Video Game Rhetorical Analysis Essay

**Length:** 4-5 full pages

# Points: 100

**Final Due Date: See Syllabus**

# Purpose

# This essay builds on the previous essay by extending close reading, analysis, and argumentation skills to the analysis of digital media, particularly video games. As an increasingly dominant cultural form, video games work rhetorically, which is to say that they persuade us with their processes and cultural values. In this unit, we want to do the following: 1) analyze video games as culturally important, influential, and persuasive texts, 2) analyze the rhetoric at play in *Neverwinter* and another game with which you choose to work, and 3) write an argumentative and research-driven essay that analyzes the rhetoric(s) of that game from a particular socio-cultural angle. *You will not be graded on how well you play the game but instead on the effectiveness of your argumentation and writing*.

We are doing this work with video games in class for two reasons: first, while video games are often dismissed as mere entertainment or even ways to “waste time,” the video game medium is actually complex, culturally significant, narratively rich, and very persuasive. Studying video games offers us the chance to develop the critical literacies needed to understand the persuasiveness of games that occupy a large part of many of our recreational time. Similarly, the act of play itself is paramount to learning: the searching, seeking, developing, adapting, and experimentation essential to play helps us learn. Playing games bring us into close contact with otherness—other worlds, values, ideologies, norms, and ideas—and thinking rhetorically offers us a way to better understand on only the game’s persuasiveness but worlds outside the game as well.

# Audience

Your intended audience for this assignment will be the other members of the class. As always, you need to think about our needs as readers, whether you’re writing about the game we all played or you’re writing about another game.

# Assignment

You should write an essay of 4-5 pages based on the following prompt:

* Choose one video game, and compose a thesis-driven essay that analyzes the game rhetorically through a particular socio-cultural lens. Focus on one specific cultural issue (see list below) to guide your rhetorical argument. Support your analysis with direct analysis of the game, sound argumentation, and research. While some brief discussion of ethos, pathos, and logos is needed in this essay, your essay should focus on an argument that you make that takes up some cultural, rhetorical, sociological, or philosophical issue that you identify in the game-text as being important. You’ll need to use at least four peer-reviewed sources to support your claims (Bogost’s essay can be one of them, though it doesn’t have to be).

**Research**

Check out the following peer-reviewed journals for game studies research:

* Game Studies – [www.gamestudies.org](http://www.gamestudies.org)
* Games and Culture – <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/gac> (you will need to login to Tri-C’s Library to obtain access to these articles)
* Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture – [www.eludamos.org](http://www.eludamos.org)

*Be sure to search Tri-C’s library as well as OhioLink for game studies books*. *We have a growing collection of game studies books at Westshore*. *I also have a host of game studies books in my office*. *If you’re taking a particular theoretical approach to a game, you can use peer-reviewed sources from a non-game studies field as long as it helps make your argument.*

**Elements of the Game to Observe**:

* Mechanics (reward system, controls, constraints, limitations, rules, auction house/economy, travel, money)
* Narratives (in quests, cut scenes, loading screens, etc.)
* Images and Iconography (architecture, city design, character appearance, NPCs, environment, etc.)
* Your own cognitive-affective responses to the game
* Communities of practice inside the game (guilds, dungeon groups, etc.) or outside the game (game forums).
* Game industry, marketing, announcements, and news

**A Starter List of Issues to Analyze as You Play** (there's more than these things--this is meant just to jumpstart your thinking):

* Race
* Gender
* Sexuality
* Sex
* LGBTQ+ issues
* Labor
* Consumerism
* Environmentalism
* Politics
* Religion
* Philosophy
* Psychology
* Gaming Cultures and Communities
* Monetization
* Body Image/Size
* Narrative
* Art
* History

**Evaluation Criteria**

* Appropriate response to the prompt
* 4-5 pages in length
* Clear thesis statement that is developed throughout the essay
* Some analysis of ethos, pathos, and logos
* A focused purpose in your writing – not too broad
* Strong support from the text
* Evidence of critical thinking and reflection
* Awareness of assigned audience
* Appropriate stylistic choices
* Proper use of MLA format, including in-text citations and works cited entries
* Research (at least **4 peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles/sources**).