



Writing Inspired by Video Games (Eng 2070)

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Office Hours: Monday 11:30-1:00



Course Description and Goals

Welcome to Writing Inspired by Video Games, the theme for our English 2070 course! This course has been designed to facilitate your writing abilities and rhetorical knowledge by understanding, discussing, and responding to the medium of digital games. In pairing both writing and video games, my goal is to ultimately help encourage you to understand how to transfer writing skills across the disciplines and contexts.

Positioned in a key role of the entertainment industry, video games are omnipresent, helping develop and diversify our cultural identity. Despite this popularity, many of us have yet to cultivate a response to this central question: *how do we analyze and write about video games?* More importantly, as we'll discover during this course, we hesitate on how to answer, *how can video games improve and develop our writing, specifically our rhetorical and genre knowledges?*

There are no correct answers to the above questions. We interact with digital mediums differently, bringing prior knowledge and values to each interaction. Those experiences shape us, shape our writing, but this course will enable you to tie those considerations with new rhetorical theories and concepts of writing.

Though the medium of video games will remain vital to our conversations, I want to stress no prior interest or ownership of games is required. This is a writing course, and all that is necessary is an open mind and willingness to learn about writing.

By partaking in this course, students will:

- ❖ Understand how prior perceptions and values impact our future writings
- ❖ Apply rhetorical strategies and critical analysis to write about video games
- ❖ Consider the contexts writing and games are created in
- ❖ Deconstruct the unique components of the gaming landscape, such as interactivity, character design, graphics, or narrative construction through comparisons to rhetoric and genre constructions
- ❖ Question who the author and audiences are for multiple genres
- ❖ Engage in new genres of media, writing, and multimodality
- ❖ Learn how to transfer genre awareness and rhetorical knowledge across contexts
- ❖ Enjoy themselves



Required Texts

There are no required textbooks for this course. Instead, students will read various articles, chapters, and news reports uploaded to our Canvas page.

Students must create a Steam Account for their gaming materials, however. Steam is an online gaming hub where you can buy and play games on a laptop. Games you will be required to buy/play over the semester include:

Her Story. Steam version, Sam Barlow, 2015.

Oxenfree. Steam version, Night School Studios, 2016.

Gone Home, The Fullbright Company, 2013.

I recommend waiting until closer to date of play to buy, as the games might be on sale. If you own one of these games for a different system, please let me know in advance so we can determine how you will play or if we should select a different game.

These games were selected due to their cost (free to ten dollars each), length of time to play to fully assess the content (1 hour to 6 max) and their emphasis of writing and narrative. By playing and discussing them, we will see how players control writing and rhetoric within games, and the constraints of that rhetorical knowledge and genre.

Optional Texts to Buy

While I'll supply excerpts from many books over the semester, I selected a few to highlight here if interested in the topics of the course. They are not required or necessary to purchase.

Bawarshi Anis S. and Mary Jo Reiff. *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. The WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, 2010.

Bogost, Ian. *How We Talk About Videogames*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, et al. *Understanding Video Games the Essential Introduction*. Routledge, 2016.



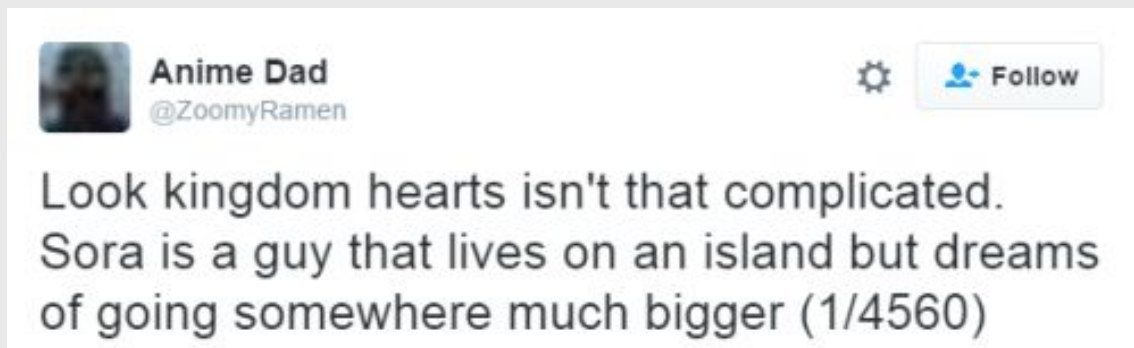
Foss, Sonja K. *Rhetorical Criticism: Explorations and Practice*. 4th ed. Waveland Print Inc., 2008.

