

ENGL 2123: Literary Traditions and Themes
Video games and Literature
Spring 2017

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Office Hours:
MWF 11:30-12:30
or by appointment

TEXTS AND SUPPLIES

Required

Books

Ready Player One by Ernest Cline, ISBN: 9780307887443

Inside UFO 54-40 by Edward Packard, ISBN: 9780553231755

Other readings from Moodle

Games

WML = available for Windows, Mac, and Linux on Steam

Gone Home (PS4, XboxOne, WML) <http://gonehome.game/>

Undertale (WML) <http://undertale.com/>

The Stanley Parable (WML) <https://www.stanleyparable.com/> (full version, not the demo)

Portal 2 (PS3, Xbox360, WML) <http://www.thinkwithportals.com/>

Recommended (excerpts will be on Moodle)

The Annotated Alice by Lewis Carroll and Martin Gardner, ISBN: 9780140289299

Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction 2nd Edition edited by Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca, ISBN: 9780415896979 (*UVG* on schedule)

Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling edited by Marie-Laure Ryan, ISBN: 9780803289932

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In his famous dismissal of video games as art, Roger Ebert writes, “No one in or out of the field has ever been able to cite a game worthy of comparison with the great dramatists, poets, filmmakers, novelists and composers.”

Students in this course will unpack and explore the validity of this statement, as we encounter games that aspire to be literature and literature that aspires to be game-like. In examining the relationship between video games and literature, we will attempt to answer the following: what can literary studies contribute to video game studies, and vice versa? How are the two genres similar in their artistic expression of representation and cultures, and how are they different?

We will begin by defining basic concepts of video game and literary analysis before applying these concepts to selected games and literary works across genres and time periods. Readings will include short fiction, excerpts of longer works, novels, and short and long videogames, as well as academic and theoretical works exploring elements of style, ludic philosophy, and narrative in the history of gaming and literature. Thus, we will touch on classic forms of both literary and gaming criticism to develop a comparative – and applied – toolbox with which to explore the complex relationship between the two mediums.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In exploring the framework of our course and thinking through these initial questions in various assignments, students will learn to demonstrate effective communication of complex knowledge and ideas through written, oral, visual, and technological media.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Daily reading responses (250 words, due for each class period) 15%

- You will be responsible for turning in a reading response/journal entry for each class period. These responses should be the notes you take as you read, and include any thoughtful reflections or significant passages that you wish to discuss or comment on during class. You might also use these responses to jot down questions about the reading. Each response should be 1 full sheet of paper in length if hand-written, or 250 words if typed. These responses may be informal in nature. See the Moodle page for an example journal entry.

Slack conversations (Twitter length responses, 200ish characters, due once a week) 10%

- Slack is a messaging service, similar to Twitter, which we will use to facilitate class discussion. You are required to respond to the weekly prompts on the Prompts board posted by me every week by Sunday at midnight, and you are free to respond to your fellow classmates there. Additionally, we will be using Slack during small group discussion through the General board. Each of you will at some point be in charge of your group's Slack feed, so be sure to familiarize yourself with the website's interface.

Creative assignment and 500-word reflection due April 3rd, 20%

- Using the Twine software, you and 3 other classmates will adapt a selection or scene from a work of literature into an interactive fiction game. You will then each write a 500-word reflection of the assignment, including the choices you made, your contribution to the assignment, etc. Details of this assignment will be discussed further in class.

Essay #1 1000-1200 (3-4 pages) due March 3rd, 15%

Essay #2 1200-1500 (4-6 pages) due April 28th, 20%

Reading quizzes 5%

- We will sporadically have pop quizzes based on the readings. As long as you all demonstrate that you are actively doing the assigned reading, these quizzes may be phased out.

In-class participation 15%

- This class will lean heavily on class discussion. This includes both our large discussion, and group discussion. We will spend the majority of the semester talking to each other about the texts we are reading and playing, and about the ideas and questions we see them engaging with. As such, participation in these class discussions is vital to both the course's success, and your success within the course. Moreover, respectful discussion is essential. This means treating your fellow classmates and their ideas/opinions with respect, and being present and engaged throughout discussion.

