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Potential For a Pedagogical Level-Up: Teaching First-Year Composition
Through Rhetoric of Gaming

A Thesis by

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Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

May 2022

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May 2022

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Through Rhetoric of Gaming

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ABSTRACT

Potential For a Pedagogical Level-Up: Teaching First-Year Composition

Through Rhetoric of Gaming

by Cayman Chandler Beeman

Instructors of First-Year Composition courses are pursuing new ways to help integrate students into collegiate writing. One approach that has been gaining more widespread use is teaching composition through a popular medium. Inspired by these pedagogical movements, I designed a first-year composition course that approached writing through looking at different rhetorical elements of video games. During the course I encouraged students to enter into an I.R.B. approved study in which I recorded certain elements of their progression, discourse, and understanding regarding composition taught through gaming in an effort to document what was pedagogically successful, and what aspects of the course I could go on to change in further renditions. This approach is not a new one, but I wanted to help validate the argument for teaching composition through something students not only had prior knowledge of, but deeply wanted to discuss. My hope is that this study will help future students of first-year composition courses by encouraging their instructors to think critically about their own pedagogy, and help meet students where they begin their collegiate writing journey.

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Introduction

The first day of a high-school composition course is filled with budding anticipation, as students meekly shuffle in and begin to find their seats. Their thoughts stir with a romanticization of writing. Shooting stars of thought drift through their mind about expressing their own elements of creativity, wanting to write about the way they see the world. The educator hands out the syllabus. Essay One: Personal Essay. Essay Two: Autobiographical Essay. "Is there any difference between the two?" a student asks in a shattered-sounding voice as those hopeful thoughts slowly begin to dim. The instructor huffs and continues, Essay Three: Compare and Contrast, Essay Four: Research Paper. The students, once excited to write, slowly recognize a repetition of the same constraints in form, allowable topics, and rhetorical situation placed upon their ideas. First-year composition teachers understand that a replication of students' rhetorical experience lead to a stagnation in their compositional knowledge. Instead, these first-year composition classes should act as an experimental academic writing platform, attempting to utilize almost anything and everything to aid students in their compositional journey. Students are unaware of academic expectation, and are often approaching the FYC class environment blind to collegiate writing. David Bartholomae reminds us of something we often forget now that we are on the other end of education, that students have to "appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily and comfortably one with their audience, as though they were members of the academy" (4-5). First-year students enter into their first year expected to already understand how to adhere to collegiate writing by "assembling and mimicking its language, finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline. They must learn to speak our language. Or they must dare to speak it, or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is "learned." And this,

understandably, causes problems” (4-5). This expectation however is not well adapted to, and students that fail to succeed in speaking this ‘language’ slip through and proceed into their other classes academically illiterate. I want to stop for a second and address that I do not believe there exists a correct way to write, and if there were, typical academic writing expectations would not be the ultimate shape taken on, but what is certain is that academic writing confines can be an important stepping stone, a compositional point of progression, that can aid writers into thinking more critically. This is the role of the first-year composition classroom and it is dreadful to imagine students attempting to fake their understanding of composition rather than being led through the process of composing better writing, both creatively and analytically. Recognizing this phenomenon outlined by Bartholomae can guide educators towards a transition process for students that allow them to make mistakes and experiment.

First-year composition classes then function as students first integration, not to ‘invent the university,’ but to find their compositional place within it. If we, as educators in the field of composition studies, are humble enough to accept that we have been either the student or the educator at one time or another within the hyperbolically imagined classroom experience shown above, we know then know that there exists a problem within this all-to-typical pedagogical delivery for teaching early composition. Where do we go wrong in harnessing that student’s hope for a course that they connect to? My goal is to join together with other composition scholars in the idea that the problem does not necessarily belong in what we are writing *about*, but rather the way we *approach* writing before the course even begins. Many pedagogical theorists in the field of composition like Elbow, Berlin, Powell, and others, encourage us to look at different ways to compose or think about composing in order to prepare students for a variety of writing situations. This sort of pedagogy subverts the current-traditional concept of FYC as a

training ground for academic writing, and instead teaches students how to think rhetorically about any given writing situation. In other words, thinking about writing enables students to better transfer what they have learned to new contexts relevant to their individual lives. What if we looked at writing and composition through the lens of a hobby or popular interest? Would the students come in with a sort of generalized prior knowledge that they can then apply to the class's concepts? How much sooner would compositional concepts like understanding one's audience, different forms of rhetoric, or narratology present themselves to the student if they had already been displayed through something that the students are familiar with, or in short, something that is relevant to their contemporary life or culture? This is how I approached designing and teaching my first FYC course, and this thesis will describe not only my approach, but the conclusions I have drawn from a study of that experience. My hope is that I will be able to express the lessons I learned, exhibit the validity of approaching a class through this pedagogical venture, and all of the surprising findings I experienced along the way.

