THE GAME STUDIO: DEVELOPING LITERACY THROUGH THE LENS OF GAME DESIGN

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

Middle Tennessee State University
August 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge that this is a piece of academic writing. I also acknowledge that I wrote this academic writing in my native language of English. I acknowledge that I have lived a life of privilege and access; and as such, I have experienced failure with more grace than I deserve. I acknowledge that these failures were instrumental in my success. I acknowledge Dr. Allison Smith and Dr. Julie Barger who have blessed me with their patience and their passion for scholarship. I acknowledge, Dr. Ellen Donovan, Dr. Wes Houp, Dr. Jennifer Kates, and Dr. Ron Kates, who have put up with my academic and pseudo-academic shenanigans for too many years and still happily say hello to me in the hallway. I acknowledge that I will need to vary my sentence structure a great deal more in the following pages. Finally, I acknowledge my wife Crystal for being the first to acknowledge me for who I am and who I could become.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I propose a curriculum for first year composition (FYC), called the Game Studio curriculum, in which students learn writing through experiences playing, analyzing, and designing games. In Chapter 1, I review the ways in which many students are already learning in video game spaces and argue that the study of games has potential to alter FYC instruction for the better. In Chapter 2, I frame the scholarship behind the Game Studio using James Paul Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach us About Learning and Literacy* and Jesse Schnell's *The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses.* I also provide context for Middle Tennessee State University's "Literacy for Life" objectives and discuss how the Game Studio curriculum supplements these objectives. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed list of introductory projects designed to give both students and instructors a running knowledge of game jargon and game design concepts. In Chapter 4, I provide details for the final two projects, which involve the development of student-designed games. I conclude in Chapter 5 with my reflections on student responses to an exit survey at the end of the Game Studio semester.

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CHAPTER 1:
WHY GAME DESIGN?

This is all about learning language.

Marc Prensky, in 2001, published "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants" within which he writes "Our students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the internet," (4). Digital natives were born into a world with digital technologies and grew up playing video games. Digital immigrants are "[t]hose of us who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology" (5). These immigrants "need to print out a document written on a computer in order to edit it… and bring people physically into [their] office to see an interesting website (rather than just sending them the URL)."[1]
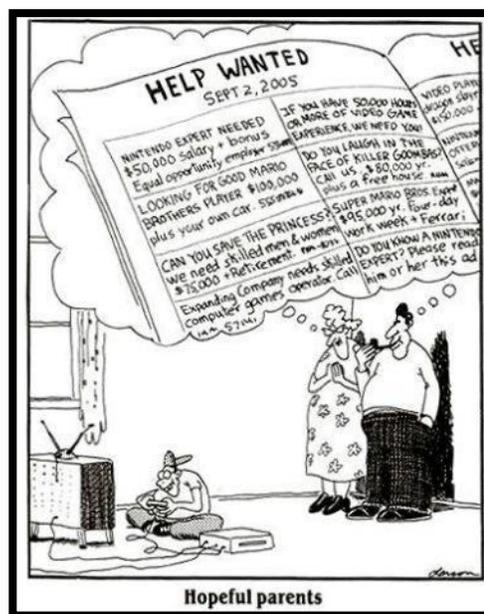
Figure 1. Gary Larson's comics were very popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They were commonly found in newspapers across America.

Prensky identifies this divide between digital natives and digital immigrants as a primary source for many of the struggles in modern day education. Digital natives who "[spent] their formative years learning with *Sesame Street"* and playing video games have very different expectations compared to digital immigrants who "think learning can't (or

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[1] It's important to note that someone can grow in a world with digital technologies and still be a digital immigrant. This delineation is established by an individual's relationship to technology, not their birth year.

shouldn't) be fun" (6). The Gary Larson comic in figure 1 was funny back in the early nineties because many digital immigrants couldn't possibly imagine that the job postings in the news ad become a reality. Ironically, a Google search for "salary for video game play tester" reveals a website called www.gameindustrycareerguide.com estimates the average salary for a video game play tester is between $18,000 and $58,000 a year.

Consider the following scenario. A digital native in middle school has been playing *Super Mario Bros.* for about three to four hours when one of his digital immigrant parents enters the room. "Why aren't you doing your homework?" they ask.

The digital native responds, "I'll get it done, I promise."

The digital immigrant, having heard this before says, "You are wasting your time. Do something productive."

What the immigrant did not understand was that the native was in fact learning a great deal. The native was experiencing a form of learning that:

- is paced by the individual,

- has many low stakes opportunities for failure,

- has a regulated reward system for success,

- and has a social and collaborative problem solving community.

Opportunity for Failure

Consider the first section of *Super Mario Bros.* (see figure 2). An incredible amount of learning is designed into this first level. The opening screen is just a flat straight away, and the players might choose to push any number of buttons on the controller at this point without any repercussion. In this first screen players can't fail. Because the screen scrolls

from right to left, players quickly learn that they can't move to the left, so they make their way to the right. After this, the first thing player see is a golden
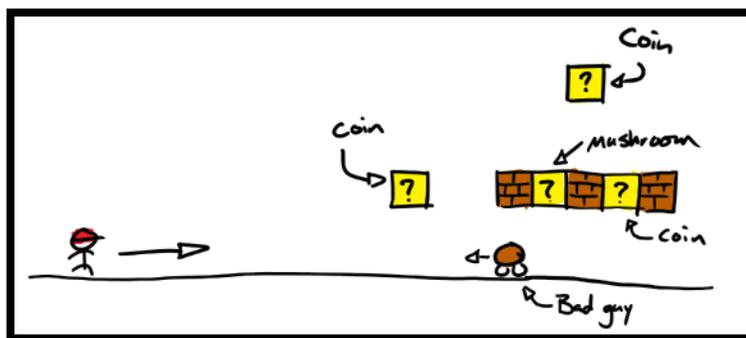
Figure 2. My hand-drawn depiction of the first section of Super Mario Bros.. *The game is designed in such a way that the player will quickly learn the basic mechanics of the game.*

question mark box with no instructions as to what this box does. The only options is for the players to jump at it. Since the players aren't experienced with controlling Mario, they might jump over the box or bump Mario's head on the box. If they jump over the box, they will discover that this is an object that Mario can walk on. If they miss and bump Mario's head on the bottom of the box, then they discover a golden coin inside. Already players have learned two of the basic principles of *Super Mario Bros.*. Question mark boxes contain good items, and the players can stand on them.

Soon a little brown creature, also seen in figure 2, will start to crawl its way toward players. Players may run directly into this creature which results in another lesson: little brown creatures hurt you. Players might try to jump over the creature. Since it's still early in the game, most likely players still haven't mastered their jumping yet. Players might successfully jump over the creature, or they might land on top of it. If they succeed in jumping over the creature, they are allowed to continue. If they land on top of the creature, they squish it and remove it from the screen. The game has barely started, and players have already learned that question mark boxes are good, little brown creatures are bad, and players can get rid of the brown creatures by jumping on top of them.

To truly understand these rules, players need to experience them first hand. The illustration in figure 2, as crude as it may be, does in fact identify the key features of the game. The arrows either indicate movement or what is being defined by the captions. My text-based description gives a decent sense of what it's like to play the game, but the learning happens much more quickly when players are actually playing. It would be difficult to illustrate the physics of Mario's jump, for example. The arrows in the diagram might offer a feel for Mario's trajectory, but the diagram says little for the speed that he rises, falls, or runs. I could provide the numerical data and formulas that govern Mario's movement, but unless the reader already understands that language, such an explanation is gibberish.

Digital natives are accustomed to learning in this organic fashion. This is their language.

Opportunities for Success

Super Mario Bros., as simple as it may seem, is an incredibly difficult game to master. Each consecutive level demands that players use all the skills they have learned up to that point and then layer on more. Getting to the final level demands a high level of concentration and a high level of mastery. This is not without reward; no one would play games without some kind of reward system in place. Completing levels is certainly a reward in itself. Almost any digital native can explain the satisfaction of reaching the flagpole at the end of most of the levels in *Mario Brothers*, as seen in figure 3.
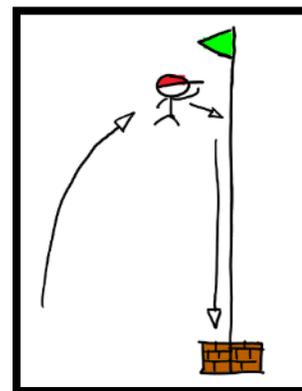
Figure 3. The reward for completing many of the levels in Super Mario Bros. *is a slide down a flagpole while hearing a celebratory musical fanfare.*

Collecting coins is a reward; every one hundred coins earns an extra life that is spent if the player fall off a cliff or run into a baddie.

The levels are broken into groups of four where every fourth level has a boss which is a dragon that shoots fireballs and is bigger than the other baddies in the game. Once the dragon is defeated, players are rewarded with triumphant theme music and the classic message, "Thank you Mario! But our princess is in another castle!"

These reward systems come at regular intervals, but become increasingly difficult to achieve as players progress through the game. Digital natives respond well to these kinds of reward systems. The rewards don't have to be big. A simple "Thank you Mario!" is enough for them to push forward to the next lesson. In digital native culture, a small reward is customary for small achievements.

Digital natives are accustomed to learning spaces that provides them regular rewards for success.

Social and Collaborative Problem Solving

Digital natives familiar with *Super Mario Bros.* will recognize the area of the game in figure 4. Two secrets are on the screen here: the green pipe on the left is in fact a secret passage that skips a large portion of the first level and gives the player several extra coins, and the dotted box in the upper part of the image is invisible unless you jump up to hit it. When the players hit the dotted
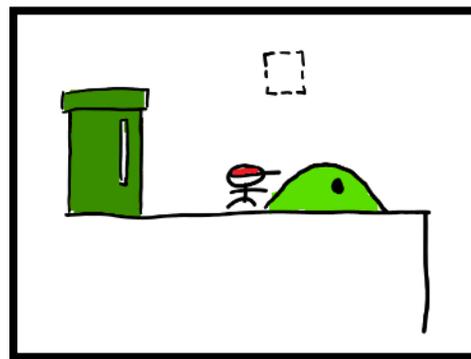
Figure 4. The box I have outlined in this figure is invisible unless players jump up to hit it. Players might find this on accident, or more likely, another player will inform them of the secret.

area, the box appears and a green mushroom comes out providing players with an extra life. It's entirely possible that a players happen upon these two secrets after hours of playing and random chance. However, many players learn of these secrets from other players of the game.

When I was in elementary school in the late eighties, the cafeteria lunchroom was converted into an open forum for exchanging video game knowledge. Copies of *Nintendo Power* magazine were passed around with the reverence of religious artifacts. Cheatcodes and game secrets were diagramed and sprawled on sheets of notebook paper, and game knowledge was a form of social capital.

These exchanges may not occur during lunch period like they did when I was young, but that doesn't mean they have disappeared. Quite the opposite. The internet made exchanges easier. Many games have entire wiki pages with extremely loose hierarchical structure dedicated to sharing knowledge about the game. These forums have gurus, who are experienced players who attract attention for the value of their gaming knowledge, not by their status. If the knowledge or idea doesn't hold up in the game, it is quickly disproven by other contributors.[2]

Digital natives believe learning works best in a collaborative environment (James Paul Gee "Semiotic Social Spaces and Affinity Spaces"). Even though gamers play in isolated rooms or basements, many gamers are quite involved in the social circles surrounding their games. Digital natives contribute best when their ideas are valued based on the merit of the ideas usefulness, not based on an artificial hierarchy. The digital native is less concerned with authority and more concerned with the merits of knowledge in its own right.

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[2] One of these wikis can be found at http://wowwiki.wikia.com/.

Again. Why Game Design?

Remember, this is all about learning language.

Digital natives and digital immigrants have very a different understanding of the learning process. Many digital immigrants might remember hours of research using the Dewey decimal system, and searching down rows of book shelves. For many immigrants, their early writing experiences involved a typewriter and a lot of whiteout. By these standards, learning was literally a physical task requiring time, patience, and perseverance. The learning experience of the digital native, unlike the digital immigrant, is enhanced by information technologies and interactive learning spaces. Digital natives expect information to be organized through metadata and hyperlinks. Hours of interactive games, coupled with a lifetime of googling information on a device that fits in their pockets, has trained digital natives to see the internet as an extension of their minds (not a separate entity).

The divide between immigrant and native is not necessarily defined by age. A recent study by the Entertainment Software Association reports that 59% of Americans play video games. Among those gamers, 29% are under the age of 18, 39% are 36 or older; and the average age of game purchasers is 35 (4). Simply playing games does not necessarily make one a digital native either. One can play video games and still interact with other technologies as a digital immigrant. Digital immigrants and natives are defined by their integration (or lack thereof) of digital technologies into their daily lives and how that integration defines their educational expectations.

Immigrants must be aware of these expectations as they teach natives. If digital natives seem disengaged during a lecture on library research methods, they are struggling to see the value in it. They live in a society where research is at their fingertips, where the meta-

data does most of the searching for them. When natives do learn outside the digital realm, they are accustomed to sharing knowledge in social groups and learning through interaction, not through lectures. Natives aren't afraid of hard work, but they are quick to recognize the tedious nature of the digital immigrant's "learning language." A learning language is a set of expectations about learning based on past successes and failures. These expectations are not necessarily shaped in an academic setting, but can also be established through acquiring hobbies (playing the guitar, learning a sport or playing *Tetris*) and social exchanges with individuals with similar interests.

A problem occurs when instructors believe their learning language is the same as their students. Such assumptions are based on the premise that the classroom belongs to the teacher, and the just students are visitors in an academic culture. In reality, the teachers are merely visitors in the lives of their students. Digital immigrants, who may have grown up learning in a top down, lecture based classroom, don't always realize the damage they are doing by using such methods. The archaic learning languages of the past might serve as good history lessons, but they do not always translate into practical learning for digital natives.

Digital immigrants do not need to become digital natives to teach across the digital divide;[3] however, like an immigrant in a foreign country, they should make an effort to learn the language of the natives who live there. Since 1983, Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* has been used to categorize students into different learning styles. Gardner uses terms are all valuable distinctions for designing lesson plans:

- linguistic intelligence

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[3] The digital divide refers to the cultural split between people and institutions that have access to and embrace technology and people and institutions who do not (Prensky 7).

- logical-mathematical intelligence

- spatial intelligence

- bodily-kinesthetic intelligence

- interpersonal intelligence

- intrapersonal intelligence

- and musical intelligence (qtd in Lynn Helding "Howard Garder's Theory of Multiple Intelligences")

Digital natives are not so easily categorized. Digital natives expect learning to occur in multiple modes and to shift fluidly between all of their intelligences. Digital natives' learning language is complex and engaging, but also increasingly demanding.

Technological advancement drives the learning language of digital natives. *Super Mario Bros.*, which is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary this year, is still widely regarded as one of the greatest video games of all time, but in terms of game software, it is extremely dated. Natives today expect their gaming experiences to have a built-in interactive tutorials that explain the basic mechanics of the game. These are often elaborate multimodal interactive experiences in which concepts are visually demonstrated alongside text and audio. The digital native's learning language demands efficiency, engagement, and lessons that are delivered in a non-linear fashion and paced at the speed of individual mastery: no simple task for FYC instructors.

Fortunately, one way to learn the language of the digital native is to learn from a digital native. Digital natives have an intrinsic understanding of their learning language even if they don't have a well-developed vocabulary to describe it. If asked, they will provide many examples of poor teaching. Poor teaching is boring. Poor teaching is impractical.

Poor teaching is judgmental. Students are actually saying: poor teaching doesn't offer regular rewards to keep things interesting, poor teaching doesn't transfer outside the classroom, poor teaching offers too many opportunities for grade-impacting failure. If asked, a digital native will also tell you what a good video game looks like. Good video games are exciting. They aren't too hard, but they aren't too easy either. They provide opportunities for failure, but failure is presented as a learning opportunity rather than a punishment. Digital immigrant instructors can benefit from learning effective game design because it provides a road map to the learning languages of the digital natives they have been entrusted to teach.

When discussing the Game Studio curriculum with millennials outside of academia, I am often met with either confused looks or anger. I understand that confusion is an appropriate response to a graduate student discussing the finer points of their research, but anger is probably less typical. This anger isn't directed at me, but at former composition instructors. "Why weren't you teaching when I was in school?!" is probably the most common response followed by, "Your class makes so much sense!" Millennials seem to inherently understand the value of teaching game design to students. I've never heard them express concerns for their instructor or hesitation: "What about the teachers who don't play games?" "I think that's too big of a stretch to be practical in a writing class." They jump on my game design bandwagon without looking back (as also evident in the survey responses found in Chapter 5).

My colleagues tend to respond differently depending on their age. Younger colleagues[4] tend to give the same response as my millennial non-academic friends. Older colleagues (typically, though not exclusively, of the boomer generation) tend to say, "Oh,

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[4] The millennials and perhaps older colleagues who are well versed in digital humanities

that's certainly interesting," and then try and change the subject. Most boomer-digital immigrants are dismissive because they have been trained to be dismissive of games; games are, after all, considered toys.

Part of the problem is most of the colleagues from the boomer generation are not actually playing video games for themselves. Many boomers who have tried playing games, are often discouraged by the unexpected learning curve. They haven't experienced the game from inside, but as observers watching a movie. The adage "Video games are great for your hand eye coordination" is practically a trope in the genre of academics speaking about games. Sadly, many gamers find themselves spouting the same false rhetoric about games that they heard from the digital immigrants: games are a waste of time.

Gabe Zicherman discusses the discrepancy between the expectations of video gamers and academic authorities in his 2011 presentation at TEDx Kids: Brussels. Zicherman explains why *Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?* is the most important video game ever made. *Carmen San Diego* "was the first and the last time that parents, teachers, and kids all agreed that a video game was awesome." *Carmen San Diego* was fun, challenging and educational.[5]

Unfortunately, a large portion of the scholarly community who prefer "sitting down on a Sunday afternoon to read a good book with a cup of tea" (Zicherman) have a tendency to use the proliferation of video games as a scapegoat for the "epidemic" of attention deficit disorder (ADD) among our youth. Zicherman cites Dimitri Christakis of UW, who states "Children habituated to games may find the **real** world underwhelming, understimulating" and Christopher Lucas of NYU who claims that "Games don't teach the **right** kind of

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[5] Rarely does an educational game meet all three of these criteria.

attention skills – sustained, no reward." Both of these scholars conclude that video games are at the heart of a crisis in our education system; games are shortening attention spans, and a warping student's expectations for reality. In spite of such studies, Zicherman cites the Flynn Effect, which shows since the 1990s, human intelligence has continued to increase year after year. He finds it ironic that, contrary to Christakis' and Lucas' findings, the Flynn Effect started shortly after video games began to proliferate in houses across the world.

Games are not going away. Instead games are seeping into the daily routines of both digital immigrants and digital natives. People wear fitbits® on their arms to monitor the amount of physical activity they have performed during the day. Calorie counter apps such as MyfitnessPal.com that turn dieting into a numbers game are extremely popular. Many hybrid cars have Tamagotchi style games built into their dashboards, so a small plant will either grow when the driver is driving economically or shrivel when the driver is not. Some mobile apps use a phone's GPS to encourage players to exercise. The competitive GPS game *Ingress* (see figure 5) has its users create imaginary links between geographic landmarks. If users create a triangle with these links, their teams earns ownership of the area covered by that triangle.

These examples represent a "gamification" movement to embrace game
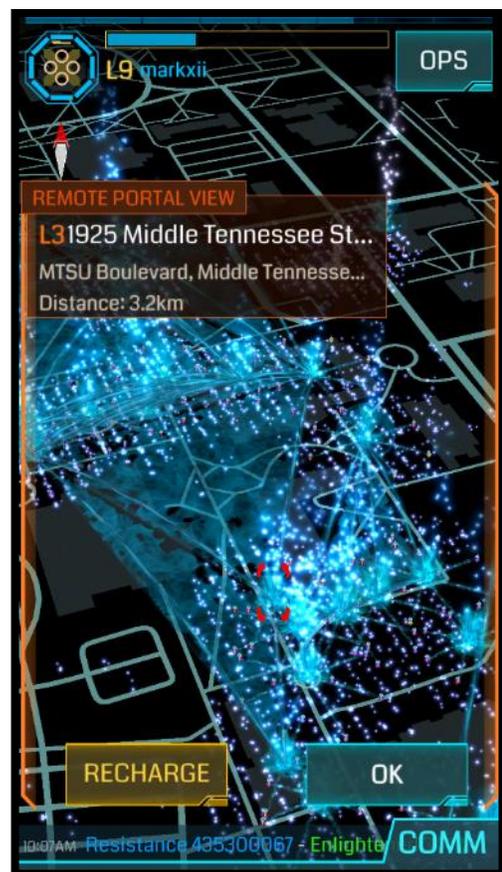
Figure 5. A screenshot from Niantic Labs' Ingress*, a game in which players compete for control over "portals" that can be found in real world places such as monuments, public buildings, or businesses.*

design, a term originally coined by Nick Pelling (Marczewski 3). Zicherman describes

gamification as "the process of using game thinking and game mechanics to engage

audiences and solve problems." Gamification embraces the strengths of digital natives and

fosters those strengths. In Zicherman's view, the problem isn't that gamers are over-

stimulated and unmotivated; rather, the problem is that the world has not figured out how to

properly stimulate and incentivize a generation of highly intelligent gamers.

This isn't to say that some scholars haven't made some excellent strides in the right

direction. In the early 2000s, James Paul Gee, a psycholinguist then in his fifties, started to

play video games. During a presentation on learning spaces, Gee describes his first gaming

experience as follows:

> I was shocked at how hard they were. And like any good baby boomer I said
>
> okay I can handle this, I'll read the manual first. And I sat down to read this
>
> little twenty-page book. And the twenty page book had one hundred-ninety-
>
> nine bolded headings each cross-referenced the other hundred-ninety-eight
>
> that were technical definitions. But I did what every kid would do. I went and
>
> played the game for hours terribly. And then the weirdest thing happened to
>
> me. I picked this book up right there and I could no longer recover why it
>
> wasn't crystal clear, because I had seen in the game an image an action an
>
> experience a goal a dialogue that fit those words. See these words are about a
>
> world. And if you haven't lived in that world and can't see it in your mind,
>
> these are just words. You can look them up in a dictionary, which is
>
> completely useless. And it struck me at that day that the key problem of our
>
> schools… is that it's full of manuals without the games. If you did that to

gamers there would be a revolution. ("James Paul Gee on Learning with

Video Games")

Gee's epiphany came when he realized games had an uncanny ability to explain complex and

abstract concepts in a very small amount of time. By fusing text, images and sound in an

interactive environment, Gee was quickly able to translate the text of the game manual that

he had previously found incomprehensible. This transformative experience led Gee to write

and publish one of the most cited books on video games in education, *What Video Games*

Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy (*WVG*). *WVG* explains in great detail what many

video gamers have struggled to say for so many years; video games "are a life enhancing

experience" (Introduction).

Gee breaks *WVG* into eight chapters which are subdivided into a total of thirty-six

learning principles. Here are the first four learning principles, which are basic in nature, apply

to the game studio curriculum:

1. Active, Critical Learning Principle

All aspects of the learning environment (including the ways in which the

semiotic domain is designed and presented) are set up to encourage active

and critical, not passive, learning.

2. Design Principle

Learning about and coming to appreciate design and design principles is core

to the learning experience.

3. Semiotic Principle

Learning about and coming to appreciate interrelations within and across

multiple sign systems (images, words, actions, symbols, artifacts, etc.) as a

complex system is core to the learning experience.

4. Semiotic Domains Principle

Learning involves mastering, at some level, semiotic domains, and being able

to participate, at some level in the affinity group or groups connected to

them. (Appendix)

Interestingly, video games are never explicitly mentioned in many of Gee's learning

principles. Gee does not confine these principles to video games, but emphatically states that

his learning principles are universal. He is concerned with learning that transfers beyond the

game space and into the real world.

In this thesis, I argue that Gee's learning principles don't have to be limited to the

game play experience; they can also be applied to the creative experience of game design.

Using Gee's learning principles as a road map, students can learn a great deal from

collaboratively designing their own games and evaluating the game design choices of their

peers. Teaching game design to students in a collaborative FYC environment teaches

students basic concepts like writing for an audience, multimodal literacies, and technical

writing, and also improves their ability to communicate to team members in small groups

and to problem solve in a collaborative endeavor. The higher order skills required to

collaboratively design a game also have potential to transfer into student's lives beyond the

FYC classroom.

"Transfer" is certainly a familiar term among composition scholars who regularly

assess the effectiveness of their field. Elizabeth Wardle provides several definitions for the

concept of transfer. In her article "Understanding 'Transfer' from FYC: Preliminary Results of a Longitudinal Study," Wardle breaks transfer into three conceptions:

1. "Task" conceptions "theorize transfer as the transition of knowledge used in one task to solve another task" (66).

2. In "Individual" conceptions, "the goal of schooling… is to teach students 'learned intelligent behavior' that will help them seek out and/or create situations in which what they have learned will transfer."

3. "Context" conceptions of transfer refer to research by Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström and are broken into three forms of context in which learning is transfered: situated or situational, sociocultural and activity-based. (67)

Wardle states, "we would be remiss to focus solely on task- or individual-based conceptions of transfer with little regard for situation and activity" (69). The term transfer implies movement of something concrete or physical. This physical connotation often leads us to think of transfer as skills based and can be limiting as skills tend to be thought of as finite whereas an activity or situation is rarely finite. Wardle suggests that a focus on the transfer of skills hinders the transfer of higher order concepts. Instead, "We should attempt to account for the ways in which knowledge and skills are *transformed* across contexts" (69). Wardle borrows an alternative term from King Beach, "generalization." She complicates the definition of transfer, by proposing that "Generalization includes classical interpretations of transfer – but goes beyond them to examine individuals *and* their social organizations, the ways individuals construct associations among social organizations, association that can be continuous and constant or distinctive and contradictory" (68).

In a discussion about teaching video game design in FYC, this understanding of transfer is critical. Gee offers a learning principle aptly named the "Transfer Principle:" "Learners are given ample opportunity to practice, and support for, transferring what they have learned earlier to later problems, including problems that require adapting and transforming that earlier learning" (Appendix). Even though *WVG* is framed around the types of learning gamers experience in video games, Gee's learning principles apply to all contexts.

In my Game Studio for FYC, the core concepts of video game design apply. Games have an audience. They are comprised from a combination of multiple modes, texts, images, symbols, sounds, and music, and each of these modes coalesce to create an experience for the player/reader. They are rigorously playtested and edited. If designed well, they can be extremely moving pieces of media. If they are designed poorly, they are less so. Students who master the art of game design will vicariously master the basic objectives of a FYC course.

