Tech News

Scratch version 1.2.1

Version 1.2 of scratch was finally released last weekend, but despite extensive beta testing, there were still some pretty big bugs (introduced in the process of fixing other problems uncovered during the beta test), so there will be a version 1.2..1 coming out soon—probably this weekend. I would recommend that people wait on doing a download until the version 1.2.1 release is announced on the Scratch forums.

Make an e-card for the holidays

Although "Day of the Ninja" (December 4) is over, there are still a lot of holidays in progress or coming up (Channukah, Winter Solstice, Christmas, Kwanzaa, New Year's, Epiphany, …). This year, make your friends and relatives e-cards using scratch. Here's how:

Make a scratch project that has the message you want to give. This can be a personal message to one person, or a more general holiday message. Try not to make it *too* personal, though, as any one in the world will be able to see the card.

You might want to include pictures of yourself, your family, your dog, your house, or other important things in your life, either as backgrounds or as costumes for sprites. You can import pictures from digital cameras and edit them in scratch's paint editor. I have found it easier sometimes to do trimming and resizing of images in Photoshop Elements before importing the images to scratch.

You can, of course, include drawings, either made directly in the scratch paint editor, or scanned or photographed from paper.

Speech can also be included, if your computer has a microphone. Grandparents and other relatives love to hear your voice. You can also add music clips from either holiday music or your favorite musicians.

E-cards are the most fun if there is some interesting animation. It is pretty easy to make sprites glide around on the screen and interact with each other in simple ways, but the effects can be quite impressive for relatives who don't know about scratch, particularly if you synchronize the movement with the music or voice clips.

Once you have your project done, how do you send it to a relative or friend? Especially one who doesn't have scratch installed? Perhaps the best way to share a Scratch project is to use the "Share!" button to put the project on the MIT web site. Then you can go to your "my stuff" page on the web site and click on your project.

Once you are on the project page, make sure that your project works correctly on the web page. There are occasionally bugs in scratch programs that only become apparent when you try to run them as java applets on a web page. If the program works on the web page, e-mail the URL (that starts with http://scratch.mit.edu/projects/) to the intended recipient, so that they can go to the web site and see the project.

Gravity in Scratch

Lots of games in scratch work better if you have gravity, so that things slide down. Here are a couple simple scripts to get you started:
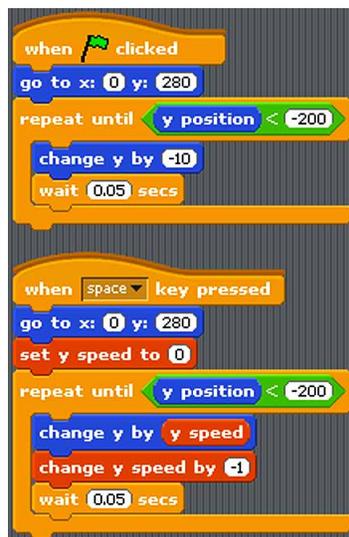
The first script just has the sprite slide down at a constant speed.

The second script uses a speed variable to make the sprite accelerate, like a real falling object.

Holiday gift suggestions

Parents at this time of year are often looking for holiday gift suggestions. I've found that the web page http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/shopping_guide.htm has a lot of good suggestions. (Hoagies is an excellent web site for resources about raising gifted kids.)

Some of the computer software that Abe liked when he was younger and that we thought was good value for the money includes the Math Blaster series, the Zoombinis series, Kid Pix, and Zoo Tycoon.