When I first designed my FYC course, "Rhetoric of Gaming," I wanted to challenge the still traditional practice of limiting which texts are considered to be academic and what is generally perceived to be more in line with a hobby. I naturally gravitated towards the idea of using video games as the popular medium to equip myself with going into teaching composition as it has long been a hobby of my own, one in which I have seen the creators of games I have grown up loving effectively use rhetorical means to communicate to their audience. I was inspired by Heidi Estrem's idea of what a text is and "what it can do," her argument being that texts typically "generate new thinking" and the act of writing is "an activity undertaken to bring new understandings" (19). In her book on rubrics and their role in the classroom, Maja Wilson references a societally expected right way to learn and critiques that idea: "In such a climate

where what we know about human beings and learning is rarely honored, writing pedagogy has much to celebrate” (45). I framed Wilson’s ideology through my own experience in my own studies about the liturgical canon in which I had been encouraged to think of as the holiest of all readings. I hope that I do not come across as discrediting literary work that established rhetorical structures and narratological theory that have brought us to where we are today in the study of composition. It is only that I struggled to see myself explaining to my students why they had to use texts that were not contemporary, that were not something they already had some sort of experience with. These curiosities and blockades presented me with a great introduction to the course’s content: I attempted to encourage my students to deconstruct the idea of what a text is and what it rhetorically accomplishes.

Much research has already been done on the potential role popular mediums could play in the classroom. Amy J. Devitt proposes teaching composition through varying genres, Laura R. Micciche focuses on writing through the lens of a feminist perspective, and Collin Gifford Brooke suggests many different ways educators can use New Media to teach different principles of writing. Heidi Huntington at Colorado State University has even employed the usage of internet memes as a method of teaching visual rhetoric. This form of pedagogy is exactly what I was curious about researching. Huntington understands that her students possess prior knowledge and attempts to use that aspect of her student’s understanding to approach the concept of visual rhetoric. I would like to mention here that my research did not focus on the broad educational benefits of playing video games, like what Simon Egenfeldt-Nelson’s article “Overview of research on the educational use of video games” outlines, nor researching the benefits of having students create their own games like Wendi Sierra’s research in her article “Creating Space: Building Digital Games.” Rather, I am interested in how student approaches to

composing non-academic texts—reviews, cultural commentary, or even table-top role-playing narratives—compare to traditional academic writing assignments. It is also important to note that I am not focusing on the pedagogical tool known as gamification (Kapp). The focus of this study is not to look at specific tools, but to offer a broader look at the effects that come with the structure teaching through a popular medium invokes.

The exigence of my research coalesces with a desire to investigate how we as educators can design our pedagogy in a way that meets the students where they begin, in order to help them progress as writers and rhetoricians. My theory is that students will approach their learning experience from a more positive standpoint, and therefore take on the personal goal of learning more about something they enjoy along with a greater personal investment if communicated through the screen of a popular medium. Albert Bandura employs a similar way of thinking through his theory of self-efficacy, which he defines “as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (1). Keeping Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy in mind, will students approach writing from a more confident, and therefore more exploratory, standpoint if the topic of writing is embarked upon through a prior interest or hobby? Upon applying the concepts I was learning about rhetoric and composition in my graduate level studies to a beloved hobby of mine, I found that utilizing gaming as a medium to discuss composition opened up the possibility for a multitude of different rhetorical concepts to be employed in a way that feels tangible and applicable to students that possess the same interest in gaming that I did.

Theoretical Foundations

The entirety of the study utilizes pedagogical theory surrounding cultural studies in an effort for students to “become better writers and readers as citizens, workers, and critics of their