I argue that all games are rhetorical in the same way that all texts or movies are rhetorical. Unlike movies and texts, games have another layer of rhetorical depth due to their interactivity. In 2014, Anita Sarkeesian looked at the *Super Mario Bros.* series through a feminist lens and criticized how the games in the series consistently portray Princess Toadstool as a helpless damsel in distress. Sarkeesian says the "damsel in distress trope disempowers female characters and robs them of their chance to be heroes in their own right." Sarkeesian's critique of *Super Mario Bros.* is evidence that even a game as simple as *Super Mario Bros.* makes rhetorical moves, whether the game creator intended them or not.

Some organizations have overtly used games to create awareness or to promote agendas. Harry J. Brown in *Video Games and Education* writes about free to play games like mtvU's *Darfur is Dying,* which was created for humanitarian purposes to raise awareness of the crisis in Sudan, and *America's Army* (2002), which was commissioned by the U. S. Army as a recruiting tool (72). Some authorities, such as Andrew Rasiej, an information and technology advisor to the Democratic Party, say that politically charged games are "cute and nice, and people will send them to each other, but they're not going to capture their imagination" (quoted in Brown 71). Brown Acknowledges that these games "may oversimplify the issues they mean to represent [but] they function… as entryways to greater understanding and more consequential political action" (72). As evident by both Sarkeesian and Brown, games offer incredible rhetorical potential for those with the ability to create them.

A common misconception about game design is that it is a techno-centric yet mystical art form only accomplished by massive teams of computer programmers in a distant land (presumably Seattle). Jesse Schell's *The Art of Game Design: A book of lenses* (*AGD*) is an excellent resource for the aspiring designer of both of analog and digital games. Schell's book is particularly helpful for understanding the parallels between game design and composition because he does not fixate his discussion on the technological aspects of game design but rather the implications of design decisions. Whether that game is digital or analog is of little consequence; the experience of the player is Schell's primary focus. This focus on experience allows the most technologically inexperienced individuals to be game designers. The first chapter of *AGD,* called "Magic Words," starts by relaying Schell's belief that anyone can be a game designer: "Would-be designers often ask me, 'How do you become a

game designer?' And the answer is easy: 'Design games. Start now! Don't wait! Don't even finish this conversation! Just start designing! Go! Now!'" (ch. 1).

Video game creation is not only possible in FYC but also appropriate. Gee has made an excellent case for the positive influence of game play. Schell has made an excellent case that game design is possible for anyone to accomplish. In this thesis, I make a case that lessons in game design foster the kinds of transfer (or generalization) that Wardle cites as imperative to successful FYC courses. This transfer does not only occur for students, but also occurs for FYC instructors who might not be familiar with the wonderful world of video games as they glean lessons from their students about good game design and the learning language of the digital native.

CHAPTER 2:
What the *Scholarship* Has to Teach Us
about Learning and Literacy

FYC scholars have been subtly (or not so subtly) blazing a trail towards game design

for years. During the 1980s, the collaborative movement deprioritized the lecture model of

instruction and gave students a new voice in the classroom. Starting around the turn of the

century, instructors used collaborative pedagogies to teach multimodal literacies and broaden

the scope of the composition classroom to include the study of rhetoric in all forms of

media. Around 2005, this expanded understanding of rhetoric allowed teachers (Diana

Baldwin,[1] Jerome Bump)[2] to take their classes on field trips into massively multiplayer online

roleplaying games (MMORPGs) where they could explore abstract concepts such as identity,

audience, and performance in completely new ways. FYC is primed for game design.

To justify teaching game design in FYC settings, instructors must consider several

questions. How do we approach game design if we have no experience with it? How can the

teaching of game design transfer (or generalize) into practical knowledge for students? What

composition scholarship directly relates to game design or sets a precedent for this type of

classroom? I answer these questions by following the scholarly breadcrumbs from

collaborative pedagogies to multimodal literacies to gaming pedagogies. Many of the

concepts in both Gee's *WVG* and Schell's *AGD* mirror FYC scholarship, and this chapter

outlines those reflections.

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[1] *Everyone's a Kool-Aid Man Today: Pedagogical Implications of Teaching First-Year Composition in Second Life.*
[2] "Thinking Outside the Text Box: 3-D Interactive, Multimodal Literacy in a College Writing Class."

Collaborative Learning

Learning principles

Collaboration is crucial for designing all games and playing many games, and Gee frequently uses *World of Warcraft (WoW)* as an example of the potential for collaboration in video games. Players of *WoW* choose to specialize in one of many skill sets which come with their own strengths and weakness. Many of the dungeons/missions in *WoW* require a diverse set of skills to complete. If five players with the healer skillset attempt one of these missions alone, they "will die in two seconds" (Gee "Learning with Video Games"). Just like the real world, diversity is required to succeed in *WoW*. This mandate for diversity in the game forces players to collaborate and even organize outside of the game. *WoW* players construct learning spaces to improve their game experiences: forums, wikis, and walkthroughs. Good ideas and information are cultural currency in these spaces, and the members of these learning spaces do not concern themselves with titles of authority. New members learn the game at their own pace and glean tips and tricks from seasoned veterans, but this doesn't mean that their voice is smaller. A sense of hierarchy and status exists among the members of these groups, but there is no singular route to climbing the social ladder. Rather, each member may achieve a guru-like prestige however they see fit, and the community gauges the value of these pursuits.

The online learning spaces for *WoW* are what Gee calls an "affinity space." Affinity spaces are complicated and fluid. Gee (in his "affinity" for lists) gives us many features of affinity spaces including:

- Common endeavor, not race, class, gender or disability, is primary…

- Newbies and masters and everyone else share common space…

- Encourages individual and distributed knowledge…

- Uses and honors tacit knowledge[3]

- Many different forms and routes to participation…

- Leadership is porous and leaders are resources… (Gee "Semiotic Social Spaces" 225-228)

An affinity space provides an environment that encourages its participants to take ownership of not only their own education, but also the education of their peers (students) and their leaders (teachers). In many ways, an affinity space is another term for a very healthy discourse community,[4] and Gee sees these features as essential to the success of our education system. The teachers who treat their classrooms as affinity spaces earn their authority not only through a passion for their students' education, but also through a passion for their own development as teachers. FYC composition should look to video game culture because "Young people who play video games often experience a more intense affinity group, leverage more knowledge from other people and from various tools and technologies, and are more powerfully networked with each other than they ever are in school" (Gee, ch.

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[3] "Knowledge players have built up in practice but may not be able to explicate fully in words" (Gee "Semiotic Social Spaces" 227).

[4] Later in this chapter I will discuss more about discourse communities.

7). FYC may never achieve the same level of intensity as the affinity groups surrounding video games, but a strong focus on collaborative learning is certainly a good start.

The scholarship

This idea of collaborative learning is certainly not limited to Gee's scholarship. In his seminal 1984 article "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" Kenneth Bruffee explores the connections between external conversations (speech and writing) and internal conversations (thoughts and ideas). Several different dialogues in writing exist: between the writer and the reader, between the writer and the writer's internal voice, and between the writer and other writers. Whereas internal conversations and external conversations are similar, Bruffee notes that internal conversations are limited "by ethnocentrism, inexperience, personal anxiety, economic interests, and paradigmatic inflexibility" (549)[5] while external conversations have a broader set of experiences and predispositions to pull from. In order to combat the limitations of internal conversation, Bruffee offers that collaborative learning "provides a social context in which students can experience and practice the kinds of conversation valued by college teachers" (551). Like Gee's affinity group principle, Bruffee identifies conversation as core to the learning experience in the composition classroom.

When instructors embrace class conversation and collaboration, they allow students of various aptitudes to benefit from the strongest members of the group. Ann L. Brown uses collaborative learning to teach reading comprehension to her students. She finds that

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[5] In the original source, Bruffee refers to his own internal thought; however, he uses this example as a generalization for all internal thought.

"Group cooperation, where everyone is trying to arrive at a consensus concerning meaning, relevance, and importance, helps ensure that understanding occurs, even if some members of the group are not yet capable of full participation" (7). Because a collaborative classroom relies heavily on conversation to demonstrate understanding, "beginners can learn from the contributions of those more expert than they" (Brown 7). Brown coins the term "reciprocal teaching" which:

> involve[s] the development of a minilearning community, intent not only on understanding and interpreting texts as given, but also on establishing an interpretive community (Fish 1980) whose interaction with texts was as much a matter of community understanding and shared experience as it was strictly textual interpretation. (Brown 6-7)

By entrusting certain aspects of instruction to students, instructors give students an opportunity to participate in a small discourse community where the strengths of an individual are allowed to surface. This creates a classroom dynamic in which students are only as weak as the classroom's strongest member.

Another strength of collaborative pedagogies is that they dramatically improve divergent thinking or the ability to generate many solutions to the same problem. Janet Bercovitz and Maryann Feldman in "The Mechanisms of Collaboration in Inventive Teams: Composition, Social Networks, and Geography" research the benefits of creating science teams with a high level heterogeneity (diverse backgrounds) as opposed to teams with homogeneous backgrounds (single common knowledge area). Similar to Bruffee's discussion about the limitations of internal thought and Gee's description of non-diverse *WoW* players, Bercovitz and Feldman quote L. Fleming who, when working with science teams, finds that

"[w]hen… members of the team draw on similar common knowledge their search space is circumscribed and together they run the risk of technological exhaustion and lower chance of significant breakthroughs" (82). In contrast, heterogeneous science teams generated more patents, licenses, and royalties as they had a larger pool of experience from which to pull (83). Bercovitz and Feldman's research, though heavily steeped in the sciences, has strong implications for FYC. As a general requirement course, FYC provides students with the most heterogeneous group of classmates they will ever encounter, and as such, instructors should take advantage of this diversity. Collectively, FYC students are capable of achieving far more complicated tasks than just basic reading and writing (perhaps game design), and our instruction and projects should expect much more from them.

Even when teams are more homogenous, the potential for learning and problems solving is greater than when students write alone. Meredith Green and Sarah Duerden, from Arizona State University, in their article "Collaboration, English Composition, & the Engineering Student: Constructing Knowledge in the Integrated Engineering Program," discuss the benefits of teaching collaborative writing to second year engineering students. Since the field of engineering often requires collaborative writing, the potential for students to transfer their knowledge to their work outside of academia is greatly increased. Green and Duerden view "writing as problem-solving thereby helping students to construct knowledge about issues and ethical dilemmas in engineering through writing" (1) and discuss how they scaffold their assignments and prepare their students to work together as a team to create collaborative writing that solves technological dilemmas. They also note that teaching collaborative writing early in students' academic careers is vital because "relegating such experiences to senior level or capstone courses is a recipe for disaster" (3).

Transfer (generalization) by its very nature does not occur in the vacuum of the FYC classroom. Unless the goal of FYC is to merely create more FYC instructors, FYC scholars must look at how effective collaboration manifests in areas like the sciences (Bercovitz and Feldman), engineering (Green and Duerden), or as I suggest in this thesis game design. I am not concerned with creating great games or even great game designers. Instead I am concerned with students coming together to solve a problem that many of them thought was impossible at the beginning of the semester. I am concerned with creating great collaborators who communicate effectively in diverse methods.

Design lenses

Collaborative learning strategies are crucial to successful classroom learning and extremely important for tasks outside of the classroom. Game design is appealing in FYC because it requires collaboration to be successful. Schell and other game designers are deeply reliant on collaboration and learning from the strengths of others. This is born out of necessity as game design requires vast range of skills to master. In *AVG*, Schell lists, in alphabetical order, many of the skills necessary to create games:

animation	creative writing	psychology
anthropology	economics	public speaking
architecture	engineering	sound design
brainstorming	history	technical writing
business	management	visual arts
cinematography	mathematics	(ch. 1)
communication	music	

Schell poses the question "How could anyone possibly master all of these things?" and promptly answers "The truth is no one can" (ch. 1). It often takes a team of talented

individuals with very diverse backgrounds, like most FYC classrooms, to create a successful game. Schell suggests, "To create a modern videogame, a team of tremendous diversity is required. You need a team of people with a wide variety of artistic, technical, design, and business skills" (ch. 23). Schell spends five chapters discussing the ways design teams work or don't work. He frames this discussion around an unconventional term, "love." Love is an esoteric term, so Schell clarifies, "I don't mean that if the team holds hands, and sings 'Kumbaya,' that you are going to make a great game. I don't even mean that you have to like the other people on the team[; rather,] you have to love the game you are making" (ch. 23).

Schell's concept of love starts to echo concepts from both the collaborative movement in composition and Gee's description of affinity spaces:

- Make everyone on the team feel like they own the design.
- *Initial Brainstorming*: Involves as much of the team as possible.
- Don't even talk about the idea as 'my idea' or 'Sue's idea' – speak objectively: 'The spaceship idea.
- People who feel respected speak freely, openly and honestly.
- If you leave some ambiguity in the detailed design of your game, particularly for parts you aren't sure about, it forces the developers… to think about what that section should be like and come up with ideas for how to implement those fine details (ch. 23).

Schell's understanding of collaboration focuses primarily on the democratization of the group. Similar to Gee's affinity spaces Bercovitz and Feldman's science teams, each voice of Schell's game design team holds value. Game design offers complex challenges that require a group to solve, as Green and Duerden discovered with their engineering students. When problems are complex, diversity and collaboration are required for success.

The primary pedagogical factor that makes video game design in FYC possible is a decision to devote a large portion of the class to collaborative learning. Not all of the students in the classroom will be familiar with games. As in Brown's argument that students in collaborative environments benefit from the strongest members, students who don't play games will benefit from those that might play too many, and the students who are more technologically minded become teachers for those who are not. Some students might gravitate towards the visual aspects of game design, and others find solace in the more traditional textual elements found in games. An instructor who teaches collaborative game design allows students to learn from the diverse set of strengths that walked through the classroom door on day one of the semester.

Multimodal Literacies

Learning principles

It's not a coincidence that Gee published the first edition of *WVG* (2003) alongside an explosion of multimodal literacies scholarship. Gee reveals the benefits that multimodal literacies have to offer through his struggle to interpret a text-based game manual with 199 definitions. Gee provides several learning principles that directly relate to multimodal literacies (some of which I discuss in Chapter 1):

> **2. Design Principle[1]**
> Learning about and coming to appreciate design and design principles is core to the learning experience.

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[1] I am including the principles that most apply to multimodal literacies here.

3. Semiotic Principle

Learning about and coming to appreciate interrelations within and across multiple sign systems (images, words, actions, symbols, artifacts, etc.) as a complex system is core to the learning experience.

20. Multimodal Principle

Meaning and knowledge are built up through various modalities (images, texts, symbols, interactions, abstract design, sound, etc.), not just words. (Appendix)

As a psycholinguist, Gee understands that we naturally learn in multiple modes, proposing "In the modern world, print literacy is not enough. People need to be literate in a great variety of semiotic domains" (Gee, ch. 1). Literacy is reading/playing games and writing/designing texts.[2]

The scholarship

Multimodal composition has become more widely accepted as of late, but this hasn't always been true. Cheryl E. Ball, in her 2004 article, "Show, Not Tell: The Value of New Media Scholarship" makes the case that new media scholarship should utilize the same semiotic elements that it intends to discuss. In 2004 (and even today), many institutions gave priority to text based publications for tenure. Ball states rather frankly that print scholarship should not be valued over new media scholarship as "[v]aluing [multimodal] texts and making them less rare, which will increase our analytical and interpretational strategies for them, is important for new media scholarship to move forward" (422). Ball and her efforts made multimodal scholarship flashier[3] than its text based cousin.

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[2] This would good title for a book that I might later write.
[3] Especially when it uses Adobe Flash!

Instructors who are less comfortable with multimodal scholarship are distracted by these flashy elements and fear they are unqualified to teach modes other than text; however, the pedagogical approach to multimodal composition is firmly grounded in the same collaborative pedagogies that many of these instructors use in their classrooms daily. Rather than trace the emergence of multimodal literacies back to a single text or even a group of texts that combine to define multimodal pedagogies, a more pragmatic and much simpler task is to compare a "traditional" writing guide to a "multimodal" writing guide.

More traditional writing guides tend to focus on the manufacturing of academic texts. Cheryl Glenn and Loretta Gray recently published the second edition of *Harbrace Essentials* (2015). The usual suspects can be found in the *Harbrace*: about forty pages on academic research; over one hundred pages covering different citation styles (APA, MLA, CMS, and CSE); and around one hundred pages dedicated to grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and effective language. Each writing concept is given an alphanumeric title like "19a Locating Comma splices and fused sentences" (273) to make rules easier to reference for both the instructor and presumably the student. Each section of rules is accompanied by activities like "EXERCISE 19.1 Revise each comma splice or fused sentence in the following paragraph" (277). Glenn and Gray present a text-centric composition classroom. Only 9.5 pages out of 477 are dedicated to visual design, and the design elements that are listed are primarily charts, graphs and technical drawings. The front matter does provide some discussion on the process of writing; however, Glenn and Gray dedicate most of their efforts to defining the perfect writing product.

In contrast to *Harbrace Essentials,* Kristen Arola, Jennifer Sheppard, and Cheryl E. Ball recently published the 150 page textbook *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects* (2013). In the introduction to the teacher's manual of *Writer/Designer,* Arola, Sheppard and Ball talk about their frustrations with manuals like the *Harbrace*, "One handbook could never cover all possible citation styles an author might need (APA, MLA, CMS, AP, etc.)… [W]hat we needed was a textbook that didn't try to provide each and every answer, but rather gave the right questions to ask" (3). Arola, Sheppard and Ball, instead of overloading the student with an excessive prescriptive delineation between good and *wrong*, offer the student a broad outline of the creative process. For example, in Chapter 5 "Assembling Your Technologies and Your Team," the authors walk students through a model of the collaborative process. Arola, Sheppard and Ball don't make assumptions about what kind of projects are going to be assigned; instead they focus on the decision-making processes involved with good project management. They also offer suggestions like "limit

Table 1. The differences between Writer/Designer and Harbrace Essentials

Harbrace Essentials	Writer/Designer
481 pages	149 pages
Skill and drill exercises, long lists of grammar rules	Brainstorming, experimentation, applying new technologies
Prioritizes texts	Prioritizes choosing the proper mode for audience and context
Focus on product over process	Focus on process over product
Brief and incomplete MLA, APA, CMS, AP style guides	A chapter on finding credible sources and a discussion on copyright, fair use, creative commons, etc.
$39.95 list price	$32.99 list price

the size of your team to between three and five members" (82) or "Be a good listener– collaborating requires that you listen to the ideas of others to hear what's beneficial" (83).

The contrast between these two manuals is rather stark (Table 1). The *Harbrace* is three times as long and product driven; *Writer/Designer* is short and process driven. The *Harbrace* presents writing as a task to be mastered through skill-and-drill exercises;[4] *Writer/Designer* presents the student with a process that focuses on brainstorming, creating proposals, experimentation, project organization, and learning and applying new technologies. The *Harbrace* provides a formula for texts; *Writer/Designer* provides a scientific method for the creation process.

This allusion to science and experimentation is a reoccurring theme in much of the scholarship that to define multimodal pedagogies. Collin Gifford Brooke in his chapter entitled "New Media Pedagogies" from *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies,* explains that a classroom steeped in new media pedagogies "function[s] as a writer's laboratory, a site of experimentation" (180-182). Gifford reminisces about an activity where his students took "the four icon challenge" which has students attempt to summarize the plot of an entire movie in just four icons. Even though Gifford wasn't sure how his students might respond, "[w]eeks later when [his] students were working on designing infographics, the practice of generalizing and compressing ideas in the form of graphic icons ended up being a skill that many of them drew upon in their designs" (181). Gifford cites this as a moment of "serendipity," but I contest that such an activity is loaded with transferable (generalizable) lessons.[5] Gifford even uses Wardle's preferred term for transfer: "generalizing and compressing ideas…" (181).

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[4] Or as Allison Smith refers to them, "Skill, drill, and kill excercises."

[5] Students come to understand key concepts of semiotics as they scour the internet for symbols for the various narrative elements of their movie, and also come to understand audience when their peers struggle to understand the meaning of the various symbols.

Multimodal literacies shift the focus of FYC away from often formulaic forms of writing that lend themselves to the five-paragraph essay (that commonly results in an amateur and inauthentic academic tone).[6] Instead, students are asked to innovate, experiment, and try and fail. Post academe, rarely will students encounter moments where a forced academic tone is valuable, but the capacity to innovate and adapt in broad and generalized ways is crucial to the future success of students no matter what path they might take after they leave their campus. Wardle prefers the term "generalization" over transfer for this very reason. In the pilot for a longitudinal study where Wardle interviews several FYC students over the course of their college careers, she states that "Despite students' assertion that they had, in fact, learned useful lessons in FYC, they also maintained that they rarely needed those lessons elsewhere… For the most part, the students did not need the writing-related behaviors they used in FYC (i.e., careful preparation, careful research, deep revision, peer review) to achieve good grades on writing assignments in other courses" (73). She later concludes that "*meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies* in FYC may be the most important ability our courses can cultivate… We cannot prepare students for every genre, nor can we know every assignment they will be given or the genre conventions appropriate to those assignments across the disciplines" (82).

Design lenses

Experimentation and innovation are a given for games, but innovating in way that creates an immersive interactive experience is a complicated endeavor. Schell, who is not a composition scholar in the least, never uses the term "multimodal" to describe the different

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[6] Introduction, three body paragraphs, and one conclusions.

elements that go into a game. Instead he chooses to talk about creating a game experience in which the elements of the game (sounds, images, text, music, symbols, etc.) combine to create an experience for the player. Schell posits, "When people play games, they have an experience. It is this experience that the designer cares about. Without the experience, the game is worthless" (Schell, ch. 2). Schell states that the need to create an experience is not exclusive to game design as "[d]esigners of all types of entertainment – books, movies, plays, music, rides, everything – have to cope with the same issue: How can you create something that will generate a certain experience when a person interacts with it" (ch. 2). I expand Schell's argument to include scholarly texts as well. Scholars' goals are to create the experience of enlightenment in their readers, which is generated through careful consideration of design choices. Arola, Sheppard and Ball argue that "*all* writing is designed, even if it doesn't look like much thought was put into those one-inch margins" (xxiii). Even an MLA style paper was designed with an audience in mind. Those one inch margins create a reading experience for the reader, mostly instructors, which is to allow for annotations to be written to the side of the text.

The way Schell describes an experience is closely related to the way that Madeline Sorapure evaluated her students in a multimodal assignment in 2006. Madeline Sorapure, in her article "Between Modes: Assessing Students' New Media Compositions," discusses the terminology and methods by which she assesses student work. Sorapure's students were asked to create a visual representation of an Allen Ginsberg quote about controlling the media. One of her students' pieces can be seen in figure 6. Sorapure describes how she assessed this student's work based on the efficient use of metaphor and metonym. The image of George W. Bush in figure 6 creates a very powerful *experience* because the student

made very explicit visual connections: there
are lines that connect George W. Bush to
the talking heads in the television set by
means of puppet strings; the puppet strings
are controlled by crucifixes; the image of
9/11 in the background is easily discernable.
Little ambiguity is seen in this piece.
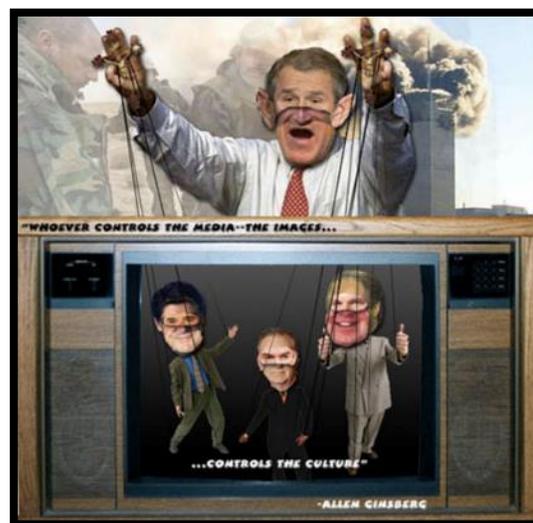
Figure 6. Madeline Sorapure provides this example of a strong multimodal assignment.

Creating a strong psychological
experience is the goal of any writer/designer.
Schell lists several fields of study that would-be game designers can research to improve their
ability to create an immersive game experience. Not surprisingly, psychology and
anthropology make the list, but he also includes the study of design. Schell later posits that
"Perhaps one day these three fields will find a way to unify all their principles" (ch. 2); if only
Schell read more composition studies, he might find that some scholars are already bringing
these three fields together. Collaborative and multimodal scholarship is rooted in the
psychology of learning and the ways that writers/designers compose to create rhetorical
experiences for their audience.

The study of multimodal literacies has done a great deal to expand our design
repertoire(s). Schell also notes that an expanded repertoire of skills is necessary for game
design; "We will be able to learn useful things from almost every kind of designer: musicians,
architects, authors, filmmakers, industrial designers, Web designers, choreographers, visual
designers, and many more" (Schell, ch. 2). The study of multimodal literacies opened the
door to video games in FYC classrooms, and many of the skills associated with the

professions in Schell's list are used to generate engaging FYC class activities and final projects.

Gaming Pedagogy/ Interpretive, Curriculum, and Design

Several composition instructors (Baldwin, Bump, Hodgson, etc.) have published scholarship that outlines the various ways in which they are using games FYC. Some ask students to enter game spaces and interpret those experience in writing tasks; others design their curriculum as a game, in which assignments, grading, and class activities borrow their design from popular game mechanics; and some instructors use games as a space for rhetorical creation and design.[7] Though these instructors appropriate games for different reasons and to different ends, each finds that the level of engagement in their students transcends that of a more traditional FYC classroom.

The interpretive use of games

One example of using games as a space for interpretation occurred in 2007, when Dianna Baldwin took her students on field trips into the massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) *Second Life* (*SL*). Students enter the game and then write about their experiences. Baldwin used the *SL* experience to explore themes of identity asking her students to dress their in-game avatars as the Kool-Aid man and then to try interacting with other players in the game world. Doing this gave Baldwin's students an opportunity to experience prejudice as other players of the game denied them access to certain buildings,

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[7] Even though the Game Studio is focused primarily on game design, I use all three of these paradigms to teach FYC. The way I do this is described in detail in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

and her students wrote profoundly from these experience on the meaning of identity and racism. One student wrote:

> During my time spent as the Kool-aid Man in Second life, several avatars denied me the right to enter buildings and people's conversations based on foolish motives. Numerous avatar characters rejected my identity and refused to accept or tolerate me. Having people refuse my presence because of my appearance ultimately forced me to question my stability as an individual. (147)

The game experience of *SL* allowed this student to experience something akin to racism and then feel the psychological effects of that treatment.

