Video Game Rhetorical Analysis Unit for ENG 101H Project

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**Description of the Project**

This FIG-supported project aimed to engage students in ENG 101H Honors College Composition I in the study of rhetoric and writing through video games. The grant provided course release time to research best practices in composition studies and game studies to integrate this complex, dynamic medium as a “text” to study and analyze rhetorically. Based on my reading in these fields—a sample of which is detailed in the following annotated bibliography—I created a five-week unit for my 14-week ENG 101H course centered around video game analysis. It was admittedly a very small class with only five students regularly attending (ENG 101H enrollment is much higher in the Fall versus the Spring). This small class size afforded a great space within which to work with students individually on their projects, help them forge connections with one another, and create a sense of rapport as we played—and thought—our way through a new game and classroom experience together.

The lessons for this blended ENG 101H section below are shared for your use, development, and adaptation. Indeed, as my first attempt to integrate games into the composition classroom in a meaningful way (not in a spirit of technological determinism), these lessons need the development only possible through additional experience. My reflection following the lessons is based on my own observations about how to make the unit more robust and on student feedback regarding how the unit could be improved. The value of thinking about video games as influential, complex “texts” lies in how their content speaks to many different disciplines and areas of study, from the literature and history to ecology and education. The critical approaches I took to the game we played and studied reflects only the tip of the iceberg of what could be done with games in the classroom, and many of the readings were selected based on the interests of these five students and the games they played recreationally.

The video game medium, which popularly (and reductively) associated with mere recreation and even “wasting time,” is complex in its inner workings and full of potential for learning. It is important that instructors who use games as texts in the classroom actually play those games. Reading in the field of game studies before teaching with games is important because the multidisciplinary field has 30+ years of research that delves into video game narratives, mechanics, theories of play, iconography, discourse, and gaming cultures. Any approach to analyzing video games should take into account game rules, mechanics, interfaces, narratives, music, images, player response, rhetorics, and haptics in the analysis to do justice to such a multifaceted medium. One could isolate one or two of these aspects for course adaptation, but that would effectively miss out on the dynamic form of video games that make them so immersive. Analyzing video games as “texts” has a lot of potential for student engagement and achievement.

**Lesson Plans**

For the sake of brevity, I’ve mostly only listed course outcomes in the outcomes column (with a few objectives for illustrative purposes), but specific course objectives were also given to the students.

