HINTS, ADVICE, AND MAYBE CHEAT CODES: AN ENGLISH TOPICS COURSE ABOUT COMPUTER GAMES

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Inherently complex, computer games exist in the boundary zones between many of the more established disciplines in the contemporary university—disciplines such as computer science, engineering, art, physics, and business, to name a few. Implicated in all of these fields yet not defined by any, they embody one of the central challenges facing English Studies: the question of how to adapt pedagogies originally intended to address the exigencies of print culture to artifacts that produce meaning through a number of different and, at times, desperate mediums. This article describes a 300-level English topics course that I designed in response to this challenge. Focusing on the course syllabus, assignments, and other documents, it provides an overview of the course’s scaffolded, social-constructivist pedagogy. It explains how I employ specific elements of this pedagogy to accomplish two ostensibly contradictory goals: 1) to help students understand how the methodologies traditionally privileged by English Studies are relevant to computer games; and 2) to help them recognize and thereby address the limitations of these methodologies through scholarship, game design, or other forms of critical performance.

CRITICAL PROVOCATION

In their 2011 book, Gaming Matters: Art, Science, Magic, and the Computer Game Medium, Ruggill and McAllister write that computer games are inherently slippery, complex, and contradictory. They argue that it is difficult, if not impossible to produce a comprehensive or coherent definition of what constitutes computer games as a medium, employing terms like “idiosyncracy,” “irreconciliability,” and “alchemy,” (14). Discarding methodologies that reduce computer games to single, clearly definable genres, technologies, or properties, they challenge scholars to acknowledge the “complex and protean nature of the medium” (4). As they explain, “Computer games exist because of an élan of a multiplicity of perspectives, not the hegemony of just one. They are synergistic artifacts whose nuance really only begins to make sense when approached in kind” (3).
Following this provocation, the challenge of designing a course about computer games is not to define the medium, to provide students with a list of definitive characteristics, or even to teach them how to recognize the difference between good and bad games. The challenge is, instead, teaching students a critical methodology: a dialogical approach to computer games that helps them not only come to terms with the medium’s constant flux and contradictions but, in doing so, participate and perhaps intervene in the medium as critical subjects. Such a goal, of course, might seem overly ambitious, especially for a 300-level topics course designed primarily for students who, while not new to English Studies, have typically not had much experience analyzing media, technology, or mass culture. I argue, however, that it is imperative, especially if we are to remedy an oversight that, according to Hayles, has traditionally plagued English Studies. As she argues in her 2004 article, “Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis,” English Studies has long privileged print-based artifacts as the proper objects of study, often ignoring the critical question of how these artifacts have been shaped by the medium of print, either through material practices such as printing and typesetting, or through legal exigencies such as copyright and distribution (70). Hayles argues that this refusal to consider the impact of the medium on the way that texts make meaning has been detrimental to English Studies, leaving scholars largely unprepared to study emerging forms of digital production—forms that challenge many of the assumptions that the field has long held about print and print-based culture (71). As Ball and Moeller point out, this refusal has also resulted in a very limited definition of what constitutes composition and writing, one that privileges the scholarly essay and similar performances as the primary means of critical intervention.

COURSE DESIGN

My English 395 topics course is designed to not only help students better understand the critical topography and potential of English Studies in relationship to computer games and other emerging forms of media, but to empower them to move beyond the discipline into the more fraught territories of game studies and perhaps further afield. Accordingly, I construct the course around three major pedagogical goals:

1.) to teach students how to appreciate the inherent complexity of mediums such as computer games;
2.) to teach students how to locate themselves as critical subjects amidst this complexity; and
3.) to teach students how to participate in and make meaning from this complexity.

Articulated through three interlinked and, to some degree, overlapping units, these goals provide students with a starting point from which they can contribute to the scholarly conversations surrounding computer games on their own terms, either through the types of academic discourse traditionally privileged by English Studies, or through the medium of the games themselves.
I am very conscious that this pedagogy asks students to approach a subject in which they are deeply invested in ways that often challenges their assumptions and sense of expertise. To minimize the shock of this transition, I construct the course as a game in and of itself. As becomes clear from my syllabus, I use strikethroughs, parenthetical comments, and other typographical features to frame the course as a playful introduction to the otherwise ‘serious bizzness’ of studying games critically. I also make this point through my classroom management strategies. In an effort to encourage student engagement and collaborative learning, I typically structure each class meeting around a fifteen- to twenty-minute exercise that requires students to variously ‘play’ with and produce tangible results from course readings or other materials. An integral part of my pedagogy, these activities shift the burden of constructing meaning from assigned texts, games, and other materials from myself to students. Since they challenge students to create concrete outcomes under specific constraints, these activities also lay the foundation for extended reflection and discussions about core concepts. Equally significant, they require students to interact meaningfully with each other, and they afford me with an opportunity to give students individual attention as I rotate among groups, all of which increase the sense of community in the classroom.