Gee, James Paul. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Shaw, Adrienne. *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Walls, Douglas M. and Stephaie Vie, eds. *Social Writing/Social Media: Publics, Presentations, and Pedagogies*. The WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado, 2017.

If remaining curious on the topics raised in class, both gaming and rhetoric, please let me know. I'll be happy to inform you of other reading options.



Policies, Procedures, and Expectations

Attendance: The success of our course hinges upon engaged participation, classroom workshops, and the sharing of ideas. I understand illness and family emergencies occur. If you must miss class, please inform me (hopefully ahead of time) so we can strategize how to catch you up. Five or more absences will result in a loss of credit for the course. Three late arrivals results in an absence. If you are more than ten minutes late to class, you will earn an absence.

Submissions: Submit work as a word document, google doc that allows me to edit, or as a PDF onto Canvas on the assigned date. Do not submit projects as Pages. Doing so will result in no credit. In creating multimodal projects, we will decide in advance how to upload them. No hard copies are required.

Late Assignments: All work and projects are to be posted on Canvas by the start of class or they will be considered late. Homework, journals, and your final project cannot



be submitted late. With the exception of extreme emergencies (of which I will require documentation) no major assignments can be turned in late without penalty. For each day an assignment is late, I will subtract 4 points from the total score. After 72 hours, I will not accept the assignment at all, and you will receive an automatic 0 for it. You must complete the assignment (and all major assignments) if you wish to pass the course.

Technology Policy: You are required to have a fully charged laptop during class, one that has Steam and the day's game downloaded ahead of time. If using tablets or cell phones for gaming purposes, let me know in advance. Use technology respectfully and in a way that does not prevent you from participating. The same rules apply if using a computer in our classroom. If on your phone or other devices and not engaged with the course, you may lose participation points or be marked absent.

Etiquette: While our opinions may differ, we will conduct ourselves courteously, empathetically, and with understanding of our diverse experiences. Disrespect will not be tolerated. Any number of penalties may result due to improper behavior, such as removal from class if your conduct is deemed harmful to another student. If group discussions suffer due to a collective failure to complete readings, quizzes and extra writing projects will be assigned.

Professor Absence: If I cancel class unexpectedly and cannot find a substitute professor, check our Canvas page and your emails for alternative assignments and how this will affect the plans for the following course. Not checking the Canvas page is no excuse for not having work for the following class.

Professor Communication: Email is the preferred method of contact. If you email me something, I will respond, ordinarily within 24 hours. However, if you don't receive my email reply, this means that I did not receive your message and that you should

discuss the content of your email with me personally. I will also periodically send out class announcements via Canvas during the semester.

Personal Safety and Comfort: If the subject matter of a specific game, presentation, or assignment makes you uncomfortable, see me immediately and we can work out alternative arrangements. You must contact me before an assignment is due and not retroactively. Acknowledging online spaces are not always safe, we ourselves will not be interacting with multiplayer spaces, though we will read and learn about them. Your safety and comfort should always be a priority. If ever concerned about your mental health, contact BGSU's Counseling Services at 419-372-2081.

University Closure Due to Bad Weather: In most cases, the University will not close for winter conditions unless the Wood County Sheriff's Department declares a Level 3 emergency. Closing information will be communicated through BGSU's AlertBG text system, BGSU e-mail notification, BGSU's website, and Toledo's Television stations. (Note: You can sign up for AlertBG by signing into MyBGSU and clicking on the AlertBG tab at the top of the page.)

Religious Holidays: It is the policy of the University to make every reasonable effort to allow students to observe their religious holidays without academic penalty. In such cases, it is the obligation of the student to provide the instructor with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which he or she will be absent. Should you need to miss a class due to a religious holiday, you should understand that absence from classes for religious reasons does not relieve you of responsibility for completing required work. In such an event, you should consult with me well before you leave for the holiday to find out what assignments will be due while you are absent—and you subsequently should have the assignments completed and turned in to me prior to missing class.

Academic Honesty: While our class will include peer review, collaboration, and sharing ideas, all writing must be done by you alone. Plagiarism, including buying papers, stealing another student's work, and/or failure to cite sources, is strictly forbidden. Sources used in papers must be properly cited in MLA style citation. All cases of intentional plagiarism will, at the very least, result in a failure of the assignment and will be reported to the school. Please refer to BGSU's current Student Affairs Handbook for information regarding BGSU's academic honesty policies.