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| Week | ENG 101H Outcome | Assessment(s) | Activities | Readings | Writing |
| 1 | Outcome: Read, interpret, and analyze, both verbally and in writing, various kinds of texts that may include but are not limited to nonfiction essays, articles, reports, literature, advertisements, photographs, other forms of visual art, and videos.Objectives:-Identify and evaluate the objectivity and reliability of information found in texts.-Identify and evaluate purpose and audience of selected texts. | - The reading response- Assessed students’ understanding through class discussion- Having already worked with the idea of rhetoric, my largest assessment of their understanding of how rhetorics work in digital worlds occurs in their rhetorical analysis essay. | - Download and sign up for *Forsaken World* (a free massively multiplayer online role playing game)- In-class discussion of Bogost’s work on video game rhetorics and his own rhetorical moves as he attempts to explain the value of studying video games. We look particularly at Bogost’s use of *logos* and *ethos*- Watch brief clip of Bogost on *The Colbert Report* | Ian Bogost’s “The Rhetoric of Video Games” | -1-2 page reading response on Bogost’s work relating it to their own gaming experiences.-Video Game Rhetorical Analysis Essay is assigned |
| 2 | Outcome: Read, interpret, and analyze, both verbally and in writing, various kinds of texts that may include but are not limited to nonfiction essays, articles, reports, literature, advertisements, photographs, other forms of visual art, and videos.Objectives:-Identify and evaluate the objectivity and reliability of information found in texts.-Identify and evaluate purpose and audience of selected texts. | - Gaming Log (Week 5)- In class discussion of their experiences in the gameworld and their connections to Bogost’s article.- Reading response to Dooghan’s essay | - Begin playing *Forsaken World* outside of class, sharing their character names and describing their experiences/struggles on a new Blackboard Discussion Board Forum - Watch video on visual rhetoric-Watch YouTube walkthrough on creating a character in *Forsaken World* and getting started. | - Read my notes on online harassment, elements of the game to observe, and possible issues to analyze-After polling students to see what games they play, I assigned Daniel Dooghan’s “Digital Conquerors: *Minecraft* and the Apologetics of Neoliberalis  | - Reading response-Begin pre-writing for rhetorical |
| 3 | Read, interpret, and analyze, both verbally and in writing, various kinds of texts that may include but are not limited to nonfiction essays, articles, reports, literature, advertisements, photographs, other forms of visual art, and videos.Objectives:- Distinguish between main points and supporting details.-Identify and analyze themes, images, and motifs. | - Reading response to one of the two assigned readings, in which they have to integrate a quotation from one of the readings -Check gaming log in class and give some feedback, showing them some of my own gaming logs from my research | - Discuss tech issues with *Forsaken World*- Small group discussion of the assigned readings followed by a group discussion.- Discuss matters of colonialism within *Forsaken World* as well as the religious and esoteric rhetorics at play, based on their observation and their readings. - Discuss other socio-cultural issues they observed while playing-Watch video on integrating quotations.-Each student presented briefly on what they were planning to write about, and I provided some feedback and direction to each student | -Based on our discussions and what we were seeing in the game, I assigned Jessica Langer’s “The Familiar and the Foreign: Playing (Post)Colonialism in *World of Warcraft* and Gregory Price Grieve and Heidi Campbell’s “Studying Religion in Digital Gaming: A Critical Review of an Emergent Field.”-Notes on conducting research in game studies (we had done a little bit of research before, which while not emphasized in ENG 101H outcomes is nevertheless important to the Honors experience.  | -Reading response-Gaming log-Produce 3 page draft of analysis essay for peer review |
| 4 | Outcomes:Write compositions using appropriate rhetorical strategies that may include but are not limited to summary, analysis, report, reflection, narration, proposal, persuasion, and argumentation, with opportunities for response and revision. | - Assessed the peer review sheet the following week after they finished their essays | - Held class in Westshore’s Spark Lab, where we had the game up on a large screen to look at as a group-Completed a peer review activity- Final discussion of *Forsaken World*- Addressed questions about the essay and about their individual essays.- Gave a bag of Tri-C SWAG to student who leveled up the highest in *Forsaken World* ☺ | - No readings this week, since students were focusing on writing their drafts.  | - Revise and edit the final rhetorical analysis essay and submit it in Blackboard before the next class. |
| 5 | Outcomes:Write compositions using appropriate rhetorical strategies that may include but are not limited to summary, analysis, report, reflection, narration, proposal, persuasion, and argumentation, with opportunities for response and revision.Apply proofreading, editing, and revising techniques to all writing assignments and written communication. | -Grade and provide feedback on the video game rhetorical analysis essay | - in class written reflection-discussion about how I could improve this unit moving forward- Activities related to the next unit | - Readings related to the next unit | -Video Game Rhetorical Analysis Essay is due at the start of this week. -In-class written reflection on the process of writing and researching for this essay |

Video Game Rhetorical Analysis Essay Assignment Sheet

**Length:** 4-5 full pages

# **Points:**  100 points

**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 (as we read in Ian Bogost’s work). 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 *Forsaken World* or another game with which you choose to work, and 3) write an argumentative essay that analyzes the rhetoric 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*.

# 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 (it can be *Forsaken World*), and compose a thesis-driven essay that analyzes the game rhetorically through a particular socio-cultural lens. Focus on one specific cultural issue (see the Week 8 Lesson folder for ideas) 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 scholarly 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 the Westshore Campus*. *I also have a bookshelf 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.*

**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**).