The University Plus/Minus Policy indicates these standards for the letter grades when used in undergraduate courses:

- The letter grade A, including A+ and A-, denotes distinguished mastery of the course material.
- The letter grade B, including B+ and B-, denotes good mastery of the course material.
- The letter grade C, including C+ and C-, denotes acceptable mastery of the course material.
- The letter grade D, including D+ and D-, denotes minimally acceptable achievement. □ F denotes failure

Plus/Minus Grading is required for all undergraduate, graduate, and professional courses using the A through F letter grading system. The letter grades A, B, C, and D have the suffix plus (+) or minus (-) included to distinguish higher and lower performances within each of these letter grades. The letter grade F does not include the plus/minus distinction.

For individual assignments in this course, the following grade scale will apply: A+, A, A-=100, 95, 92; B+, B, B-=88, 85, 82; C+, C, C-=78, 75, 72; D+, D, D-=68, 65, 62; F=59 and below

For determining mid-term and final grades, the following grading scale will be used:

100-97=A+	89-87=B+	79-77=C+	69-67=D+	59 and below=F
96-93=A	86-83=B	76-73=C	66-63=D	
92-90=A-	82-80=B-	72-70=C-	62-60=D-	

ATTENDANCE

When students have valid reasons for absence (see [PS-22](#)), they are responsible “for providing reasonable advance notification and appropriate documentation of the reason for the absence” and “for making up examinations, obtaining lecture notes, and otherwise compensating for what may have been missed.” Teachers “will assist those students who have valid reasons,” but some in-class activities are difficult to make up. Valid reasons that must be documented include: Illness; serious family emergency; special curricular requirements such as judging trips or field trips; court-imposed legal obligations such as subpoenas or jury duty; military obligations; serious weather conditions; religious observances (see the interfaith calendar website); official participation in varsity athletic competitions or university musical events. Absences without valid reasons, or unexcused absences, are limited to three per term in classes that meet three times a week (e.g., MWF) and two per term in classes that meet two times a week (e.g., TTH or MW). Beyond these limits, *each unexcused absence will lower the final course grade by one grade increment: for example, a B+ goes to a B, a B goes to a B-, and a B- goes to a C+.*

NOTE: DOCUMENTATION FOR ABSENCES ARE DUE TO THE INSTRUCTOR WITHIN A WEEK FOLLOWING THE ABSENCE

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

According to section 10.1 of the LSU Code of Student Conduct, “A student may be charged with Academic Misconduct” for a variety of offenses, including the following: unauthorized copying, collusion, or collaboration; “falsifying” data or citations; “assisting someone in the commission or attempted commission of an offense”; and plagiarism, which is defined in section 10.1.H as a “lack of appropriate citation, or the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else’s words, structure, ideas, or data; failure to identify a source, or the submission of essentially the same work for two assignments without permission of the instructor(s).” (*Sec. 10.1*, LSU Student Code of Conduct: <http://saa.lsu.edu>)

Cases of academic misconduct & plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students.

Students will show respect for others in the classroom and *will not use cell phones or other electronic media unless asked to do so by the instructor*. In addition, a student who disrupts instruction will be asked to leave the classroom and will lose participation points for the day/week.

DISABILITY SERVICES

According to the *General Catalog*, “The *Office of Disability Services* assists students in identifying and developing accommodations and services to help over-come barriers to the achievement of personal and academic goals. Services are provided for students with temporary or permanent disabilities. Accommodations and services are based on the individual student’s disability-based need.” Students must provide current documentation of their disabilities to their teacher. Students should contact the office early so that necessary accommodations can be arranged.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Homework will not be graded if it is submitted late. Quizzes and other classroom activities cannot be made up if you miss them. If you have a valid excuse that is documented, the instructor will then assist you in making up the assignment (see attendance policy above).