PLAYING WITH LEGOS:

A case in point is the Lego exercise that I assign on the second day of class. Dividing the students into pairs, I challenge them to use exactly twenty-one Lego pieces to introduce their classmates. Posing a series of open-ended questions about the exercise, I then engage students in a larger discussion about the complicated relationship between play and games, rules and agency, and similar concerns. The Lego exercise thus fulfills a number of pedagogical purposes. Ostensibly an ice-breaking activity, it not only provides students with a concrete demonstration of what the course’s focus on play signifies, but also introduces the major concerns of the first unit of the course, specifically the core concepts and major concerns that define the normal discourse of game studies. More significantly, the exercise helps students understand the larger issue of how discourse works to facilitate and limit participation, oftentimes through material and symbolic affordances of the mediums it privileges. I make this point explicitly by calling attention to the fact that many of the Lego pieces that I provide originate in Star Wars (George Lucas, 1987) and Indiana Jones (Steven Spielberg, 1981) sets. I then ask students to discuss how the assumptions about gender and ethnicity implicit in the themed Lego pieces affect their ability to represent their classmates. As a means of broaching issues about power, control, and ownership, the Lego exercise therefore provides students with a metaphorical framework to understand how the dominant discourses of game studies—quite literally, the pieces of Legos that are available—both enable and constrain the conversations that ensue.

As such, this exercise anticipates the major objectives of the evaluation essay due at the conclusion of the unit. As detailed on the assignment sheet, this essay asks students to demonstrate their knowledge of the normal discourse of game studies by evaluating a
PUPPET TIME:

By contrast, the second unit of the course is more concerned with questions of subject construction—specifically, with helping students develop their own sense of critical expertise in relationship to computer games. Accordingly, most of the readings in this unit focus on issues surrounding computer games and gaming culture. Intended less as critical descriptions than provocations, these readings prompt students to take positions in regards to specific debates about topics such as the difference between hard-core and casual gamers, gender and ethnicity, violence, cheating, and similar issues. The goal of this unit is not impose particular critical position or viewpoints, but to teach students how to develop and articulate their own positions; to empower students to construct themselves as experts in their own right in relationship to specific crises in the normal discourse of game studies.

To this end, I introduce the unit’s objectives to students through another of the most distinctive exercises in the course. I bring construction paper, glue, and other crafting supplies to class. Breaking students into groups, I ask them to make paper bag puppets and stage a series of impromptu, collaborative ‘Ted Talks’ about each of the five sections in Katie Larsen McClarty’s “A Literature Review of Gaming in Education.” As with the Lego exercise, this exercise and the discussion that follows provides a metaphorical framework to help students not only think about game studies (and scholarship in general) as a critical performances, and also consider the ways in which these performances are constructed and policed through specific genres. In doing so, the puppet exercise helps students anticipate the objectives of the analysis essay due at the conclusion of the unit. As outlined on the assignment sheet, this essay asks students to locate a contradiction that manifests itself across several games and to examine this contradiction through a particular critical apparatus. This assignment thus requires students to approach computer games in terms of their inherent complexity and contradictions, much as they did in their evaluation essays. It also, however, requires them to explicitly locate themselves in relationship to this complexity through a critical, scholarly persona that they perform through research and argumentation.

EXHIBITIONISM:

The final unit of the course is concerned with helping students better understand the potential of abnormal discourse through questioning and experimentation. Intended as the culmination of the previous two units, this unit is constructed almost entirely through the final project of the course, which requires students to create their own games and present these as part of a
gaming expo held during the final exam period. Of all the major assignments in the class, this is perhaps the most intimidating. Although many students have played games for years, only a handful have attempted to mod—much less design—their own games. Accordingly, many students worry that they do not possess the requisite artistic or programming skills. I address these anxieties through a variety of strategies. First, I make it clear that students can also construct board games, card games, or paper prototypes of games. I am also careful to point out that I will not grade the game itself, but the reflection essay that students submit with it. Finally, I introduce students to a variety of free or low-cost game creation utilities such as *Sploder*, *Twine*, and *Gamemaker* as part of in-class exercises throughout the semester. Although limited, many of these programs are designed to help users quickly begin building games without much experience programming or generating in-game assets. Many also feature strong user communities and offer a range of tutorials, providing a manageable approach to what might otherwise appear to be a daunting assignment to students.

