



INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL GAMES STUDIES

ENGLISH 4800 SECTION 90, CRN 20539 3 CREDITS

FORMAT: HYBRID

F2F: MW 11:00-11:50AM, ROOM T215

ONLINE: F 11:00-11:50AM, VIRTUAL LOCATIONS TBA

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Ritter

EMAIL: CHRISTOPHERRITTER@CLAYTON.EDU (ALWAYS USE OFFICE365 EMAIL; NEVER USE D2L EMAIL)

OFFICE: ARTS & SCIENCES G110M

OFFICE HOURS: MW 12:00-12:30 / 2:00-3:00, AND BY APPOINTMENT

OFFICE PHONE: 678-466-4879

COURSE WEBSITE: [HTTPS://CLAYTON.VIEW.USG.EDU/D2L/HOME/1307681](https://clayton.view.usg.edu/d2l/home/1307681)

Course Overview

According to BusinessTech, as of 2015, the games industry was “the fourth biggest entertainment market in the world, behind gambling, reading and TV,” and ahead of movies and music.¹ According to Newzoo, videogame sales around the globe totaled \$99.6 billion dollars in 2016, about a quarter of those sales being in North America. Out of the combined populations of the US and Canada (360,405,000), 198,051,000 people are gamers – 55% of us.² In other words, gaming is *über* 1337.

As videogames have become more powerful and popular over the last generation, scholars have been figuring out how to talk about them. The field of game studies is a truly interdisciplinary one, with members hailing from rhetoric, literary studies, film studies, sociology, psychology, education, economics, and philosophy. Each of these disciplines has its own arsenal of theories and methods, so these scholars’ perspectives on videogames tend to vary a lot. This diversity makes for some

¹ Source: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/88472/the-biggest-entertainment-markets-in-the-world/>

² Source: http://resources.newzoo.com/hubfs/Reports/Newzoo_Free_2016_Global_Games_Market_Report.pdf

interesting (and sometimes heated) debates. Our class will start with the most important one, which is about what videogames actually are:

Videogames are stories. | **Videogames are games.**

Both sides have excellent points – and we’ll look at some of them – but as Jesper Juul points out, they’re both basically right: videogames are made up of real rules (and real actions) in fictional worlds; thus, they’re *half-real*.

Then we’ll move on to how one goes about studying games, which also boils down into two main points of view:

We should study videogames as cultural artifacts. | **We should study players’ interactions with videogames as cultural expressions.**

The former claim generally comes from the humanities, and the latter generally comes from the social sciences. As David Buckingham notes in the book *Computer Games: Text, Narrative, and Play*, “This tension between textual analysis... and audience-based research... is impossible to ignore... precisely because the game text is playable: it is only realized through play, and play is a lived, social and culturally situated experience.” Therefore, game studies scholars should learn to critically analyze both games and players. But what they emphasize will depend on their training and interests. You’ll get to sample some different approaches so you can find the one that work best for you.

This is all a big task, so we've got to break it down into parts, each which will form a unit of inquiry for our course:

- How are videogames like other kinds of representational media (books, films, TV shows), and how are they unique?
- How are videogames like other kinds of games, and how are they unique?
- What do games mean when we read their representational and procedural rhetorics together?
- How do players interact with games and other players?
- How and what do games teach players?
- How are games influenced by – and how are they influencers of – social forces?

Course Format

This is a hybrid course: the first two hours each week, on Monday and Wednesday, will be in our classroom; the third hour, on Friday, will be in a to-be-announced game space. (The game space will be either a multiplayer online game (like an MMO), a multiplayer single-system game (like a console fighter), or an online chat channel where we'll talk while playing the same single-player game separately.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Analyze the visual, textual, aural, spatial, and procedural rhetorics of any given videogame.
- Situate a given videogame's representational and procedural rhetorics within larger cultural formations.
- Analyze the behavior and communication of real players.
- Situate players' behavior and communication within larger cultural formations.

Required Text

Mäyrä, Frans. *An Introduction to Game Studies*. SAGE, 2008.

Required Materials

Consistent access to a game system that you can play regularly. (Don't forget the public console in the SAC if you don't have your own system.)

Assignments and Other Graded Components

Reading Assignments (15%)

Each week, there will be at least one reading assignment from the textbook or a handout, along with a set of questions to gauge your comprehension and application of the material. The questions will be in D2L discussion forums.

