

MEVIT2725 – Video Games: Aesthetics, Industry and Culture

Assessment guidelines, autumn 2022

The exam consists of two assignments. The candidate must answer both. The assignments count 50/50 in the evaluation. The candidate must ensure that the two assignments are of approximately equal length in the paper (about 5 pages for each assignment). Significant discrepancies in this page distribution must not occur. Standard rules and principles for academic writing apply. Both assignments must meet at least the minimum requirements for a passing grade (E) in order for the candidate to pass the exam in its entirety. If one assignment is evaluated as a fail, the entire paper receives an F.

The first assignment is an essay on the game industry and game history. This assignment is the same for all candidates, but it can be approached in various ways. The second assignment on game analysis offers a choice between two analysis tasks. The essay topic and game analysis test the same types of academic skills (use of relevant theory and examples, discussion and critical reflection), but differ in themes and relevant subject matter. Furthermore, the game analysis assignment tests the candidate's ability to specify their own analytical focus within a specific framework and conduct an independent analysis in which they interpret and discuss game mechanics and game content using relevant theories and terms.

The candidate must actively and explicitly use the syllabus literature in both assignments. The candidate should use both the textbook *Understanding Video Games* and relevant articles and book chapters throughout. Very good papers require the use of both the textbook and articles/book chapters. Secondary sources (like Store Norske Leksikon, Wikipedia, other online sources or other textbooks) or lecture slides must not be used as sources to define terms and theories already covered in the syllabus literature or as replacements for using the syllabus literature.

The following paragraphs explain what to look for in terms of content and focus. It is important that the candidate demonstrates a general understanding of the area the assignment asks for and that they are able to focus on aspects that are most central to and relevant for their chosen examples and cases.

Assignment 1

Assignment 1 is about the game industry as a creative and cultural industry. The candidate should demonstrate a general understanding of what that means by explaining the basics of the industry (for example, being a collaborative practice involving numerous disciplines, as something more than a software industry), competition with other media industries, economic aspects, the structure of the game industry and the game development process. The candidate must then discuss some key historical events and developments that have been important in shaping today's industry and game development practices. There are several historical events and developments from the syllabus that can be relevant here. In the course, we have focused on

technological, aesthetic and cultural aspects in game history. It is important that the candidate can recognize and argue well for how certain historical events have been impactful for today's industry.

The candidate must also reflect on the central opportunities and challenges for different types of developers today. Here, the candidate may for example choose to focus on the difference between the mainstream/AAA game industry and independent developers/studios, or to focus exclusively on one or the other. Regardless, the discussion needs examples from more than one type of developer. Relevant aspects include economic opportunities and constraints, publisher constraints, risk aversion, crowdfunding, discrimination, crunching, experimentations with genres/mechanics/conventions/innovations. The candidate must use examples to illustrate and concretize the discussion. The candidate can choose to focus on particular game studios or on specific game titles (or both). Regardless of focus, the examples must serve to argue something specific about contemporary game development. It is very good if the candidate can connect this discussion to the key historical events and developments.

Primary sources on the game industry, game history and game development include chapters 2 and 4 in *Understanding Video Games* and the two electronic chapters by O'Donnell. The articles by Shaw, Fisher, Braithwaite and Srauy contain relevant content about the industry that may further contextualize the chosen challenges and problems.

Assignment 2

In *analysis task (a)*, the candidate can choose to conduct either a narrative analysis or a representation analysis of a video game of their own choice. In *analysis task (b)*, the candidate must analyze a multiplayer game (local/online multiplayer) of their own choice. For all analysis tasks, the game must be appropriate for the selected type of analysis, and the candidate must explain why the game is academically relevant/interesting. If the game seems inappropriate or unconventional (for example, choosing to conduct a narrative analysis on a mostly non-narrative game), the candidate must convincingly argue for its relevance/appropriateness and why the type of analysis is useful for understanding the game. All analysis tasks require the candidate to formulate a specific analysis question for the game. It is important that the question focuses on what is particular for the candidate's chosen game and that it helps narrow and concentrate the aim of the analysis. The question must not be formulated in a way that directs the candidate away from what the assignment requires.

Relevant terms and theories should be explained briefly. It is important that the paper is an active analysis and interpretation of a game using relevant syllabus subject matter, not a general exposition on or listing of various syllabus subject matter or details/features in a game.