Emphasizing research, experimentation, and self-instruction, the course’s final project challenges students to move beyond the comfortable territory of the traditional assignments and academic performances privileged by English Studies. This is especially the case with the Gaming Expo, which, advertised to the entire college, explicitly requires students to look outward beyond the immediate scope of the classroom to a larger and potentially non-specialist audiences. In doing so, the expo reinforces the central theme of many of the readings I assign during the final unit—readings that broach the question of how games are implicated in a number of larger cultural and historical traditions beyond game studies. At the same time, however, the expo also requires students to look inward: to use their presentations to address the question of how computer games are relevant to English Studies and vice versa. As Trimbur writes about abnormal discourse, it thus prompts students to become more conscious of how these territories are constructed and policed, oftentimes in opposition to discourses that it are identified as unfamiliar and perhaps alien (469). The expo requires students to confront one of the overreaching questions that informs the entire course—that is, the question of what the idiosyncrasies and inherent contradictions of computer games reveal about the limitations and, therefore, the larger possibilities of English Studies as a discipline.

**ASSESSMENT:**

I employ three primary assessment strategies in English 395 above and beyond the summative assessment of evaluating student writing based on the outcomes established by the university’s office of assessment. First, I take careful notes about the lesson plans that I develop for individual class meetings, usually immediately after each class has met. Second, I incorporate reflection as often as possible into assignments and activities using the course’s achievement system to help students manage their own progress.

The first two means of assessment are, of course, standard practices for the type of formative assessment that scholars like Black and Wiliam advocate as a means of identifying and
intervening in the day-to-day activities of the classroom (5). For example, taking notes immediately after teaching helps me to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities I have constructed, gauge student response to readings and other materials, and make observations about the class’s progress towards larger course objectives. Similarly, integrating student reflection into large- and small-scale assignments explicitly requires students to constantly reevaluate their work in relationship to the goals of the course as a whole. The course’s achievement system, however, was not originally intended as a means of assessment. An outgrowth of the quest-based pedagogy that Barton and I describe in our 2010 chapter, “Quests and Achievements in the Classroom,” it was instead designed to serve two specific purposes. First, it was designed to bolster the writing requirements of the course. Deployed in conjunction with the course’s wiki, it incorporated a number of informal writing prompts that became the equivalent of a fourth major writing assignment. Second, it was intended as a means of communicating my expectations in regards to attendance, class participation, and many other aspects of the behaviors that instructors expect of students but rarely communicate explicitly.

While successful, the achievement system has also become central to the way I assess the course. Since achievements are relatively easy to grade and add or subtract as necessary, they give me the ability to actively chart student progress and engagement in the classroom, and, if warranted, direct students to supplemental content or special events via custom achievements. As such, they allow me to implement the sort of micro-assignments and rapid feedback loop that, according to Abrams and Gerber, is essential to incorporating game-like systems of authentic assessment into the classroom (99). More significantly, the relatively open-ended and unstructured nature of the achievement system encourages the sort of “self-regulated learning” that Black and William argue is crucial to student success, especially when implemented in conjunction with formative assessment strategies (17). As one student noted on a recent course evaluation, the achievements give students the flexibility to customize and manage their learning based on their interests. Remarking that “I really enjoyed the aspect of achievements for grades,” the student wrote that the achievements were “one of my favorite parts because it gave us as students more flexibility for achieving the grade we wanted.”

WORKS CITED


Course Description:
Computer games challenge many of the assumptions that textual scholars make about novels, film, and other, more traditional modes of expression. They make extensive use of narrative, graphic, and cinematic elements yet subordinate these elements to play. Moreover, they construct reading and writing as play. Using a number of methodologies privileged by English Studies, this course will study the representative and rhetorical strategies through which computer games make meaning. Multi-perspectival in nature, students will examine the discursive struggles that determine how players construct themselves as subjects in and against computer games. This course will attempt to come to terms with the larger question of how scholars, through various forms of critical play, construct, categorize, and produce computer games as a subject of academic study.

