

Virtual Writing Studio
 Comparative evaluation of 3D environment software programs
 Fall 2008

	Second Life	Protosphere	Qwaq
Avatars	<p>Completely customizable; start with a specific “type” and then customize physical features and wardrobe.</p> <p>Can download or purchase additional wardrobe items or accessories.</p> <p>While the learning curve for the avatar customization process is not high, the degree of customization is distracting; so much time is spent building a personalized avatar that actual program use suffers.</p>	<p>Avatars are based on uploaded face photos, which are attached to standardized “bodies”</p>	<p>The basic avatar is a generic “human” shape done in a single solid color. The color is randomly assigned at log-in, and different colors are given to different participants within a session.</p> <p>Users may put an image on the “face” of the generic figure (their own photograph or another image).</p> <p>Instead of a generic human shape, possible to have your avatar appear as a floating colored balloon.</p> <p>Provides several realistic male and female avatars, in “business” and “casual” outfits.</p>
Environment	<p>Environment starts out as a complete “blank slate,” with a single island (or island segment), which would then have to be built up from scratch.</p>	<p>Environment is already designed. The “campus” environment the user starts in is not interactive; the areas for interaction are the various pre-designed conference rooms and classrooms.</p>	<p>Provides a set of environments, which can be customized using elements included in the program, or through importing pictures or objects.</p>

Customization of the virtual environment?	Any kind of structure can be built, given enough time; pre-constructed buildings or building segments can be purchased from sellers.	Ability to customize is very limited (a possible detriment for an environment designed to encourage creativity).	Provides both finished spaces that are ready for use (conference rooms, a library space, etc.) and a blank “lawn” area where a completely new structure could be constructed.
Building objects	<p>Building is based around “prims,” which are simple geometrical shapes.</p> <p>The “prim”-centered building process involves combining “prims” and modifying their appearance to create the desired structures.</p> <p>Limits to how many basic components can be placed within any given purchased space.</p>	Objects cannot be built.	Allows the construction of objects using simple geometrical shapes.
Importing objects	Objects cannot be imported from other programs; however, they can be imported from within other areas of Second Life. This includes free objects and objects that are for sale.	Objects cannot be imported.	<p>Objects can be imported from Google’s 3D warehouse, an extensive, free collection of virtual objects.</p> <p>Objects from the warehouse need to be saved into the correct format using Google Sketch-Up, a free program.</p>
Working with texts?	Offers very limited text-editing capabilities. This is an area that is currently being developed.	Texts and spreadsheets can be presented but are not interactive.	<p>Texts can be placed on screens and surfaces within Qwaq environments.</p> <p>Multiple users can edit a text but not</p>

			simultaneously.
Web links?	Web links can be placed on screens within Second Life environments		Web links can be placed on screens and surfaces. Uses Firefox as its browser.
Learning curve for changing the environment?	Users have to learn how to build using simple geometric shapes or must locate other areas within Second Life that offer structures/shapes they would like to incorporate.	Changes are made through the menu.	Medium. Importing objects is very easy; positioning of objects within a three-dimensional space is somewhat trickier.
Open or restricted access?	Membership is free; however, space to build on would have to be purchased. The “open” nature of the program means that anybody can access a space, unless it is defined specifically as a restricted community. Decisions would have to be made regarding the Writing Studio’s open community policy.	Commercial software, available through subscription.	A commercial software, available through subscription.
Portability into other programs?	Objects and avatars created in Second Life are specific to the Second Life software, and cannot be exported to other programs.	Objects and avatars created are specific to the software and cannot be exported to other programs.	The use of Google’s 3D warehouse, as well as the ability to import objects, documents, links, etc., means that components could be saved outside of Qwaq and transferred to another program (e.g., Croquet).
Other features			Portals between rooms make it easy to connect different spaces to each

			<p>other.</p> <p>A laser pointer feature shows you where your avatar is focusing.</p> <p>Too many objects, sound effects, etc. within a space will affect processing speed and may cause the screen to freeze up.</p>
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