These assignments will all be **graded for their level of completion**: complete attempts to fulfill the assignment will earn full credit; partially completed assignments will earn partial credit.

Reading Assignments will be due **at the beginning of class on the date within their title** (i.e., {01-01 Reading Assignment: Exampe} would be due at the beginning of class on January 1st).

In-Class Writing (15%)

Every Monday/Wednesday meeting will involve at least one small writing assignment. It might be a freewrite, an informal writing prompt that gets you to generate ideas about that day's topic. Or it might be an activity, a prompt that involves researching or discussing a topic in a small group and writing collaboratively.

In-Class Writing assignments are **due in class**, which is the biggest reason not to miss class.

These assignments will be **graded on completion**.

The number of In-Class Writing assignments is not established at the beginning of the course – it will depend on my sense of the needs of the class in a given week.

Play Journal (20%)

Game studies begins with playing lots of games and taking good notes on them. Therefore, each week, you'll play one assigned game on Friday and one game of your choice some other day, and you'll write journal entries that reflect on these experiences.

Your Play Journal will exist in a class OneNote notebook, in which you'll each have a section. You'll be expected to write two journal entries of at least 50 words per week. Journal entries are **due each Sunday at 11:59pm**.

These assignments will be **graded on completion**.

Roundtable Presentation (15%)

Early in the semester, you will form into groups of 2-3, according to the types of games and game scholarship you're interested in. Group members will spend time immersing themselves in one game together, and on designated dates, each group will give a "roundtable presentation" – a public conversation in which you show us the game, discuss your interpretations of that game and/or its players' practices in light of course readings, and lead a discussion with the rest of the class.

This assignment will be **graded on performance**, with a rubric, using the Evaluation Key (below).

Game Analysis Project (20%)

Your Roundtable Presentation will form the basis of an extended analysis of your group's game and/or its player culture, which you'll write individually. Your analysis will incorporate discussion with scholarly sources, your peers in the class, and other players of your game, as well as your own experiences and observations. You'll post it to the course website, so you'll be encouraged to use whatever multimedia design skills you have to make it fun and interesting to read. It will be the equivalent of 8-10 pages (we'll work out how new media components like video clips and screenshots translate into pages at a later date).

This assignment will be **graded on performance**, with a rubric, using the Evaluation Key (below).

My Toolkit Statement (15%)

We'll spend the last couple of weeks reflecting on what we've learned in all of our course's readings, discussions, activities, and assignments; and the last thing you'll create will be a list of the critical

theories and methods that you found most useful – a “toolkit.” (You’ll also have to justify your selections, describing why you chose them, how you’ll use them, etc.) You’re making this for yourself, so it can be in whatever form/medium you want.

This assignment will be **graded on performance**, with a rubric, using the Evaluation Key (below).

Evaluation Key

The performance-graded assignments will each have customized rubrics with specific criteria. They will be scored with the following qualitative scale.

Level	Description	Point values
Exemplary	<i>Exemplary communication</i> is marked by originality of expression, particularized strategies to engage the audience, and scrupulous attention to detail. <i>Exemplary communication</i> performs creatively, requiring little or no revision.	98-100
Mature	<i>Mature communication</i> is marked by an audience orientation, a clear grasp of the rhetorical situation, consistency, directness, strong supporting evidence, thorough editing, and an easy-to-follow structure. <i>Mature communication</i> performs fully, requiring only minor revision.	93-97
Competent	<i>Competent communication</i> is marked by clarity of purpose, workable organization (if somewhat mechanical), an effective general purpose, acceptable style, and no distracting errors in usage or conventions. <i>Competent communication</i> performs adequately, requiring limited revision.	85-92
Developing	<i>Developing communication</i> is marked by some serious weakness that, despite promising choices in other areas, ultimately prevents the communication from succeeding. This weakness may be in a faulty assumption about the situation or audience, underdeveloped content, a confusing organization, vague word choices, etc. This level could also be marked by excessive generality and predictability that fail to engage the audience. <i>Developing communication</i> performs inappropriately in some way(s), requiring focused revision.	75-84
Beginning	<i>Beginning communication</i> is marked by failure to address some key element(s) of the communication situation. For example, evidence may be scant and/or inaccurate. Expression is weakened by vague or inappropriate verbal or visual choices. Errors in conventions, tone, or documentation are distracting. The main point is vague, trite, or poorly developed. <i>Beginning communication</i> performs incompletely, requiring extensive revision.	65-74
Basic	<i>Basic communication</i> is marked by misunderstanding the demands and expectations of the communication situation, by focusing on self rather than audience, by blatant violations of conventions and audience expectations, and by inconsistencies and contradictions. <i>Basic communication</i> performs naively, requiring thorough revision.	55-64
Unacceptable	<i>Unacceptable communication</i> is incomplete or completed with disregard for the basic assignment instructions for preparing the document. A “U” is given to work that was clearly prepared without care, either because it is far too brief, too shallow, or missing basic components.	0-54