Specifically, this course will:
• provide a survey of the key concepts and debates that comprise game studies as a field of critical inquiry;
• teach students how to approach, analyze, and construct persuasive arguments about non-traditional forms of media such as computer games (how to play with computer games); and
• experiment with authoring non-traditional forms of media such as computer games.

Texts and Materials (Scrolls, Tomes, and Other, Various Repositories of Knowledge, Ancient or Not):
2. Various readings and GAMES as assigned on the syllabus calendar.

Attendance and Behavior (Many Rules):
• Attendance is mandatory for a class game of this nature. Students who miss more than five unexcused absences may receive a failing grade for the semester (If you stay out in uncharted waters for too long, you may experience fatigue and not be able to return to the game).
• In order for an absence to be considered excused, students must provide the proper documentation in a timely manner.
• You are required to arrive at class the game on time and to be mentally present in class. You may be marked absent if you engage in disruptive behavior. You may also be marked absent if you leave class the game early.
• Come prepared to participate in class gaming discussions. You should complete the assigned readings and any out-of-class game activities. You should also supplement these readings using the Internet, library, or other resources. This is especially important if you are having trouble understanding an assigned text.
• Mute all cell-phones, beepers, pagers, and so forth while in class.

**MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS Quests:**
The major writing assignments required for completion of this class are listed as follows:

- Evaluation Essay Boss Fight
- Game Analysis Essay Boss Fight
- Game Project and Reflection Essay Boss Fight
- Participation in Gaming Exhibition (finals week)

**Assignment Quest Description** sheets will be distributed detailing the specific requirements of each major assignment Quest. All major assignments Quests must be formatted as detailed on the assignment Quest Description sheet. Completed Quests Assignments should be submitted electronically through Blackboard’s Assignment Management System. I do not accept assignments. You can’t submit completed quests as e-mail attachments.

**HOMEWORK MINOR QUESTS:**
In-class exercises and homework MINOR QUESTS will be assigned at the discretion of the instructor. Homework is due on the day assigned and must be formatted per instructions given in class.

**EXTRA-CREDIT ACHIEVEMENTS:**
You can bolster your experience by fulfilling the requirements of a number of predetermined achievements. These achievements will require you to engage the game (the class) in interesting and innovative ways. Although you are not required to complete any of these tasks achievements, the highest possible grade you can earn is 750/1000 points (75%). Conversely, since a total of 500 extra-credit achievement points are available, you can earn upwards of 250 bonus points towards your final grade.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION GAME PLAY:**
You will be graded on the quality of your class participation Game Play. This involves contributing to class gaming discussions, and participating in group activities. You should expect to speak (play) at least once every class period to receive a passing class participation Game Play grade (70%).
Grading Experience Points:
Completing major and minor quests will grant you experience points. Your character’s final level will reflect how well you have played the game.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments and Course Requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Assignments</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation Essay Boss Fight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Game Project and Reflective Essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in Gaming Exhibition (finals week)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Assignments</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extra-Credit Achievements</strong> (250 required + 250 bonus)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points Possible:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Points Needed for a Grade of 100%:</strong></td>
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</table>

Explanation of Grading Scale:

A = 100-90% — Exemplary Epic: the student has met and exceeded the expectations of all categories. The student's work serves as a model for his or her peers;

B = 89-80% — Good Rare: the student has met all of the requirements of the assignment and has exceeded the requirements of the assignment in some areas. Other areas, however, need more development.

C = 79-70% — Average Uncommon: the student has met all the requirements of the assignment, but has exceeded none. The student has accomplished average work for his or her class and skill level.

D = 69-60% — Marginal Common: the student has fulfilled some requirements of the assignment, but other requirements remain unfulfilled. You should meet with me as soon as possible.

F = 59% or below — Failing: the student has fulfilled few, if any, requirements of the assignment. You should meet with me as soon as possible.
**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:**

Plagiarism is the use of another person’s words or ideas without proper acknowledgment. Under no circumstances will plagiarism be tolerated in this class. You cannot copy the language or the ideas of another person’s work without acknowledging them, nor can you submit another person’s work as your own. In addition, all work that you submit in this class must be original to this class. Any student caught plagiarizing will receive a grade of “0” on the assignment and may fail the class. Students caught plagiarizing will be referred to the Dean of Students.

