

ENG 444: Senior Seminar

Games and Interactive Narrative

M/W 3:00-4:15, RB 290

Instructor

Dr. Jennifer Grouling (jgrouling@bsu.edu)

RB 280, Office hours TBA or on Zoom by appointment

Course Description

This section of ENG 444 combines your skills in creative writing, professional writing, and literary/rhetorical analysis to study interactive narrative in both video and board games. We will also read about writing for the game industry, including writing game pitches and design documents. You will apply what you have learned in a collaborative project that involves writing a narrative scenario for a board game, role-playing game, or interactive fiction.

As a senior seminar, you will develop your own semester long project based on the theme of the course and your specialty within English Studies. You will conduct a rhetorical, literary, or linguistic analysis of a game, design a game pitch or script for a game, or develop teaching materials that incorporate gaming in the English classroom.

Why English?

You may be wondering what games studies has to do with English. Actually, I believe it has a whole lot to do with it! Narrative is an important part of many games, and those of us in English are well trained to study narratives. Games are also a form of literacy, and that's something else we study as English majors. Designing games takes creative writing skills and professional writing skills. Finally, games involve a great deal of learning, and are thus of interest to those of you working in English Education.

Course Goals

- Plan and produce an extended individual research project related to your area of English studies

- Reflect on your learning as an English major
- Engage with the topic of narrative and gaming through reading material and discussion
- Analyze an example of interactive fiction or game narrative
- Apply knowledge of gaming and narrative to the production of game materials
- Collaborate effectively as part of a game design team

What I Expect From You

This is a senior seminar course. That means that you are expected to do a senior-level semester long project. The nature of this project is something we will negotiate so that it both fits the theme of the course and is personally meaningful for you. Whatever you choose, you should plan to start working on this project from the beginning of the course and spend approximately **1-2 hours** a week on this long-term project in **addition** to the time you spend on readings and other classroom assignments. This course will have a rigorous workload, and one of the biggest challenges for you will be manage your time. Furthermore, you will often be working on more than one project at a time. (This is good experience for the workplace!) I highly recommend setting aside a particular time every week to work on your long-term project and balancing your work carefully.

We will read about games, analyze games, and sometimes play games in this course. It should be a lot of fun, but only if you keep an open mind and treat your classmates with respect. You may not see yourself as a gamer, but chances are you engage with games in some way in your daily life. If, however, you completely dislike games or are not open to trying new games, talking about the value of games, and studying games, you will find this course a poor fit. If you are a hardcore gamer, please be patient with those who are less familiar with it than you and explain any references that you make to your own gaming experience. In addition, be open to new areas of games studies you may not have experience with.

What You Should Expect from Me

I am happy to consult on projects at any stage of development. I'll be available by appointment and during office hours. I will answer emails during regular business hours. I'll also give you feedback promptly (within a week) on any pieces of a project that are still being developed and need quick feedback.

Although I am your guide through this course, I may not have the same experiences with the material as you do. As a seminar, this course is about having conversations, not me lecturing to you and having you regurgitate information. It is my hope that you will see me as a fellow professional not as the be-all-and-end-all on the topic. In addition, class periods may involve workshops. I believe that good teaching involves hands-on learning, so designing these activities to be productive and interesting is a part of my job. If you have feedback throughout the course or wonder why we are doing something, do not hesitate to talk to me.

Requirements

Required Books and Materials

Fernandez-Vara, C. (2019). *Introduction to Game Analysis*. 2nd Ed.

Breault, Michael. (2020). *Narrative Design: The Craft of Writing for Games*

Selected Readings available on Canvas

Misc. programs and materials for work on projects

Assignments and Grading

Grades rarely assist in learning, so in this class, we are going to use contract grading to focus on feedback, effort, and reflection.

Your grades will be distributed between the following categories:

- Overall Participation: 10%
- Game Analysis Project: 20%
- Game Design Project: 25%
- Capstone Project: 35%
- Reflections: 10%

For each of the assignments or categories listed above, we will collaboratively create a contract that explains what you need to complete to achieve a certain grade. Using this method of collaborative contract grading, we will work to balance the overall course goals with your own personal goals. We will then use reflections for you to explain how you felt you met (or did not meet) those goals and hold up your end of the contract. I will determine your grade based on the contract as well as your

input in the reflection. For example, when you design your own capstone project, you will let me know what you want to achieve, and how you will demonstrate that. When your project is complete, you will reflect on what you actually achieved. In this way, we will always be in discussion about your progress in the course. Please know that you can meet with me about your grade at any point.

Overall Participation (10%)

We will decide as a class what we will expect from one another when it comes to overall class participation. You will also let us know the primary ways you engage with a course. We will design a contract for this portion of the grade.