Baldwin uses the game experience to generate student conversations, thus making her approach to gaming pedagogies interpretive. Game spaces are excellent tools for simulating real life events and can quickly expand the life experiences of students, but assigning a game as space for interpretation is similar to assigning a book or poem for a literature class. This interpretive approach to gaming pedagogies relies on a common shared experience and then a critical evaluation of that experience. Even though one student's game experience may be very different from another's, they are both constricted by the same game rules. Much like a literature instructor might have students write critically about the experience of reading a book, Baldwin uses *SL* to breach topics such as identity and the rhetorical shift that transpires when that identity is dramatically altered.[8]

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[8] In Chapter 3, I outline the rhetorical analysis of a video game project, in which my students interpreted the rhetorical moves of the video game *Darfur is Dying.*

A curriculum-based approach

Justin Hodgson (2013) used game mechanics as framework for components of his class such as grading and assignment sequences. Hodgson renamed his assignments "Quest Lines," in which he gave his students options to choose what order they complete quests. Early quests involved achieving level ten in the *World of Warcraft (WoW)* and writing responses about their game experiences and had to be completed before students gained access to more difficult quests. Later quests had students focus on specific rhetorics in the game such as using visual rhetoric to create *WoW* character trading cards. When assigning grades, Hodgson also borrowed the experience point system from *WoW*. Each Quest Line was worth a specific number of experience points, and students needed to obtain a certain number of experience points in order to pass the course. Hodgson proposes that using this system has the teacher function as a game engine or as the computer of the class.

Like Diana Baldwin, Hodgson instructs his students to visit a MMORPG (in this case *WoW*). The key difference between the two methodologies is that the game space in Hodgson's class extends beyond the video game as his syllabus is comparable to the programing or software that governs a video game. Hodgson's students (and even Hodgson himself) function as the game's hardware as they interface with the class based on the rules programed into the syllabus.[9]

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[9] I don't necessarily use game terms to define the various elements of the Game Studio curriculum; however it is designed to function like a simulation a discourse community, which I describe in greater detail in the final three chapters of this thesis.

Games as a design space

Similar to Baldwin, Jerome Bump took his students into the online world of *SL* with the goal of creating a study abroad experience. Bump asked his students to recreate Oxford's campus in the game, so they could use that game space as a digital classroom. Bump notes that "'the students came to see architecture as a form of writing,' they practiced a radical version of 'archi*textural'* writing to explore 'Friere's *ways to write and rewrite the world* in dialog with each other" (119). Bump utilized the design features of *SL* even more as he required his students to create their final projects inside the game in the form of rhetorically charged interactive environments. These projects required Bump's students to learn how to incorporate more common forms of composition like PowerPoint by adding hypertexts to the game environment that would send players to documents outside of the game.

Bump was not completely satisfied with his semester-long field trip into *SL*, but he did notice some positive outcomes from assigning the game:

> One obvious advantage was that by adding the three dimensions of virtual worlds to multimodal pedagogy we could enhance not only engagement by both sides of the brain, but also active learning, the kind of learning that enables college students to retain what they learned longer than the average of two weeks after the course is over. (120)

Bump cites evidence of this in an interview with one of his students:

> MM [interviewer]: Do you think what you are doing in *SL* is related to composition and rhetoric in world literature?
>
> I [student]: Definitely, in the description of the class he said we will be looking at world literature as the world around us rather than actual books.

So learning about iconography has made me aware of stuff; then building in

SL, where you're actually creating a world with its own set of symbols. (128)

What I find most interesting about this student's comment is the delineation that the student

makes between "actual books" and "the world around us." The student implies that the

world in *SL* is more real than the world he finds in books or perhaps linear texts, thus

making transfer a more attainable goal. Such a strong delineation reflects Zicherman's

somewhat extreme notion that "the world that we live in right now – the world of Sunday

afternoons, drinking a cup of herbal tea, chilling out by the window [reading books] – is

over. And that's okay" ("How games make kids smarter" TEDx). Students find rhetorical

moves made in video games more "real" than those they make in written texts.

Bump's approach to games is strikingly different from Baldwin's or Hodgson's as

Bump required his students to compose in the game. Instead of appropriating a premade

game experience, he made strong moves to take control over the game space his students

occupied, and inadvertently teaching game design.

Hodgson's and Baldwin's approach to video game pedagogy was limited because

they appropriate a game created by commercial developers for academic purposes. Neither

Blizzard nor Linden Labs, the makers of *WoW* and *Second Life,* set out to make a game for

composition students. This is like saying Michael Bay made the fourth *Transformers* movie for

strictly educational purposes, as most for profit game studios set out to create entertaining

games that provide a monetary return. This can be frustrating for an instructor who doesn't

share the same goals as the game developer.

Bump's attempt to appropriate the design tools in *SL* for his students' final project

justifies the using the game in the class, but many of Bump's frustrations are connected to

fact that *SL* was not necessarily made to be an educational game space. Despite Bump's successes, he still has a few words of warning for instructors who try to replicate his class design:

1. Choose a virtual world more user-friendly and easier to use than the original *SL;*
2. Understand the differences between gamers and the general population;
3. Know the difference between teachers' and students' perceptions of visual and verbal literacies;
4. "Provide training, support, and clear directions" (Trapaghan qtd in Bump) for virtual world activities; (133)

Bump had many successes, but many of his frustrations were derived from the repurposing of a for-profit game into an educational space. Perhaps he would have been better served to have his students design games instead of repurposing preexisting ones.

Unfortunately for Bump, game design software was not easily accessible at the time of his field trip into *SL*. This hurdle has become much lower, and composition instructors such Danielle LaVaque-Manty have taken full advantage of easy to use, drag-and-drop game design software.[10] In her chapter from *Rhetoric/Composition/Play* titled "Drag and Drop: Teaching Our Students Things We Don't Already Know," LaVaque-Manty not only argues that teaching "video game composition requires students to consider the rhetorical affordances of [game] rules and procedures," but also "that instructors need not have programming skills in order to do so" (114). She discusses her experience teaching a one-credit hour, seven week course called "Persuasive Games: Making Meaning with Video Games." In this course, she requires her students to create a single level of a "deliberately rhetorical video game" (116).

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[10] *RPG Maker VX Ace, Game Salad,* and *Game Maker*

Much of the language in LaVaque-Manty's chapter is reminiscent of Marc Prensky's "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," as LaVaque-Manty defines the growing technological disparity between teachers and their students. LaVaque-Manty cites Cynthia L. Selfe, Anne F. Mareck, and Josh Gardiner as she defines two types of generation gaps between composition instructors and students. The first type is "'co-figurative' in which change generates enough discontinuity that young people are more likely to turn to peers rather than older generations for advice and information." The second type is "'pre-figurative,' in which change is so rapid that elders and teachers no longer possess the knowledge or skill the next generation needs"[11] (115). She notes that for some instructors it might be easier to "read" games than it is to "write" them. Even though she does provide her students with access to free drag-and-drop game creation tools such as *Game Salad* and *Game Maker,* at no point does she claim to be an expert at creating games.

Using an amalgam of pedagogies (both collaborative and multimodal), LaVaque-Manty describes her course sequence as follows:

- On the first day of class, I offer a brief lecture on rhetoric and procedural rhetoric, then ask students to play and analyze an easily interpretable game such as *Darfur is Dying.*

- To help students imagine that it will really be possible for them to create games of their own… I sketch out a pen and paper game and then ask them to design their own games in groups.

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[11] I imagine that many of the colleagues that wanted to avoid discussions about this thesis are deeply entrenched in a pre-figurative paradigm.

- During weeks two and three, I ask my students to play and analyze games and to write about them via traditional papers or blog posts.

- During the fourth class session, student groups present their intended game designs.

- Game drafts are played during week six. (117-118)

- [Final submission on week seven]

LaVaque-Manty's conclusion tends to focus more on the fact that in-class game creation is possible and less on the implications of what such a class might accomplish for both the teacher and the students. She briefly discusses co-figurative and pre-figurative teaching and emphasizes the attitude an instructor must adopt to ensure the success of student-designed games.

As I created the Game Studio curriculum, my course closely resembled LaVaque-Manty's class although I had not encountered her chapter in *Rhetoric/Composition/Play* before the creation of my syllabus. In fact, it was half way through the semester before I stumbled upon her work. My class design does have several distinct differences though. First of all, LaVaque-Manty was not teaching a FYC course, but rather a seven week single-credit course specifically billed as "Persuasive Games: Making Meaning with Video Games." My course did not advertise itself as a games course, so my students had no way of knowing that they would be asked to design games for their final projects when they signed up for the course. Second, I use games for the specific goal of teaching students to write. I am less concerned with the creation of a well-polished rhetorically charged game (even though my rubric requires the games to be educational); rather, I am more concerned with the process by which my students come together to create a complex project. I emphasize the importance

of communication between team members and how to collectively make design decisions. I am impressed with LaVaque-Manty's work, but more is at stake than the successful creation of video games. In the following chapters, I show how my project sequence promotes transfer across a wide variety of FYC objectives.

What the Institution (Middle Tennessee State University) Has to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy

Teaching game design in a FYC course requires a willingness on the part of the instructor, but also requires a willingness on the part of that instructor's institution. Fortunately for this project, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) has been very supportive as I've married my research with my course design. Kayla McNabb, in her 2014 thesis *Using Web 2.0 Technologies to Teach "Literacy for Life": How to Use Multimodalmatters.Com,* details the ways in which MTSU's English department re-evaluated and redesigned their FYC composition objectives.[12] In 2011, MTSU's Lower Division Committee assessed their FYC sequence, which included "Expository Writing," an introduction to college writing, and "Argumentative Writing," the second course in the FYC sequence. The committee found that the "Expository Writing" course was dated, and other comparable universities had implemented more contemporary pedagogical approaches to better fit the needs of FYC students. MTSU's Lower Division Director Dr. Laura Dubek began to question the content of MTSU's "Expository Writing" its inclusion of *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*, the required book for the course (McNabb 10). Dubek, in coordination with Dr. Allison Smith, Dr. Julie Barger, Jennifer Rowan and Patricia Baines, heavily revised the "Expository Writing"

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[12] For a full list of MTSU's "Literacy for Life" objectives visit
http://www.mtsu.edu/english/forfaculty/1010LearningandTeachingObjectives%2012.16.13.pdf

learning objectives and called the new course "Literacy for Life" (11). "Literacy for Life" is

still in the process of being officially accepted as the replacement for "Expository Writing,"

but Dubek, Smith, Barger, Rowan, and Baine's work is still deeply impacting MTSU's

approach to the FYC classroom (17). Table 2 places the original "Expository Writing"

objectives next to the new "Literacy for Life" equivalents. I have taken the "Literacy for

Life" objectives out of order and highlighted key phrases in both sets of objectives to more

clearly identify the key differences between the sets of objectives. The original "Literacy for

Life" learning and teaching objectives are unaltered in appendix A.

Much of the scholarship referenced in this chapter is reflected in the new "Literacy

for Life" objectives, which focus on transfer and real world writing (Wardle), allowing design

and content to be governed by the rhetorical situation (Ball; and Arola, Sheppard and Ball),

and peer workshops and collaborative learning (Bruffee; Bercovitz and Feldman; Brown;

Green and Duerden). I certainly agree that the new objectives meet the needs of the modern

student; however, I add three more objectives to the list:

9. Students and teachers will have multiple **low stakes opportunities for
   failure and success**.

10. Students will **simulate a discourse community** and be **directly involved
    in at least one assessment of their peers**.

11. Students will work **collaboratively to achieve a common goal.**

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, many video games provide an engaging interactive experience

with opportunities for failure, success, and social and collaborative problem solving. I also

refer to Prensky's terms "digital natives" and "digital immigrants"[13] and make a case that many digital immigrant FYC instructors might benefit from learning game design.

The learning objectives I offer supplement the "Literacy for Life" learning objectives by giving students opportunities to learn from their mistakes, and also giving them a voice to prioritize their knowledge. These learning objectives, if followed, allow the class to be what Gee calls an affinity space. Affinity spaces have porous leadership that fluctuates from member to member depending on the task (Gee "Semiotic" 15).
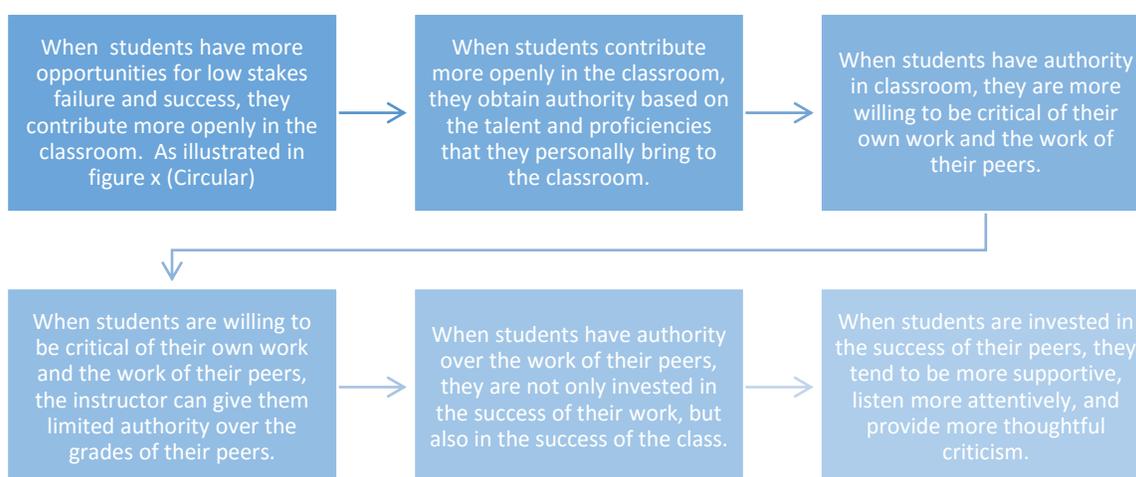
Figure 7. The "slippery slope" of failure

After I incorporated these objectives into my FYC coursework, a series of events found in figure 8 occurred.

The process of game design is a perfect vehicle to create an affinity space because it forces students to be reliant on the knowledge of their peers for their own success and creates opportunities for success and failure. These collaborative opportunities for feedback occur at multiple points in the semester: students write proposals that are either chosen or

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[13] Put simply, digital natives are individuals who have grown up using technology, and digital immigrants are those of us who have not grown up with technology, but may have incorporated some aspects of technology into our daily lives.

not chosen by their peers, learn how to program games, watch their games be played, and manuals be read, and provide feedback for others as they play and read their peer's games.

Also, the game design process gives students an understanding of the need for a diverse array of skill sets in the creation process as suggested by Gee's experience in *WoW*. Not every student will be excited to learn how to program a video game,[14] which is fortunate because programing is only one aspect of game design. Other aspects include playtesting (anyone can playtest a game), researching the game's topic, writing scripts, writing game manuals, and designing artwork. Each of these tasks is crucial to the success of the game, and it is imperative that the student placed in charge of each task stays in close communication with the other members of their design team.[15]

Students don't necessarily understand or trust their own expertise going into the Game Studio class. Even though many students learn best in an affinity space and have experience learning in affinity spaces outside of an academic setting, many students come to the classroom with preconceived negative ideas of how the class dynamic will operate. It takes time for students to build rapport with one another and confidence in their ability to be critical of each other's work. Some students who have performed poorly in other classes or under other instructors internalize their past failures and may be skeptical of the class dynamic of an affinity space. Likewise, instructors who are more accustomed to traditional instruction, in which the instructor is the distributor of knowledge and the student is the receiver of that knowledge, might be apprehensive about relinquishing their authority to FYC students.

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[14] Based on my experience about one in three are excited about learning to program video games at the beginning of the class. More come on board as they learn how easy it is to program games.

[15] Game design is monumental task, and given the limited amount of time the Game Studio had to dedicate creating games, it was imperative that all members of each group stay on task as much as possible.

In the next two chapters, I outline the projects that break down many of these barriers to creating an affinity space. In Chapter 3, I describe how to accomplish this by scaffolding[16] the projects and activities in such a way that both instructor and students build a running knowledge and vocabulary about game design. I designed the introductory projects to give students experience writing and considering multiple rhetorical situations, including audience, content, form, and organization. I frame these projects around games to give both the instructors and students a running vocabulary for the game design process. Instructors also benefit from these introductory projects by learning from their students, who may be more familiar with the many tropes of game genres and design. In Chapter 4, I describe the final two projects, which represent a transition of authority to the students as they consider the kind of game they want to create and how they will utilize the technology available to them to accomplish this goal.

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[16] Scaffolding refers to purposeful classroom design in which lessons scale in complexity and was coined by Jerome Bruner in 1957.. In a well scaffolded curriculum, each assignment and lesson builds upon the previous, so students are consistently challenged throughout the semester and are not asked to complete tasks that are either too simple or complex based on their previous instruction. Gee mentions scaffolding indirectly in his learning principle called the "Incremental Principle" which reads "Learning situations are ordered in the early stages so that earlier cases lead to generalizations that are fruitful for later cases. When learners face more complex cases later, the learning space (the number and type of guesses the learner can make) is constrained by the sorts of fruitful patterns or generalizations the learner has found earlier" (*WVG* Appendix).

Table 2. Comparison of MTSU's "Expository Writing" and "Literacy for Life" Learning objectives

"Expository Writing"	"Literacy for Life"
1. The ability to generate **informed writing objectives** for yourself each time you write.	At least one of these tasks will give students practice **distilling a primary purpose into a single, compelling statement.**
2. The ability to analyze the strengths and weaknesses in your **own** writing.	Students will develop the skill of **constructive critique**, focusing on higher order concerns, including matters of design, **during peer workshops**.
3. The ability to follow the **process of prewriting, drafting, rewriting, and editing in your writing**.	Students will get **practice writing in multiple genres** and in response to **real world writing situations**.
4. The ability to draw content for your writing from your **experience, your imagination, and from outside resources (e.g., printed materials, interviews, films)**.	Students will read and analyze various types of text—**print, visual, digital, and audio.**
5. The ability to develop a thesis with **a variety of supports in your writing (e.g., definition, illustration, description, comparison and contrast, causal analysis).**	Students will complete writing tasks that require understanding the **rhetorical situation and making appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation.**
6. The ability to distinguish between central and supporting ideas.	
7. The ability to **adapt to audience** in your writing's content and language.	Students will complete writing tasks that **require understanding the rhetorical situation** and making appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation.
8. The ability to **read, summarize, paraphrase, analyze, quote from, and write critically** about assigned readings.	Students will **conduct basic research necessary for completing specific writing tasks**, learning to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources and between fact, opinion, and inference.
9. The ability to adapt language and the structures of sentences and paragraphs to the purposes of a given piece of writing.	Students will get **practice writing in multiple genres** and in response to real world writing situations.
10. The ability to express ideas with clarity and specificity.	
11. The ability **to vary the structure and length of your sentences.**	Students will get **practice writing in multiple genres** and in response to real world writing situations.
12. The ability to **write with grammatical competence** and to use conventional punctuation and spelling in writing that is especially free of the following errors: faulty subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement, faulty use of principal parts of verbs, sentence fragments, faulty predication, comma splices and fused sentences, misuse or omission of apostrophe, and misspellings of commonly used words.	Students will complete writing tasks that require understanding the **rhetorical situation and making appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation.**
NO EQUIVALENT.	Students will understand composition as a field of study that involves research about writing and how it works.
NO EQUIVALENT.	Students will develop their own writing theory (based on the key concepts) that they can transfer to writing situations in other classes and in life.

CHAPTER 3:
What the *Game Studio Curriculum* Has
to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy

I taught the Game Studio curriculum in the spring of 2015 at MTSU. Though I have

years of experience with video games, and despite Schell's inspiring introduction in *The Art of*

Video Games (*AVG*),[1] I knew it would be imprudent to ask students to design rhetorical

games at the beginning of the FYC semester. As evident in Chapter 2, both the scholarship

and my institution[2] supported the inclusion of game design in FYC; however, most of my

students were not prepared (or did not believe they were prepared) to tackle the diverse

demands of game design at the beginning of the semester. On the first day of class, when I

described the final game design project,[3] my students provided a variety of reactions; some

expressed excitement at the prospect of designing a game and others were skeptical.[4] To

better prepare my students for the task of game creation, I designed the Game Studio, so

students would simultaneously:

- practice fundamental writing/designing skills in several genres,

- learn to write collaboratively as a team, and

- develop an in-class, game-design-discourse community to support them in

  their final projects.

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[1] "Design games. Start now! Don't wait! Don't even finish this conversation! Just start designing! Go! Now!" (Schell, ch. 1).
[2] See Chapter 2 for a literature review of composition scholarship and MTSU's FYC "Literacy for Life" Learning objectives.
[3] In this thesis, I use the term "project" instead of "assignment." Projects are complex tasks that individuals or groups complete with a limited budget of time and resources. Assignments are something that teachers *assign* and then grade.
[4] IRB exemption form found in appendix m.

I designed projects with elements of writing-to-learn (W2L)[5] and writing-in-the-disciplines (WID)[6] (Smith and Smith 7). W2L refers to low stakes tasks in which students use

Project #1
The Game Walkthrough: Students describe game mechanics.

Project #2
Rhetorical Analysis of Video Games: Students rhetoricaly analyze game mechanics.

Project #3
WoWHG: Students use game mechanics to make rhetorical arguments.

Figure 8. Scaffolding of the first three projects in the Game Studio.

the practice of writing to foster critical thinking about a topic or idea that may or may not be writing related (Smith and Smith 3); the goal of these tasks is to "make [a student's] thoughts more visible" (3). Some common W2L tasks are journaling, freewriting, brainstorming, and in-class writing prompts.[7] WID refers to tasks in which students learn conventions, formats, and forms common in discourse communities inside and outside of academia (Smith and Smith 5). Some common WID projects are rhetorical analysis essays, project proposals, position papers, literature reviews, and annotated bibliographies. WID tasks give the student an opportunity to write for a specific purpose, audience, and under specific circumstances; W2L tasks are typically low stakes (pass/fail), and WID are high stakes (major projects, typically evaluated and graded on a numeric scale).

The introductory projects in the Game Studio curriculum do not require the act of game design, but are scaffolded, so students learn about game design and collaboration as they complete both W2L and WID tasks (see table x). Each project I describe in this chapter

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[5] Allison Smith and Trixie Smith use "WTL" as an abbreviation for writing-to-learn. At Middle Tennessee State University, it has become common to use the abbreviation W2L instead. Since my class documents all refer to the Writing to Learn exercises as W2L, I use that abbreviation.

[6] These are sometimes referred to as "Learning to Write" tasks, or LTW tasks. I am using Smith and Smith's term (WID) for this document.

[7] The Game Studio utilizes all of these tasks over the course of the semester. Freewriting is not specifically mentioned in this thesis, but I did use it as a warm-up activity for several classes.

is purposefully designed to scaffold students' understanding of both writing and game

mechanics. Students describe game mechanics in the game walkthrough project. They

evaluate those game mechanics in their rhetorical analyses of video games, and they put

those game mechanics to rhetorical use in their *WoW* meets *Hunger Games* presentations

(WoWHG). Scaffolding is imperative for the Game Studio because it allows the instructor to

incrementally give students more authority and independence as the class takes on the

features of a discourse community. By the end of the semester, both students and instructors

of the Game Studio will have many opportunities to learn about writing, collaboration, and

game design.

Table 3. Scaffolding in the Game Studio

Scaffolding in the Game Studio accomplishes several tasks.

- It eases students into the writing demands of the FYC class.
- It eases instructors and students into a better understanding of rhetorical game design.
- It fosters the natural creation of a discourse community.

Table 4. Breakdown of the first four projects of the semester.

Sequence	Project	WID Description	W2L Goals	Primarily Graded for
Continuous	W2L Journal	Students write short text-based responses after completing their assigned readings, or playing the assigned games for each class.	• Deeper understanding of rhetoric and composition • Practice writing	• Completion • May provide critical feedback, but does factor into grade
Weeks 1-3	Project #1 The Game Walkthrough	Students write a detailed walkthrough of the first level of *Super Mario Bros.,* assuming their audience has never seen or played the game before.	• Learning game jargon • Familiarizing students (and teachers) with the relationship between games and composition • Practice writing	• Level of detail • Clarity • Format/design • Organization • Grammar
Weeks 4-6	Project #2 Rhetorical Analysis of Video Game	Students write a rhetorical analysis of a video game assigned early in the semester.	• Students learn rhetorical moves that apply across media. • Practice writing	• Strength of analysis • Organization • Format • Grammar
Week 7	*World of Warcraft* meets *Hunger Games* Presentation	Students present an argumentative presentation advocating for one race in *WoW* over another.	• Building rapport within the classroom • Practice research • Practice writing	• Depth of argument • Format/design of presentation • Evaluation by peers • Evaluation of peers

W2L: Writing 2 Learn Journal (10 percent of final grade)

Description of journal

Within the first week of the semester, I assigned the W2L journal, in which students wrote a short response for every reading/game/video listed in the syllabus. I did not limit what the students could or could not write in the journal, and I encouraged them to express themselves openly and freely. The only formatting requirement for the journal was that they

provide clear headings including the title of the reading/game/video to which they were responding, so my students would worry less about being correct and more about getting their ideas in writing. As its name suggests, the W2L journal is what Smith and Smith call a W2L task, as it gives students a place to practice writing and think critically about the content that they consume for class.

I required students to create their W2L journals in Google Docs and share them with me at the beginning of the semester, which gave me instant access to their journals as long as I had an internet connection. I prefer using Google Docs because they are easy to access, and Google's software automatically saves multiple versions of the document, so I can review a student's revision process over the course of the semester. Google Docs has a comments feature with which instructors can ask questions, and provide affirmations to students without the need of a physical copy. Collaborative writing is easy in Google Docs as multiple users can edit a single document at a time. Though the collaborative features of Google Docs are not used in the W2L journal, many of my students chose to use Google Docs for their collaborative projects later in the semester.

At random intervals in the semester, I performed a journal check and left comments (see figure 10). When I left this feedback, I typically asked questions about the students' ideas, or prompted them to think about a subject from a different position. When I did journal checks, I gave my students credit based on the number of responses they had completed, and I didn't concern myself with the eloquence of their work. If they had responded to all of the
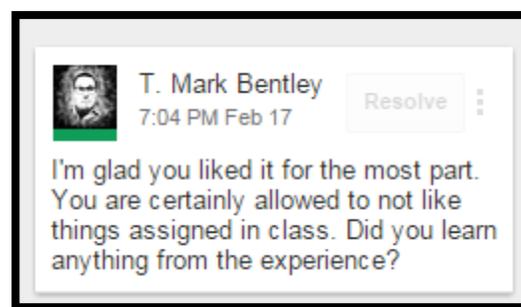
Figure 9. An example of my comments in a W2L Journal.

assigned reading/games/videos for that point in the semester, then they received a perfect score for that journal check.

Where are the games?