culture” (George, Lockridge, and Trimbur 98) and to better understand the medium in which they traverse. Deconstructing the idea of a text is crucial to understanding what the functionality of composition is in its entirety. My theory is like that of Estrem’s; to thoroughly interrogate the idea of what exactly a text is and what its purpose could potentially be. In the same vein, I believe the genre of gaming to be as rich with rhetorical artifacts that can be made just as if not more accessible than those found within the pages of a book. Because cultural studies redefines already long-established texts to provide new, or previously overlooked, insights, video games then prove to be a great option in subverting traditional approaches to composition studies. It allows students to dissect the text at hand through their already existing contemporary relationship to it, or look back upon the games encountered in their youth to see how they hold up to their audience now. Because games exist due to collaborative composition, as games are created by teams of many individuals, students are also able to identify creatively with the game’s authors in how they compose collaboratively. This will be expanded upon later through their creation of their own tabletop role-playing game. Gaming being a recent and contemporary medium provides itself as a thoroughly unique approach to composition, something that students benefit from greatly. Video games, like traditional texts, are products of their time, and are often culturally or contemporarily dated. Because of this, videogames offer themselves as cultural snapshots or glimpses into that culture’s zeitgeist. At this moment in contemporary culture, gaming is in significant need of cultural progression. Theorists like Bonnie Ruberg open the door for conversations regarding queer approaches to videogames and encourage the practice of approaching a game differently than what is societally expected. Going against the composer’s intentions, thinking differently from societally expected approaches, and even aspects like failure, as Ruberg notes, is something that can change the way we look at success in life. When

approaching these concepts through Ruberg's theoretical framework, going against the game's intentions becomes largely beneficial to the player.

In addition to the previous benefits of utilizing relevant and popular mediums, gaming is a recent and consistently developing medium that reflects the expansion of contemporary culture. Katrin Becker illustrates educator's contemporary hesitation to use video games as a pedagogical tool in her article "Video Game Pedagogy : Good Games = Good Pedagogy." Becker's research here focuses more so on the argument that students can learn effectively through video games, but the reason this article is worth focusing on in conversation with the research outlined in this essay is that educator's "interest in games for learning in formal education is high but so is suspicion" (74). Although this has shifted drastically from when Becker originally published her work, because video games occupy a primarily recreational space, students may not be able to make the jump in understanding that the focus of the course is not primarily a cultural studies course, but an analysis of composition within something they love to do. As we will investigate later, utilizing a hobby-like medium can be potentially dangerous, as students can stray from discussing compositional elements to independently shifting the focus towards general topics of gaming. However, there is still some academic stigma behind the concept of which texts are deemed to be 'academic' or worthy of discussion or collegiate focus. This notion is flawed, and has been shifting in contemporary compositional courses, because of traditional English courses, for a great period of time, deifying a primarily white-washed, male-dominated liturgical canon. An extraordinary aspect of approaching the composition classroom through a recent and relative medium is that it becomes easy to engage with real problems at play in our own contemporary culture. Students are able to recognize rhetorical devices that invoke or maintain certain societal hierarchies and actively change their approach to what they choose to support. In pursuing

gaming as a medium in which to discuss rhetorical and compositional concepts, we allow ourselves to dive into diverse artifacts of learning in which to present to our students. In turn, engaging with solely written texts as the primary pedagogical conduit can also lead to academic discourse surrounding those texts that often deify the author, a singular figure. Whereas with gaming, the author of the game is a collaborative group that is attempting to tell a story, or communicate a moral value. This leads to many recursive conversations among students about what the composers collectively deemed to be their theme or message when creating the text in question.

The role of English in the pantheon of educational fields has been developing and transforming itself in recent years, and compositional studies has been the forerunner of changes that shift the focus of English away from a passive study of text into an active analysis in the productive process of a text. Kathleen Blake Yancey, in the 2004 keynote address to the Conference of College Composition and Communication, argues that composition studies should act as a gateway to collegiate education, which only further validates the effort composition studies professors are now taking on to meet students at a place where they are both excited to learn and hoping to increase their ability to create effective composition. We, as educators, understand that our pedagogical choices matter in order to engage students early on and equip them with tools that will then transfer, as Doug Downs and Liane Robertson mention in their chapter in *Naming What We Know*. The role of first year composition should be “(1)...to examine and ideally reconsider prior knowledge about writing in light of new experiences and knowledge offered by their FYC course(s), and (2) for the course itself to serve as a general education course, teaching transferable knowledge of and about writing so that what is taught and learned can be adapted to new contexts of writing” (105). Students should feel as though their first

collegiate writing class is preparing them to face differing and varying forms of composition throughout all aspects of their lives. The focus of what composition as a study is should then shift to educating students to feel confident and professional when approaching composition. First-year composition educators should feel a call to arms similar to what Dobrin mentions in his book *Postcomposition* on the exigence for altering contemporary composition studies: “I argue that the possibility of this future for composition studies demands disruption, epistemological and bureaucratic” (7). Typical approaches to composition, like those shown in the introduction, bore students into actually believing that composition is not something that they interact with daily. There has been a past narrative that scholars like Bartholomae, Ian Bogost, and Benjamin Miller have been actively changing in which there are only certain kinds of “real” writing or only certain texts deemed to be legitimate enough in endeavoring to write about. If we can flip this entirely and show our students that composition exists even in their hobbies, student engagement will hopefully become organic.