**English 395: Evaluation Essay**

**Assignment:**

In a well-written, well-organized essay of approximately 600 words, evaluate a computer game. Using the critical approaches that Brian Sutton-Smith, Raph Koster or other scholars we have read employ to understand the often complex relationship between play and games, establish criteria with which to judge the game you have chosen. Then, qualify your reaction to the text. Using the criteria you have established, tell your readers how they should approach it. How, for instance, how does it compare to similar texts? What does it do well? What does it do badly? What is its relative value? Use a minimum of three university level sources to provide background information, support your conclusions, or illustrate your argument.

**English 395: Game Analysis Essay**

**Assignment:**

In a well-written, well-organized essay of approximately 700 words, analyze a computer game (or games) of your choice. Using one of the critical approaches to games we’ve discussed in class or that you locate through your own research, try to identify and account for a pattern or a series of patterns in the game that, while recurring, are also puzzling or paradoxical. For example, what does it mean that games like World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) insist that players chose a gender when creating their characters, when gender has no bearing on game play? Alternatively, why do so many fantasy-themed RPGs include steampunk and other elements ostensibly drawn from science fiction?

Essays that analyze cultural artifacts like games typically contain the following components:

- **Introduction:** identifies the topic of your paper to your readers, briefly provides an overview of the topic and explains how your paper will approach it.
• **Methodology:** details your approach to the topic by explaining the critical framework that you will use to understand your topic.

• **Application:** provides specific examples of what your topic looks like when seen through the critical lens you described in the methodology section.

• **Discussion / Conclusion:** discusses the implications of your analysis to the topic and to broader issues that are related to the topic. This section sometimes identifies limitations of your methodology, or areas where further inquiry is needed.

Use secondary sources to provide background information about the subject of your paper and to support the claims you make. Use MLA citation style to document the sources you cite directly or indirectly.

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**ENGLISH 395: GAME PROJECT AND REFLECTION ESSAY**

**ASSIGNMENT:**
This assignment has three parts. The first part, of course, is to create a game (computer-driven or otherwise) using free game development software such as the Unity 3D Engine or the modding tools that are packaged with computer games such as *Neverwinter Nights 2* (Obsidian Entertainment, 2002), *Dungeon Siege* (Wargaming Seattle, 2002), *Starcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010), and so forth. Your game can be serious, whimsical, educational, artistic, or derivative. The important thing is that your classmates and visitors to the expo can play the game.

Alternatively, you can produce a derivative work based on a computer game or on the principles that we’ve learned this semester. This can be a board game or a tabletop RPG, a work of machinima, a game design document, portions of a graphic novel, a course syllabus, for example.

The second part of the assignment involves writing an approximately 750 word reflection essay detailing the process of creating the game (or the derivative work). What were your initial goals? How do those goal relate to the larger themes/concepts we have discussed this semester? How did those goals change/evolve as you began to build the game? How did these goals determine the medium you chose? How were you forced to adapt your goals by the medium you chose? What was fun about creating the game? What was not fun?

The third part of the assignment involves packaging the game (or derivative work) for the gaming expo that the class will hold on the date of the final exam, Thursday, May 1, 2014. In addition to displaying the game you created, you should produce posters, flyers, instruction manuals, game art, and/or other related materials that showcase your work. In short, produce an exhibit centered on your game project.
Achievements: the following list summarizes the achievements you can earn this semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Criteria:</th>
<th>Points:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crappie</td>
<td>Earn 75 Achievement points.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glass Fish</td>
<td>Earn 150 Achievement points.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silver Fish</td>
<td>Earn 250 Achievement points.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gold Fish</td>
<td>Earn 350 Achievement Points.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whale fish</td>
<td>Earn 450 Achievement Points.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kissing Gourami</td>
<td>Propose a unique achievement and convince me to add it to this list.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poacher</td>
<td>Complete an achievement that a classmate has convinced me to add to the achievements list.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warty Angler</td>
<td>Find and e-mail a picture to me that I can use to illustrate one of these achievements.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>First Fish</td>
<td>Attend the first day of class.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun Fish</td>
<td>Attend the class before Spring Break.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleeper</td>
<td>Attend the class after Spring Break.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last Fish</td>
<td>Attend the last day of class.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mackerel</td>
<td>Complete the semester without missing more than three unexcused absences.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholly Mackerel</td>
<td>Perfect attendance.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participation:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pencilfish</td>
<td>Serve as the scribe for an in-class group activity.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carp</td>
<td>Convince two other classmates to help you prepare and</td>
<td>+20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parrotfish</td>
<td>Convince two other classmates to help you prepare and deliver a seven-minute presentation about a scholarly work cited by one of the assigned readings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grouper</td>
<td>Obtain both the “Carp” and “Parrotfish” achievements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lanternfish</td>
<td>Create an exhibit for and participate in the end of the semester gaming expo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trumpetfish</td>
<td>Create a poster or otherwise publicize the end of the semester gaming expo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Wiki:</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Gallon Tank</td>
<td>Earn a fish tank by creating a home page for yourself on the wiki.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Gallon Tank</td>
<td>Create a subpage of your homepage entitled “Game Room” that briefly describes and links to your favorite games.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Gallon Tank</td>
<td>Create a “Bed Room” sub-page of your homepage that introduces and describe your in-game persona to your classmates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog Fish</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that provides a brief overview of one of your least favorite computer games.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filefish</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that links to 10 different but related wiki pages. Make sure you write a description that explains this relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weaver</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that provides a biography of a famous or influential game designer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mullet</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that provides a biography of a famous or influential game player.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red Herring</td>
<td>Add a unique wiki page that describes and provides an example of a logical fallacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missed-hake</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that identifies a common mistake college writers make and offers tips on how to correct this error.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caviar</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that provides a brief description of a favorite or influential game.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School of Fish</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that provides a tutorial that is designed to help your fellow succeed in a specific area of this class.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medusafish</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that summarizes a work of fiction, cinema, or poetry that references computer games or which is based on a computer game.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-eyed fish</td>
<td>Create a unique wiki page that is dedicated to some arcane aspect of the lore of a popular computer game.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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</table>