Even though I call this curriculum the Game Studio, the incorporation of game design is meant to supplement the objectives of FYC, not to replace or alter them. In the W2L journal, students only mention games when they respond to their gaming experiences as they complete the assigned "readings" in the course's syllabus; however, their writing still contains the same kinds of rhetorical analysis typically found in student responses to printed texts. After playing the game "Windfall,"[8] Bill wrote:

> I did not enjoy windfall all that much. It was a strategy game, and I am not fond of strategy games. I never have the patience to do them well. However, I did succeed in beating the easy mode several times. Although I beat it, my popularity was almost all of the way down every time I played. I could not, to save my life, figure out a way to keep my popularity up and win. If I built large wind turbines my popularity went down significantly but plenty of power was provided, and when I built small turbines my popularity barely went down but provided little power. When I tried to keep my popularity up I ended up running out of time. It really frustrated me. [sic] (1)

Bill clearly identifies one the primary weaknesses of *Windfall*; a game designed to promote political awareness should not be difficult to master, because steep learning curve might

---

[8] "Windfall" is a free to play internet game designed to promote the use of wind power. The game has the player place wind-turbines on a map and connect those turbines to a power grid for a nearby town. The player must balance the electrical output of their grid with a political popularity score as the placement of wind turbines lowers the value of neighboring properties.

cause an adverse reaction to the game. In Bill's case, this adverse reaction manifested in

frustration when he couldn't build enough wind turbines to complete the game to his

satisfaction. Bill also discusses the problematic "popularity gauge" in *Windfall.* Since the

popularity of wind power decreases as the use of wind turbines increases, *Windfall*

unintentionally devalues its goal of spreading the popularity of wind power.

In contrast to this Bill's response to *Windfall*, Tracey's responses to one of the

assigned readings was hesitant to question the authority of the author. After reading the

chapter called "Thinking Rhetorically" from Andrea Lunsford's *Everyone's an Author*, Tracey

states:

> When it comes to thinking rhetorically you should listen to other folks and
>
> think about why they are saying what they are saying, or what they're trying
>
> to teach. And always be open minded when hearing or thinking about their
>
> subject of choice. (Tracey 2)

On the surface, Tracey seems to have learned a valuable lesson about the importance of

perspective and personal biases; however, most of her writing is a regurgitation of

Lunsford's text, which reads:

> [You can develop careful ethic use of language] by learning to think and act
>
> rhetorically, that is, by developing habits of mind that begin with listening
>
> and searching for understanding before you decide what you yourself think
>
> and try to persuade others to listen to and act on what you say. (6)

This particular quote is found on the first page of the assigned reading, which leads me to

believe that Tracey did not read the entire chapter. She does seem to understand the text, but

does not make any effort to think beyond the text. When writing about games, my students

tended to express more authority and take chances with their writing.

Opportunities to fail

When Bill relayed his frustrations with *Windfall*, he took a chance. Openly criticizing

an instructor's homework assignment is usually relegated to spaces where the instructor is

absent as some students believe that they run the risk of failing a class if they criticize the

content of an instructor's syllabus.[9] The last thing I want my students to worry about is

failure over the pursuit of knowledge.

In games, failure is (fun) an essential part of the player experience. Anyone who can

recount their first time playing *Super Mario Bros.* will remember the many times they died

running into a bad guy or falling down a bottomless pit. Failure is how players learn what

not to do. The designers of *Super Mario Bros.* understood this, which is players have three

extra lives at the beginning of the game and opportunities to earn more throughout the

game. Schell states that good games "give the player *permission to fail*, which (aside from being

fun) is incredibly educational – because the learner not only sees the failures, but sees why

they happened, which leads to significant insight about the workings of the whole system"

(ch. 30). When discussing the incorporation of failure in games, Gee uses Erik Ericson's

term "psychosocial moratorium [which is] a learning space in which the learner can take risks

where real-world consequences are lowered" (Gee, ch. 3). The W2L Journal is a space where

I invite students to fail for credit. When I grade the W2L Journal, I leave constructive

feedback when it is apparent that a student is not putting much thought into their responses

---

[9] Occasionally, I am one these students.

(such as Tracey's response to Lunsford), but these comments do not have any effect on their grade. I simply checked to see that something was written and give a pass if the text is there and a fail if it is not. The opportunity to fail gives students the freedom to be independent thinkers.

WID: Project #1 - the Game Walkthrough (10 percent of final grade)

Description of project

Games are not easy. This was Gee's "first revelation" about the medium (ch. 1). Gee attributes his lack of skill in games to the fact that he is a baby boomer and not accustomed to the types of learning required to master video games; however, I have been playing video games for over thirty years, and I still find some games incredibly (and often frustratingly) difficult.[10] I am not alone; many gamers rely on player created online resources called

Table 5. Game Walkthrough Itinerary

Itinerary During Project #1	
Week 1	Day 1: Handout syllabus and icebreaker activities.
	Day 2: Assign Game Walkthrough and setup Google Docs for W2L Journals
	Day 3: Discussion on Semiotics Homework (HW) - play *Darfur is Dying*
Week 2	Day 1: Review examples of Game Walkthroughs online.
	Day 2: HW - Play *Windfall*
	Day 3: HW - Play *Food Import Folly*
Week 3	Day 1: HW - Read *Everyone's an Author* Chapter 33 "Taking Advantage of the Writing Center"
	Day 2: Group peer review activity
	Day 3: Game Walkthrough Due
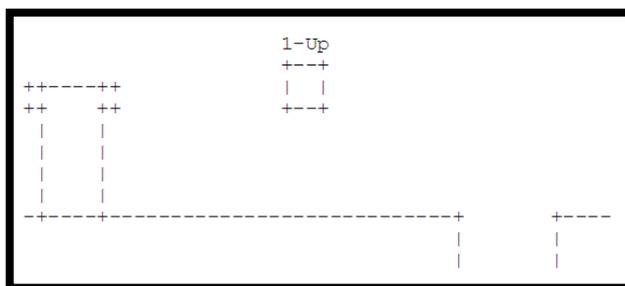
Figure 10. By Brian P. Sulpher, an ASCII depiction of the hidden extra life in the first level of Super Mario Bros.. *This is the same mushroom as in figure 8 and 3.*

---

[10] *Super Mario Bros.*, despite its simplicity, is an incredibly difficult game. I've been playing it for thirty years and can only beat the game about 10% of the time even when I skip past most of the levels with warp tunnels.

game walkthroughs for strategies and

detailed instructions on how to

overcome the most difficult obstacles

of a game. Before the proliferation of

screen capture software, walkthroughs

were completely text based, and used
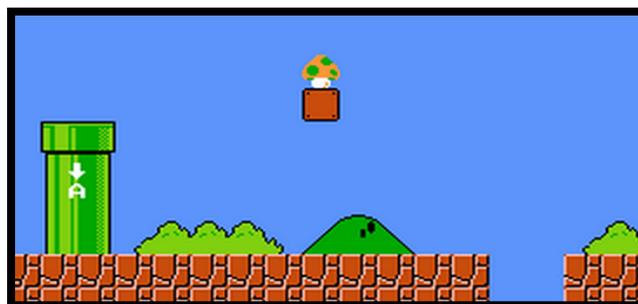
Figure 11. Screen capture from Super Mario Bros. *that shows the location of the same hidden extra-life mushroom as found in figure 10*

ASCII[11] characters to create images and symbols found in the game (see figure 11). Now,

most walkthroughs use screen-capturing software to show key elements of the game (see

figure 12).

For the Game Walkthrough project, my students wrote a game walkthrough for

Super Mario Bros. that provided players with the games controls, basic game mechanics, and a

thorough description of all the obstacles found in the first level of the game. Students were

to assume their audience had

never played a video game

before (let alone *Super Mario*

Bros.). I didn't require a specific

format, but I did ask that my

students write their documents

in a word processor such as

Microsoft Word.[12]

Figure 12. All of the controls are correct in this student example, but the controller is for the wrong system.(Shayna 1)

---

[11] ASCII stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange which is a techno-fancy way of saying alphanumeric text (which is another way of saying "text").

[12] I require students' work to be in *Microsoft Word* only because this file format is compatible with the *Turnitin* software I use to check for plagiarized work. Game walkthroughs are so bountiful online that it could be tempting for a student to copy and paste the majority of this assignment.

The rubric that I used to grade my students' walkthroughs prioritized organization and clarity (see appendix F). Students who had effectively organized walkthroughs tended to have basic information, like game mechanics and controls, towards the front of the document followed by a detailed description of the level. Walkthroughs with clarity tended to position images next to the text that described them. I graded grammar as it related to clarity; however, even when not teaching the Game Studio curriculum, I am more lenient with grammar in the beginning of the semester. I do take time to note any grammar mistakes in the comments section, but grammar only counts for ten percent of the students' grades.

As an instructor who has played video games for a long time,[13] I found some walkthroughs extremely difficult to grade, and needed to delineate between the quality of the walkthrough and quality of a student's gaming knowledge. For example, Shayna provided the
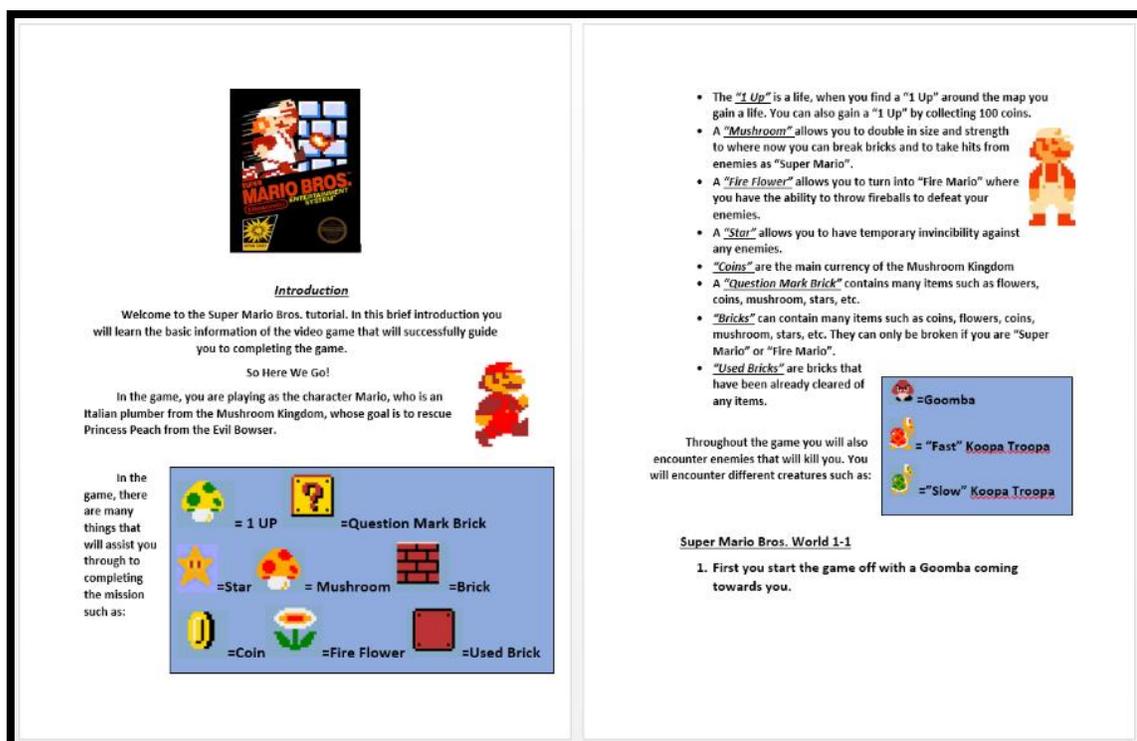
Figure 13. This student learned to organize basic definitions and symbols early in their document. Using screen capture software, he pulled images directly from the game and placed those images in close relation to the text that describes them. (Fred 1-2)

---

[13] I am easily a digital native as defined by Marc Prensky in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

controller diagram in figure 13 to explain the controls of *Super Mario Bros.* to her reader. Her

diagram was by far the most elegantly designed; however, she used an image of a controller

for the Nintendo 64 game console, one of two Nintendo consoles that never saw a rerelease

of the 1985 *Super Mario Bros.*. Had Shayna chosen almost any other Nintendo controller, I

would have had no issue, but since I was not grading the walkthrough based on a student's

knowledge of gaming history or console specific information, I did not deduct points from

her grade.[14] Instructors less familiar with video games and the history of game console

controllers will probably not run into this issue.

Student examples

Figure 14. Tracey used photo editing software outside of Microsoft Word *to create this image. (1)*

The first level of *Super Mario Bros.* is not long in terms of gameplay, but a textual description of the level can be very tedious and excessively long if not properly organized. Players have more agency in a video game than a printed text and can experience the

game in an infinite number of ways.[15] Although players can experience the game in a

nonlinear fashion, students have to make decisions about the organization of their

walkthroughs which are linear texts. The most successful students frontloaded basic

---

[14] As a self-proclaimed advocate for gaming history, I still left a comment for Shayna informing her of the mistake, but I was also very clear that it had not affected their grade.

[15] Since players have control over the game avatar, they also can rewrite the actions of that avatar as they see fit.

information (what in the world is a Goomba anyway?)[16] and referred back to that
information in the later sections of their document. Figure 14 is an example of how Fred
decided to frontload some the basic game mechanics in his walkthrough. Well organized
walkthroughs were often much more concise as students did not have to redefine concepts.

Since the final drafts of my students walkthroughs had to be in *Microsoft Word,* they
were forced to either fully rely on the "picture tools" function of *Microsoft Word* or use an
outside program like *Microsoft Paint* or Apple *Preview.* Arola, Sheppard, and Ball call this
"*learn*[ing] *how to learn* which technologies might be most useful" (*Writer/Designer* 77). *Microsoft
Word* is excellent at formatting text, but some students' graphic representations required a

more powerful tool to complete. In
figure 15, Tracey used a graphics
editing program to ensure that the
arrows and text stayed aligned with
the correct buttons on the Nintendo
controller.

Students also resourcefully
positioned their images in their texts.
In figure 16, Hal used long images of
the game world to split his game
walkthrough into sections, which
organized his text into manageable
chunks close to the images they were
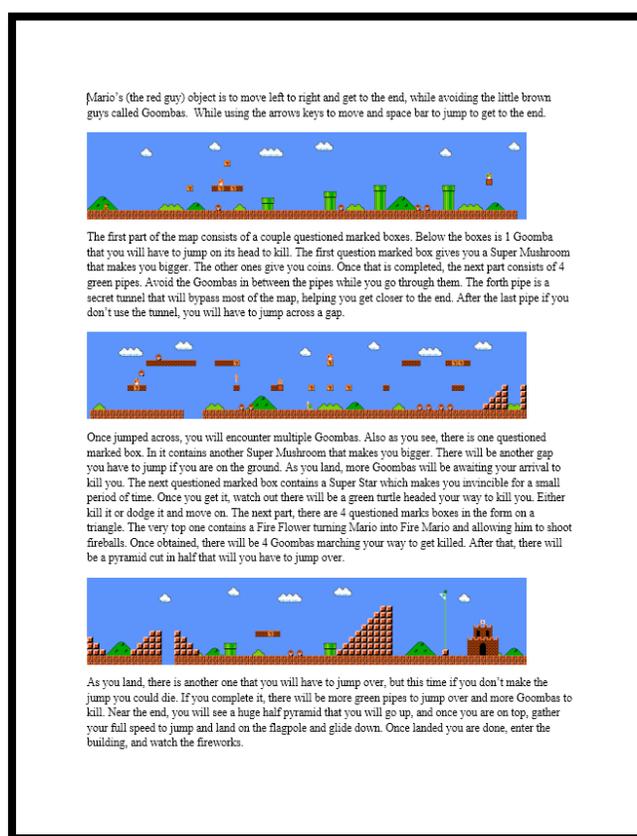
*Figure 15. Hal strategically divided his screen captures of the level into three
parts to divide his text into three manageable chunks. (1)*

---

[16] After 30 years of playing games in the *Super Mario Bros.* franchise, I still do not know what a Goomba is. Is it
a mushroom with feet? Is it a mammal? Alien?

describing. The images of the level did end up being very small, but Hal was able to condense the entire project into a single page and still describe every obstacle in the game.

First steps towards building a discourse community

Popular video games always have a large online discourse community, and the original *Super Mario Bros.* is not exception due to its excellent game design and longevity (Nintendo is celebrating the game's 30th anniversary this

5 minutes	• Students, in groups, read a peers game walkthrough
5 minutes	• The author of the text is not allowed to talk • Peers discuss the game walk throughs strengths first and "oppportunities second.
5 minutes	• author is allowed to speak and ask questions that have not yet been address.
Rest of class	• Repeat with next game walkthrough until all students have been reviewed.

Figure 16. Peer review of game walkthrough.

year). The *Super Mario Bros.* discourse community has tournaments in which players race to beat the final boss, forums in which players can create and share levels of the game, and (of course) has hundreds of player-created game walkthroughs. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Gee refers to these online spaces as "affinity spaces" where members interact with one another in pursuit of a better game experience.

To establish a discourse community in the Game Studio, I incorporated at least one peer review day per project. On peer review day for the game walkthrough,[17] I broke students into several groups of three, in which they silently read one group member's game walkthrough. Once finished reading, I had the group discuss the strengths and weakness of the writing while the author silently listened. After about 5 to 10 minutes of discussion, the

---

[17] Peer Review day is typically done the one class meeting before the project is due.

authors of the walkthrough was allowed to speak, at which point they could ask questions or try to explain their writing/designing process to their peers. If done correctly, this process should take about 15 to 20 minutes per peer review, and get faster as students become familiar with the process. If I had more time available, I could have asked students to change groups each time so they would be exposed to many different perspectives.

When I had students conduct these peer review sessions, my students took several important steps towards building a discourse community in the classroom. First, the authors, who were not allowed to talk during the discussion of their work, learned to trust the authority of their peers. Second, peer reviewers learned to trust their critical authority in the classroom and to demonstrate that authority in a respectful way. Third (and perhaps most importantly to the Game Studio), this review process highlighted the strengths of each student as some students exceled at graphic design, had a wealth of gaming knowledge, or was an excellent writer of texts. After the peer review day, it was obvious that Fred was good at organizing information, Tracey was good with editing graphics, and Hal was resourceful with the way he positioned his text next to images. Knowing the strengths of the individuals in the classroom became imperative later in the semester as the demands of the Game Studio curriculum became increasingly diverse.

WID: Project #2 - Rhetorical Analysis of a Video Game (20 percent of final grade)

Description of project

The rhetorical analysis essay is a common writing task in FYC and aside from the subject being analyzed, a video game, the rhetorical analysis essays in the Game Studio are

similar to in other FYC curriculums. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, video games have a

tremendous amount of rhetorical potential "as entryways to greater understanding and more

consequential political action" (Harry J. Brown

72). Over the course of the semester, my

students play several free-to-play rhetorical

video games (*Windfall, Darfur is Dying, Food

Import Folly, Oil God*) for at least one hour

outside of class.[18] The basic student learning

objectives of the rhetorical analysis project are

for students to identify the rhetorical stance of

one of the assigned games and then describe

the ways in which that game makes an

argument.

I grade this project no differently than I

would any other rhetorical analysis paper (See

Table 6. Itinerary of Rhetorical Analysis

Itinerary During Project #2	
Week 4	Day 1: Assign Rhetorical Analysis Project
	Day 2: HW - Read *Everyone's an Author*: Chapter 7 "Arguing a Position"
	Day 3: HW - Read *Everyone's an Author*: Chapter 13 "Analyzing Arguments"
Week 5	Day 1: HW- Play *Oil God*
	Day 2: Read *Everyone's an Author*: Chapter 9 "Writing Analytically"
	Day 3: "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis" Group Activity
Week 6	Day 1: "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis" Group Activity (cont.)
	Day 2: Group Peer Review
	Day 3: Rhetorical Analysis Project due

appendix G and H for assignment sheet and rubric). I expected my students to summarize

the elements of the game that carry the most rhetorical weight and explain why those

elements were effective. Some students used screen captures to illustrate their points, but

visual elements were not required. Successful students:

- provided clear examples followed by clear analysis
- used strong transitions between their ideas
- had relatively few grammatical errors
- organized their ideas in a logical fashion

---

[18] In my experience, the percentage of students who play video games as homework as opposed to reading articles is much higher. My students seemed to really appreciate the opportunity to play instead of study. As a video game scholar, playing and studying are often one and the same. Such is the life.

- had an easily identifiable thesis statement and a strong conclusion[19]

Student examples

The semester before I taught the Game Studio, I asked students to write rhetorical analyses of TED talks such as Sir Kenneth Robinson's "How Schools Kill Creativity" and Susan Cain's "The Power of Introverts," which are very engaging and easy

Figure 17. Players choose from one of eight family members to forage for water.

for students to follow. Most students were exceptional at *defining* and *summarizing* the

arguments of TED talks; however, many still struggled with *analyzing* those arguments. Similar to the Tracey's W2L journal response to Lunsford, the students who rhetorically analyzed TED talks tended to regurgitate the speaker's stance as fact, and not discuss how they were convinced that the TED speaker was stating facts. In contrast, the students in

Figure 18. Once the player returns with water, they distribute it among plants, animals, and brick builders in order to maintain their village.

the Game Studio had a much easier time analyzing video games. Like in Bill's W2L Journal

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[19] These goals reflect several of the goals mentioned in MTSU's "Literacy for Life" objectives outlined in Chapter 2 and found in the appendix.
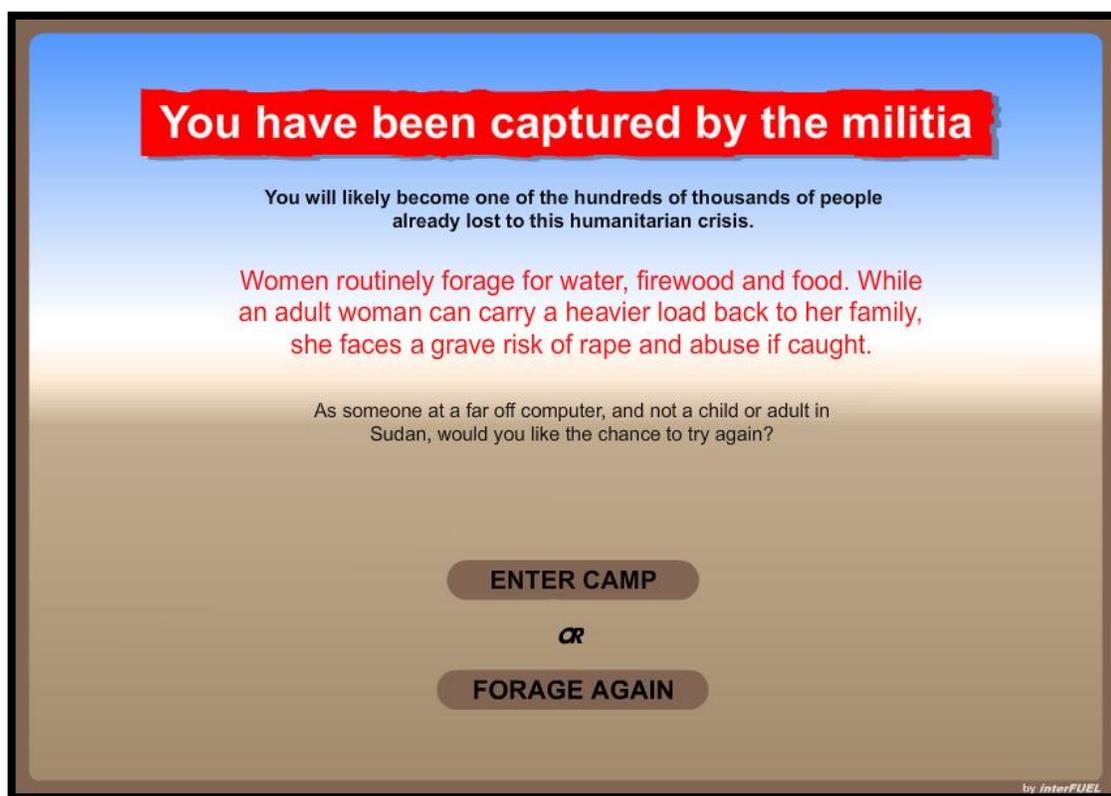
Figure 19. This is an example of one of the images displayed in Darfur is Dying if player is captured by the militia. Depending on the family member chosen by the player, the outcome may be different.

response to *Windfall*, my student didn't just restate the arguments made in the game, but explained why they believed the rhetorical decisions made in the game were effective or ineffective.[20]

Many of the students in the Game Studio chose to analyze *Darfur is Dying*, designed by mtvU (2006) to promote awareness for the crisis in Darfur, and the rhetorical moves in *Darfur is Dying* are obvious. At the start of the game, players take control of one of several family members from a small village in Darfur (see figure 18). The family member runs to a well to get water for the village. While searching for water, the family member attempts to avoid a truck filled with militia men who are trying to abduct the player. If caught, the player

---

[20] I imagine there could be a number of reasons why my students weren't afraid to question the authority of video games. Sadly, another reason might be because video games have been a political scape goat over the years, and my students have been indoctrinated to be skeptical of them as a medium.

loses that family member and a message describing that family member's outcome is displayed (figure 21). If the player successfully navigates to the well and returns to the village with water, the next task is to rebuild the village. Water is a valuable asset to different parts of the

Figure 20. Players hide from the militia as they hurry home with water for their village.

village: fields require water to grow food; animals require water to live; and brick makers require water to make bricks, which the player can make into homes for the villagers. The most rhetorically charged moments happen when the game makes the player feel uneasy.

Jeff described his experience with the game:

> Foraging for water is somewhat stressful and it makes you think about the trouble these people go through just to get water. If you are captured it tells you what will happen to the person who got captured. Girls are beaten and raped, boys are beaten and possible death, and men are killed. Informing the player on what happened to the person they were playing as hits them emotionally because they were playing as them and it kind of makes it seem more personal. [sic] (Jeff 1)

Even though Jeff is writing about his personal experience with the game, he recognized that the designer made water scarce to illicit stress in the player. Jeff also recognizes that a game designer created different consequences for failure based on the age and gender of the character in the game in order to evoke different emotional responses from the player.

Tracey wrote about how different spaces in *Darfur is Dying* were designed to illicit different emotional responses. She writes:

> The refugee camp is where the game captures the player's emotions the most due to the stories that are told about the others there and how they ended up there. "Fatima was taken away by the attackers, they were all in uniforms. They took dozens of other girls and made them walk for three hours. At night they were raped several different times." The creators of the game made this statement so that the players would feel sympathy towards Fatima and all the other people in Darfur who are getting raped or in fear of being raped. [sic] (Tracey 1)

In this example, Tracey gives agency to "[t]he creators of the game." Unlike many of the summaries of TED talks I have received in the past, Tracey demonstrated her meta-awareness of the game designer as she describes her gaming experiences. Instead of quoting the game's claims as fact, Tracey recognizes the game designer's intentional use of language to elicit an emotional response from the player of the game.