Because students have had prior experience with playing video games, one theory was that students will be quicker to place themselves within the role of the audience when dissecting these texts, and therefore be more open to discussing the rhetorical concept of audience invocation. When discussing video games, the students are already aware that they are being “invoked” as Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede describe. Students have had first-hand experience with the concept that “The central task of the writer, then, is not to analyze an audience and adapt discourse to meet its needs. Rather, the writer uses the semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader—cues which help to define the role or roles the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text” (160), they just do not yet have the correct language to identify and discuss it. For example, students who have played video games

understand that one way the composer communicates with them, the player/audience, is through the established expectation to respond to visual rhetoric. These elements are usually color-coded symbols or indications: blinking red means the game's creators are attempting to indicate some sort of danger or potential peril for the game's audience, or blue being usually tied to magic or other mystical elements the audience may not already be familiar with (Razbuten). This signaling is a great way for students to visualize how composers communicate with their audience, and transitions easily into discussions on rhetorical concepts like symbolism, foreshadowing, and authorial intention.

Another way that gaming transforms the process of teaching composition is through collaborative narratology. Collaborative narratology is also something that is often neglected in composition studies, but is praised through narrative-based collaborative games like Dungeons and Dragons. Sometimes composition professors prioritize individual writing in an attempt to help FYC students find their own writing style or voice, something that is incredibly necessary, but end up placing so much emphasis on individual writing that students feel lost or uncertain when asked to compose collaborative writing. Richard D. Bennert argues for the existence of a rhetorical framework within tabletop roleplaying games, a compositional structure that can be pedagogically utilized to allow the students to view composition in a different light, allowing them to see collaborative writing practically in something they may have played with their friends: "Finally, the 'intrastitious' level of immersion occurs when an audience member moves from responding to stimuli to actively engaging in creation of the pretense, or, as Korol-Evans puts it, 'actively creating belief'" (33). When writing creatively students inherently understand that they need to convince their audience to believe in the fictional world and characters. In non-fiction, academic composing, that same strategy of active belief creation is necessary to

rhetorically influence (persuade, inform, engage) an imagined audience. My hope in assigning this was that students would attain a greater understanding of the collaborative nature of any sort of text. I wanted students to see that even though a text may be published, and therefore seen as a completed text, the way in which their audience interacts with it allows that text's meaning to be constantly changing, shifting with contemporary culture, the audience's complaints or praises, and so on. For example, many games like *Old School RuneScape*, *Destiny*, *Lost Ark*, and many others continue to succeed because they prioritize player feedback and release patches (changes to the original text) in order to appease their audience (Neal, Tyrrel, Nitu). In recognizing this relationship between texts and their audience I hoped that students would then begin to see this interaction in every sort of text they encounter. Belief in a story, belief in a narrative or argument, belief in the author's conceptual direction, begin to function as a collaborative process between audience and composer. In the way that these students then created belief in their stories and their peers' in their RPG project, it allowed them to view something they composed through a lens that removes the stigma of critical classroom evaluation and focuses primarily on exploring the collaborative process fully. This ends up accomplishing several goals that traditional FYC writing courses attempt. Students are able to see their completed work interact with their audience firsthand, their writing is exhibited through something practical and attainable, and above all, the creative process ends up being an enjoyable experience. In my course this was performed by the students, as they created multiple branching narratives both as player and narrative leaders through a tabletop RPG of their own design. No matter how much the students planned prior, their narratives branched in previously unforeseen ways when their writing came into contact with the audience, or the other students acting as players. This was

incredible to see how students' conceptualization of their audience changed something fictitious or imaginary, into a tangible and interactive element of composition.

Ian Bogost's theory of procedural rhetoric helps argue for the acceptance of a popular medium to be used as a tool in order to make the concept of rhetoric more accessible to students, which not only helps explain the study's purpose, it enacts it. It is crucial that students begin their approach to rhetoric and composition through the theoretical lens of how Bogost breaks down the concept of epistemology: "One of the reasons we tend not to consider video games as legitimate venues for learning to take place is precisely because they are *games*, playthings" (120). Contemporary students have grown up coming to understand video games as play, and "[p]lay is often considered a children's activity, a trifle that occupies or distracts kids and which they eventually grow out of, turning to more serious pursuits" (120). The exigence for this study lies in Bogost's argument that "[p]lay and learning have been segregated from one another in contemporary schooling, further cementing their perceived disparity" (120). This directly engages with another concept Bogost raises: Procedural Rhetoric. In his book *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* Bogost describes procedural rhetoric as "...a way of creating, explaining, or understanding processes" (2-3). These "processes" Bogost mentions are structures that exist all around us. They "define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics that drive the operation of systems, from mechanical systems like engines to organizational systems like high schools to conceptual systems like religious faith" (3). Studying rhetoric in this way then functions as a magnifying glass in which to view societal structures and the processes that allow them to function. The ultimate goal for these students is to perceive these societal structures at play around them, and understand them on an epistemic level in order to recognize them in their writings as well as the composition they come into contact