*Hardcopies of assignments are due at the beginning of class. If you are going to be absent on the day that an assignment is due, you are still responsible for turning it in on (or before) the scheduled due date. If the assignment is uploaded after class has started, it will be considered one day late. For every day that an assignment is late, one letter grade will be dropped (10% deduction), unless you have made arrangements with me in advance or you provide valid documentation for your absence (see attendance policy above). You must turn in a hardcopy of each assignment and upload a copy to our course Moodle page as back-up; however, **only hardcopy assignments will be graded and returned.**

IMPORTANT NOTE: Even if Moodle says that the assignment is due by “5:00pm” or another time, assignments are ALWAYS due before the start of your class

Technology issues are not an acceptable excuse for late and/or incomplete assignments. The secret to avoiding technology problems is completing your work **far in advance of the due date**. I will always hold the student accountable unless I have received an official notice from the university that myLSU or Moodle has been down for an entire 24-hour period before class time.

PARTICIPATION, TARDINESS POLICY & MISSED CLASS

Participation is worth 15% of your final course grade. Participating in class discussion and group and/or individual activities is vital to students' success in this course.

Therefore, you are expected to show up to class on time and ready to learn. I reserve the right to count students as absent (unexcused) after excessive lateness and/or unpreparedness. Excessive lateness in this case will include: being late to class 3 or more times, coming to class without the required materials 3 or more times, and/or not participating or listening to lectures 3 or more times (this includes sleeping, using cell phones for any reason, using technology for reasons other than note-taking or class work, being unprepared to answer questions when prompted by me, and/or participating in general day dreaming/solemn window gazing.)

The instructor will not email students the day’s notes or activities if they miss class. Instead, they should contact classmates to find out homework instructions and what we did that day in class.

COURSE SCHEDULE

DAILY PLAN (subject to change)				Homework (due next class meeting)
JAN Unit I Games as Literature: Introduction and <i>Gone Home</i>	11	Wed	-Introduction to course and texts -Explanation of syllabus and assignments -Letter of Introduction	- Sign syllabus agreement and plagiarism form -Read <i>UVG</i> Ch. 3 pp. 29-31, 33-37, 43-45 on Moodle -Read excerpt #1 of Narrative Across Media on Moodle
	13	Fri	-Discuss <i>UVG</i> readings: “What are video games?” -Discuss excerpt #1 of Narrative Across Media on Moodle	-Read <i>UVG</i> Ch.1 pp.8-12 on Moodle -Play <i>Gone Home</i>
	16	Mon	Martin Luther King Day holiday NO CLASS	-see above

Unit II Literature as games: <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>	18	Wed	-Discuss UVG Ch.1 "How do we study videogames?" -Discuss <i>Gone Home</i>	-Read "Are Video Games Literature?" on Moodle -Read "Games telling stories?" on Moodle
	20	Fri	-Discuss "Are Video Games Literature?" "Games telling stories?" by Jesper Juul -Discuss <i>Gone Home</i> -Final date for dropping courses without receiving a grade of "W", 4:30 p.m. deadline	-Read excerpts from <i>The Annotated Alice</i> , (AIW Ch.6, TLK Preface, Ch.2, Ch.8-12) on Moodle -Read "Phenomenology of Reading" on Moodle
	23	Mon	-Discuss excerpts from <i>The Annotated Alice</i> -Discuss "Phenomenology of Reading"	- Read "Through the Looking Glass, Darkly: Reading Alice in the Computer Game" on Moodle -Read excerpt from <i>Half-Real</i> on Moodle
	25	Wed	-Discuss "Through the Looking Glass, Darkly: Reading Alice in the Computer Game" -Discuss excerpts from <i>Half-Real</i> -Tips for <i>Undertale</i> , strategy guide, etc.	-Play <i>Undertale</i> , Neutral + True Pacifist run
	27	Fri	-Discuss <i>Undertale</i>	-Play <i>Undertale</i> , Neutral + True Pacifist run
	30	Mon	-Discuss <i>Undertale</i> -Discuss " <i>Undertale</i> : Player Presence, Morality, and Self" on Moodle	-Play <i>Undertale</i> , Neutral + True Pacifist run -Read " <i>Undertale</i> : Player Presence, Morality, and Self" on Moodle