Accessibility Statement: If you have a documented disability which requires accommodations to obtain equal access for your learning, please make your needs known to me, preferably during the first week of the semester. Please note that students

who request accommodations need to verify their eligibility through the Office of Accessibility Services at <https://www.bgsu.edu/accessibility-services.html>

Student Veteran-Friendly Campus: BGSU educators recognize student veterans' rights when entering and exiting the university system. If you are a student veteran, please let me know if accommodations need to be made for absences due to drilling or being called to active duty.

"Come one, everyone! We should be proud! We were able to change the world in the end. If this is all just fiction, then everything we've achieved up till now might be a lie. But those lies... They changed the world. Even if we are just fictional characters someone made up. We were able to change the world." Shuichi Saihara,
DanganRonpa V3: Killing Harmony

Assessment and Assignments

During the semester, you will be responsible to attend class, complete homework, engage in different modes of reading and interactivity, use games to further knowledge, and complete four major assignments.

Weekly Responses: Over the semester, students will write 5 responses on a topic inspired by the week's readings and discussions. There are 7 times in the semester when a responses is due; decide which weeks interest you or when journaling fits into your schedule. Each piece must be at least two pages long. For formatting details, check Canvas.



Topics will range in focus on gaming and writing. Typically, each week's response will have two potential topics to engage with.

A sample of potential topics for gaming include: the use and design of setting to convey genre to the audience, the purpose of games, a comparison of reviews about a chosen game, or a pre-approved idea of your choosing about an issue of gaming we didn't have time to discuss in class or not enough time. You'll note these questions still require deep reflection on writing concepts or rhetorical situations.

A sample of potential topics more focused on writing include: how can you recognize the rhetorical situation in a digital medium, what values do you have in writing on digital context, how do you define genre, do you believe the content of this class can transfer to other writing situations, or a pre-approved idea of your choosing.

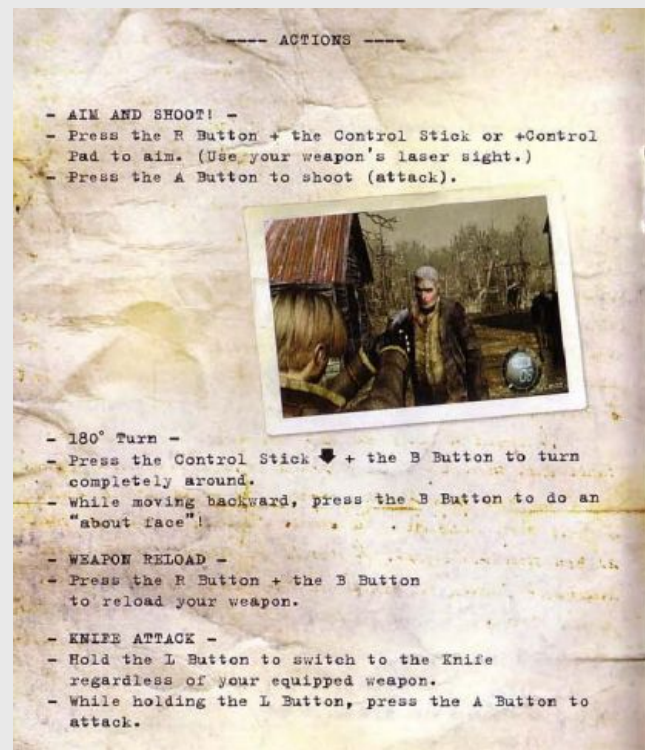
If electing to write on a pre-approved topic, I need to be informed and give consent prior to 48 hours when the assignment is due. You may write on a max of two pre-approved topics during the semester.

Game Review: Your first project tasks you with focusing on the rhetorical situation of gaming publications, players, and game reviews to write a game review of a game not played in class.

Select a publication that writes game reviews. It can be a traditional gaming site, such as IGN, Kotaku, Polygon, etc., independent publishers like Easy Allies, a Youtube channel on gaming, such as Jim Sterling's The Jimquisition, Yahtzee Crowshaw's Zero Punctuation, and ACG's video game essays titled, "'Buy, Wait for Sale, Rent, Never Touch?'," or publications with infrequent gaming reviews but with agenda and purpose when they do so, such as Feminist Frequency or sites like QueersPlayGames, linking to LGBT+ websites of game reviews and content. Prior to writing your review, complete a brief rhetorical analysis on the audience, purpose, medium, and design of the site and reviews. Gaming reviews are largely multimodal now, using audio, visual, and textual elements to inform readers.