with on a daily basis. To do so effectively, students needed to think back on what we had discussed in class, integrate it into their understanding of composition, and reevaluate their existing thoughts on societal structures within all forms of composition. They needed the pedagogical approach of reflection, applying critical assessment to what exactly they were learning and how it was relevant to composition.

Reflection was a necessary component within this first-year composition course in order for students to analyze why they are completing the assignments they are assigned and how it applies to rhetoric and composition. I wanted to make sure the students were not simply talking or writing about video games, but about the rhetorical concepts found within them. When dealing with a popular medium in order to convey complex systems like rhetorical and societal constructs, reflection is imperative so that the students do not become enamored with solely the popular medium, and that rhetoric and composition always becomes the forefront and priority of discussion (Mays). Collin Brooke, who also argues for pedagogies of failure, reminds us that “[Reflective assignments] like these invite students to engage in the same sorts of reflective practices that we do as teachers when we ask them to work with new media” (187). It is crucial that the students understand that even though these projects are not traditional writing exercises there is still meaning behind why they are being required to portray their knowledge in this sort of way: “New media pedagogy is not simply a matter of trading out one set of products for newer models; they change the dynamics of the classroom itself in addition to what it means to write and write well” (187). The reasoning for these assignments also highlights how the students come to think of how their rhetorical intention shifts and changes when they are asked to compose both multimodal projects as well as traditional essays. In tandem with the pedagogical theory of teaching for transfer, the students will also be required to think about how what they

have learned about rhetoric will go on to apply to classes that they will take in the future, creating a learning process that engages the past, present, and future of the student.

Methods and Findings

My primary goal in conducting this research is to validate prior theory of using popular mediums in composition studies and share how I found it beneficial in my own teaching. This is all done in an attempt to approach composition and rhetoric from a place of creativity and celebration while analyzing what form of pedagogy works well, and why it does so. This study utilizes an epistemological argumentation as a basis for why, as many other composition studies scholars have claimed, approaching rhetoric and composition through a lens that students not only understand, but are excited to pursue leads to greater student self-efficacy and overall learning outcomes.

This study is a participatory action research project. I, the researcher, am actively participating in the classroom as the course's instructor to facilitate discourse surrounding the topics mentioned within the study's theoretical framework with the students. Through this I am seeking to better comprehend the process of student understanding and how to better approach pedagogical choices of first-year composition in the future. This would then be impossible without first observing student work directly and then analyzing the outcomes. I would like to acknowledge that some may find my being both researcher and educator in this study might lead to research prone to subjectivity or invalidate research to my own views of what effective composition is, but what I am attempting to do, I believe, can only be done through the perspective of both channels. My goal for conducting this research is to contribute to the field of effective pedagogy, and validate what educators before me have explored. In doing so I hope to convey the altruistic belief all educators possess that the most important focus of research is to

aid our students in their ability to think more effectively and critically about the world around them and advance their ability to compose writing that illustrates that.

Three specific methods were used to gauge student response and development throughout the course: response posts, a reflection essay on their Tabletop RPG project, and a final guided interview. The response posts expressive compositional assignments where they were encouraged to reflect on the prior week's content and write about what they learned. These were utilized in order to gain an accurate, progressive understanding of how students were developing their understanding and writing throughout the semester. My goal with the reflection essay was for students to think about their composition process, especially due to this being their first creative composition project, and reflect on how they were using what we had discussed in the course to inform their creative process. Lastly, the guided interview was to address questions I had about how they felt utilizing gaming affected their overall understanding and course experience. All of the data was collected via the student's coursework within the class titled "English 103: Rhetoric of Gaming." This functioned as a general education writing inquiry course fulfillment at Chapman University. The course consisted of first-year through senior students, all of which were from varying majors and educational focuses. For the methods provided below that I used to record student learning it is important to note which week these responses came from in order to contextualize them. I will do so by organizing the week and the unique student's response via a key where the number represents the week (out of 10 possible weeks) and the unique student by letter (up to "Q", as there are 17 potential student responses). For example, week 1, unique student A would be represented as Student response 1A.