Grading Scale

- A 90%* and above
 - * If you have an 89% at the end of the term, and you have completed every assignment, I will round your 89% up.
- B 80-89%
- C 70-79%
- D 60-69%
- F below 60%

Teaching Philosophies

Here are the primary philosophies that inform my teaching, so you have an idea of what to expect from me and how our class will run on a daily basis:

- I am a teacher of rhetoric. I define *rhetoric* as “the systematic study and practice of all conscious communication, in all modes and media.”
- I am a teacher of literacies. I define *literacy* as “the ability to use communication tools to convey meaningful messages to specific people.”
 - There are three types of literacies my courses address:
 - Functional: the ability to use communication tools.
 - Rhetorical: the ability to say meaningful messages to specific people.
 - Critical: the ability to understand how and why specific people find their tools useful and their messages meaningful.
- Good learning is situated in real-life (or simulated) practice, not in abstract discussion.
- A good teacher is a “guide on the side” rather than a “sage on the stage.”
- People learn new things by connecting new information or skills with information/skills they already have (also known as “scaffolding”).
- Good learning is a back-and-forth process of hypothesizing about a new idea, trying it out, and reflecting on how that trial went. (This dialectical process is also known as “active and critical thinking.”)
- Students learn best when they’re engaged with the material. The ways that I try to engage my students are:
 - by giving you as much choice as possible about what you’ll study/create, and encouraging you to choose subjects that you’re excited about
 - by encouraging you to actively seek information rather than passively absorb it

Policies

Attendance

Any student who fails to complete the scheduled assignments during the first week of class will be reported as a “No Show.”

Attitude

Maintain a positive attitude – excessive negativity brings down the whole class, inhibiting everyone’s learning.

Code of Conduct

Students must abide by policies in the [Undergraduate and Graduate Student Code of Conduct](#) and the [Basic Undergraduate Student Responsibilities](#).

Discrimination

I am committed to providing a safe class environment that is free of discrimination. No harassment of any kind is allowed in class including but not limited to gender, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. That being said, ignoring our differences in an attempt to avoid conflict or discomfort can sometimes wind up reinforcing the same prejudices and conflicts we’re trying to avoid, so I will encourage the input each of you brings to the class based on the identities you’re comfortable speaking from.

Due Dates

Reading Assignments will be due **at the beginning of class on the date within their title** (i.e., {01-01 Reading Assignment: Exampe} would be due at the beginning of class on January 1st).

Play Journal entries are **due each Sunday at 11:59pm**.

In-Class Writing assignments are **due in class**.

The larger assignments will be due on specific dates; see the Schedule.

Email

I will **only** respond to emails sent to ChristopherRitter@clayton.edu via Office365 Outlook. I will **never** respond to emails sent through D2L.

I will respond to emails within 24 hours, unless you email on or just before the weekend, in which case I will respond by the end of the next business day.

Hardship Withdrawal

Students who experience an unexpected event or circumstance beyond their control that directly interferes with their ability to continue to make satisfactory progress in classes, such as serious illnesses or unexpected major life events, may petition the Dean of their major for a hardship withdrawal from **all classes**. In order to be considered for a hardship withdrawal, the student must have been passing all courses at the time that the emergency or other hardship arose and notify his or her instructors or other University officials about the hardship situation as soon as possible after it

arose (per University and BOR policy, passing is defined as a grade of D or above). Hardship requests that are not filed in a timely manner are subject to denial even if the student was passing and the hardship was legitimate. Students who attend any classes through the end of a term and complete all course requirements (i.e. final project or exam) are not eligible for hardship withdrawal. If you have taken a final exam in any of your courses, you may not request a hardship withdrawal. For more information go to <http://www.clayton.edu/registrar/Withdrawal>.