FEB Unit III Metagames Part I: <i>Undertale</i> and Barth Unit IV Metagames Part II: Choose your own adventure	1	Wed	-Discuss <i>Undertale</i>	-Play <i>Undertale</i> , Neutral + True Pacifist run
	3	Fri	-Discuss <i>Undertale</i>	- Complete <i>Undertale</i> , Neutral + True Pacifist run, if you haven't already -Watch (or play?) <i>Undertale</i> genocide run
	6	Mon	-Discuss <i>Undertale</i> (genocide run and full game)	-Read " <i>Undertale</i> : Player Presence, Morality, and Self" on Moodle -Watch (or play?) <i>Undertale</i> genocide run
	8	Wed	-Discuss " <i>Undertale</i> : Player Presence, Morality, and Self" on Moodle -Discuss <i>Undertale</i> (genocide run and full game)	-Watch "Is <i>Undertale</i> the Most Violent Game This Year?" Idea Channel video on Moodle -Watch (or play?) <i>Undertale</i> genocide run
	10	Fri	-Discuss Idea channel video -Discuss <i>Undertale</i> (genocide run and full game)	-Read "The Literature of Exhaustion" on Moodle -Read "Lost in the Funhouse" on Moodle
	13	Mon	-Discuss "Lost in the Funhouse" -Discuss "The Literature of Exhaustion"	-Read "The Four Types of Metafiction in Videogames" on Moodle
	15	Wed	-Discuss article -Discuss "Lost in the Funhouse" and <i>Undertale</i> -Introduction to Essay #1	-Think about possible paper topics -Read "The Best New Videogames..." on Moodle -Read "The Garden of Forking Paths" on Moodle
	17	Fri	-Discuss "The Best New Videogames..." on Moodle -Discuss "The Garden of Forking Paths"	-Read "The Babysitter" on Moodle -Play <i>The Stanley Parable</i> , find at least 3 endings
	20	Mon	-Discuss "The Babysitter" -Discuss <i>The Stanley Parable</i>	-Play <i>The Stanley Parable</i> , find more endings. Find (or watch) the "Games" ending. -Read "Understanding the Walker Experience through Four Design Themes"

	22	Wed	--Read "Understanding the Walker Experience through Four Design Themes" -Discuss <i>The Stanley Parable</i> -Essay writing tips	-Finish rough draft of Essay #1 for peer review -Read "The Stanley Parable: 'The end is never the end is never the end...'"
	24	Fri	-Discuss "The Stanley Parable: 'The end is never the end is never the end...'" -Discuss <i>The Stanley Parable</i> -Essay #1 Peer review	-Revise Essay #1 -Read <i>Inside UFO 54-40</i> -Read "Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games" on Moodle
	27	Mon	Mardi Gras holiday, NO CLASS	-see above

MAR	1	Wed	Mardi Gras holiday, NO CLASS	-see above
Unit V Literature about games; Easter eggs and Interactive Fiction	3	Fri	-Discuss <i>Inside UFO 54-40</i> -Discuss "Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games" -Essay #1 due at the beginning of class	-Read <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0000-0005 -Read excerpt #2 of Narrative Across Media on Moodle
	6	Mon	-Discuss <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0000-0005 -Discuss excerpt #2 of Narrative Across Media Mid-semester grades due, 9:00 a.m.	-Read <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0006-0011
	8	Wed	-Discuss <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0006-0011	-Read <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0012-0016 -Read "Perchance to Dream" on Moodle
	10	Fri	-Discuss <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0012-0016 -Discuss "Perchance to Dream"	-Read <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0017-0022 -Read excerpt #3 of Narrative Across Media on Moodle
	13	Mon	-Discuss <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0017-0022 -Discuss excerpt #3 of Narrative Across Media	-Read <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0023-0027
	15	Wed	-Discuss <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0023-0027	-Read <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0028-end
	17	Fri	-Discuss <i>Ready Player One</i> Ch. 0028-end	-Read excerpt #1 of <i>Electronic Literature</i> on Moodle -Play <i>Galatea</i>
	20	Mon	- Discuss <i>Galatea</i> -Discuss excerpt #1 of <i>Electronic Literature</i> on Moodle	-Read excerpt #2 of <i>Electronic Literature</i> on Moodle -Play <i>The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo</i> , reach all endings
	22	Wed	-Discuss <i>The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo</i> -Discuss #2 of <i>Electronic Literature</i> on Moodle -Introduction to creative assignments	-Brainstorm ideas for creative assignment on Slack -Watch Twine tutorial videos on Moodle
	24	Fri	-Introduction to Twine -Choosing groups and group brainstorming Final date for dropping courses, 4:30 p.m., deadline	-Meet/coordinate with groups on project as needed
	27	Mon	-Work day for creative assignments	-see above
	29	Wed	-Work day for creative assignments	-see above
	31	Fri	-Work day for creative assignments	-see above

