 preset dialogue options. These options lead to different branches in the narrative. (There is some variability/flexibility in this system, detailed under “Flexible Dialogue” below.) Rarely, a conversation begins with a Decision Point, where the player has the option to message a character first.

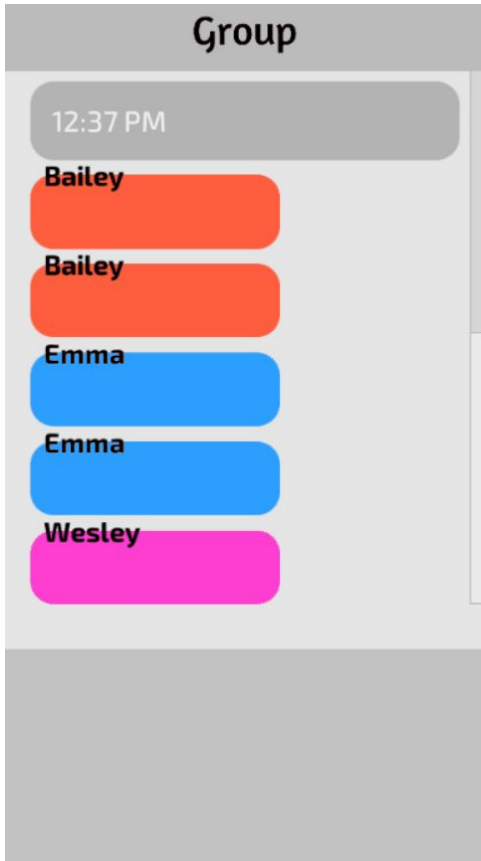
## Flexible Dialogue

Decision Points are not singular moments in time, do not cause the conversation to pause, and do not halt progression of the game. Instead, they have a predetermined time range, during which the dialogue options will be visible to the player while the other characters continue to talk amongst themselves, until either one is chosen or the time range ends ([similar to how Telltale Games does their dialogue choices](#)). Time ranges vary widely, from just minutes for a minor conversation decision point to hours for a Critical Conversation decision point (see below). Once a dialogue option is chosen, the narrative switches branches. Until a dialogue option is chosen, the previous branch may continue to run, causing messages to be delivered during the Decision Point time range.



## No Response Situations

Because of the Decision Point/Flexible Dialogue system, it is possible for players to not interact with the game at all and still have the narrative progress. If a player doesn't choose a dialogue option within a Decision Point's time range, the conversation progresses on either the branch it was previously on, switches to a designated “default” branch, or switches to a special “No Response” branch, depending on the conversation.



## Critical Conversations

Some Conversations are marked as “critical,” meaning they represent turning points in the plot or contribute heavily to the progression of the game. In real-time, these conversations behave in the same way that normal conversations do. However, if a player misses a Critical Conversation, they are given the opportunity to replay it in a diegetic manner by scrolling up to the first message of the Critical Conversation and tapping a button appearing next to it, which results in the player sending a message reading “Can we talk about what happened earlier?” ***This option DOES NOT replay the exact same conversation***; instead it plays a different version of it, but allows the player a second chance at making the important decisions in the Critical Conversation.

Replaying Critical Conversations is only possible on the same day that said conversation was sent (so you can’t replay a CC from day 2 on day 3). If a player only misses a part of a Critical Conversation, they will not be able to replay the conversation.

## Relationships

### Friendship Score

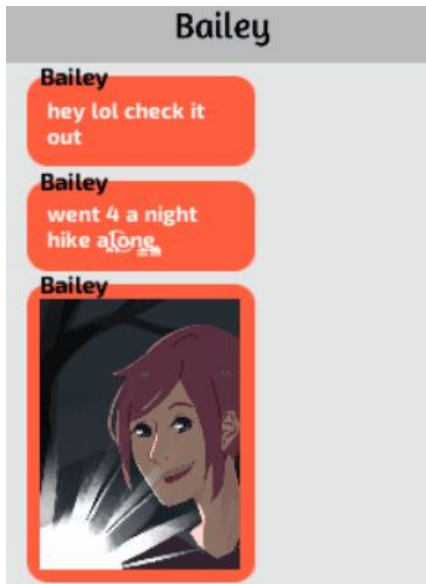
Each character has a “friendship score” that represents their relationship with the player character. This value is raised or lowered by dialogue choices the character makes while speaking with the character in PMs or GCs. Certain dialogue options are only visible to the player if their friendship score is over or under a certain threshold. Similarly, some PM Conversations will only trigger if the player character’s friendship score is within a certain range.

### Decision Flags

Similar again to Telltale’s or Supermassive’s methods, certain options will act as “flags”, changing a specific aspect of that character from that point onwards. These are independent of friendship scores, and can do things like determine if a character is more aggressive or more of a team player, or whether or not they are taken by the demon midway through the week.

## Character States

Characters can be taken by the demon and will disappear from the game until the final day. If a character is taken, none of their PMs will trigger and they will be absent from group chats (the group chat will play as usual or with small edits, but the taken character's messages will not be sent.)



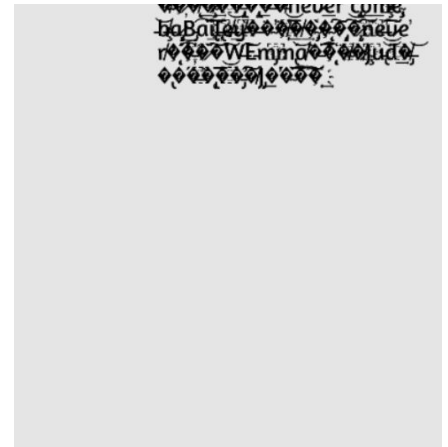
## Multimedia Elements

*Long Distance* will employ multimedia elements to increase immersion. Characters will send the player messages containing **photos, audio, and potentially even video**, in addition to normal text messages.

Characters will also send fake "links" in their messages that the player can tap on to be taken to a fake web page within the app (similar to Facebook Messenger, which opens it's own internal web browser on mobile when a link is sent.)

## The Demon

*Long Distance*'s Demon character is capable of causing visual glitches in the app, including distorted text (similar to [Zalgo text](#)) and other screen-wide visual glitches. Additionally, the demon has the ability to crash the app, sending players to their phones' home screens when the characters need them most.



## Text/Messaging App Elements

*Long Distance* will employ elements common to texting and messaging apps in order to utilize the affordances of the mobile platform.

Before sending a text, the player will see a "(character name) is typing..." indicator on the screen, cluing them in to the fact that the conversation hasn't ended, as well as allowing a moment of suspense in stressful situations.

In PMs, the player will be able to see read receipts - a text indicator that says "Seen," "Read," or something similar so that characters can effectively ignore the player in a way that makes that clear to the player.

Additionally, if the player opens the app while a conversation is available, reading the beginning of a PM and not replying, characters will be able to know, and subsequently call the player out for ignoring them.

Currently, these elements are planned to be conversation-specific, pre-scripted possibilities; however, a more dynamic way of using these concepts, if possible, could be utilized to make the story feel even more “alive.”

## References/Examples of Mechanics in Other Games

- Telltale Games (*The Walking Dead*, *The Wolf Among Us*, etc)
- *Until Dawn*
- *Oxenfree*
- *Lifeline* (realtime mobile narrative game)
- *I Am Innocent*