Late Work

I will not accept late Play Journals, Reading Assignments, or In-Class Writing unless we have a prior arrangement – i.e., you email me before the assignment's due date, and I grant you an extension. I will accept the Game Analysis Project and My Toolkit Statement late; but unless I have granted you an extension before the due date, I will deduct half a letter grade for each day the paper is late. **Again, you can miss a deadline without penalty only if you have requested an extension beforehand.**

Office Hours/Contact Information

One of the most valuable ways to improve your writing is through sustained, personal attention to your work. I offer this attention during office hours (listed at the beginning of the syllabus) or by appointment. In addition, you may email me to discuss specific questions you have about your writing, and I am happy to meet with you online for a face-to-face web chat.

Online Etiquette (Netiquette)

We all know that the gamer world can be rife with hideous speech, but we will hold ourselves to a higher standard. Please remember to conduct yourself collegially and professionally. Unlike in the classroom setting, what you say in the online environment is documented and not easily erased or forgotten.

The following guidelines apply:

- Avoid using ALL CAPS, sarcasm, and language that could come across as strong or offensive.
- Use proper punctuation, grammar and be sure to edit your contribution before posting.
- Read all postings before posting your responses to discussion topics so as to not unnecessarily repeat information.
- Keep chat comments brief and to the point.
- Focus on one topic at a time when chatting or posting to discussions.
- Remember that unlike in face-to-face learning environments what you say in discussions and chats is documented and available to be revisited. Choose your words and discussion topics carefully.
- E-mail should only be used for messages pertaining to the course. Please refrain from sending forwards, jokes, etc. within e-mail.

Plagiarism

If you consult outside sources in order to supplement or advance or generate your own ideas, you need to give credit to the author(s), whether you directly quote them or not. You're all aware that

intentional plagiarism is wrong, and that it has dire consequences. Most students who intentionally plagiarize do it because they're pressed for time and feel too stressed to write their own paper. My advice: come talk to me if you have any problems getting the work done, or if you're confused about documentation. I'm here to help you, not catch you.

[Guidelines for Writing from Sources and Consequences of Plagiarism](#)

The following descriptions are designed to help explain plagiarism and its consequences to help you avoid it in your writing for this course. We will devote class time to learning and understanding how to use sources in your writing, how to research and take notes effectively, how to use and cite electronic resources, and how to get help from various writing aids and resources.

[Problems in Writing-from-Sources:](#)

Inaccurate Citation: Mechanics and Format: Students are expected to cite both written (print and electronic), oral, and visual sources consulted in papers and presentations. All borrowed ideas—both direct quotations and paraphrasing from another's work—require accurate citation, and direct quotations require quotation marks. Students should learn and use correct format for block quotes, quotations, and in-text parenthetical documentation. Source material should be introduced fully, and all borrowed ideas should be cited; Works Cited pages should be formatted correctly. Drafts of papers with inaccurate citation, mechanical citation problems, and/or minor Works Cited inaccuracies will require mandatory revisions; final papers with these problems will receive a letter grade deduction.

[Plagiarism:](#)

Insufficient Citation: Patchwriting and Derivative Papers: Students should fully introduce and cite borrowed material. Cutting and pasting passages from your source into your own paper without citation and turning in the paper as your own is plagiarism, as is directly quoting without using quotation marks. Undocumented paraphrasing is plagiarism: fully cite the source of your ideas. In addition, students are expected to paraphrase and summarize using their own stylistic features, not the source's, to avoid patchwriting (also called stylistic plagiarism). If your summary is too close to the original in a draft, keep working to synthesize it fully. In addition, students are expected to develop their own framework for their papers rather than borrowing their source's argument wholesale (even if acknowledged). Drafts with several examples of insufficient citation, papers that fail to develop original arguments, papers lacking a Works Cited page, or papers that exhibit patchwriting will earn a lowered grade and will require mandatory revision; final papers will receive a 0 for the assignment for failure to meet the minimum requirements of papers in 1101/1102, and students will face disciplinary action as per the CSU Office of Student Affairs and [Community Standards](#).

False Submissions, Ghostwriting, or Fraud: Students are expected to write their own original papers for each assignment, from development of ideas and research to revision. Plagiarized papers include papers written by someone else (i.e. acquired or bought through the Internet, an organization, friends, family members, or another student); papers in which much of the material is cut-and-pasted from sources without correct documentation; and papers submitted by the student for another course/assignment. If such a paper is submitted for a rough draft, the student will receive a 0 for the draft and be required to do a mandatory revision and/or new rough draft before submitting a final

paper. If students turn in such papers as final papers, the student will receive an F for the course and face disciplinary action as per the CSU Office of Student Affairs and [Community Standards](#).