**Why Not?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cat Fish</th>
<th>Write a Haiku, Limerick, or other brief poem that celebrates the various achievements (or misdeeds) of Dr. Moberly’s cat.</th>
<th>+10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labyrinth fish</td>
<td>Create a computer game using a game creation tool or other piece of software you “discover” on the internet.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcastic Fringehead</td>
<td>Write a satire of no less than 400 words based on a computer game.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubeshoulder</td>
<td>Produce a five minute or more work of machinima using a computer game.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyretail</td>
<td>Produce a song inspired by a contemporary computer game or a “mixtape” of five other people’s songs inspired by a contemporary computer game.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plunderfish</td>
<td>Wear a game-themed piece of apparel or otherwise bring an artifact from or related to a computer game to class.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clownfish</td>
<td>Come to class dressed as a character from a computer game.</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minnow</th>
<th>Bring a draft of your first writing assignment to Writing Tutorial Services.</th>
<th>+10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sprat</td>
<td>Bring a draft of your second writing assignment to Writing Tutorial Services.</td>
<td>+10</td>
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<td>Tutorial Services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morwong</td>
<td>Bring a draft of your third writing assignment to Writing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|                  | Tutorial Services.                                     | +10
| Star Fish        | Successfully Complete the Star Quest I tutorial.       | +10
| Rock Fish        | Successfully Complete the Star Quest II tutorial.      | +10
| Rock Star Fish   | Successfully Complete both the Star Quest I and the Star| +10
|                  | Quest II tutorial.                                     |
| Chub             | Turn in a major writing assignment on the date assigned. | +10
| Hornyhead Chub   | Turn in two major writing assignments on the dates       | +10
|                  | assigned.                                              |

**ENGLISH 395 SCHEDULE**

**MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS DUE:**

- **2/20**  Evaluation Essay Due.
- **3/27**  Game Analysis Essay Due.
- **4/29**  Game Project and Reflection Essay Due.
- **5/1**   Gaming Expo (Final Exam Time).

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS:**

**WEEK ONE:**  PLAYING WITH STUFF.
1/14  Discuss Course Syllabus, Policies, and Procedures.
1/16  Play: with Legos.

**WEEK TWO:**  BEGINNING TO PLAY:
1/21  **Read:**  Sutton Smith, Brian. “Play and Ambiguity” from *The Rhetoric of Play*.
      **Play:**  Zork.
1/23  **Read:**  Brand, Stewart. “SpaceWar: Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death
Among the Computer Bums.”