Use this information to influence how you'll write your own review, which game you might discuss, and the overall content. You'll notice reviews across multiple contexts can be positive but reflect on diverse aspects of the game itself, from the narrative, to the gameplay, to the value, to the representation. Instead of focusing on a simple pro-con list of the games successes and faults, you're challenged to comprehend the rhetorical situation of reviews, priorities of different audiences, and how to write about games.

Genre of Gaming Manuals and Presentation: Students will revisit a disappearing form of writing in the gaming industry: video game manuals. For this project, you will select 5 manuals from one genre of gaming and 5 more from another genre. Next, you will perform a rhetorical analysis of each genre's manual. Question everything, from how the historical context impacts the manual to what you can learn about



the audience from it. Compare and contrast the two genres you selected: does a fighting game need a section on plot, for example, like a Role Playing Game might? Discover what is necessary and present in all gaming manuals and argue what must be included in the genre.

In completing this project, students will further their awareness of both the writing involved in games but the diversity of applying the rhetorical situation across numerous contexts. Upon completing the analysis of genre, you will create and show a short presentation based upon the content of your paper to your class. In creating this presentation, you will further develop rhetorical awareness along the lines of mode, medium, and design.



Mock Trial: Students will use their skills in rhetoric and genre to compose arguments answering the question, “Are video games worth playing?” To do so, they will be on pro/con sides in a trial. Students will have two class periods to prepare arguments and perform the trial on the third day.

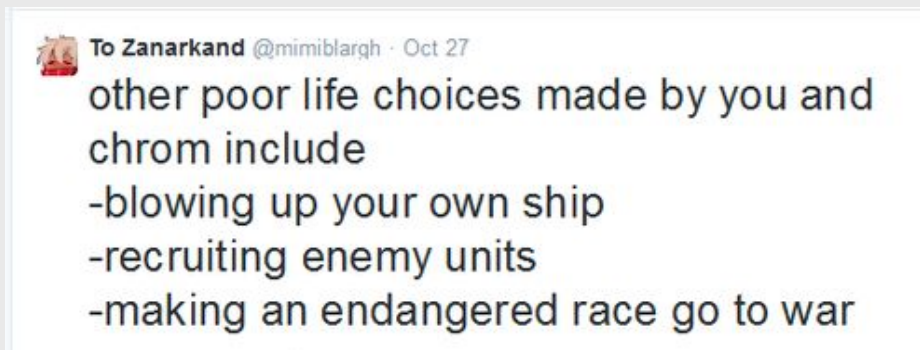
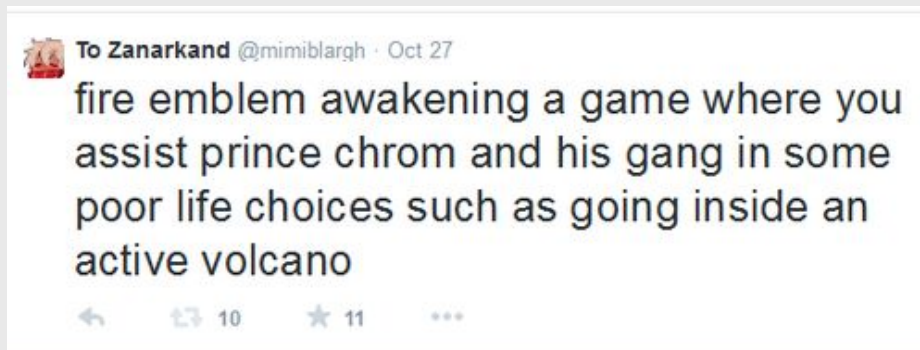
Final Project: Students will select one of the following prompts for their final.

- ❖ Essay: In our course, students have analyzed how narratives, and player agency function in games. Now, they will craft a critical essay or narrative criticism (see the Foss reading) about a game of their choosing, one not played for the course. You are required to have numerous sources.
- ❖ Game: Over the semester, students have learned the nuances and components of games: genres, protagonists, environment, gameplay mechanics, setting, plot, etc. For their final project, they will ‘create’ a game, outlining on paper a game they’ve designed, considering the above elements. They must also write a short reflection explaining what they’ve created and why.

Grade Break Down

Assignment	Percentage of Final Grade
Weekly Journals	15%
Genre of Manuals and Presentation	25%
Game Review	20%
Mock Trial	5%
Final Project (Game or Essay)	25%
Participation	10%

Revision: Writing about games is likely new for many of us, and even our best efforts might need additional help. You have the option to revise 1 project during the semester. You are required to contact me and meet about your revision within 48 hours of receiving a final grade. Revised projects are due within a week of our conversation. The new grade will replace the old one. You cannot revise late assignments, incomplete assignments, journal entries, or the final project.