If you have any doubt about whether or not you're plagiarizing, talk with your professor before submitting your paper.

Plagiarism Detection Software

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. You should submit your papers in such a way that no identifying information about you is included.

Revision

Revision is an integral part of the writing process and an essential part of improving one's writing. To that end, multiple drafts of the performance-graded assignments will be required. However, once an assignment has been graded, it may not be revised for an improved grade. As such, each grade reflects your final written product rather than your effort.

Schedule Changes

By necessity, our schedule may change according to the needs of the projects. I will announce changes on D2L, but you are responsible for knowing and following them. See the live schedule at <https://goo.gl/u8hpFU> for up-to-date changes.

Uses for Your Work

All of the assignments produced in this class will be posted on the course website. In this way, our class will have a body of communication documents to study throughout the semester. I reserve the right to use your work, in whole or in part, as a teaching tool in this particular section, though I will do so by removing your name first. You will grant or deny me permission to use your work in future classes and/or my research in the first week of class.

Resources for Students

Writers' Studio

You can get free assistance on any aspect of your writing from a trained tutor at the Writers' Studio. You can meet tutors in the Studio itself or online.

The goal of the Writers' Studio is to give rise to better writers, not just to better writing. People who love to write, people who struggle mightily with it, and people who fall anywhere else on the spectrum can find a place at The Writers' Studio—a place for students to come for writing guidance and feedback.

Each student may receive up to 90 minutes of assistance per day and 3 hours per week. Furthermore, both appointments and walk-ins are welcome. Here's The Writers' Studio's contact information:

Location: Arts & Sciences Building, Room G-224
Phone: 678.466.4728
Email: ws224@clayton.edu
Website: <http://clayton.edu/writersstudio>

Visit The Writers' Studio at <http://clayton.edu/writersstudio> or schedule your appointment online at <http://clayton.mywconline.com> (Note: first-time users need to complete a one-time registration prior to using the online appointment website).

Operation Study

At Clayton State University, we expect and support high motivation and academic achievement. Look for Operation Study activities and programs this semester that are designed to enhance your academic success such as study sessions, study breaks, workshops, and opportunities to earn Study Bucks (for use in the University Bookstore) and other items.

Accommodations for Students with Special Needs

Individuals with disabilities who need to request accommodations should contact the Disability Services Coordinator, Student Center Room 255, phone 678-466-5445, or email: disabilityservices@mail.clayton.edu.

Tentative Schedule

If necessary, I may make changes to the schedule to meet the class's educational goals more effectively. My live schedule can be found at <https://goo.gl/u8hpFU>.

Week	Dates	Topic	Due
1	1/9	Introductions and Syllabus	
	1/11		Reading Assignment:
	1/13		Game:
2	1/16	NO CLASS: MLK DAY	
	1/18	NO-SHOW DEADLINE	Reading Assignment:
	1/20		Game:
3	1/23		Reading Assignment:
	1/25		
	1/27		Game:
4	1/30		Reading Assignment:
	2/1		
	2/3		Game:
5	2/6		Reading Assignment:
	2/8		
	2/10		Game:
6	2/13		Reading Assignment:
	2/15		
	2/17		Game:
7	2/20		Reading Assignment:
	2/22		
	2/24		Game:
8	2/27		Reading Assignment:
	3/1		
	3/3	MIDPOINT- LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW WITH A W	Game:
9	3/6	[SPRING BREAK]	
	3/8	[SPRING BREAK]	
	3/10		
10	3/13		Reading Assignment:
	3/15		Roundtables 1-2

	3/17		Game:
11	3/20		Reading Assignment:
	3/22		Roundtables 3-4
	3/24		Game:
12	3/27		Reading Assignment:
	3/29		Roundtables 5-6
	3/31		Game:
13	4/3		Reading Assignment:
	4/5		
	4/7		Game:
14	4/10		Reading Assignment:
	4/12		
	4/14		Game:
15	4/17	COURSE EVALUATIONS BEGIN	
	4/19		
	4/21		Game Analysis Project
16	4/24		
	4/26		
	4/28		Game:
17	5/1	LAST DAY OF CLASS COURSE EVALUATIONS END	My Toolkit Statement
		5/5: LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW WITH A WF	