APR	3	Mon	Creative assignment and reflection due -Introduction to Essay #2 -Presentation of creative assignments	-Think about possible topics for Essay #2 -Play student games (links on Slack)
Unit VI Conclusion Games and storytelling/ The L-L chart	5	Wed	-Presentation of creative assignments -Discussion of student games	-Begin playing <i>Portal 2</i> -Read "In Defense of Cutscenes"
	7	Fri	-Discuss "In Defense of Cutscenes"	-Play <i>Portal 2</i> and work on final essay
	10	Mon	Spring Break, NO CLASS	-Play <i>Portal 2</i> and work on final essay
	17	Mon	-Discuss <i>Portal 2</i> Ch. 1-5	-Finish <i>Portal 2</i> , if you haven't already -Read excerpt from <i>Video Games and Storytelling</i>
	19	Wed	- Discuss excerpt from <i>Video Games and ...</i> -Discuss <i>Portal 2</i> Ch.5-10	-Finish rough draft of Essay #2
	21	Fri	-Discuss <i>Portal 2</i> -Peer review for Essay #2	-Revise Essay #2 -Read excerpt from <i>Literary Gaming</i> on Moodle

	24	Mon	-Discuss excerpt from <i>Literary Gaming</i> -Introduction to L-L chart	-Work on L-L chart activity
	26	Wed	-Filling out L-L chart -Individual conference meetings	- Canonical games activity
	28	Fri	-Final paper due -Canonical games chart -Conclusion discussion: Video games and Literature	NO FINAL EXAM! Have a great summer ☺

MAY	9	Tue	Final grades due (degree candidate), 9:00 a.m. deadline	
	10	Wed	Final grades due (non-degree candidate), 9:00 a.m. deadline	

Syllabus Agreement

I, _____, have read and understood the policies on this

(PRINT NAME)

document and I agree to abide by the terms of this syllabus: including policies on cell phones, conferences, attendance, participation, no plagiarism, academic integrity, and student conduct, etc.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

PLAGIARISM

Certain misconceptions about plagiarism are common. This explanation is intended to dispel such misunderstandings.

To plagiarize is, according to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, "to commit literary theft." Writers (or speakers) plagiarize if they use the words, ideas, arguments, etc. of another and make it appear that these materials are their own. To avoid the charge of plagiarism when using materials derived from another, the writer should follow accepted conventions of punctuation, indentation, and documentation. A handbook of composition will provide a list of these conventions.

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

1. Quoting material from a particular source, such as a text, article, Internet or e-mail, without indicating the source and without placing the directly quoted material within the quotation marks;
2. Taking the ideas of arguments of another person without acknowledging the source of the ideas or arguments;
3. Substituting synonyms for an author's words but preserving his or her sentence structure or mixing the author's words or phrases with your paraphrasing and failing to put the author's words in quotation marks. Citing the source does not excuse you from the charge of plagiarism.
4. Using a theme or portion of a theme written by someone else. For example, you plagiarize if you purchase an essay from an Internet service or use someone's essay from a previous semester.

Plagiarism cases are reported to the Office of Student Advocacy and Accountability for action. According to section 10.1 of the *LSU Code of Student Conduct*, "A student may be charged with Academic Misconduct" for a variety of offenses, including the following: unauthorized copying, collusion, or collaboration; "falsifying" data or citations; "assisting someone in the commission or attempted commission of an offense"; and plagiarism, which is defined in section 10.1.H as a "lack of appropriate citation, or the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else's words, structure, ideas, or data; failure to identify a source, or the submission of essentially the same work for two assignments without permission of the instructor(s)."

I have read the above statement, and I understand it.

(Signed) _____

(Print name) _____

(Date) _____