Course Calendar

Subject to Change

Date	Readings Due	Projects Due
January 28 (M)	Introduction to Course	
January 30 (W)	Setting up Steam, review of terminology for the course	Class Survey on Values and Prior Interest
February 1 (F)	Gee, “Why Game Studies Now? Video Games: A New Art Form” (Canvas) Shaw, “What is Video Game Culture” (Canvas)	
February 4 (M)	Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation” (Canvas) College Composition and Communication, “Rhetorical Situation” (Canvas)	
February 6 (W)	Killorian, “The Rhetorical Situations that Invite Us Online” (Canvas)	
February 8 (F)	Campbell, “Gaming’s Toxic Men” Responses to “Gaming’s Toxic Men”	Reflection One Due
February 11 (M)	Reed, “Resident Evil’s Rhetoric: The Communication of Corruption in Survival Horror” (Canvas) Demonstration in-class	
February 13 (W)	<i>Her Story</i> , in class	

February 15 (F)	<i>Her Story</i> , in class	
February 18 (M)	Alberti, "The Game of Reading and Writing: How Video Games Reframe Our Understanding of Literacy" (Canvas) Introduction to Gaming Review Assignment	Reflection Two Due
February 20 (W)	Select Reviews on: <i>Uncharted 2, Journey, Fallout 76, and Assassin's Creed Odyssey</i> (Canvas/links also to be provided in email)	
February 22 (F)	Online Reviews from Jim Sterling and ACG to discuss visual rhetoric (Canvas/links also to be provided in email)	
February 25 (M)	Ivory, "Still a Man's Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of Video Games" (Canvas) Exploring various gaming websites	
February 27 (W)	Workshop Day	Reflection Three Due
March 1 (F)	"Genre Across The Curriculum" introduction Defining genre	
March 4 (M)	Wolf, "Genre and the Video Game" Introduction to Genre of Instruction Manuals project	
March 6 (W)	Ware, "The Slow and Silent"	Review Project Due

	Death of the Video Game Manual Explore: http://www.gamesdatabases.org/all_manuals	
March 8 (F)	Bawarshi and Reiff, “Chapter 9: Genre Research in Public and New Media Contexts” (Canvas) Connection to gaming manuals	
March 11 (M)	Foss, “Genre Criticism”	
March 13 (W)	Play Gone Home	
March 15 (F)	Askehave and Nielsen. “Digital genres: a challenge to traditional genre theory” (Canvas)	Reflection Four Due
March 18 (M)	SPRING BREAK	
March 20 (W)	SPRING BREAK	
March 22 (F)	SPRING BREAK	
March 25 (M)	Presentations	Reflection Five Due (On Gone Home)
March 27 (W)	Presentations	
March 29 (F)	Presentations	
April 1 (M)	Presentations	
April 3 (W)	Workshop and additional conversations on genre	
April 5 (F)	Begin Playing <i>Oxenfree</i>	
April 8 (M)	Class Trial on Games	Genre Due
April 10 (W)	Class Trial on Games	

	Introduction to Final Project Options	
April 12 (F)	Class Trial on Games	
April 15 (M)	Wolf, "Narrative in Gaming" Foss, "Narrative Criticism"	
April 17 (W)	Application of Narrative Criticism of <i>Oxenfree</i>	Complete <i>Oxenfree</i>
April 19 (F)	Bogost, "Procedural Rhetoric" (Canvas)	
April 22 (M)	Bogost, "Procedural Rhetoric" (Canvas)	
April 24 (W)	Bourgonjon, Vandermeersche , and Rutten, "Perspectives on Video Games as Art" (Canvas)	Reflection Six Due
April 26 (F)	Wolf, "Space/Time"	
April 29 M)	Isbister, "How Games Move Us" Introduction Game Clips	
May 1 (W)	Foss, "Fantasy Themed Criticism"	
May 3 (F)	Anzaldua, "From Borderlands/La Frontera" Select video game clips	Reflection Seven Due
May 6 (M)	<i>Indie: The Movie</i> clips on writing performed in games	
May 8 (W)	Workshop Time Course Evaluation	

May 10 (F)	Workshop Time	
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Final Exam: May 14, 8:00-10:30 AM, Presentation of Projects

Works Cited

Alberti, John. "The Game of Reading and Writing: How Video Games Reframe our Understanding of Literacy." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2008, pp. 258-269.

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Wolf, Mark. *The Medium of the Videogame*. University of Texas Press, 2002.