**Read:** Bartle, Richard. “Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDS.”

**Play:** *Arteroids.*

### Week Three: Playing with Children and Roosters:

**1/28**

**Read:** Vygotsky, Lev. “Play and its Role in the Mental Development of the Child.”

**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Two: How the Brain Works.” *A Theory of Fun.*

**Play:** *Silent Conversation*

**1/30**

**Read:** Geertz, Clifford. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.”

**Play:** *Amorphous +*

### Week Four: What Games Are:

**2/4**


**Read:** Costikyan, Greg. “I Have No Words but I Must Design”

**Play:** *Loondon*

**2/6**


**Play:** *A Mother in Festerwood.*

### Week Five: What Games Teach Us:

**2/11**

**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Four: What Games Teach Us.” *A Theory of Fun.*

**Play:** *Covetous.*

**2/13**

**Read:** McClarty, Katie Larsen. “A Literature Review of Gaming in Education.”

**Watch:** McDonigal, Jane. “Reality is Broken.”

### Week Six: What Games Aren’t:

**2/18**


**Read:** Aarseth, Espen. “Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation.”
Play:  *Moby Dick the Video Game.*

2/20  
**Read:** Zimmerman, Eric. “Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games: Four Naughty Concepts in Need of Discipline?”

**Evaluation Essay Due.**

**WEEK SEVEN:**  
**DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS.**

2/25  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Six: Different Fun for Different Folks.”  
*A Theory of Fun.*

**Play:** American Dream.

2/27  
**Read:** Bai, Matt. “Master of His Virtual Domain.”

**Listen:** Nelson, Noah. “Hard-Core And Casual Gamers Play In Different Worlds.”

**Play:** Aether.

**WEEK EIGHT:**  
**PROBLEMS.**

3/4  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Seven: The Problem with Learning.”

*A Theory of Fun.*

**Play:** You Only Live Once.

3/6  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Eight: The Problem with People.”

*A Theory of Fun.*

**Play:** Creaky Old Memory.

**WEEK NINE:**  
**SPRING BREAK:**

3/11  
**Class canceled for holidays**

3/14  
**Class canceled for holidays**

**WEEK TEN:**  
**CONTEXTS AND COMPLEXITIES:**

3/18  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Nine: Games in Context.”  
*A Theory of Fun.*

**Read:** McAllister, Ken. “Studying the Computer Game Complex.” From *Gamework: Language Power and Computer Game Culture.*

**Play:** Samarost.

3/20  
**Read:** Galloway, Alexander R. “Gamic Action, Four Moments” from *Essays on Algorithmic Culture.*

**WEEK ELEVEN: CHEEERS, PULLERS, AND GLITCHERS:**
3/25  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Ten: The Ethics of Entertainment.”  
_A Theory of Fun._

**Read:** Consalvo, Mia. “To Cheat or Not to Cheat: Is that Even the Question?” from _Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Video Games._

**Play:** _Oligarchy._

3/27  

**Play:** _The Tower of Heaven._

**Game Analysis Essay Due.**

**WEEK TWELVE: GENDERED GAMING:**

4/1  
**Read:** Mortensen, Torill and Hilde Corneliussen. “The Non-sense of Gender in _NeverWinter Nights._”

**Play:** _Scarygirl._

4/3  
**Read:** Kennedy, Helen. “Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis.”

**Read:** Scimeca, Dennis. “Why I can’t Call Myself a Gamer Anymore.”

**Play:** _Scarygirl._

**WEEK THIRTEEN: THE ECONOMICS OF IDENTITY.**

4/8  
**Read:** Langer, Jessica. “The Familiar and the Foreign: Playing (Post)Colonialism in _World of Warcraft._”

**Play:** _3rd World Farmer._

4/10  
**Read:** Moberly, Brent and Kevin Moberly. “Revising the Future: the Medieval Self and the Sovereign Ethics of Empire in _Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic._”

**Play:** _Phone Story._

**WEEK FOURTEEN: NOT SO DISTANT FUTURES:**

4/15  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Eleven: Where Games Should Go.”

**Read:** Sotamaa, Olli. “When the Game Is Not Enough: Motivations and Practices Among Computer Game Modding Culture.”

**Play:** _Alien Hominid._

4/17  
**Read:** Galloway, Alexander. “Counter Gaming.” From _Essays on Algorithmic Culture._
**Play:**  
*And Everything Started to Fall.*

**WEEK FIFTEEN: THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE:**

4/22  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Chapter Twelve: Taking Their Rightful Place.”  
*A Theory of Fun.*  
**Read:** Koster, Raph. “Epilogue: Fun Matters, Grandpa.”  
*A Theory of Fun.*  
**Play:**  
*The Infinite Ocean.*

4/24  
**Read:** Jenkins, Henry. “Art Form for a Digital Age.”  
**Read:** Martin, Brett. “Should Video Games be Viewed as Art?”  
**Play:**  
*Colour My World.*

**WEEK SIXTEEN: CONCLUSIONS AND EXPOSITIONS.**

4/29  
Conclusions.