Another step towards a discourse community

I assigned the rhetorical analysis project early in the semester, but it was one of the most difficult writing tasks my students encountered. Many of the students openly admitted that they had never encountered a writing task like rhetorical analysis before. To better prepare my students for

10 minutes	•Students read example rhetorical analysis essay
5 minutes	•The instructor breaks students into groups and assigns each a paragraph from sample essay
10 minutes	•Each group outlines (in the shared Google Doc) what their paragraph contributes to the analysis.
20 minutes	•As a class students read through their descriptions and justify their outlines.

Figure 21. How to Write Rhetorical Analysis activity

the genre, I gave the students two class periods to collectively write a how to manual for the genre of rhetorical analysis.

At the beginning of the first day, I brought copies of a sample rhetorical analysis essay that I found on the internet[21] and had students read the essay in silence. While they were reading, I emailed the class a link to a blank Google Doc entitled "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis." I divided the class into five groups and assigned each of those groups a paragraph from the sample essay. Using the Google Doc, each group collaboratively wrote a description of their paragraph. Once the students understood their instructions, I stepped to the back of the room and let them take over. Many of the students were a little intimidated as the single Google Doc on the class projector broadcast their typos in front of their peers,

---

[21] There are many examples online, and since I ultimately want students to analyze the genre rather than analyze a single document, I don't mention the name of the sample in the main text. The one that I used for this particular activity is called "A Search for Equality" by Sarah Norby. It can be found at http://isucomm.iastate.edu/105samplerhetoricalanalysisessay

but, by the end of the class, they had collectively written a text outlining the major features

of the sample rhetorical analysis. At the start of the next class, I provided the students with

copies of another sample rhetorical analysis paper,[22] divided them into groups, and asked

them to revise the "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis" Google Doc from the previous day.

Since students still had access to the link to the Google Doc in their email, it took less time

to set up this activity, and students could focus on collaborating together.

Even though "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis" was not a perfect document, the

students did manage to outline most of the key features of the genre. My students described

how to write an introduction for a rhetorical analysis:

> Paragraph one is important because it is the opening of whole
>
> paper/analysis. It introduces the author and key points of the main idea that
>
> is being talked about throughout the paper/analysis. Also, in this paragraph,
>
> you will give an overview of the main point of the article written by the
>
> author. [sic] (English 1010-05 Spring 2015)

This activity marked the first time in the semester that I gave complete control of the class

over to the students. Many of the students were skeptical that they could write such a

document, but in the end, they proved themselves capable.

By turning the classroom over to the students I created an affinity space that

"[e]ncourage[d] individual and distributed knowledge… [and l]eadership [was] porous" (Gee

"Semiotic Social Spaces" 225-228). When instructors create activities that foster these

features, students become better prepared to function in their respective discourse

communities. In the Game Studio, I gave students agency to think critically on their own and

---

[22] I used the sample rhetorical analysis essay called "Why Privacy Matters: Debunking the Nothing-to-Hide Argument" found at http://www.uwec.edu/Blugoldseminar/testout/upload/Sample-Rhetorical-Analysis.pdf

opportunities to critique the ideas of their peers, which required a great deal of trust in my students. Had they concluded that the task of writing a "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis" manual was beyond their ability, I would have needed to change strategies, and they might have missed the opportunity to practice working collaboratively. Students need their instructors to believe in them and outwardly express this trust in the classroom; creating a discourse community in the classroom accomplishes just that.

Table 7. Itinerary during WoWHG

WID: Project #3 - The *World of Warcraft* Meets *Hunger Games* (10 percent of final grade)

Itinerary During Project #3	
Week 7	Day 1: Split class into groups and present WoWHG dilemma.
	Day 2: Preparation day
	Day 3: Students present and evaluate presentations.

Description of project

The *World of Warcraft* Meets *Hunger Games* (WoWHG) presentation was the most crucial project to the success of the Game Studio as it marked the first time in the semester in which the students relied on their peers for their academic success and offered them another chance to collaborate. At the beginning of week seven, I broke the class into three groups and then presented them with a PowerPoint presentation (see figures 23- 33) that triggered cognitive dissonance[23].

---

[23] Students experience cognitive dissonance on multiple levels because many students expect learning to only occur in "real" world scenarios. I use pop-culture references in this presentation (World of Warcraft, Hunger Games and South Park) to give students an opportunity to try rhetorical moves in their presentations that they might not otherwise try. For more on cognitive dissonance and pedagogy look to Paul C. Gorski's "Cognitive Dissonance as a Strategy in Social Justice Teaching."

Before I started this PowerPoint presentation, I asked students to be prepared to take notes.

Figure 22. WoWHG PowerPoint (Introduction Slide)

I highlighted the key terms in this slide, so students who were taking notes would be able to identify the most important concepts in the dilemma.
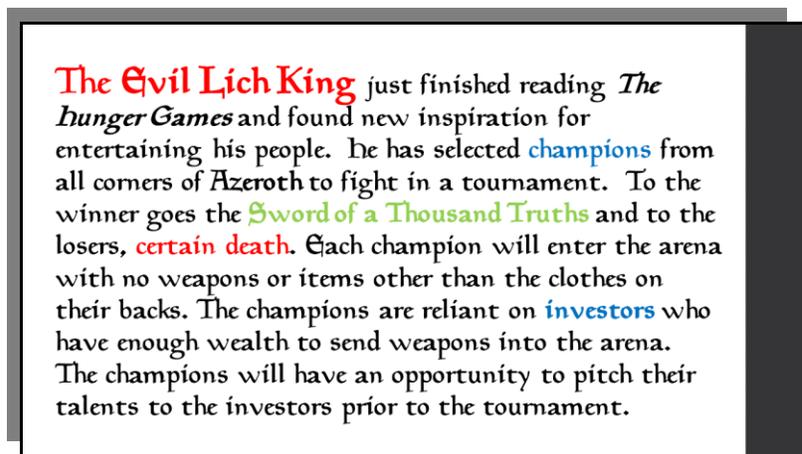
Figure 23. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 1)

In the next few slides, I introduced the students to the three races they would use for their presentations.
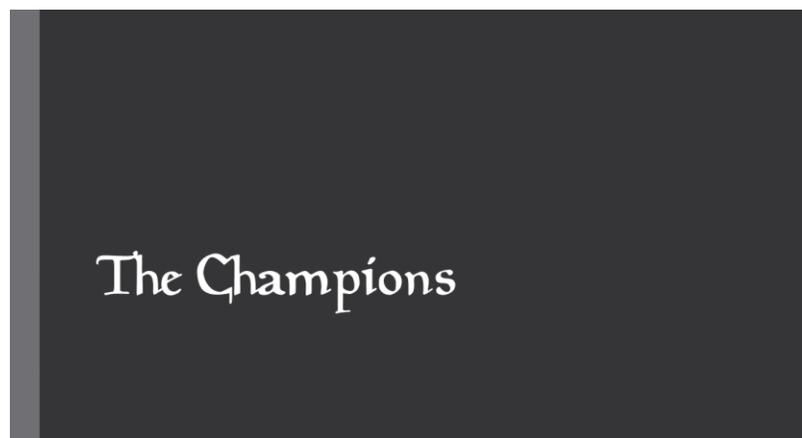
Figure 24. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 2)

I borrowed the descriptions of each race from the *World of Warcraft* official website.

Figure 25. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 3)
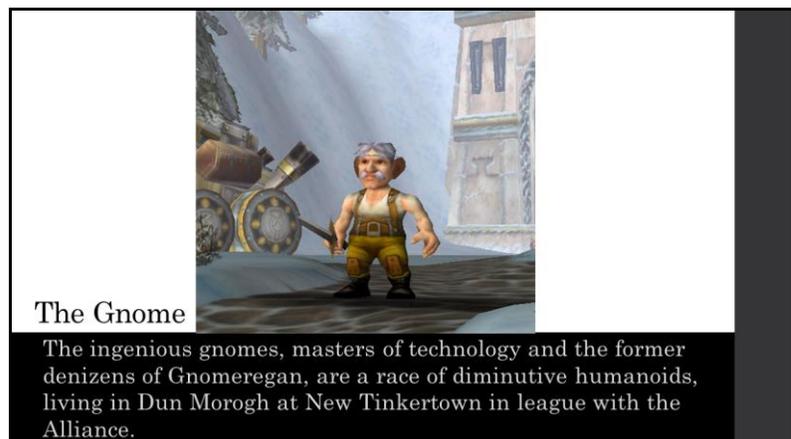
Figure 26. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 4)
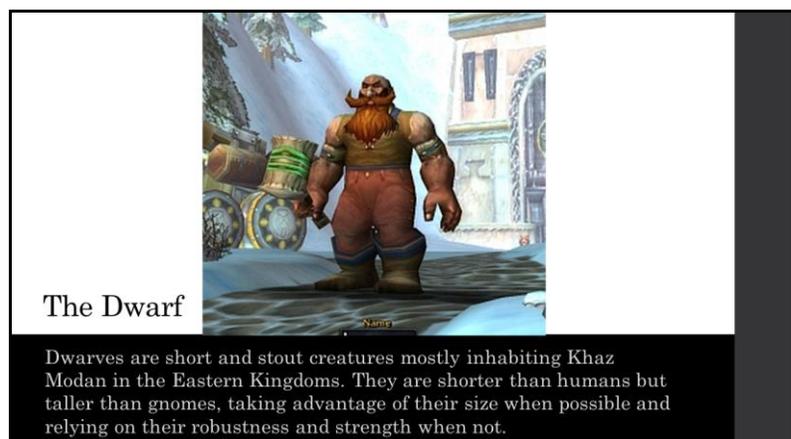
Figure 27. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 5)

In this slide, I described the two roles that students would undertake in the following week: presenters and investors.

In this slide I provided a detailed description of what it means to be an investor and a rubric for how investors will evaluate the presenters.

Each of the
presentations lasted 10
minutes followed by 5
minutes of Q&A in
which both presenters
and investors would
openly debate the
strengths and
weaknesses of each
champion.

Presentations (10 minutes each)

· Each team will be given 10 minutes to pitch their champion to the investors.

· During this time they may present a PowerPoint presentation, draw on the whiteboard, or use any other equipment in the room to sell their champion to the investors.

Figure 30. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 8)

Q&A (5 Minutes Each)

· After each 10 minute presentation, the investors will be allowed to ask questions of each team.

· These questions can be about how each respective champion will win the tournament, or how they will see a return on their investment after the tournament is won.

Figure 31. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 9)

Once this slide is on
the screen, I turned the
class over to the
students.

Presentations due at the end of this week.

(Start now)

Figure 32. WoWHG PowerPoint (Slide 10)

For the rest of the week, I gave my students free reign over the classroom to prepare for their presentations.[24] To research the strengths of their champion and the weaknesses of their opponents, students were allowed to use information from anywhere on the internet. This sent them to *WoW* wikis and forums

Table 8. Rubric for WoWHG

Grading Category	Formula	Possible points per category
Presenter evaluations of fellow presenters	Average score of all peer evaluations.	3 points
Investor evaluations of other champions	Average score of all peer evaluations	3 points
Instructor evaluation of individual students	At instructor's discretion	4 points
Total points for project		10 points

where they found character descriptions, game statistics, and other valuable pieces of information. For example, Figure 34 shows a table of statistics on every playable race in *WoW*.

My students had less than a week to research and polish their presentations, but this lack of time also forced them to utilize their class time wisely. Since the premise of WoWHG is competitive, some groups opted to work on their presentations outside of class, even though I did not expect them to do so.

---

[24] In the class students have access to the whiteboards, a projector with a video input for laptops, a sound system.

On the final day of the one-week period, the students presented their champions to the class and engaged in Q&A. Once these performative elements of the project were complete, I presented the students with the rubric in table 8 for grading their peers, in which they evaluated each presentation on a scale of 1-3 points, 1 point being poor and 3 points being superb, along with a one sentence justification for their assessment. Then, the students evaluated the effectiveness of their fellow team members based on the same 3 point scale and provided a one sentence justification per group member. My portion of the WoWHG grade, worth 4 points, was based on the copious amount of notes I took during each of the presentations and the Q&A periods, in which I was not only concerned with the performance of the presenters, but also of the engagement of the investors. To determine their final grades, I averaged all of the student's assessments and added them to my own.

Faction	Race	Priest	Rogue	Warrior	Mage	Druid	Hunter	Warlock	Shaman	Paladin	Monk	Death knight	Str	Agi	Sta	Int	Spi
Alliance	Human	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	20	20	20	20	20†
	Dwarf	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	25	16	21	19	19
	Night elf	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	16	24	20	20	20
	Gnome	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	15	22	20	23†	20
	Draenei	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	21	17	20	20	22
	Worgen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	23	22	20	16	19
Both	Pandaren	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		20	18	21	19	22
Horde	Orc		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	23	17	21	17	22
	Undead	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	19	18	20	18	25
	Tauren	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	25	16	21	16	22
	Troll	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	21	22	20	16	21
	Blood elf	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	17	22	20	23	18
	Goblin	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	17	22	20	23	18

Figure 33. A table from the World of Warcraft Wiki that compares the strengths and weaknesses of each race.

Student examples

Not only are these presentations entertaining, but the nonsensical nature of the WoWHG premise also gives students an opportunity to try rhetorical moves they might not have otherwise, many of which surprised me. When I asked my students to prove their champion's marketability, I did not expect them to look beyond the *WoW* wikis or forums. For example, in *WoW* and other Roleplaying games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, the numeric value for charisma could be used prove character's potential for salesmanship; characters with a higher charisma value would certainly be more marketable as it takes a certain amount of

Time	Activity
10 Minutes	First presenters present their champion to the class.
5 minutes	Question and answer period for investors.
10 Minutes	Second presenters present their champion to the class.
5 minutes	Question and answer period for investors
10 Minutes	Third presenters present their champion to the class.
5 minutes	Question and answer period for investors
10 minutes	Students write and turn in their evaluations of their peers and other presenters

Figure 34. WoWHG presentation day

charisma to sell anything. Some of my students didn't limit themselves to the *WoW* websites. In the PowerPoint slide in figure 36, Dan, Tracey, Stephen, Bill and Hal borrowed images from gnome-based products, including garden gnomes, gnome cereal, gnome action figures, and gnome baby costumes, to show off the marketability of their champion's race (see figure

35).[25] The gnome group's resourcefulness paid off, as their peers gave them the highest grade of all the races.

Figure 35. An example slide from a WOWHG project. The idea to use marketing materials from other gnome tropes was a smart move by this group.

Discourse communities = collaboration and assessment of peers

The conclusion of WoWHG project was a seminal moment for many students because professors rarely ask students to evaluate and grade the work of other students. Even though I averaged their peer evaluations for the final grade, my students we aware that their collective evaluations were worth sixty percent of the presentation's grade. Ultimately, I had the final say in regards to my students' grades, and the WoWHG presentation was only worth ten percent of the students' final grade; however, giving my students control over the grades of their peers was a strong symbolic gesture. Students who were previously

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[25] I didn't give students any examples or format for this project. I wanted students to be as creative as possible, and if I had provided examples, students might have been tempted to merely copy those examples rather than try something bold and creative.

unengaged now spoke up in class as they recognized that I wasn't going to be the only one holding them accountable in the classroom.

Giving my students the opportunity to evaluate one another also fostered the creation a discourse community in the classroom as learning was now perceived as a collaborative endeavor. The WoWHG presentation was designed to look like a competitive task, and several of the students treated it this way; however, during the peer grading process, most of the students were supportive of the other groups and cited just as many strengths as they did weaknesses. I asked my students to provide very brief justifications for their scores. Here are a few examples:

- Goblins – 3 points – Good presentation and seem to be confident. (Dan)

- Goblins – 2 points – Good presentation. Could've handled questions better. (Shayna)

- Dwarves – 1 point – This presentation was short and they didn't have enough information proving their point. (Bill)

- Dwarves – 2.5 points – Wasn't as organized. PowerPoint only 5 slides including title screen. [sic] (Jeff)

- Gnomes – 3 points – Were well organized, had MANY good points and facts along with numbers. Great presentation. (Gordon)

- Gnomes – 3 points – I would invest in the Gnomes because they seem trustworthy and aren't as ugly. (Lisa)

As evident from these evaluations; the dwarves were unorganized; the goblins were more prepared and confident, but they weren't prepared to answer questions; and the gnomes, who scored highest across all evaluations, had the most elaborate presentation with many

facts and figures which made them seem trustworthy. These student evaluations were not always eloquent, but they made grading much easier, and proved that my students were capable of respectfully critiquing the work of their peers.

Unrelated to their academic experience, experiencing such a bizarre dilemma together helped my students build a tight rapport with one another that extended through the rest of the semester. They were less afraid to be critical of their peers' work and expressed that critique outwardly. The gurus (gamers, visual artists, writers, techno-literates, researchers, etc.) of the classroom made themselves apparent to their peers as their individual skills were required for the success of their presentations. After performing the FYC equivalent of a trust fall, my students and I were finally prepared to enter the Game Studio, which I describe in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4:
The Final Projects of the Game Studio

Projects 4 and 5 of the Game Studio were interrelated. For project 4, my students wrote proposals for project 5, the game design project, in which they collaboratively designed functional prototypes for original educational games. In this chapter, I outline the last six weeks of the Game Studio in which these projects were completed.

Project #5
Game Design: Using ideas from their game proposals, students build functional prototypes for their games.

Project #4
Game Proposal: Students design generate ideas for possible games for their final projects.

Project #3
WoWHG: Students use game mechanics to make rhetorical arguments.

Project #2
Rhetorical Analysis of Video Games: Students rhetoricaly analyze game mechanics.

Project #1
The Game Walkthrough: Students describe game mechanics.

Figure 36. Complete Scaffolding of projects in the Game Studio

Project #4: The Game Proposal (20 percent of final grade)

Description of Game Proposal

For the game proposal, a WID[1] task, students wrote proposals for the game design project. Similar to other projects in the Game Studio curriculum, I did not assign a specific format for the game proposal, rather I asked students to choose a format that reflects the needs of their rhetorical situation. Proposals were to be a minimum length of 500 words,

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[1] See Chapter 3 for a description of Smith and Smith's WID and W2L tasks.

though I did not check for this length during the grading process.[2] Students assumed that their audience would be both their peers and myself, as their peers would be using the proposals to generate ideas for the game design project, and I would be grading their work.

Table 9. Itinerary during Game Proposal

Itinerary During Project #4	
Week 8	Day 1: Concerns Writing Prompt #1
	Day 2: Concerns Writing Prompt #2 and Learning Technology
	Day 3: Brainstorming
Week 9	Day 1: Brainstorming and
	Day 2: Proposal Genre Writing Conventions Activity
	Day 3: In-class Discourse Community on Game Proposal Genre
Week 10	Day 1: Group Peer Review
	Day 2: Group Peer Review
	Day 3: Game Proposal Due

Since the proposal stage was early in the game design process, I was intentionally ambiguous about the requirements for the final game; the games needed to be educational and simple enough for a small team to design and create in three weeks. Digital games[3] needed to have at least four minutes of functional gameplay, and analog games[4] needed to be fully functional with a detailed game manual describing all the rules necessary to play the game.[5]

Address concerns through writing

When I originally designed the syllabus for the Game Studio, I assumed my students would be ready to start brainstorming ideas at the beginning of the game proposal stage; however, despite the scaffolding of game design into the previous three projects, many

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[2] I assigned a minimum word length so my students would perceive a certain formality with the assignment. When grading their work, I was less concerned with word length and more concerned with whether or not their proposal accomplished its rhetorical goals.

[3] A software based game played on a video screen with some kind of controller.

[4] Any game that requires no digital technology to play.

[5] Originally, I wanted to require that all of the games be digital. Unfortunately, my request for a computer classroom was not fulfilled. Since only some of the students had access to laptops, I was forced to allow for analog games as well. This issue of technological access will be discussed in Chapter 5.

students were unprepared to generate game ideas of their own.[6] It was clear that I needed to address their concerns first.

On the board I wrote, "What are the three worst possible things that could happen for these projects?" and gave my students around ten minutes to list their concerns in silence. Next, I broke the students into groups of three or four, asked them to discuss their concerns with their peers for five or six minutes, and generate a list of as many solutions as they could for each of those concerns. Finally, each group reported their favorite solutions back to the

- **10 minutes** • In silence, students generate a list of personal concerns about the firnal project.
- **5 minutes** • Students share their list of concerns peers in groups of 3 or 4.
- **10 Minutes** • Groups try to come up with solutions for as many concerns as possible.
- **10 minutes** • Groups share their solutions with the class, and a list of concerns they were unable to solve.
- **15 minutes** • Class discussion and plan for next meeting.

Figure 37. Addressing students' concerns.

class. This activity resolved many of the students' concerns, and also helped the students build rapport as they shared their anxieties.

The activity was a success; however, three concerns were not immediately resolved: having enough time to complete the game design project, coming up with a "good" idea, and becoming knowledgeable enough about a topic to make an educational game. The following day, I gave my students another writing prompt, "How can you address concerns about time, original game ideas, and educational content?" Like the previous day, my students wrote silently first, shared their ideas in groups second, and reported their ideas to the class

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[6] At the start of class, I asked them to write down as many different game ideas as they could. Many of the students stared blankly at the page and wrote nothing, at which point I changed strategies.

as a whole. Using this process a second time, we came to a consensus for all three concerns. We addressed time concerns with a class discussion about respectful collaboration and by requiring the inclusion of a detailed timeline in each game proposal. To generate game ideas, they decided that it would make sense to immerse themselves in games, both digital and analog, and pay specific attention to the way those games are designed.[7] The students addressed content concerns by deciding to choose game topics that they could easily research and learn in a short amount of time.

I did not anticipate dedicating two days of class time managing my students' concerns and anxieties about these two final projects, but the extra effort paid off as my students were more willing to take chances with their game ideas and trust in their ability to communicate those ideas clearly.

Brainstorming

To generate ideas for their games we spent two class periods doing brainstorming activities. The first day I wrote the following writing prompt on the board "What is something that you are better at than anyone else in the room? How would you teach someone how to do that thing?" Again, students wrote silently, discussed their ideas in groups and shared with the class. I then asked the students how they might turn their lessons into games.

Several students still struggled to come up with game ideas. Gordon, who used to box competitively, wanted to teach a proper boxing stance, but said that he was not sure he

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[7] Ironically, this is exactly what I had asked them to do in their rhetorical analysis papers. Several students made this connection about halfway through the class discussion.

could turn that lesson into a game. I thought this was a particularly strange thing to say as boxing in itself is a game. I asked Gordon to stand up and show the class a proper boxing stance, which he did. I then asked him why a proper stance was important. He stated that, if he did not keep a proper stance, it would be easier for his opponent to push him over. I then asked him how he learned a proper stance. He said that his trainer would walk around him and push him in different directions. If he fell over, then his stance was wrong. I inquired, "Isn't that a game? A game of Don't Fall Down?" This was a transformative moment for both Gordon and the classroom as they realized that their ideas did not have to be incredibly complex to be games.

The second day, I brought a stack of analog games[8] to class and asked my students to bring games with them as well. I told them that they could play any of the games they wanted as long as they played with the intention of getting ideas for their proposals. I also installed *RPG Maker VX Ace* on the classroom computer so students could play and become familiar with the features of the game design software. For the rest of the class, I asked students to come and meet with me one at a time for brief five-minute mini-conferences, in which we discussed the kind of game they wanted to pitch in their proposals.

The students that wanted to design analog games often had trouble coming up with game mechanics for their ideas. This was typically because they were trying to make their games more complicated than they needed to be. Amanda initially wanted to create a forensics game comprised of multiple playable characters with different strengths and weaknesses, and a complex story that the players would unfold as they played the game. At first, I suggested that she look to the rules of *Dungeons & Dragons,* which is a game that tells a

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[8] *Dungeons & Dragons, Monopoly, Clue,* several decks of playing cards, Dominos, and *Risk*

story using a combination of math and choose your own adventure style writing.[9] As we discussed how she might design her forensics game, Amanda decided that her idea might be too complicated.

The next day Amanda came to me with a new idea loosely based on the *Game of Life,* in which players would try to avoid dying first. In her game, which she eventually called *Time Clock,* players take turns moving around a circular game board. Each square requires a player to either add or subtract years from their life (starting with 80 years). Some squares had the player draw a card that faced them with a dilemma, which would add or subtract years based on how the player responded. *Time Clock* was a much simpler game than Amanda's original forensics idea because all of the players' decisions in *Time Clock* affected a single game mechanic, time.

For students that wanted to make digital games, the primary issue I had to address was their grandiose notions of what their games would look like. For example, Hal wanted to teach a history lesson about the Roman Empire. He had played games like *Total War: Rome II* in the past and thought that I was expecting the class to create a game with the same level of depth and detail. I explained to him that games like *Total War: Rome II* had hundreds of highly trained individuals programing and designing

Figure 38. Total War: Rome II is an incredibly complex game where the player controls thousands of soldiers and fights an extremely complex artificial intelligence in historically accurate battles.

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[9] I would highly recommend picking up a *Dungeons & Dragons Starter Kit,* which outlines the basic rules of *Dungeons & Dragons* in a very accessible way and comes with everything you would need to start a basic game.

around the clock for several years, and it would not be fair for me to expect that same

amount of programing skill and effort in just three weeks of class. We also discussed he

would need to take technological limitations into account when he proposed his game,

otherwise his peers wouldn't take him seriously. I showed him how he might still make a

game based on the Roman Empire but scale back the level of detail and complexity to better

serve the requirements of the class. On my laptop, I searched for how-to videos for *RPG

Maker VX Ace* and showed him some of the basic features of the game software.[10] Hal,

fascinated by the amount of free information available online, decided to use *RPG Maker

VX Ace* for his proposal, and ultimately, Hal's peers chose his game proposal for the game

design project.

*Defining the game proposal
genre*

After addressing students'
concerns and brainstorming, many
students began to feel more
confident in their ideas, but were

10 minutes	•4 groups of students find examples of 4 different proposal sub-genres.
10 minutes	•Each group answers questions about the feature of their proposal sub-genre in a Google Doc shared with the entire class.
10 minutes	•As a class discussion each group provides an explanation of their answers
20 minutes	•As a class, create a how-to manual for game proposals.

Figure 39. Students design their own proposal genre.

still unsure about the process of writing a proposal. Instead of asking students to follow a

prescribed proposal style, I asked them to look at multiple sub-genres and decide which

features of those sub-genres were most appropriate for the needs of the game design project.

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[10] *RPG Maker VX Ace* is used to design story driven roleplaying games. For more information on this
software, visit http://www.rpgmakerweb.com/products/programs/rpg-maker-vx-ace

Similar to the student-written "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis" activity described in Chapter 3, I created a Google Doc called "How to Write Proposals"[11] and shared its link with the class. I separated the Google Doc into four sections:

Figure 40. Student generated expectations for their game proposals.

Business Proposals, Research Proposals, Kickstarter.com Proposals, and Marriage/Pick-up lines, and under each section, I wrote the following questions:

- What is the goal of this type of proposal?
- Who is the typical audience for this kind of proposal?
- How are these kinds of proposals organized?
  - What kinds of headings do these proposals use?
  - Is there a cover letter?
  - How long is each section?
  - What does each section accomplish?