Game Analysis Project (20%)

We will read about how to conduct a game analysis. We will then play a few games together as a class. For each gaming experience, we will prepare for analysis beforehand. Your analysis can take the form of a short-written essay (about 4-5 pages) or a video (about 4-5 minutes).

Game Design Project (25%)

This project will involve collaborating with others and bringing your own skill set to that collaboration. You will apply what you have learned about transmedia story to “construct and develop [a] story outside the realm of authorized interpretations” (Booth, p. 32). You will be working with a group of 3-5 peer game designers using a common story that the class selects together.

Capstone Project (35%)

You will also be working all semester on your own capstone project. Your project will relate to the theme of the course; however, the direction you take will be up to you and your own interests within English Studies. All projects will involve extensive writing and research. You may write a 15-20 page research paper that analyzes a game or gaming community. You may design a plan for a course that uses gaming in some way. Or you may design and write a game pitch or script. We will use a proposal, conferences, and progress reports throughout the semester to keep you on track with your capstone project. This work will always be due on Fridays (we do not meet then) as a way to help you manage this work in relationship to the other aspects of the course.

Reflections (10%)

Throughout the course you will be asked to submit reflections on your work. You will also be asked to write a more formal reflection about your overall learning in relation to your English major.

Course Policies

Attendance/Participation

To get the most out of this class, I invite you to attend regularly. We are doing a lot of collaborative work this semester, and we need *you!* If you cannot attend, please communicate a makeup plan with me and any group members.

We are scheduled to be in person; however, if you are sick, please let me know via email by 2 pm, and I will open my Zoom link: <https://bsu.zoom.us/my/jgrouling>. Attending via Zoom counts for attendance to me as long as you still participate, but should not be your default method of attendance.

Finally, we will have a few game days that require longer than our usual class period. You must attend one of these but may attend all of them.

The following absences are excused per university policy:

- Disability accommodations
- Pregnancy, hospitalization, or medical leave
- Bereavement leave
- Religious observation
- Jury duty or court witness leave
- Military leave
- Ball State sponsored events

Academic Dishonesty

In this class, we will do some collaborative work, and we will give each other credit for what each person contributes to that work. Remember to always cite your sources, even if they are images or games.

If I discover any plagiarism (not crediting sources) or academic misconduct (making up information, turning in something from a different class, etc.), I will contact you immediately to schedule a meeting. After the meeting (or if I do not hear from you in 1 week), I will determine a course of

action, including submitting the paperwork for an academic ethics violation. Also, please familiarize yourself with the [Student Academic Ethics Policy](#).

Non-Discrimination Statement

As a part of the Ball State Community, we all agree to respect our students, our classmates, our teachers, and our community, both inside the classroom and online. If I feel that your actions are not in keeping with these community standards, I will meet to discuss them with you and may refer you to the Dean of Students for [Disruption of an Academic Setting Links to an external site.](#) If you ever believe my actions are not in keeping with these standards or feel discriminated against by a classmate or student, I invite you to discuss this with me as well. [Bias Incident Response service](#) can also be used to report such instances if you are uncomfortable talking to me directly.

Triggering Material

Although this course does not typically deal with triggering material, some games, discussions, or articles may be triggering for some students. Should you at any time feel triggered, feel free to leave class if needed and email me later. In addition, if a game you design has content that may be triggering to others, please advise them of this fact in advance. Triggers are things that provoke memories of trauma, not simply topics that are uncomfortable. Should you have questions or want resources on this topic, do not hesitate to contact me.

Resources

This page lists available resources at Ball State. In addition, I am always happy to meet and help connect you with resources either on or off campus.

Accommodations, Accessibility, & Disability Services

I am happy to make any accommodations that will make this course more accessible for you, whether or not you have registered with disability services. Please talk to me at any point in the course about doing so.

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or you have emergency medical information to share with me, please make an appointment to discuss these issues with me as soon as possible. [Ball State's Disability Services](#) office coordinates services for students with disabilities;

documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at [765-285-5293](tel:765-285-5293) or dsd@bsu.edu.

Canvas provides a user experience that is easy, simple, and intuitive. Special attention has been paid to making Canvas screen-readable. The Rich Content Editor encourages users to create accessible content pages (i.e. text formatting is accomplished using styles). Canvas is designed to allow limited customization of colors and schemes to be accessible for all users. The National Federation of the Blind granted Canvas the Gold Level Web Certification in 2010. Find more information by visiting the [Canvas Voluntary Product Accessibility Template \(VPAT\)](#).

Health & Wellness

The [Health Center](#) is covered in your student fees. The Health Center is located at 1500 W. Neely Avenue. To make an appointment, please call the Health Center at 765-285-8431.