It may also be of interest what the week's content was in order to contextualize the student's responses, so I will provide that list below.

Week 1: Audience and Intention
Week 2: Affective Rhetoric
Week 3: Procedural Rhetoric
Week 4: Culture & Race
Week 5: Feminism
Week 6: Queer Theory
Week 7: Community Rhetoric
Week 8: Linguistics, Word Choice, & Symbolism
Week 9: Reality & Perspectives
Week 10: Difficulty & Accessibility

Fig. 1. Weekly Schedule.

Student Response Posts

The response posts were assigned in order to analyze progress throughout the semester, giving students an outlet to express their thoughts about that week's readings/assignments. I wanted to explore Chris Burnham and Rebecca Powell's recommendation of using expressivist composition in the academic classroom. I believed it would be helpful if students were able to express their thoughts and feelings without the critical evaluative nature of essays or open response quizzes. In addition to utilizing expressivist writing I also wanted to encourage reflection and replication. Although this stems from John Raucci's idea of replicating research done in the field of composition, something that this thesis somewhat enacts, the concept of replicating work or revisiting work to "[challenge, verify, refine, and extend] cherished (or perhaps entrenched) beliefs, practices, and pedagogies" (449) in order to evaluate whether we want to embrace or reject them is another reason I wanted students to revisit the concepts addressed within the prior week's curriculum. Students often reported their learning process to be something similar to Student 1L: "The video introduced a new perspective that I once thought of before, but my idea was somewhat vague, and this video helped me visualize that concept...As I watched the video, I was able to get a glimpse of my idea put into practice and presented in an effortless way to understand." Allowing students to express their cognitive and

compositional process helped me as the instructor to see where the gaps of knowledge were, what stuck with students, and what I can address going forward into the next week. I also found it interesting what students were more likely to write about, and how on certain concepts the responses were longer, expressing more depth and interest in that week's topic. Below is a graph that illustrates this concept.

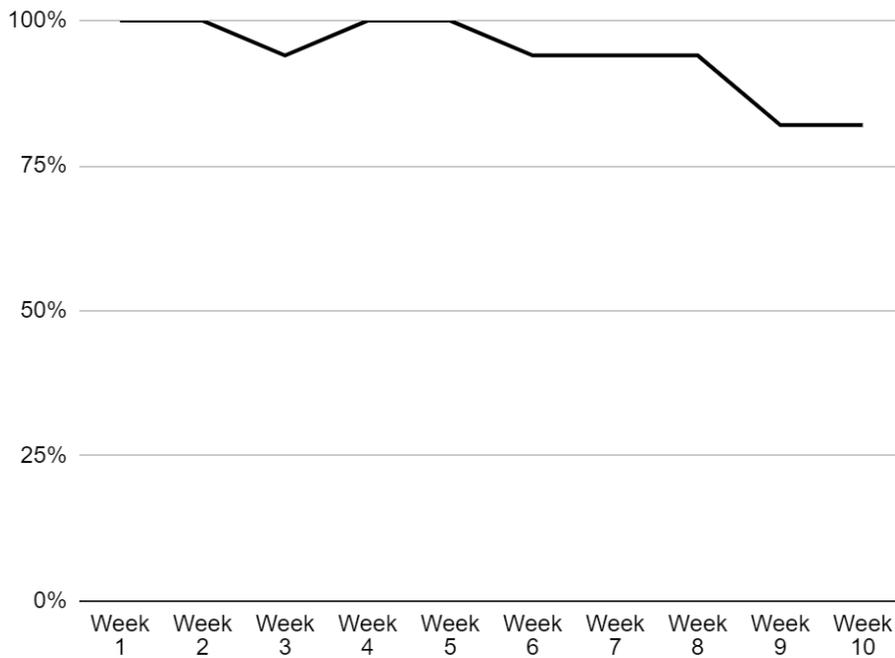


Fig. 2. Percentage of Student Responses by Week.