At the start of class, I broke my students into four groups, assigned each group one of the four sub-genres in the document, and asked each group to answer the questions in the Google Doc using at least three examples of their sub-genre found online. Once each group

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[11] This document can be viewed at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1C3G8KNQVnCz5-2ObVEFsHQ-Z_KI3NtNV8XnSXDRUB4M/edit?usp=sharing

finished, we discussed their answers as a class, and then I added the following questions to the end of the Google Doc:

- What information will need to be in the proposals for digital games?
- What information will need to be in the proposals for analog games?
- What is a possible organization for these proposals?

Just like in the "How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis" activity, described in Chapter 3, I let the students take control of the Google Doc, only stepping in to format their writing so their ideas were organized, and after about twenty minutes, the class created the document in figure 41. Not only did my students successfully analyze the features of the proposal genre and multiple sub-genres, but they also established a set of concrete expectations for their game proposals, which addressed the three primary concerns (time, original game ideas, and content) they had expressed at the start of the project.

Student examples

Knowing that their peers would gravitate towards game designs that were simple and easy to understand, several students decided to create their proposals in the form of a three-fold brochure. The three-fold brochure format helped students organize their ideas and was easy to read when it came time to decide which proposal to use in
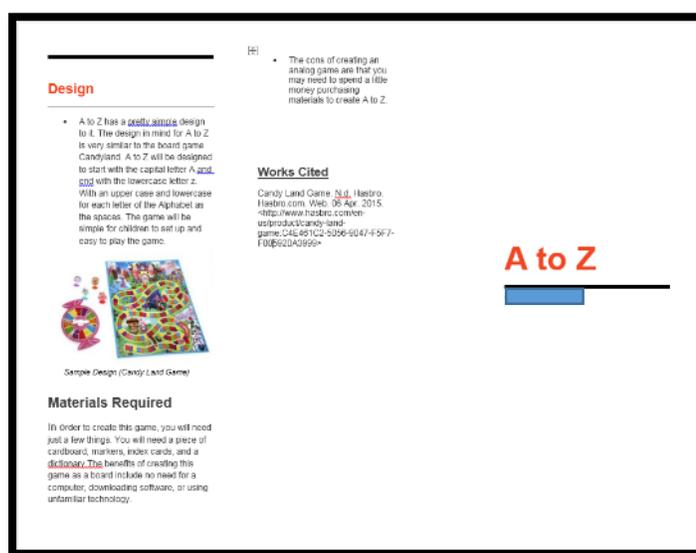
Figure 41. Bill's game proposal for A to Z (front).

the final projects. Figures 42 and 43 show Bill's three-fold brochure, where he pitches his idea for a spelling game called *A to Z*. Simplicity was one of the strongest qualities of Bill's proposal, as the large amounts of white space to made his text easy
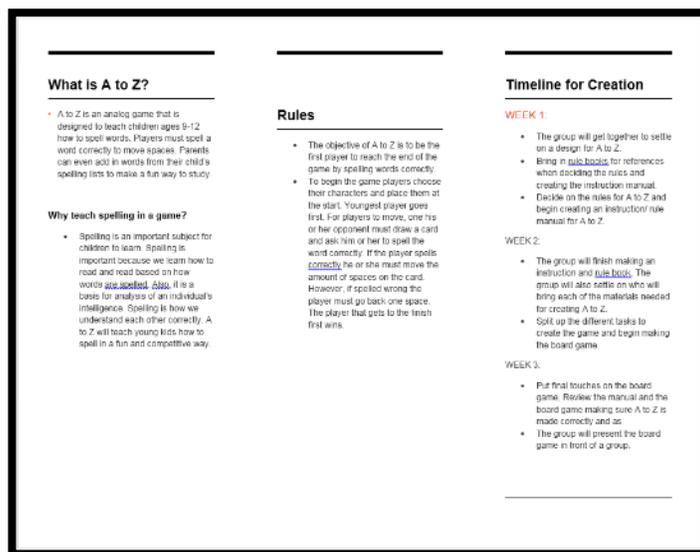
Figure 42. The second half of Bill's game proposal.

to navigate. He even states that one of "the benefits of creating this game… include no need for a computer, downloading software, or using unfamiliar technology" [sic].[12]

Several students referenced commonly known games to help explain ideas, and to give credibility to their game concept. Bill's game proposal referenced the children's game *Candy Land* as an example of what *A to Z* might look like and proof that "the game will simple for children to setup and... play" (1).

Figure 43. Hal's screenshot for his game idea Roman Empire.

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[12] Since there was limited access to technology in the classroom, the analog option was very appealing to many of the students.

Proposals for digital games took a different approach, as not every student was familiar with the software technology needed to make digital games. Hal's proposal for *Roman Empire* was also a three-fold brochure, similar to Bill's *A to Z* proposal, but, since *Roman Empire* was a digital game, Hal had to prove to his peers that designing a digital game was not just possible but also easy to do. To accomplish this, Hal built a prototype of his game in *RPG Maker VX Ace* and used that prototype to provide screenshots for his proposal (see figure 44). When it came time for the groups to choose a game proposal, Hal was able to show his prototype on his laptop as proof of his concept, which ultimately led his group to choose his idea.

Gordon also used *RPG Maker VX Ace* to make screenshots for his game proposal, called *Fire Survival,* which puts players in a room with various fire hazards. As the

Figure 44. In Gordon's proposal, he placed images of wine bottles on the walls to represent fire extinguishers. Quite ingenious.

player interacts with the room, these fire hazards start to burn, and it is up to the player to either put out the fire or safely escape the room. As he turned this assignment in, Gordon was especially proud of the fact that he had repurposed the *RPG Maker VX Ace*'s image of a wine bottle to look like a fire extinguisher hanging on the wall (see figure 44).

An unfortunate circumstance of the Game Studio is that the students simply did not have enough time to create every promising game concept proposed. Several students had excellent game ideas, but their proposals were not strong. Gordon's digital *Fire Survival* game had a lot of potential; it was a perfect fit for the *RPG Maker VX Ace* software and the time

constraints of the class. I was certain his group would choose it; however, Bill's *A to Z* game was ultimately chosen instead because it was perceived as an easier route to success.[13] Several times during the game creation process, Gordon expressed frustration that his proposal had not emphasized how simple the *RPG Maker VX Ace* software was to use.

Dan's game concept was probably one of the most rhetorically

Figure 45. Dan's game board for The California Drought. *The design of this proposal looks ok at a glance, but the map of California doesn't seem to be utilized well in Dan's descriptions.*

charged as it was based on the California Drought that occurred in the spring of 2015 when I was teaching the Game Studio curriculum. Dan's game, *The California Drought Game,* was intended "to raise awareness of the growing drought that [was] threatening California by presenting the gamer with choices that will guide them to the final conclusion of what will happen to California" (Dan 1). In the *California Drought* game, players would choose from one of four possible solutions for the drought. The game, using statistical data, would generate different outcomes based on the player's decisions. I would have loved to see this game become a reality, but several factors prevented Dan's group from choosing it. First,

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[13] It is entirely possible that my students were looking for an easy way out. Ironically, I think designing Gordon's game would have been much easier and far less time consuming than building a physical game board with dozens of laminated cards.

Dan did not describe his game rules with enough detail. He writes that there will be "four possible solutions" for players to choose from, but nowhere in his proposal does he state what those solutions might be or how those options might be conveyed in the game. Dan did provide a diagram of the game board (seen in figure 45), but the descriptions of the game board were confusing and did not make good use of the map of California.

Dan's and Gordon's game ideas had a lot of potential, but their proposals did not effectively convey that potential to their fellow group members. Even so, both Dan and Gordon had the opportunity to watch their peers evaluate their respective proposals and provide real face-to-face critical feedback. Likewise, all of the students who wrote rejected proposals were in an excellent position to learn from their peer review experience.

Project #5 Game Design (20 percent of final grade)

The game design project was the capstone project for the Game Studio curriculum. Over the course of the final three weeks of class, students choose from their peers' game proposals, designed first drafts of their games, playtested the games of other groups, revised their games, and submitted their final drafts for both instructor and peer evaluation. Digital

Table 10. Itinerary for Game Proposal

Itinerary During Project #5		
Week 8	Day 1: Evaluate game proposals and choose game design	
	Day 2: Workshop	
	Day 3: Workshop	
Week 9	Day 1: Workshop	
	Day 2: Workshop	
	Day 3: First Drafts Due Playtesting Day	
Week 10	Day 1: Workshop	
	Day 2: Workshop	
	Day 3: Game prototypes due for instructor and peer evaluation	

games needed to have at least four minutes of gameplay, and analog games had to be fully

functional games. Both digital and analog games required a printed game manual that would

provide the rules for the game.

Assigning groups

I considered several factors when I assigned students their groups for the game

design project.[14] First, I looked at the attendance of each student and evenly distributed

students with poor attendance across all the groups. Next, I assessed which students'

proposals were the most feasible and distributed those students evenly across the groups.

This was a difficult task as many of the best game ideas were not always associated with the

strongest proposals. Several of the students had excellent game ideas, but their proposals

lacked refinement. Other students had written/designed their proposals well, but their game

ideas were either too ambitious or simply infeasible given the technological limitations of the

classroom. Assessing the proposals in this way took some time and consideration as it

required some intuition to assess the viability of an unmade game.[15] I used the notes from

my one to one meetings with my students during the brainstorming activities for their game

proposals. These notes gave me a better understanding of my students' game ideas, even

when those ideas were not clearly articulated in their proposals.[16]

Once I evenly distributed the students with poor attendance and the most feasible

game ideas, I separated students into groups where they would be less familiar with their

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[14] For alternative ways of breaking students into groups look into Krista Kennedy and Rebecca Moore
Howard's chapter in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (2014) entitled "Collaborative Writing, Print to Digital."
[15] If an instructor intends to use this assignment in their own FYC course, I recommend taking some time to
play with the various game design software available. *RPG Maker VX Ace* and *Game Maker* are relatively easy to
learn, and a familiarity with the technological limitations will make this assessment much easier.
[16] Ultimately, dividing proposals in this way was not practical as the students still gravitated towards proposals
with games the students perceived as easier to design.

peers. I do this for two reasons. First, a certain amount of unfamiliarity between group members forces students to communicate more objectively and consider the opinions of others. Second, like-minded students had gravitated toward one another early in the semester, and separating these cliques created more diverse group dynamics which forced students to work with personality types that they might not have encountered otherwise.

Evaluating proposals

On the first day of the game design project, I assigned students to their groups, reviewed the assignment sheet for the project, and handed back the students' game proposals (without grades or comments). In their groups, I asked each student to silently read the proposal of the student on their left and continue passing them in this fashion until they had read all the proposals. I then asked each group to narrow their decision down to two choices.

10 minutes • Instructor reviews the project sheet and grading rubric

20 minutes • Students read all of the proposals for their group

20 minutes • Groups narrow their decision down to two ideas

5 minutes • Students create a detailed list of action items and turn that list into the instructor at the end of class
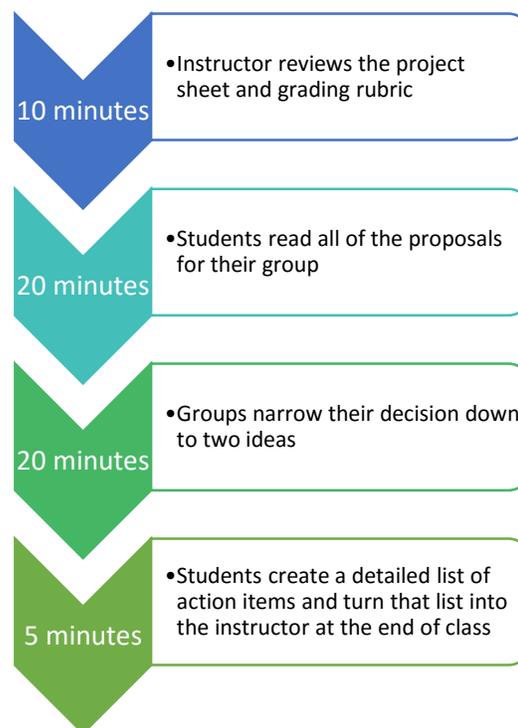
Figure 46. Evaluating proposals activity

The conversation was heated but courteous as each student made a case for his or her game idea. After about twenty minutes of discussion, most groups had no trouble picking their top two choices.

Dividing responsibilities

To successful complete their games, each student needed to contribute their personal strengths to the team, which ultimately made their game designs much more elaborate and educational by the end of the semester. I let the students govern how they used their time in class for the next four class periods.[17] Occasionally, I visited each group to see how their games were progressing, but for the most part, I tried to stay out of their way. At the end of each class, I asked the groups to delegate homework to each group member and provide me with a list of those delegations. I rarely checked to see if individual students did their homework, and I certainly did not want to micromanage my students; however, monitoring group tasks in this way forced students to strategically delegate tasks and added a perceived layer of accountability.

Bill's group, for example, decided to make his spelling game, *A to Z*. Since Bill was the most familiar with his own idea, his group relied on him to design the game manual while the rest of group assembled and designed the game board and pieces. In Hal's group, which made *Roman Empire*, Amanda felt that she was most comfortable with research, so she took on the role of historian for the game. In contrast, Hal and Jeff, having spent time learning *RPG Maker VX Ace* during the proposal phase, typically volunteered to program the game based on Amanda's research.

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[17] Some groups worked on their games outside of class, but I encouraged them to take full advantage of class time to get their work done.

Playtesting

After two weeks of designing games, the class conducted a playtesting day, in which each group brought a functional (but not complete) version of their game and a complete draft of their game manual to class. At the start of class, each group created a list of three primary concerns or questions that were unaddressed in the current iteration of their game design. Then each group selected one member to stay with the game and act as an "observer" while the rest of the members playtested the other groups games as "ambassadors."[18] During the

5 minutes
- Each group creates a list of primary concerns for their game.

10 minutes
- Ambassadors from other groups play games while a single observer from each group silently watches and takes notes.

5 minutes
- Ambassadors stop playing and discuss the game while the observer silently takes notes.

5 minutes
- The observer asks the ambassadors questions about their groups concerns if they have not already been addressed.

5 minutes
- Ambassadors return to their game and generate a new list of concerns based on the first playtest.

25 minutes
- Groups select a new observer and ambassadors repeat the above steps with a different group's game.

Figure 47. Outline of Playtesting day.

playtest, the observers were not allowed to speak or interfere with the ambassadors' play experience in any way.

The ambassadors attempted to learn and play the game for ten minutes followed by a five-minute discussion about their experience with the game; the observers were to remain

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[18] An observer is a student who documents and responds the feedback and play experience of the ambassadors. Ambassadors play the games of other groups and provide feedback to the observer.

silent during both the playtest and the initial discussion. When the conversation between the

ambassadors began to slow, I allowed the observers to ask the ambassadors questions based

on the groups concerns. At the end of this conversation, each group reconvened so the

observers could report what they had discovered during the playtest. With this new

information, each group generated a new list of concerns and questions, chose a new

observer for the group, and repeated the above steps with a different game.

As an instructor, this day was easily the most satisfying of the entire semester as I

had not foreseen one of the greatest benefits of teaching game design to FYC students.

Playtesting games (which is essentially peer review) makes weak areas in writing/designing

visible. If the game and/or game manual was written/designed poorly, the playtest quickly

fell apart as ambassadors became confused and/or made assumptions about the game rules

that the game designers did not intend. Even a game as simple as *A to Z*, where players spell

words correctly to move forward across a game board, proved to be difficult for the

ambassadors as the instructions were not written clearly (Stephen, Bill, Gordon and Lisa). It

was comical to watch observers fight the urge to step in to explain the game rules and the

ambassadors fight the urge not to ask the observers questions.[19]

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[19] Many of my students made the same face my brother used to make in 1998 when I played *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* "wrong."

Even when the game worked well, the playtest revealed other weaknesses in the game. The prototype for *Roman Empire,* looked fantastic, but the players had a difficult time knowing where to go. *Roman Empire* gave its players so much freedom that they skipped

Figure 48. In the prototype of Jeff, Amanda, Hal, Fred and Calvin's game Roman Empire, *the players had a hard time knowing where to go next.*

large portions of the story. When Amanda, an observer for *Roman Empire*, asked the ambassadors if the game was educational, most of them said that it was not because they had skipped most of educational parts of the game.

This feedback proved invaluable to the final revisions of the games. The *A to Z* team completely rewrote their game manual and removed most of the obscure words from the game. The *Roman Empire* refocused their efforts in research and limiting player choice so the parts of the game that were educational were less likely to be skipped.

Student examples

My students created three games for their final projects: *WWII Trivia*, a board game that teaches facts about World War II; *A to Z,* a board game that teaches vocabulary and spelling;

Figure 49. WWII Trivia *game board*

and *Roman Empire*, a video game about the life of Julius Caesar. Each of these games came with a set of strengths and weakness.

Dan, Tracey, Shayna and Gary created a game called *WWII Trivia* (see figure 49), which combined the rules of *Risk* with *Trivial Pursuit*. Similar to *Risk*, players take turns claiming territories on a map with a predetermined number of pushpins and then take turns answering trivia questions found on game cards. If a player answers a question correctly, they can steal control of any territory neighboring one of their own from another player, and can continue to answer questions until they get one wrong signifying the beginning of next player's turn.

WWII Trivia was actually a well thought out game. The game board was intentionally small and soundly constructed.[20] They borrowed a quadrant of *Risks* game map and gave credit to their source. The questions were well researched and quite interesting;[21] some questions were so obscure that the only ones who knew the answers were the creators of the game. Since no one knew the answer to the trivia questions, the game typically remained at a stalemate, but despite its small flaws, *WWII Trivia* was still fun to play. Dan, Tracey, Shayna and Gary typically stayed past the end of class to play their game which became fiercely competitive as they became increasingly familiar with their trivia cards.

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[20] *Risk* is a game that takes hours to complete. By selecting only a small portion of the map, the students were able to control the amount of time it would take to complete their.

[21] Did you know that in WWII the Polish used **bears** to help them carry ammunition? I certainly did not.

Stephen, Bill, Gordon, and Lisa created *A to Z* in which players spelled and defined words to race around the game board. This group really benefitted from the simplicity of their game and the artistic talent of Stephen, who in one weekend designed the entire game board (See figure 50), and Lisa, who made the word cards for the game (See Figure 50). This team was a pleasure to watch

Figure 50. A to Z *Game board*

as they built their game; they were exceptional at delegating tasks and keeping each other accountable. Like *WWII Trivia*, *A to Z* was not an easy game as many of the words were

obscure and difficult to spell. Originally, the game only required that a player spell a word correctly to move forward. Later, they added more rules requiring players to spell, define, and name the grammatical function of a word in order to progress in the game.[22]
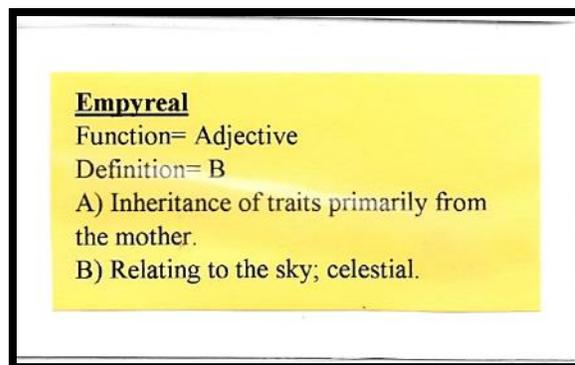
Figure 51. A game card from A to Z *with a rather obscure and difficult to spell word.*

When this group first started making *A to Z*, they were primarily concerned that the premise was too simple. In an attempt to add complexity, they found extremely obscure words for players to spell (see figure 51). On playtesting day, they recognized most of their word cards were too difficult, but they had already used all of the laminating material and

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[22] Often writers do the same thing as the process of writing reveals deeper understanding.

card stock. As their resources were limited, they were forced to remove the most difficult word cards from the game, limiting the game to about forty words. Since the game required players to move fifty-two spaces, game cards would often come up multiple times in a single game. The game quickly became tedious as players memorized all of the words in the card stacks and removed much of the competitive nature of the game.
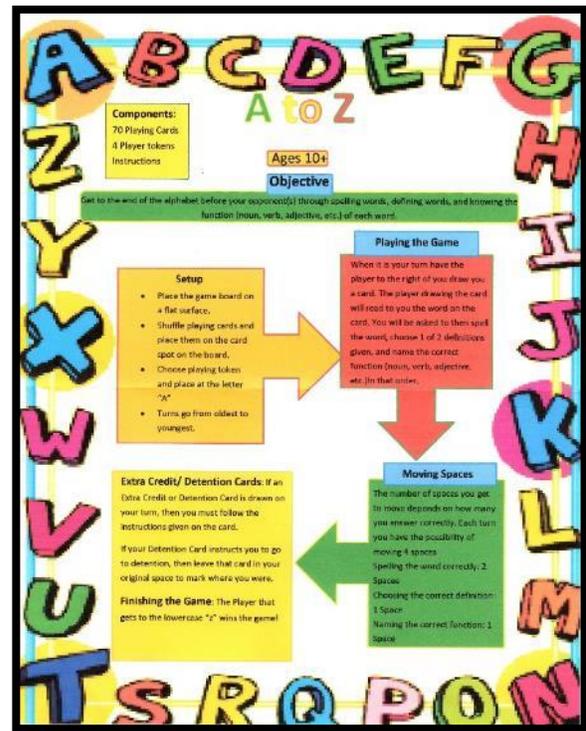
Figure 52. The A to Z *game manual*

The A to Z game manual was the best designed in the class as it used a flow chart to guide through every step of the game from beginning to end. The simplicity of their game allowed them to spend less time deliberating over game rules and more time writing them in a concise manner.

Roman Empire, created by Jeff, Amanda, Fred, Hal and Calvin, was created using *RPG Maker VX Ace* game design software. In the *Roman Empire*, the player took on the role of Julius Caesar as he fought a war against Pompey and was ultimately assassinated on the Ides

Figure 53. In Roman Empire, players travel across Italy and the Algerian Sea to fight Pompey.

of March. Amanda, Calvin and Fred did most of the research for the game, while Hal and

Jeff worked on the programming.

Considering this group built *Roman Empire* in just three weeks, it is quite an

impressive game. In figure 53, you can see how Hal and Jeff created the boot of Italy on the

left of the screen. They also programed each of the characters in figure 54 to move in

random directions and create the effect of crowd. If the player bumps Ceasar into certain

characters he is assassinated in a final
battle seen in figure 55. Many of the
images were repurposed making the
historical accuracy a little off at times
(the second assassin to the left is a
vampire), but the team had to make
such allowances given the deadline of
the project. It was inspiring to see
how the *Roman Empire* team chose to
tell their story given such limitations.

Figure 54. If a player touches any of the characters in this room, they are assassinated.

One lesson that the *Roman
Empire* team learned extremely well was
that a writer/designer has very little
control over how reader/player
interprets a work once published. In
digital games (and analog games),
players have a lot of interpretive

Figure 55. The final battle/assassination in Roman Empire. *Hal and Jeff programed these enemies to be so strong that they would be impossible for the player to defeat.*

freedom because they are the ones holding the controller (or in this case, the arrow keys on the keyboard). In *Roman Empire*, the team never quite figured out a way to guide players to perform certain actions. Many of the events in the game's story were reliant on the player accidently walking across invisible squares on the game map; if the player never found these areas, then they simply did not experience that section of the game. Hal and Jeff placed dirt paths in the game to guide the players from one place to the next, which helped a little; however, as soon as the player embarked across the Algerian Sea, these paths disappeared, and it was less obvious where to go.

Since my students were not professional game designers,[23] I did not expect these games to be perfect. At the beginning of the final class, I asked each group to answer the following question, "If you had another month to complete this project, what would you change?" Jeff, Amanda, Fred, Hal and Calvin (*Roman Empire)* wrote, "Make the game more challenging. Make it go into depth more. Use all of the tools that were provided [in the software]." Stephen, Bill, Gordon, and Lisa (*A to Z*) wrote they "… would have made easier cards along with easier words." Dan, Tracey, Shayna and Gary wrote that they would have made "better lookin & variety of cards (multichoice, true & false, etc.) better designed map. Pieces with country's flag on them [sic]."

Having these responses made grading much easier, as I could be lenient about some of their games' shortcomings and then focus instead on their strengths. It also gave the students an opportunity to analyze their own games rhetorically; this was, after all, a composition course, not a game design course. I was less concerned that their games were

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[23] Although after this experience, Hal expressed an interest in changing his major to game design.

ready for mass production, and more concerned that my students were able identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work.

Finals day and grading

One of the primary features of the Game Studio curriculum is peer evaluation, and the final project is no different. On finals day, I asked my students to provide a grade for the other groups games based on a 1 to 4 scale provided on the whiteboard. Having experienced the peer review process multiple times during the semester and a similar grading process in the WoWHG

5 minutes • Groups answered questions about their games on index cards.

20 minutes • Students play the first game designed by one of the other groups.

5 minutes • Students evaluate and grade the first game on personal index cards. (4 possible points)

20 minutes • Students play the second game designed by the other groups.

5 minutes • Students evaluate and grade the second game on personal index cards. (4 possible points)

5 minutes • On the reverse side of their personal index cards students evaluate the members of their group. (4 possible points)

Figure 56. Process for student evaluations of games.

project, my students were prepared to offer thoughtful critiques of their peers' final projects.

At the beginning of class, I gave students two twenty-minute sessions to learn and play the games of their peers, after which they evaluated the game on an index card (see figure 57). Students separated their evaluation cards into four quadrants. In the top two quadrants, students wrote the name of the game they were evaluating and a list of positive features about the game. In the bottom two quadrants, students described opportunities for improvement and their numeric score for the game. These evaluations made my job of

grading much easier as my students identified many game features that I might have missed having an opportunity to play the games in class.[24]

Once both gameplay sessions were complete, the students flipped their index cards over and wrote evaluations for other students in their design group (see figure 58). Like the game evaluations, the peer evaluations consisted of numeric score (on a scale of one to four) and a brief justification for that score. For example, Fred gave Hal a perfect

Figure 57. Dan's index card on which he graded the games of her peers.
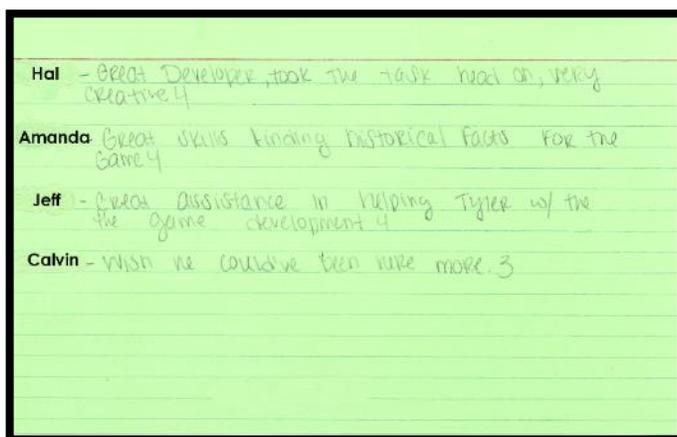
Figure 58. The flipside of the evaluation card where students gave grades to their fellow teammates.

score of four points because he was a "great developer, took the task head on, very creative [sic]." In contrast, Fred gave Calvin, who was struggling with attendance, a score of three citing that he "wish[ed] he could've been here more." To calculate final grades, I averaged their peer evaluation scores and then added those scores to my own based on the grading rubric in appendix L.