The [Counseling Center](#) provides free and confidential psychological and career resources to students. The primary mission of the center is to assist students in reaching their educational goals, as well as to improve their quality of life. The staff is diverse, professional, warm, and receptive to students who seek services. To make your first appointment with the Counseling Center, call our office at **(765) 285-1736** or stop into **Lucina Hall, Room 320**.

Basic Needs

It's also hard to learn when your basic needs aren't taken care of. If at any point you need assistance or would like me to direct you to resources on or off campus, do not hesitate to reach out. Ball State has more information about services at the [Basic Needs Hub](#), but here are a few of our main services.

If you are facing food insecurity, Ball State provides a student food pantry, [Cardinal Kitchen](#).

Ball State has an [emergency loan option](#) for students who need it.

As an administrator at Ball State, I am a mandatory reporter. However, Ball State has a confidential [Victim Advocate](#) to help survivors of domestic or gender-based violence.

Academic Support

[The Writing Center](#) gives one-on-one feedback on any projects, even those that don't involve traditional prose. This semester they are offering **online appointments**. Visit them for help brainstorming, drafting, or polishing your work. The Writing Center is a comfortable, supportive environment for writers from all communities and backgrounds. In addition to helping with papers, the writing center can help you with finding and documenting sources, getting started with brainstorming, and even visual design. To make an appointment go to ballstate.mywconline.com.

The librarians at [Bracken](#) can help you find sources either in the library or online. The library also has computers that have a variety of technology you may use for your projects. To contact a librarian go to: <https://bsu.libguides.com/helpandFAQ/askalibrarian>. The library also has a [Library Guide on Games and Gaming](#) by librarian Joseph Roberts, who specializes in this area.

Technology Assistance

The [Ball State Technology Helpdesk](#) is designed with the IT support needs of Ball State distance learners in mind. At this site, you may access the IT knowledge base, find answers to frequently asked questions, report a technology issue or request assistance, check on the status of your ticket, review your ticket history, join a remote assistance session and much more. You may also visit the help desk in Bracken Library 101. In addition, the [Canvas Student Guide](#) may be useful if you are having trouble with Canvas.

Schedule

The complete schedule for the course will be posted in Modules under Canvas. However, this is (in general) the cycle we will follow throughout the course.

General Rhythm of the Course (with the expectation of the first couple of weeks)

Mondays (Class)	Wednesday (Class)	Friday (No Class)
Readings & Discussion	Application & Group Work	Progress Reports/Independent work on your capstone project

Part 1: Game Analysis

Days	Reading (for class)	Turn In
M 1/9	None	
W 1/11	<i>Game Analysis</i> Ch. 1	Introduction Survey, Character Sheet
F 1/13		
M 1/16	<i>MLK DAY</i>	
W 1/18	<i>Game Analysis</i> Ch. 2 & 3	
F 1/20		Do Twine final assignment sheet. Post a few ideas for your project direction
M 1/23	<i>Game Analysis</i> Ch. 3	
W 1/25	Do IF Tutorial: http://adamcadre.ac/if.html	In-Class Begin IF
M 1/30	Game Analysis Ch 4	Proposal for Capstone Project due

W 2/1		Board Game Experience, Conferences Begin
M 2/6	<i>Game Analysis</i> Ch. 5	
W 2/8		Tabletop Roleplaying Experience
M 2/13	Game Analysis Ch. 6 & 7	
2/15	<i>No Class, CCCCs</i>	Game Analysis Due, Complete Group Survey
Game Design		
2/20	Booth article on Walking Dead	Decide what text we'll be adapting
2/22	"Writing Eyeball to Eyeball" Ch. 7 in <i>Narrative Design</i>	Group Meeting, complete contract
2/27	Ch. 1-3 in <i>Narrative Design</i>	
3/1	Ch. 4-5 in <i>Narrative Design</i> , Read "The Art of Keeping Game Design Simple"	Work on game concept in groups
Spring Break!		

3/13	Ch. 9-10 in <i>Narrative Design</i>	Concept Document Due
3/15		Group Meeting
3/20	Writing rules is hard Rulebook Video Gaming Frustrations	
3/22		Group Meeting
3/27	Ch. 6 in <i>Narrative Design</i> , Other readings on Playtesting	
3/29		Group Meeting
4/3	Readings on Accessible Game Design, Diversity in Games	Group Meeting
4/5		Playtesting
4/10	Ch. 8, 10-11 in <i>Narrative Design</i>	
4/12		Playtesting Report Due Group Meeting
4/17	Readings on Game Design/Revision	
4/19		Group Meeting

4/24	Ch. 12-13 in <i>Narrative Design</i>	
4/26		English Major Reflection Due
5/1		Games Due
5/3 9:45-11:45		
Final Exam: Final Project Due. Play final games		