Despite the responses being required assignments and a sizable portion of the students' grades, students did not always contribute to the response posts. In fact, there was a 100% response rate only 40% of the time. I include this statistic to bring attention to what weeks specifically engaged the whole of the class, these being four total weeks, two of which being the first two weeks, which I attribute to students being eager to participate early on. However, the third and fourth 100% contributions belonged to weeks 4 and 5, both of which directly focused on societal issues: Cultural and Race Rhetoric, and Feminist Rhetoric. I found it interesting that

students felt more inclined or wanted to participate during the weeks that had a common theme of dealing with human interaction and discrimination. This interest was expressed in the students' discussions as well. This particular excerpt was representative of the discourse expressed during weeks 4 and 5:

“This week what stood out to me is how some video games represented other cultures and races. I never really thought about it because I always used video games as a time to relax so things like that were not really what I would think about during that time... This sends messages to those playing the video game of how to perceive people of other races and cultures in a bad way because since they are so underrepresented when people do see them then it is in a way that doesn't really shine a good light upon them... This also made me take a look back at the video games I have played and come to the realization that some of the video games I have played have done the same thing. It made me think about how there could be a lot of great games out there or games that could be much better if they had represented other cultures and races but they don't exist because they don't fit the norm of the video game industry.” (Student 4H)

Student 4H's response displays a rollercoaster of thought from expressing their own experience with video games as a form of escape to something that is a text in which they are actively interacting with. This realization proves to be jarring for them as they slowly begin to realize what societal structures are behind the composition within video games they have experienced. This illustrates the concept of collaborative composition, how the audience and composer are linked and in constant interaction whether they know it or not. These elements of created belief then bleed into other societal structures their audience places themselves in, and students begin to see how blatant certain detrimental narratives are being pushed. Student 5M displayed

ongoing problematic sexist tropes during our discussions of feminism in week 5. This opened the conversation more fluidly into discussing social structures at play within composition: “I now realize after watching it that mostly every game out there has your basic Mario story of [Princess] Peach getting captured by Bowser and Mario getting her. I feel like that is the most basic version of Damsel in distress” (Student 5M). Prior to weeks 4 and 5 we had been discussing procedural rhetoric through Bogost’s examples within *Animal Crossing*. Students engaged heavily with *Animal Crossing*, and because Bogost directly references that game students were able to specifically see how procedural rhetoric functioned through the game’s design. As we continued into weeks 4 and 5, students used games that they had experienced independently throughout their life to express complex thoughts about racism and sexism. Because the students had experienced Bogost do something similar, student understanding shifted from viewing games as something simply providing entertainment to cultural artifacts that reflect larger elements within the course. Analyzing the tropes Student 4H mentions they see within video games can help us better engage with real problems at play in our own contemporary culture. Besides the percentage of student response, I noticed a trend within average word count in weeks 4 and 5. With those two data sets we can assume that students were more engaged during these weeks due to the nature of their concepts.

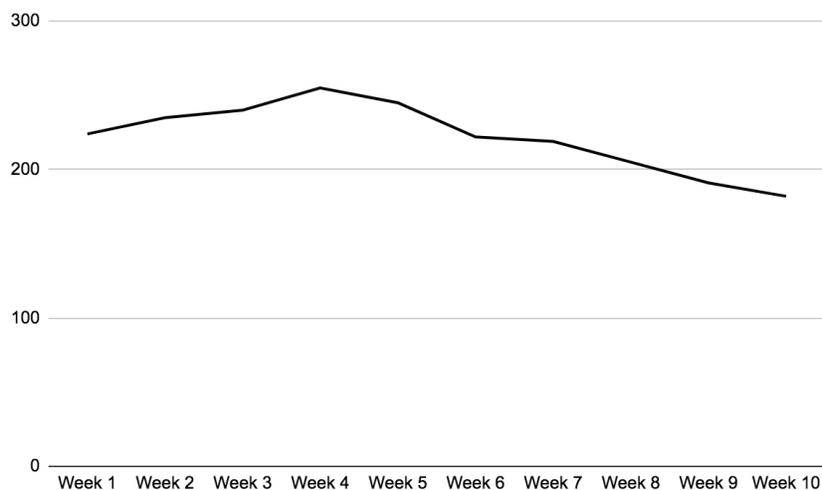


Fig. 3. Average Word Count by Week.

Average word count for student response peaked at an average of 255 words for week 4, “Culture and Race.” and remained high during week 5 with an average word count of 245. I draw focus to this trend because it may suggest that the medium is not necessarily the main factor in student understanding, the data may indicate that students need to be engaged on a multitude of levels, their interest in gaming being only one of them. As students work with heavier, more important topics they are most likely to want to engage with the course’s content. Gaming here may function as a sort of background enabler for students to feel more equipped when discussing social issues. Students came into discussion already aware of these tropes and social issues existing within games they had played, and were eager to speak on them. It may also have been an issue with accessibility, as students would rather watch a TED talk than engage with Bogost’s academically structured article on procedural rhetoric. Both utilize video games to teach a rhetorical structure, but students wanted to talk more about the weeks with the videos rather than the weeks with heavier reading. Another element worth noting is how certain students were more likely to write more during certain weeks rather than others. For example, Student Response 30 was 77 words, which held insight about their response to week 3’s