Analysis task (a): Both analysis types require the candidate to discuss the relationship between gameplay, aesthetics and the theme of the analysis. Thus, the candidate must demonstrate

knowledge of and ability to use relevant game aesthetic terms, such as game rules and structures, genres, mechanics, interfaces, geography, perspectives, graphical styles, sound and music.

- For a narrative analysis, the following is relevant: definitions of narratives; similarities and differences between games and narratives; Aarseth's ludonarrative model (world, objects, agents and events); narrative mechanics such as cutscenes, characters, branching, choices and quests; emergent narratives and storytelling through landscapes.
- For a representation analysis, the following is relevant: definition and importance of representation; game representation specifics; historical and current representations of gender in games; types of LGBTQ+ content in games; race/ethnicity in games; species in games; diversity; aesthetic pluralism; optional content.

Analysis task (b): The multiplayer analysis is more focused on gameplay and mechanics than audiovisual content. The candidate is free to choose a game that is exclusively multiplayer or a game that features both single player and multiplayer modes (or a simultaneous combination of both, as in MMORPGs). In the latter case, it is important that the candidate focuses on the multiplayer aspects, not the single player aspects/modes.

The candidate should demonstrate how the game facilitates multiplayer (player behavior, strategies, motives) through various types of rules (for example, operational rules, interplay rules and evaluation rules), mechanics (core mechanics, supporting mechanics), balancing (in-game balancing, player-player balancing) and level design/topography (gameworld, perspective, interfaces). The candidate may also include other terms from the syllabus if they are relevant for the analysis.

The candidate must actively discuss how the formal aspects and systems of the game encourage various forms of cooperation and/or conflict between players (player-versus-enemy and/or player-versus-player). Furthermore, the analysis should focus on how players can use the game's systems to create their own rules, playstyles or strategies. This may be related to options and functions made available in the game (for example, by allowing the players to set various parameters, goals, rules and modes themselves), local norms and "meta" contexts, or subversive and unintended use of the game's systems. The candidate needs to focus actively on the interplay between the game and player behavior throughout the analysis.

Syllabus literature:

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Braithwaite, A. (2016) It's About Ethics in Games Journalism? Gamergaters and Geek Masculinity. *Social Media + Society*. 2 (4). doi:10.1177/2056305116672484.

Brock, A. (2011) «'When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong'»: Resident Evil 5, Racial Representation, and Gamers. *Games and culture*. 6 (5), 429–452. doi:10.1177/1555412011402676.

Consalvo, M. (2009) There is No Magic Circle. *Games and culture*. 4 (4), 408–417. doi:10.1177/1555412009343575.

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Fisher, H.D. (2015) Sexy, Dangerous—and Ignored: An In-depth Review of the Representation of Women in Select Video game Magazines. *Games and Culture*. 10 (6), 551–570. doi:10.1177/1555412014566234.

Jagoda, P. (2018) On Difficulty in Video Games. Mechanics, Interpretation, Affect. *Critical Inquiry*. 45 (1), 199–233. doi:10.1086/699585.

Jørgensen, K. (2012) Between the Game System and the Fictional World: A Study of Computer Game Interfaces. *Games and Culture*. 7 (2), 142–163. doi:10.1177/1555412012440315.

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Prax, P. & Soler, A. (2016) Critical Alternative Journalism from the Perspective of Game

Journalists. *Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*. 13 (1), 1–15. <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/critical-alternative-journalism-from-the-perspective-of-game-journalists/>.

Hutchinson, R. (2021) Observant Play: Colonial Ideology in The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. *Game Studies*. 21 (3). <http://gamestudies.org/2103/articles/hutchinson>.

Shaw, A. (2009) Putting the Gay in Games: Cultural Production and GLBT Content in Video Games. *Games and Culture*. 4 (3), 228–253. doi:10.1177/1555412009339729.

Thach, H. (2021) A Cross-Game Look at Transgender Representation in Video Games. *Press Start*. 7 (1). <https://doaj.org/article/8a60c157a6c44adf96cc27e6f20fec64>.

Srauy, S. (2019) Professional Norms and Race in the North American Video Game Industry. *Games and Culture*. 14 (5), 478–497. doi:10.1177/1555412017708936.

Shaw, A. & Friesem, E. (2016) Where Is the Queerness in Games? Types of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content in Digital Games. *International Journal Of Communication*. 10, 3877–3889.