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[24] In the future, I will make a point to play each game at least once during the design process.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the results of a reflection survey that my students took at the end of the semester and discuss some of the lessons that I learned from teaching the Game Studio curriculum.

CHAPTER 5:
Games are More Tangible than Grades

Taking my own medicine...

At the end of the Game Studio curriculum, my students voluntarily filled out an anonymous survey of five questions based on their classroom experience:

1. Do you see a relationship between designing games and more traditional forms of writing? If so, can you describe this relationship?

2. Did learning game design help you understand ideas of audience, genre, and/or rhetoric? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

3. What were your expectations for the game design project before it began?

4. How might you apply what you learned in the game design project to activities outside of this class?

5. Now that you have made your game, what would you have liked to know before the game design project started?

As a thought experiment, I took the survey for myself, and, in keeping with the anonymous survey genre, I've kept these responses candid to be as up-front and honest with my answers as possible. As I revised this chapter, I added footnotes to clarify my ideas, but for the most part these responses are as they were when I first wrote them.

Do you see a relationship between designing games and more traditional forms of writing? If so, can you describe this relationship?

At the start of the Game Studio semester, I simply thought it would be "cool" to have my students design games for their final projects. Maybe hip and trendy are more accurate. After reading and re-reading Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, I knew about the relationship between game design and traditional composition, but once the Game Studio started, I was truly able to see the parallels. Both require the writers/designers to consider their rhetorical situation; both have a brainstorming, revision, and editing phase; and both are commonly misperceived by the public as having a mysterious (almost mythical) creation process. The more I watched my students create their games, I came to realize the primary difference between game design and more traditional texts is the way the products are consumed. Readers *read* texts; players *play* games. Game designers have to consider the free will of the player as they create their games, but this isn't too different from the lack of control authors have over the interpretation of their texts.

Did learning game design help you understand ideas of audience, genre, and/or rhetoric? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

Absolutely. As my students built their games, they constantly took their audience (which was usually their peers) into account. The *A to Z* team regularly debated whether they should color code their word-cards by difficulty, so younger players could compete with older players. The *Roman Empire* team took steps to introduce their audience to the conventions of the JRPG (Japanese Roleplaying Game) genre as several students were not familiar with the genre to which *RPG Maker VX Ace* is best suited. For example: in JRPGs,

players are expected to probe their environment to discover clues and information about the world in which they are playing. When students unfamiliar with this convention did not perceive the game as educational, it wasn't because the educational elements didn't exist; rather, it was because those students didn't know to look for them. The *Roman Empire* team really struggled to make their game more educational for their players and experimented with putting historical facts in different places to improve the odds that the player would have an educational experience.

I should have explained genre more in class to help my students understand their rhetorical situation, and I might have accomplished this in several ways. Similar to how the class dissected the proposal genre, I could have asked my students to dissect the JRPG genre and even create a shared Google Doc to that end.[1] Conversely, I might have asked the *Roman Empire* team to build a stronger tutorial for their game with which they could better prepare the player. Either way would have encouraged a better understanding of their rhetorical situation.

What were your expectations for the game design project before it began?

Like my students, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. At the beginning of the semester, I had not read LaVaque-Manty's chapter in *Composition/Rhetoric/Play*, so I didn't have any models in regard to class design, and I certainly didn't have any examples of student-designed games. I knew that student-designed games were possible, and I suspected that my students would enjoy the game design process, but I wasn't sure how game design

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[1] I would recommend instructors unfamiliar with games to try this first method. Refer to Chapter 4 for a detailed description of how to use Google Docs to collaboratively generate a genre analysis.

would affect their learning experience. This might have been because my initial understanding of multimodal pedagogies was focused on the products (games) and not the process (game design). I later came to see that multimodal pedagogies are best made possible through the implementation of collaborative pedagogies. This shift made a huge difference in the way I conducted the classroom and the way my students perceived their roles. Now that I have examples of student-designed games to use in my future classes, I can worry less about the end product and simply focus on the process.[2]

How might you apply what you learned in the game design project to activities outside of this class?

I took a calculated risk when I chose this research topic for my thesis. If the Game Studio failed, not only would my students have suffered, but my research would have as well. Fortunately for all parties involved, the Game Studio curriculum accomplished a great deal in the short term, more than I originally envisioned. As a result, the Game Studio curriculum has deeply affected my teaching philosophy. In the past, my teaching philosophy briefly mentioned the incorporation of "play" in the classroom.[3] The experience of teaching the Game Studio has forced me to revisit the concept of play as I turned the entire class into a simulation game with real consequences for failure. I began to realize that the threat of poor grades is not enough to motivate some students; they need something immediate and tangible to inspire them. When I turned the curriculum into a game, my students'

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[2] For an example of a student-designed video game, the following contains a link to download and install a copy of *Roman Empire* at http://www.tmarkbentley.com/academic-pieces-and-professional-blog/.

[3] My teaching philosophy refers to John Cleese ("How to be Creative") and Steve Sherwood ("Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist"). Both of these discuss the concept of play in detail, and I recommend any instructor look to both of these for pedagogical inspiration.

opportunities for failure became tangible but not insurmountable. Student failure over a safety net is a crucial part of my teaching philosophy. In several activities (the in-class grading processes, in-class presentations, in-class proposal evaluations), many of my students experienced small failures that had a negligible impact on their final grades and gave them the opportunity to pick themselves up and try again. Maybe I'll look to trapeze artists next.

Now that you have made your game, what would you have liked to know before the game design project started?

My students and I are in complete agreement in regards to this question; we all wished we had concrete examples of what student-designed games might look like. At the beginning of the semester, I had no idea what kind of games my students were capable of producing in the final three weeks of the semester. I based the Game Studio on countless hours of research but putting that research into practice was a scary proposition. I wish I had more expressed more faith that my students would be able to succeed at designing games.

Initially, I was so focused on the game design aspects of the curriculum that I didn't realize in many ways, the Game Studio curriculum is just a themed FYC course. My students might have had similar apprehensions to a FYC course themed around healthcare, the food industry, or even pop culture (all common themes for FYC). When I framed the class around game design, I distracted my students from their anxieties about writing (even when they were writing for their games) by refocusing their anxieties on the game design aspects of the course, which in turn gave them the freedom to be more innovative in their writing/designing.

Students take the survey

My students' voluntarily provided anonymous responses to the five questions of the exit survey.[4] For many of them, this was the last academic task of the semester, so their responses were short; however, despite the brevity of their writing, several of my students displayed evidence of a high level of metacognition (thinking about thinking, or thinking about the learning process). When responding to the first survey question (Do you see a relationship between designing games and more traditional forms of writing? If so, can you describe this relationship?), one student said:

> Somewhat, when it comes to communication, this class taught me just that. I
> honestly feel I can communicate better now because of it. What's more
> important? Communication? Or capitalizing the C in China? (Student A)

The first two sentences of this response is just an affirmation of the class,[5] but the second clearly demonstrates an important distinction between effective communication (a higher order concept) and memorization of grammar rules (a lower order concern): communication is more important than punctuation.[6] When looking through the results of this research, I saw evidence that students weren't just providing affirmations for the course design, but they were also providing evidence that their answers were genuine.

Though not all of the students wrote eloquent responses, their answers were almost unanimously positive with the exception of the final question (Now that you have made your

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[4] I kept these responses anonymous because I did not want students to think that these surveys would influence their final grade. I printed out copies of the survey with spaces for my students to write responses. I collected the surveys at the end of finals day.

[5] Perhaps lip service to the instructor.

[6] I am sure some grammarians might contend that proper punctuation is an integral part of effective communication, which is certainly true; however, good grammar is nothing when authors do not understand the other elements of their rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, etc.).

game, what would you have liked to know before the game design project started?) When I created this question, I assumed that my students would have wanted to know more about game design or the technologies available. In contrast, many of the students wrote that they would want to know more about my expectations for the project.

In retrospect, this should not have surprised me, having never used game design as a framework for FYC. My syllabus gave a rough outline for the semester, but I had also given myself the freedom to adapt to the needs of my students as they tackled the more experimental projects of the semester. Going into the game proposal stage, I was intentionally vague about the final game design project because I had no way to anticipate the kinds of games my students would want to create. Now that I have taught and written extensively on the Game Studio, I can use this experience to better address student concerns in the future.

My students' responses to the other survey questions were overwhelmingly positive, and three topics came up repeatedly in their surveys:

- Designing games was easier than they had originally anticipated.

- The process of game design improved their audience awareness.

- Students felt more confident in their ability to collaborate with others. [7]

In the next few sections of this chapter, I explore these three topics and postulate why my students might have cited them in their responses.

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[7] I chose this particular order to highlight the collaborative nature of the Game Studio, which is a topic that my students mentioned despite not being listed anywhere on the survey.

Game design is hard - "I was terrified; expected it to be much harder & more strenuous on me, but it wasn't." (Student B)

In Chapter 3, I briefly comment on my students' initial reactions to the prospect of designing a game for a grade. Several students were excited, but many were scared that the task was going to be too difficult or even

GAME DESIGN WAS EASIER THAN ORIGINALY ANTICIPATED

6 — Did mention
7 — Did not mention

Figure 59. Number of students who thought game design would be hard.

impossible. Apparently, fear of inadequacy is a normal reaction to game design. In *AGD*, Schell describes this lack of confidence as would-be game designers "feel stuck in a catch-22: If only game designers can design games, and you can only become a game designer by designing games, how can anyone ever get started?... the answer is easy. Just say these magic words: *I am a game designer*" (ch. 1). He repeats the words "*I am a designer,"* in (his) italics, six times.

Schell's motivational words are reminiscent of the title and premise of Andrea Lunsford's *Everyone's an Author,* a text book for FYC. If everyone is an author, everyone is a game designer,

Figure 60. As I created the prospectus for my thesis, I also made a supplemental game in RPG Maker VX Ace *that included an early version of my ideas. They player was able to scroll the MLA style paper up and down by walking their character up and down the side of the screen.*

and authorities from both fields feel compelled to emphasize these facts, it stands to reason that game design, like writing, is not as mystical as many might perceive it to be. Until the recent proliferation of video games, the secrets of game design were rarely seen or discussed; have you ever considered the designing and revision process for *Candyland?* As games have become more diverse and more accessible, so have the tools for creating them. Similar to the way word-processors (and more recently Web 2.0 sites such as Twitter and Facebook) made publishing more accessible in the 80s and 90s,[8] accessible game design software, such as *RPG Maker VX Ace, Game Maker, Unity, Source,* and the *Unreal Engine,* have made game design a much more attainable pursuit.[9] As access to these design tools has increased, so has the number of independent and amateur game developers. I was aware of these shifts in accessibility because I have been researching games obsessively since I was eight years old (1988).[10] Many students (even the ones that self-identify as gamers) don't follow gaming trends as closely as I do, so it would make sense that they were intimidated by the idea.

Without any student-designed examples to show my students, they were reliant on their experiences with the professionally created rhetorical games that I assigned them in the syllabus and a short game I had designed as a supplement to my thesis prospectus (see figure 60).

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[8] Gail E. Hawisher, Paul LeBlanc, Charles Moran and Cynthia L. Selfe outline this transition in detail in *Computers and the Teaching of Writing in American Higher Education, 1979-1994: A History.* In this book, Hawisher, LeBlanc, Moran and Selfe discuss the many ways in which advancements in word-processing software and technological access completely altered composition scholarship.

[9] Most of these design softwares cost less than $100 and some (*Unity*, and *Unreal Engine*) are free for users until a game is published, at which point the creators of the design software charge a commission for the use of their design tools.

[10] In the 1980s and 90s, I read countless magazines like *PC Magazine* and *Nintendo Power.* In the late 1990s, I shifted to video game websites like www.happypuppy.com (which is no longer available). More recently I frequent websites like www.gamespot.com, in which excellent journalists like Danny O'Dwyer, Lucy James and Cameron Robinson feature well researched video editorials on gaming culture and trends.

After dedicating two days of class time to alleviating my students' concerns, most of my students felt more confident with the prospect of game design; however, if I had had an example of a student-designed game at the beginning of the semester, many of those concerns might have been abated. Now that I have concrete examples, I can circumvent dedicating so much class time to genuine, but perhaps unwarranted, concerns about game design.

Audience - "When I write papers for other classes or when I talk to people I will think about who my audience is and how to keep them interested." (Student C)

Of the thirteen surveys I took for the class, ten students specifically mentioned that learning game design improved their understanding of audience. This is

THE PROCESS OF GAME DESIGN IMPROVED AUDIENCE AWARENESS

- Did mention
- Did not mention

3

10

Figure 61. Number of students who said game design helped them understand audience.

probably due to my approach to peer review. Unlike a simple peer review session in which students merely read and provide unengaged feedback, the Game Studio created scenarios where students actively participated in the success of their peers. In several class assignments (the WoWHG, game proposal, and game design projects), students not only acted as

consumers of their peers' creative work, but also acted as evaluators and critics in very

concrete ways.

The WoWHG presentation project required students to analyze and grade the

presentations of their peers. Since these evaluations counted towards the students' final

grades, they paid much closer attention to what was being said during the debates. Unlike

when an instructor gives a student a grade, which can feel arbitrary to a student who doesn't

understand the grading rubric, WoWHG put students in the role of critical audience member

whose opinions matter in a solid way.

During the game proposal project, my students performed a genre analysis of several

proposal sub-genres, decided which features of those sub-genres would be most appropriate

for their games, and generated a definitive list of their expectations. Completing these tasks

forced my students to form a discourse community in the classroom, which gave them a

better understanding of the way professional discourse communities agree on preferred

styles (like MLA and APA) and prioritize certain pieces of information based on the need of

the rhetorical situation.

The discourse community evolved further during the game design process, as the

students had several opportunities to give and receive constructive feedback: they chose a

game idea from their peers' game proposals, they playtested their peers' games, and they

provided a final critique/grade for their peers' games. Since the students could physically

watch these evaluations take place, especially during the playtesting stage, they were able to

understand the needs of their audience and adapt their games accordingly. Compared to

other peer review activities, in which students merely read the texts of their peers and

provide passive feedback, playtesting forced students to physically engage in the texts of

their peers. The weaknesses of the students' early game manual drafts physically manifested, as the players fumbled with awkwardly written directions; the students often gave the best feedback without even trying.

In a more traditional classroom setting, students only turn papers in to an instructor for a few days who returns them with cryptic comments and a grade at the bottom.[11] In the Game Studio, I still reviewed my students' work; however, a large portion of the grading process was transparent because my students were their own audience. In short, they understood audience, because they practiced being the audience.

Collaboration - "This project helped with group working skills and leadership skills…" (Student D)

When I first started researching for the Game Studio, I simply wanted to assign a video game assignment under the umbrella of multimodality;[12] after all, what is more multimodal than a video game? I expected that my
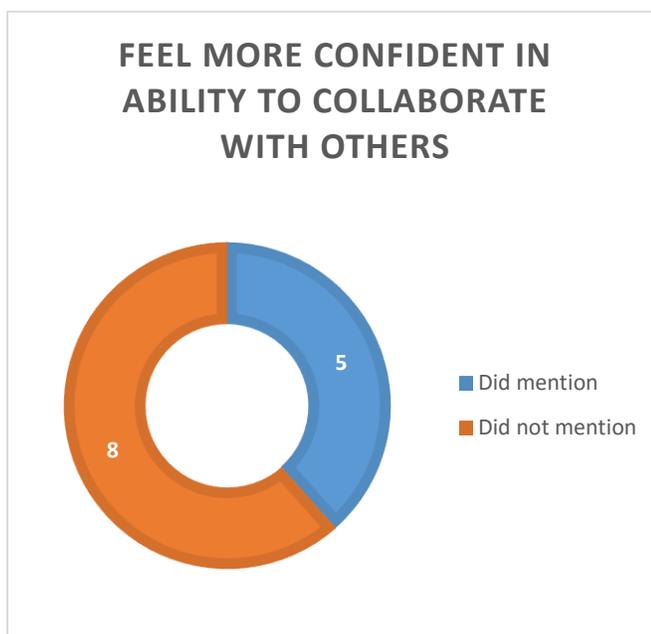
Figure 62. Number of students who said game design improved their collaboration and teamwork skills.

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[11] I recognize this form of grading is unavoidable to a degree; however, the purpose of this example to contrast experiences of the student, not to polarize instructors who grade in this way. I provided feedback in this way for almost all of the projects in the Game Studio.

[12] Not only did MTSU's FYC "Literacy for Life" learning objectives give priority to multimodal projects, but I had also just met Cheryl Ball at MTSU's Peck Series and had an opportunity to bounce thesis ideas off her for about an hour on the way to the airport.

research would focus on multimodal literacies or even technology in the classroom; I did not expect that my research into video game design would lead me to concentrate so heavily on collaborative pedagogies. Very few games are created by a single designer. It takes teams of individuals with diverse talents to create a game. In many ways, FYC composition is a perfect space for the diversity required for game design because the student population is so diverse.

In the survey, over twenty-five percent of my students wrote that collaboration and teamwork were the primary skills they learned in the Game Studio.[13] In Chapter 2, I explained how Ann L. Brown fostered the development of a "minilearning community" where the strongest members of the class were able to build up the weakest. If instructors embrace their students' experience as a class resource, the opportunities for instruction are multiplied by the number of individuals in the classroom.

What makes the Game Studio special is that it puts a lot of power in the hands of the students. When my students wrote that they learned about collaboration and teamwork, it wasn't because I taught those skills or even referred to collaboration in their W2L or WID tasks; it was because those skills were absolutely essential to the tasks I required them to complete. They learned to collaborate because they did not want to let down the other members of their discourse community. The Game Studio, just like any collaborative endeavor, requires a certain amount of trust. Students have to trust that instructors will be supportive and provide a positive learning environment, and instructors have to trust in their students' capacities to learn. Benjamin Zander, the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, said in his 2008 TED Talk:

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[13] Twenty-five percent might not seem like much, but nowhere in the survey was collaboration or teamwork mentioned (unlike "audience"). The students made this distinction on their own.

> It's one of the characteristics of a leader that he not doubt for one moment
>
> the capacity of the people he's leading to realize whatever he's dreaming.
>
> Imagine if Martin Luther King had said, "I have a Dream. Of course, I'm not
>
> sure they'll be up to it."

Originally, my dream was to see my FYC students design rhetorically charged video games, but as I researched and taught the Game Studio curriculum, it became apparent that my dream of simply designing games in class was short sighted. Teaching game design in a classroom is not for everyone the same way that teaching classical music is not for everyone, but the dream in Martin Luther King's speech refers to something more complex than adopting a theme for an FYC class. His dream was about learning to working together and collaborating for a better future.

Designing games was fun, but more important was my focus on creating a student-led discourse community, without which student-designed games would be an unattainable pipe-dream. In order to foster the creation of this community, I thought of the class as a simulation game for the world outside my classroom. This simulation had real consequences (like in the real world), and those consequences were driven by student interaction. I frequently made my students work in groups and evaluate the effectiveness of their peers. The evaluative portion of these student interactions created consequences for failure that were low stakes but still real. Designing the class as a game works because games are more tangible than grades.

Epilogue-ish

Refining my own work

Moving forward, I will continue fine-tuning the Game Studio and this research. Video games and other interactive media have created a brave new world for FYC scholarship. My hope is that the research and experiences outlined in this thesis will be part of a trend in which FYC instructors think and teach outside the bounds of traditional writing instruction. Teaching game design in FYC is just one of many ways to push these boundaries, and other frameworks may prove equally beneficial to students; however, I have found that the diverse requirements of game design substantially complement the diverse needs of FYC.

In Chapter 2, I included Schell's list of twenty different areas of study necessary to become a good game designer; this alone warrants the study of game design in FYC. Not every student in FYC is an aspiring writer (or game designer), but the diverse demands of the Game Studio give students with different aptitudes an opportunity to contribute to the discourse community of the FYC classroom in ways that other frameworks do not.

Refining the scholarship

Journals such as *Kairos* are free to access and encourage their writers to experiment with new formats and mediums in order to demonstrate ideas clearly, free from the limits of traditional journals more grounded in the text and print-based publication paradigm. I hope to see more FYC instructors publish their findings (in open source journals such *Kairos*)

about teaching game design. [14] I would also like to see more examples of student-designed games available to download online. If LaVaque-Manty had published examples of student-designed games online, I might not have needed to spend so much time addressing my students' concerns at the beginning of the game proposal project as they would have had concrete examples to use as inspiration.

Refining the technology

New game design technologies are released all the time, and not all of them are strictly "digital." *Tabletop Simulator*, as its name suggests, is a digital tabletop where users can play analog tabletop games in a digital space. Using an internet connection, multiple players (or designers) can log into the same
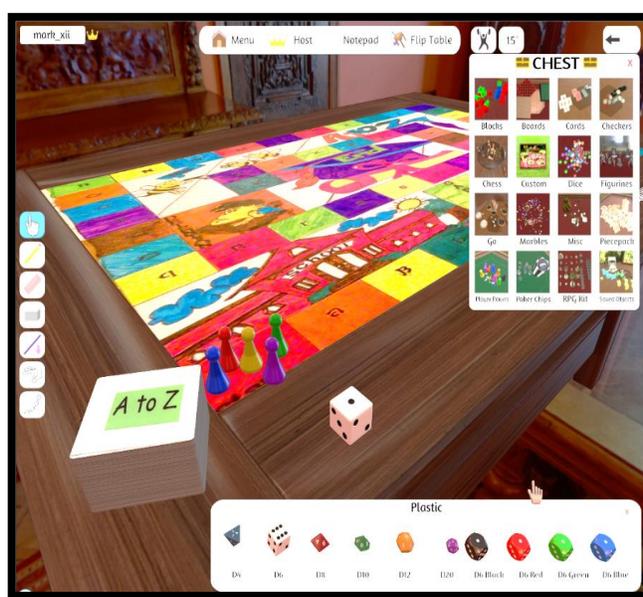
Figure 63. I took the liberty of making a quick digital version of A to Z *using the* Tabletop Simulator's *interface.*

digital tabletop, and, once connected, they can chat, manipulate objects with real simulated physics (ideal for rolling digital dice), and even draw on the game board with a mouse. Of course, the use of this software would require access to an internet-connected computer, but it also cuts down on creation time since digital files can be much easier to edit and have the convenience of the undo button (see figure 63). Provided my future students have access to

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[14] Perhaps I will write a video game based on the Game Studio and get it published.

computers, I might require that all of their projects be digital and insist that any "analog" games be made using *Tabletop Simulator.*

Refining ourselves

Finally, everyone (politicians, academic administrators, instructors, parents, and students) should buy a dedicated video game console,[15] buy a few games,[16] and play them! Games offer some of the most moving and diverse experiences on the planet. One of the worst things we can do is condemn an entire media genre before we truly understand it. Too often we see video games come under fire for being too violent (yet we give academy awards to movies like *Saving Private Ryan*), or for contributing to Attention Deficit Disorder (yet players often play games for hours at a time).

Figure 64. Never Alone, *by Upper One Games.*

Figure 65. In Papers Please, *players take on the role of an immigration officer.*

Figure 66. This War of Mine *tells the story of war from perspective of the victims.*

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[15] Preferably made by Nintendo, or PlayStation.
[16] I highly recommend the *Final Fantasy II* or *Final Fantasy IV*. They are very story driven games and don't require much "skill" to master.

Games are not just about improving hand eye coordination. The game industry is experiencing a renaissance, and games like *Darfur is Dying* are just the tip of the iceberg. *Never Alone* (see figure 65) is a game developed through a partnership between Upper One Games and the indigenous people of Alaska as a way to immortalize the stories of the indigenous Alaskan culture for a younger generation. *Papers Please* (see figure 66) puts players in the role of an immigration officer who has to make complex decisions about who to let in to the country and who to exclude. *This War of Mine* (see figure 67) is a war game told from the perspective of the victims of war, not the soldiers. Genuine meaningful experiences can be found in this medium; the time has come for all of us to take the plunge. Until we get into the games with our students and talk about them from the inside out (instead of the outside looking in), we will forever be immigrants babbling incomprehensibly to the natives.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MTSU's English 1010 "Literacy for Life" Learning Objectives

1. Students will understand **composition as a field of study** that involves research about writing and how it works.
2. Students will define and illustrate **key concepts** in composition studies: rhetorical situation, exigence, purpose, genre, critical analysis, audience, discourse community, reflection, context, composing, and knowledge.
3. Students will **read and analyze** various types of text—print, visual, digital, and audio.
4. Students will complete **writing tasks** that require understanding the rhetorical situation and making appropriate decisions about content, form, and presentation. At least one of these tasks will give students practice distilling a primary purpose into **a single, compelling statement**.
5. Students will get practice writing in **multiple genres** and in response to real world writing situations.
6. Students will conduct basic **research** necessary for completing specific writing tasks, learning to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources and between fact, opinion, and inference.
7. Students will develop the skill of **constructive critique**, focusing on higher order concerns, including matters of design, during peer workshops.
8. Students will know how to use their **handbook** as a reference tool.
9. Students will develop their own **writing theory** (based on the key concepts) that they can transfer to writing situations in other classes and in life.

APPENDIX B: Game Studio Syllabus

English 1010–05 – Spring 2015 – Literacy for Life – Syllabus

Instructor	T. Mark Bentley	**Setting**	MWF 9:10 – 10:05 am COE Room 104
Office	Peck Hall 105	**E-mail**	███████████████ ████████
Office Hours	_____	**Phone**	████████████

Required text for class:

- Lunsford, Andrea A., et al. *Everyone's an Author*. New York: Norton, 2013. Print
  - **ISBN 978-0393932119**
- Lunsford, Andrea A. *Easy Writer: A Pocket Reference*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2010. Print.
  - **ISBN 978-1457695483**

We will be using both of these books regularly in class, so make sure that you bring them with you. If you can find e-book versions of either of these texts feel free to use those; however, I will be referencing the printed version and not the electronic on in class.

Other Requirements for the class

- **Gmail and access to Google Docs:**
  Many of our in class activities will be using Google Docs and a Gmail account is required to access this. If you don't want to share a personal Gmail account with your classmates, then you should consider creating a new account just for class. **Do not use this email account to contact me. Use your MTSU account.**
- **Internet access:**
  Many of your assigned "readings" will actually be videos that you can only access online. If you do not have reliable access to the internet you might need to schedule time in the library or the computer lab in order to view these.