5/1  
**Gaming Expo (Final Exam Time).**  
**Game Project and Reflection Essay Due.**

**REVISED EVALUATION ESSAY**

**SCENARIO:**  
As an up-and-coming authority in gaming, you have been invited by the Academy of Game Design to nominate a specific game for inclusion in the academy’s annual exhibit of important games. The Academy holds this exhibit as part of an ongoing effort to both convince the general public that digital games have social, artistic, and economic value, and to raise revenue through the sale of tickets, T-shirts, and corn dogs.

**BACKGROUND:**  
Last year’s exhibit was an unmitigated train wreck. It not only opened three weeks late, but was skewered by two well-known film critics for not being serious, academic, or compelling. Already suspicious of gaming, these critics specifically complained about the lack of clear criteria in the previous year’s selections and the lack of research in the catalog that the Academy published in conjunction with the exhibit. They asserted that the Academy’s writers selected games based solely on personal taste and rarely cited scholarly sources, often deferring to sources such as Wikipedia and industry-sponsored gaming sites. They also complained that the nomination essays were not well-written enough to justify the price of the catalog. In a widely distributed quotation, one critic wrote that reading the essays was like “paying to have my eyes gouged out by a rusty toilet brush.”

**TASK:**  
The academy has asked you to produce an approximately 600 word nomination essay to
accompany the game you select for the exhibit. As with previous exhibitions, this essay will be published in a catalog that will be released with the exhibit and which will be available for purchase for the low, low cost of $29.99.

COMPLICATION:
Still smarting from the criticisms leveled against last year’s exhibit, the Academy has updated its nomination standards. The revised guidelines stipulate that:

1.) Nominators must explicitly justify the games they pick by demonstrating how each game embodies critical concepts that major figures such as Raph Koster, Clifford Geertz, Lev Vgotsky, Brian Sutton-Smith, and others have developed to understand the relationship between play and games.
2.) Each nomination essay must cite a minimum of three impressive (old skool) sources that provide background information about the game being nominated, illustrate a specific point about the game, or speak to larger issues affecting the subject of gaming generally.

REVIEW:
Before any nomination essay can be published in the exhibit’s catalog, it will be reviewed by a panel of three highly-esteemed experts. These experts will evaluate each essay based on:

1.) How well it uses specific criteria to justify its nomination;
2.) How well it incorporates research from both popular and academic sources;
3.) How well the essay is organized and written.

These experts will issue recommendations for revision, which individual nominators must address before their essays can be published. Because of lingering concerns about the Academy’s labor practices, each nominator must also submit a review report (form WX59a-3) with their final draft detailing the particular triumphs and travails of their revision process.

DETAILS:
Problems with last year’s nomination process resulted in a two week delay in the opening of the exhibit. Since this delay cost the Academy approximately $423.53 in lost ticket sales, not to mention the lost revenue from the corn dog stand, the Academy has established the following timeline in order to ensure that the exhibit opens as scheduled:

Thursday, February 5: Nominators identify the specific game that they intend to nominate.

Tuesday, February 10: Nominators submit two previously published reviews about the game they intend to nominate.

Thursday, February 12: Nominators successfully complete the Academy’s
Intensive Expository Writing certification program.

Tuesday, February 17: Nominators submit two scholarly sources that are relevant to the game they intend to nominate.

Thursday, February 19: Nominators successfully complete the Academy’s Safe and Sustainable Use of Criteria certification program.

Thursday, February 26: Nominators submit drafts of their nomination essays to the review panel.

Thursday, March 5: Nominators submit their nomination essays to the Academy for publication. Nominators must also submit their revision reports (form WX59a-3) on this date.

ACHIEVEMENTS: The following achievements are associated with this assignment:

• **20 Gallon Tank**: Create a subpage of wiki your homepage entitled “Game Room” that briefly describes and links to your favorite games.
• **School of Fish**: Create a unique wiki page that provides a tutorial that is designed to help your fellow succeed in a specific area of this class.
• **Minnow**: Bring a draft of your first writing assignment to Writing Tutorial Services.
• **Star Fish**: Successfully Complete the Star Quest I tutorial.
• **Rock Fish**: Successfully Complete the Star Quest II tutorial.
• **Rock Star Fish**: Successfully complete both the Star Quest I and the Star Quest II tutorials.
• **Chub**: Turn in a major writing assignment on the date assigned.