Description of class:

This class is designed to prepare you for whatever major writing assignments and projects you might encounter during your time here at MTSU. This semester our class will be themed in video games and analogue games. Each project for this class will scale in complexity, but if you stay on top of the work and remain engaged in the classroom you will set yourself up for success. We will have four major sections, each one building upon the next. You will learn how to write for a range of varying audiences, think critically about your own work and the work of your fellow classmates, analyze the ways a "text" makes an argument, and work collaboratively to make your own arguments.

Final Grade:

In order to succeed in this course you will need to show significant improvement in your understanding of composition over the course of the semester. The following is a breakdown of how your assignments will affect your final grades.

Final Grade Breakdown

Project 1: Game Walkthrough	10 Points
Project 2: Rhetorical Analysis	20 Points
Project 3: Educational Game Proposal	20 Points
The WoW Hunger Games	10 Points
Final Project: Game Pitch	20 Points
Writing 2 Learn Journal	10 Points
Attendance	10 Points
TOTAL:	**100 Points**

Letter Grade Breakdown

		B+	88-89	C+	78-79				
A	90-100	B	83-87	C	73-77	D	60-69	F	0-59
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72				

Please note that while a grade of D may be awarded to individual assignments, a D is not a passing grade for English 1010. To pass English 1010 students must receive a final grade of 70 or higher. Students who do not qualify for a passing grade at the end of the semester may be eligible for a grade of N. An N grade is a non-punitive grade. While an N is not a passing grade, it allows the student to retake the class without a penalty to his or her GPA. To qualify for an N, the student must be taking ENGL1010 for the first time; additionally, the student must complete all assignments and have satisfactory attendance.

◢ Projects:

Each of these assignments will be explained in further detail as the semester passes. I will be giving you an assignment sheet later in the semester for each project. The assignment sheet should act as your guide as you work through each project. If you have questions about an assignment, look at the assignment sheet **first** for answers. If you still can't find the answer, feel free to ask me.

Project 1: Video Game Walkthrough

In this relatively low stakes assignment you will describe in detail how to complete the first level of the original Super Mario Brothers to someone who has never played the game before. Don't be distracted by the simplicity of this assignment. I'm looking for an incredible amount of detail in this assignment.

Project 2: Rhetorical Analysis of TED talk or Game

For this assignment you will either demonstrate your ability to analyze an argument presented in one of the TED talks or one of the games assigned as a class reading. Either choice will have you not only describe the overarching argument of a work, but also describe how that work makes that argument.

Project 3: Educational Game Proposal

The success of this assignment will help determine the success of your final project. For this assignment you will write a proposal for an educational game. This could be a video game, or a physical game, it's up to you. You decide the lesson that you want to teach and decide the way that the game will teach that lesson.

Final Project: Group Game Pitch

This will be the culmination of everything that you've done so far in the class. You will be broken up into groups of five and then will be tasked to choose a proposal from among your group's previous assignments. Using that proposal as an outline you will spend final few weeks of class developing a prototype for you your game as well as a presentation that you will pitch to the class as your final.

Writing 2 Learn (Journal)

You will keep an online digital journal (via Google Docs) of what you have learned over the course of the semester. This will be very informal writing, but I will read it and you will receive a grade for your work. In this journal you will write about how your understanding of the writing process has changed, evolved, or simply become clearer over the course of the semester.

This writing is completely informal so I will **not** be checking for grammar or punctuation so much as I will be looking for evidence that you are thinking about the process of writing in a critical way and that I can see evidence that you are working to improve your writing as a craft. We will talk more about this in class.

I will be periodically checking on this journal so make sure that you keep up to date with your postings. You should have at least one entry per reading assigned.

Academic Progress Reports

I will be posting your grades on D2L as soon as possible once grading is completed. Occasionally you might receive an email notice about an academic progress report. This is a way for me to keep you aware of your current standing in the class.

Course Policies:

Attendance:

With the exception of the items listed below, all absences are considered unexcused. I expect you to show up to class on time and ready to engage in the class activities. However, I understand that life is complicated, and you might not be able to make it to every class. You may have three absences without a negative impact on your final grade. After your third absence any additional absences will begin to affect your final grade for the class.

Attendance Break Down:	Points of Final Grade out of 10
0 Absences	12/10
1-3 Absences	10/10
4-5 Absences	05/10
6+ Absences	00/10

Exceptions are made for:

- **University-sanctioned activities.** Students shall not be penalized for such absences. Students anticipating participation in University functions which will take them out of classes should discuss these events prior to the absence with their instructors at the earliest convenient time. Additionally, students participating in University-sanctioned functions must provide documentation of the event on official letterhead or stationery.
- **Military service.** The University considers participation in military responsibilities as an excused absence. Notice of absence for service must be provided by the student/service member or an appropriate officer of the Armed Forces as soon as it is known that military orders are forthcoming for service. Notice must be provided to the Veterans Affairs Office which will notify the student's/service member's instructors. The notice must be written unless such notice is precluded by military necessity. Affected students should contact the Veterans Affairs Coordinator with questions regarding excused absences necessitated by military orders. Excessive absences of students who are veterans of the armed services, and who receive benefits by virtue of their service, must be reported to the Veterans Affairs Coordinator.

Changes in Schedule

This schedule can and probably will change over the course of the semester. If for any reason there is a change I will announce it in class. It is up to you to keep up with these changes.

In Class Behavior:

I look forward to having a productive semester with all of you, and I look forward to learning with you. HOWEVER, I will have very little patience for behavior that is either disruptive or disrespectful to the other members of the class.

Disruptive behavior includes, but is not limited to the following: intentionally antagonizing the instructor, receiving phone messages or text-messaging in class, leaving class early or coming to class habitually late, talking out of turn, doing assignments for other classes, and engaging in other activities that detract from the classroom learning experience. Work missed by the student (in the rare case that s/he is removed from the class) will not be allowed to be made up, and the student will be considered absent for the day(s) removed from the class.

Late Work:

If a student is unable to meet the assigned deadline due to unforeseen circumstances (such as **severe illness or a death in the family**) the student may ask for an extension. Extensions will be granted only at the discretion of the instructor. Students must request an extension before an assignment is due. If an extension is granted, the essay will not be penalized for being submitted late; otherwise, late work will be penalized 2 points for each day it is late, counting weekends.

Academic Misconduct:

For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

1. **Plagiarism.** The adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, statements, images, or works of another person as one's own without proper acknowledgment.
2. **Cheating.** Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise. The term academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours.
3. **Fabrication.** Unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.
4. **Facilitation.** Helping or attempting to help another to violate a provision of the institutional code of academic misconduct.

I have designed this class so it will be extremely difficult to cheat, or plagiarize work, however, If I find out that you are intentionally trying to receive credit for someone else's work I will report you academic affairs and you will receive an F for the semester. We will discuss this further on the first day of class. If you have any questions please ask.

Additional Information for Students:

University Writing Center

The UWC is located in room 362 of Walker Library. In addition to providing students help with their essays, the UWC's website has many helpful tools for students (http://www.mtsu.edu/uwc/index.shtml). Students will never be required to go to the writing center, but many who do see marked improvements in their grades. Appointments are usually required, so contact the Writing Center at 904-8237 for an appointment.

Inclement Weather

In the event of inclement weather, you should first check the MTSU homepage to see if classes have been cancelled. You should also check your MTSU email account because there is a possibility that I might be forced to cancel class even if MTSU is open. If MTSU has not been officially closed for the day and I have not emailed you, assume that classes will meet. Per MTSU policy, students should exercise their own judgment when inclement weather exists and will not be counted absent if they choose not to attend because of extreme weather.

Accommodations

Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: ADA accommodation requests (temporary or permanent) are determined only by Disabled Student Services. Students are responsible for contacting the Disabled Student Services Office at 615-898-2783 to obtain ADA accommodations and for providing the instructor with the Accommodation Letter from Disabled Student Services.

Lottery Scholarship

Do you have a lottery scholarship? To retain the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship eligibility, you must earn a cumulative TELS GPA of 2.75 after 24 and 48 attempted hours and a cumulative TELS GPA of 3.0 thereafter. A grade of C, D, F, FA, or I in this class may negatively impact TELS eligibility.

APPENDIX C: Game Studio Schedule

Course Schedule

		In Class	Homework
Week 1	Day 1	Ice Breaker Activities	
	Day 2	Setup Gmail Assign W2L Journal and Game Walkthrough	Everyone's an Author: Read Chapter 30 "Designing What you Write" TED Talk: Watch John Bohannon "Dance vs. PowerPoint, a modest proposal"
	Day 3	Discussion on Semiotics Activity: Four Icon Challenge	Video Game: Play *Darfur is Dying* for at least one hour.
Week 2	Day 1	Review examples of Game Walkthroughs online.	Video Game: Play "Windfall" by Persuasive Games for at least one hour.
	Day 2	Discussion on Windfall	Play "Food Import Folly" by the *New York Times* for at least one hour.
	Day 3	Discussion of TED Talks	YouTube: Onion Talks "Ducks Go Quack, Chickens Say Cluck" YouTube: Onion Talks "Compost-Fueled Cars: Wouldn't that be Great?" **LAST DAY TO DROP WITHOUT A "W"**
Week 3	Day 1	Discussion on Genre	Everyone's an Author: Read Chapter 33 "Taking Advantage of the Writing Center" TED Talk: Watch Dave Eggers "My Wish: Once Upon a School."
	Day 2	Peer Review Workshop	TED Talk: Watch Susan Cain "The power of introverts" **BRING DRAFT OF PROJECT 1**
	Day 3	Class discussion about Game Walkthrough	**PROJECT 1 DUE: GAME WALKTHROUGH**
Week 4	Day 1	Assign Rhetorical Analysis of Video Game	Everyone's an Author: Read Chapter 2 "Rhetorical Situations" TED Talk: Watch Sir Kenneth Robison "How Schools Kill Creativity."

	Day 2	Discussion on Sir Kenneth Robinson's TED Talk	*Everyone's an Author*: Read Chapter 7 "Arguing a Position"
	Day 3	Discussion about TED Talk Genre	*Everyone's an Author*: Read Chapter 13 "Analyzing Arguments" TED Talk: Watch Benjamin Zander TED talk "The Transformative Power of Classical Music"
Week 5	Day 1	Discussion on *Oil God*	Play *Oil God* *Everyone's an Author*: Read Chapter 1 "Thinking Rhetorically"
	Day 2	Discussion on *Everyone's an Author* Chapter 9	*Everyone's an Author*: Read Chapter 9 "Writing Analytically"
	Day 3	"How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis Activity"	*Everyone's an Author*: Read Chapter 5 "Writing and Rhetoric as a Field of Study"
Week 6	Day 1	"How to Write a Rhetorical Analysis Activity" Cont.	
.	Day 2	Group Peer Review	**BRING DRAFT OF RHETORICAL ANALYSIS**
	Day 3		**PROJECT 2 DUE: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF TED TALK**
Week 7	Day 1	WoW HUNGER GAMES	
	Day 2	WoW HUNGER GAMES	Work on WoW Hunger Games
	Day 3	WoW HUNGER GAMES Writing a Proposal	**WoW HUNGER GAMES PRESENTATIONS DUE**
Week 8	Day 1	Assign Game Proposal Concerns Activity Prompt #1	*Everyone's an Author*: Read Chapter 19 "Writing a Project Proposal" **and** "A Sample Research Proposal" Page 374-376*Everyone's an Author*: Read Chapter 3 "Writing Processes"
	Day 2	Concerns Activity Prompt #2	
	Day 3	Brainstorming Activities	Bring Instructions for either a Board Game or Video Game

Week 9	Day 1	Brainstorming Activities	*Everyone's an Author:* Read Chapter 12 "Choosing Genres"
	Day 2	Conventions of the Proposal Genre Activity	
	Day 3	Defining the Needs of the Game Proposal Activity	
Week 10	Day 1	Group Peer Review	PEER REVIEW – BRING DRAFT OF PROJECT 3
	Day 2	Group Peer Review	PEER REVIEW – BRING DRAFT OF PROJECT 3
	Day 3	Class Discussion	PROJECT 3 DUE: PROPOSAL
Week 11	Day 1	Assign Game Design Project Break into groups, evaluate game proposals, and choose game design	*Everyone's an Author:* Read Chapter 4 "The Need for Collaboration"
	Day 2	Game Studio	
	Day 3	Game Studio	
Week 12	Day 1	Game Studio	
	Day 2	Game Studio	
	Day 3	Playtesting	Workshops for Final Project
Week 13	All week	Game Studio	
Finals Day		Final Presentations	Final Presentations Due

APPENDIX D: W2L Journal Assignment Sheet

English 1010 – Spring 2015 – T. Mark Bentley

Writing 2 Learn Journal

Description

Over the course of this semester you will keep a digital journal on Google docs. **You will need to write at least one entry per day that there is an assigned reading.** These entries should more than a few sentences but less than a whole page. The journal is essentially a pass fail assignment that I will checking on periodically throughout the semester. Since the journal will be kept online, you won't know when I'm going to be checking the journal so it's in your best interest to keep up with the journal at least once a week.

This journal is worth a letter grade and it will be very difficult to pass the course if you don't keep up with it, so make a note now that this should be part of your routine for the class.

Content

The content of the journal will revolve around the assigned readings, TED Talks, and game play that I've assigned you this semester. **I won't be checking for grammar, but I do expect to see evidence that you've put some thought into your writing.**

Headings

You must provide some kind of heading at the beginning of each section. This can be as simple as just writing the date, or even giving a short title to your entry. If you don't do this I may have a hard time figuring out whether or not you wrote something for each reading.

Grade

This journal will be worth 10 points of your final grade. **I will check it online 2 or 3 times over the course of the semester without warning** and I will leave a comment on your journal letting you know whether you pass or fail that check.

Document Sharing

You will need to share your journal with me so I can see it. I will go over how to do this in class, but you can also find instructions on how to do this on the back of this assignment sheet.

I will need to have permission to edit your journal as well, otherwise I won't be able to leave you feedback, or let you know that I've graded the work.

Share the document with my MTSU email address: tmb2c@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Questions

If you have any about how to accomplish any of this don't be afraid to email me ASAP.

APPENDIX E: Game Walkthrough Assignment Sheet

Project Number One: Game Walkthrough

Due: at start of class Monday, 02.02.2015

Description and Purpose

For this assignment you will find a YouTube video of a player successfully completing the first level of *Super Mario Brothers* originally released on the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1985. Using this video as a guide, **you will write detailed instructions describing how to complete the level.**

The purpose of this introductory assignment is to get you accustomed to the technology and language that we will be using throughout the class. **Think outside the text box.** To help make your ideas clear you can add screen captures, or other images (perhaps a picture of a controller that maps out the button assignments).

Game Link

There are many ways to complete the first level of Super Mario Brothers and there are almost as many videos of the level on YouTube, so I won't provide you a link to a specific one.

Audience

Your audience is someone who has **never played video games before.** You will need to provide all the information necessary for them to beat the first level. This means you will need to describe how to control the game as well as how to overcome the level's obstacles.

Instead it's up to you to look up a video and provide your reader with a link to that video.

Length and Format

There is **no minimum or maximum** length on this assignment; however, I am looking for you to be as thorough as possible. Remember, this person has never played the game before. What do the turtles mean if you run into them? Why should the player get the mushroom?

Works Cited MLA

Finally, you will need to provide a Works Cited for this assignment. You will need to cite both the video that you chose, and the original game.

For more information on how to cite your article consult the Easy Writer or go to the Purdue OWL website. You can find this site by googling "purdue owl MLA" or by going to the following web link https://owl.english.purdue.edu/

APPENDIX F: Game Walkthrough Rubric

Grading Rubric

	Excellent (2.0 pts)	Good (1.5 pts)	Fair (1.0 pts)	Poor (0.5 pts)
Description	This document provides more than enough detail on how to complete the level. Language is clear and provides visual aids.	This email provides just enough information on how to complete the level. Language is clear and may provide visual aids.	This email provides just enough information on how to complete the level.	This email is either for the wrong level, confusing to read, or simply does not provide enough information to the reader.
Audience	All of the language is appropriate for the intended audience.	Most of the language is appropriate for the intended audience.	Some of the language is appropriate for the intended audience.	None of the language is appropriate for the intended audience.
Format/ Design	All of the format is appropriate, easy to understand and designed in an aesthetically pleasing way. Visual aids may have been used to help the reader understand the game.	All formatting is appropriate, and easy to understand but some design elements could use improvements. Visual aids may have been used to help the reader understand the game.	The format can be understood, but some elements may be out of place, cluttered, or poorly placed.	There is little or no evidence that the writer took formatting into account before submitting this email.
Works Cited	Follows MLA Guidelines with no errors.	Follows MLA guidelines with one or two errors.	Follows MLA Guidelines with three errors.	Either does not follow MLA guidelines or has four or more errors.
Grammar and Spelling	The writer uses all correct grammar and spelling.	The article contains mostly correct grammar and spelling.	The article contains several grammar and spelling mistakes.	The article contains many grammar and spelling mistakes.

APPENDIX G: Rhetorical Analysis of Video Game Assignment Sheet

English 1010 – Spring 2015 – T. Mark Bentley

Project Number Two: Rhetorical Analysis of Video Game

Due: February 27, 2014

Description

Over the course of the semester, you have been exposed to several games that cover a wide range of subjects. My hope is that you have found at least one of them thought provoking. This assignment will have you explore **how** these arguments work.

This is not an assignment about whether or not you agree with the speaker or game, rather how the speaker or game makes an argument. This is also **not a synopsis** of the argument. You will need to provide examples to back up your analysis, but you will need to explain why you chose those examples and what those examples do for the speaker's argument. We will talk about the difference between synopsis and analysis in class.

Purpose and Audience

The purpose of this project is to give you an opportunity to look at games in a completely new way. While I will be the one reading and grading your work, **imagine your audience is a group of people that have not seen or played the game you are analyzing.** Because they may or may not be familiar with the topic, you should provide examples from the game in order for your readers to understand the context of your analysis.

Length and Format

This paper should be about three to four pages or about 1000-1500 words and written in MLA format. You must include an in text citation.

Just like with the formal letter you will need to include a Works Cited page for this paper. You should only have one source for this paper, which is game you have chosen. For more information on how to cite your article consult the Easy Writer or go to the Purdue OWL website. You can find this site by googling "purdue owl mla" or by going to the following web link https://owl.english.purdue.edu/

APPENDIX H: Rhetorical Analysis of Video Game Rubric

English 1010 – Spring 2015 – T. Mark Bentley

Grading Rubric

	Excellent (4.0 pts)	Good (3.0 pts)	Fair (2.0 pts)	Poor (1.0 pts)
Analysis	Specific, developed analysis and insightful observations.	Analysis is generally sound but could be more specific or insightful in some areas.	General and/or undeveloped analysis.	No relevant analysis and insightful observations made
Supporting Details	Support information is related to analysis and supportive of the topic/subject.	Support information has minor weaknesses relative to analysis and/or support of the topic/subject.	Support information has major weaknesses relative to analysis and/or support of the topic/subject.	No support information found or irrelevant.
Flow of writing/ Organization	The writing is written in a fluid and logical manner. Uses transitions between main ideas and those ideas are well organized.	The writing is mostly fluid and organized. Uses transitions between most of the main ideas and those ideas are well organized.	The ideas may be strong, but the writing is unorganized and may seem disjointed in parts.	The writing is unorganized. May be difficult to understand the flow of thought from one idea to another, or the ideas are not related in any coherent way.
Polish/Grammar	Demonstrates skillful writing fluency, exhibits few or no mechanical errors.	Demonstrates reasonable writing fluency, exhibits few mechanical errors.	Writing fluency is lacking, exhibits several mechanical errors.	Writing is not fluent— unreadable.
MLA and Documentation	Sources are cited correctly in the document and on the reference page.	Sources are cited, but there are a few errors in the format.	Sources are cited, but there are several errors in the format.	Sources are not cited at all.

APPENDIX I: Game Proposal Assignment Sheet

English 1010-05 – Spring 2015 – T. Mark Bentley

Project Number Three: The Proposal

Due: Monday 04.06.2015

Description

This semester many of your reading assignments have either been games or videos. For this assignment you will start the process of creating your own game. For this assignment you will start the process of creating your own game. **When you get into the real world, you will quickly learn that people with a plan get more done than people without a plan.** These plans don't just appear out of thin air; they are brainstormed and developed over a long period of time. For the purposes of this class, we will be speeding up the process quite a bit. We will be brainstorming, drafting, and submitting proposals in just over two weeks. The success of this project will directly affect your final projects so I advise you to come to every class during this time so you won't miss out on any step of the process.

Type of Game

The game will be educational, but outside of that, the game that you propose is up to you. **It can be digital (***Darfur is Dying, Windfall***) or analog (***Monopoly, Chutes and Ladders***).** The type of game **will be largely determined by what you want the game to teach.**

- Digital games will need to have 4 minutes of complete gameplay.
- Analog games must be fully functional.

Purpose and Audience

The Purpose of this assignment convince both myself and your peers that this is a game worth creating.

Length and Format

This proposal should be at least 500 words long, but probably much longer. Don't concern yourself with word length, instead remember that your classmates will be the ones reading these. You want to make sure they understand you idea.

- Design your proposal in a way that is easy to understand for both your classmates and myself.
- Don't assume you reader knows anything about game design.

Other things to consider

- What kinds of technology will you need?
  o Photoshop
  o Google docs
  o Game design software… etc.
    ▪ RPG Maker
    ▪ Game Maker
  o Analog game materials.
    ▪ Cardboard
    ▪ Markers
    ▪ Index cards
    ▪ Etc.
- How much time will the game take to create?
- How will tasks be delegated across the team?

APPENDIX J: Game Proposal Rubric

Grading Rubric

	Perfect (5.0)	Good (4.0 pts)	Fair (2.0 pts)	Poor (1.0 pts)
Game Idea	Proposal clearly defines game idea and identifies key components of the **game concept.**			
Methods	Proposal provides **more than enough detail** that the reader will have a good sense of what is involved with creating the game. This might include a **timeline,** and/or **how the work will be divided among the team.**			
Audience	All of the **language is appropriate** for the intended audience.			
Format	All of the **format is appropriate, easy to understand** and **designed in an aesthetically pleasing way.** The writer uses all **correct grammar and spelling.**			

APPENDIX K: Game Design Assignment Sheet

Final Project: Rhetorical Game Design

Due: Wednesday May 6, 2015 at 10:00 am.
NO LATE SUBMISSIONS!!!

Description

It all comes down to this. Over the course of this semester I've asked you to write game walkthroughs, play rhetorically charged games, analyze various forms of multimedia (including games), make argumentative presentations based on the rules of game, and write a proposal for a game that teaches its players something.

If you haven't figured it out already, this class is not just about writing, but also about learning to be critical of the media you consume. This could be books you read, movies you watch, music you hear, or the games you play. Games are just a framework for the bigger topics of rhetoric, the writing process, and understanding many different genres of writing.

This final project will have you combine everything you have learned up to this point and create a learning experience of your own. You and your team members will create a game.

Approval of Game

In the past I've been very involved in the decisions about content. I provided you with topics for both project 1 and 2, and I worked closely with your through multiple meetings for your game proposals.

For this final project, I will be available to answer questions if you have them, but for the most part you will be relying on your group to make the final decision for your game topic. You will have all of your team's game proposals to choose from, but you are not limited to those choices. Your group might collaborate together and come up with a better fit for this assignment.

Audience

Your audience will vary depending on the type of game you decide to create. It is up to your team to decide the target audience for your game.

Game Requirements

The game must be in a functional state by the day of the final. If you choose to make an analogue game, the game must be complete. If you design a digital game, the game will need to be functional through at least a single level, or at least four minutes of interactive gameplay.

All games (digital or analogue) must come with a manual that explains the rules of the game. If the game is analogue, this document will need to be very detailed and explicit. If your game is digital, the manual will probably be less complex as you can build many tutorials into the game experience. Both analogue and digital game manuals will need to include an introduction to the game.

Both analogue and digital games should have some kind of reward experience and possibility of failure. This could be as simple as a digital game telling you "Good job," or the death of the game character, or might be more complicated (in game money, life points, etc.)

APPENDIX L: Game Design Rubric

Grading Rubric

English 1010 – Fall 2014 – T. Mark Bentley

	Excellent (4.0)	Good (3.0)	Fair (2.0)	Poor (1.0)
Digital Games	The game is functional and has a complete first level, or at least four minutes of solid interactive gameplay. There is reward system and opportunity for failure and it explicitly teaches a lesson.			
Analogue Games	The game is fully functional "out of the box." There is reward system and opportunity for failure and it explicitly teaches a lesson.			
The Game Manual	The game manual explains all the rules necessary to play the game out of the box. It includes an introduction that clearly explains the goals of the game. It is carefully edited and appropriate for the audience of the game.			
Playtesting	Your team provides constructive feedback to the other teams and is supportive of their project. Your team is also willing to receive constructive criticism and solicit help from other teams.			
Individual Collaboration	Your team members all agree that you have contributed in a meaningful way to success of the game and/or game manual.			
Evaluation of Other Teams	The other teams all agree that your team has created a game that meets the requirements of the assignment and that your team has been a positive influence on their games as well.			

APPENDIX M: IRB Exemption

MIDDLE TENNESSEE
STATE UNIVERSITY

4/22/2015

Investigator(s): Thomas Bentley, Allsion Smith,
Department: English
Investigator(s) Email Address: tmb2cc@mtmail.mtsu.edu; Allsion.Smith@mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: THE GAME STUIDO: REVERSE ENGINEERING RHETORIC THROUGH THE LENSE OF GAME CREATION

Protocol Number: #15-297

Dear Investigator(s),

Your study has been designated to be exempt. The exemption is pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1) Evaluation/Comparison of Instructional Strategies/ Curricula.

We will contact you annually on the status of your project. If it is completed, we will close it out of our system. You do not need to complete a progress report and you will not need to complete a final report. It is important to note that your study is approved for the life of the project and does not have an expiration date.

The following changes must be reported to the Office of Compliance before they are initiated:
- Adding new subject population
- Adding a new investigator
- Adding new procedures (e.g., new survey; new questions to your survey)
- A change in funding source
- Any change that makes the study no longer eligible for exemption.

The following changes do not need to be reported to the Office of Compliance:
- Editorial or administrative revisions to the consent or other study documents
- Increasing or decreasing the number of subjects from your proposed population

If you encounter any serious unanticipated problems to participants, or if you have any questions as you conduct your research, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Lauren K. Qualls, Graduate Assistant
Office of Compliance
615-494-8918

MTSU Compliance Office
010A Sam Ingram Bldg.
1301 E. Main St.
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

Template Revised March 2014