curriculum where we began to craft characters for their Tabletop RPG project: "...These character creations are incredibly in-depth, and when one puts that much effort into constructing something, they have to develop at least a slight sense of connection to it, which helps to more fully immerse the individual in their activity." This response contains vague platitudes, shows forced interest, and a more academically focused response rather than one where they reference their own thoughts on the content. This response is in no way a lackluster one despite its word count and rhetorical intentions. It offers elements of reflection, further understanding of the creative compositional process, and discussion of what the student would employ in further elements of the class. Whereas the student goes above and beyond in their response about race and culture a week later:

"What I found most interesting this week was the class' discussion on identity/representation, and the differences between people's perceptions of the two, mainly representation. As we were prompted to write about what we thought about what representation is, I immediately thought of minorities in America being represented in popular forms of media, whether it is in games, movies, or music." (Student 4O)

They go on to mention various references to the week's assigned video, connect their thoughts from gaming to representation and identity, and provide an example that they witnessed growing up playing games. Here it is plain to see that the student had a personal investment in the course's curriculum that aligned with both their interest in gaming and the societal issues of racism at play within all forms of composition. They speak in first person, discussing elements of the course's content that they found useful, interesting, and connected with. Student 4O even mentions that they understand this problem to be at play within all forms of popular media. This illustrates the idea that no matter what the course's popular medium is, students will be able to

identify the rhetorical structures within them. This returns us to the idea that even prior to the course's beginning, students see a composition class that deals with a prior interest of theirs, in this instance it is gaming. Having experienced identity and representation through gaming, Student 40 is more equipped to discuss complex topics like racism because they are already a few steps into the conversation. Similarly, it was perplexing to see how likely students were to use video games they had played independently prior to the class in their responses.

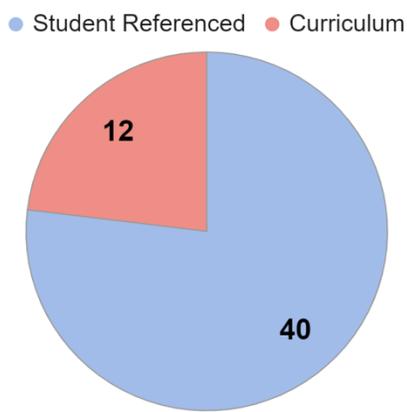


Fig. 4. Total Video Games Referenced.

Throughout the student responses over the course of 10 weeks, 52 unique video games were mentioned independently by students, 12 of which were originally intended to be discussed throughout the course's curriculum. Because video games are less accessible for students due to requiring unique consoles to play them on, difficulty of completion, and in most cases take an extraordinary amount of time to finish, I had intended to reference twelve video games in the curriculum but not require the students to have played through them. The video game discussed did not necessarily matter other than providing certain elements I deemed to be most accessible for students. These were things like difficulty and affect that pervade every game. Through this fluid approach, students felt that they could apply the concepts we were discussing about composition to games that they have played where they saw these concepts mimicked. It did not

matter whether I, or other students, had played the game, because the focus of their composition was not on the game itself, but rather the rhetorical concepts we were discussing as a class. For example, in our discussion of collaborative composition we utilized speed running, where the game, or task, is completed as quickly as possible, to explore the idea of how a community comes up with rules and how that affects the way the audience experiences the text, or in other words how the player plays the game under this set of new restrictions. Students were then able to take games that they have played prior and apply them to the rhetorical concept exhibited through speed running much like Student 7F:

“...We learned of the importance these superficial structures hold to the speed running community. While “speed running” may be considered a form of cheating in the case of actual gameplay, it becomes a perfectly valid and even praised “sport-like” activity for the games’ player base. These practices have become so popular that entire sub-genres of the concept have been constructed with varying roles of what the community believes to be “credible” gameplay, ranging from glitchless runs to any percent runs, all with the goal to beat the game in a way the developer did not originally intend. (Student 7F)

The student also mentions how gaming communities contradict themselves, actively changing their rules, reacting to the game’s changes, and developing their procedures as time goes on. In this response one of the most important elements is how the student comes to see the video game as a text that changes along with its audience. This student’s experience with analyzing the existence of speed running communities proved to be a positive pedagogical choice for discussing epistemology. Alongside Bogost’s theory of procedural rhetoric, Student 7F is referencing our discussion of Martin Ricksand’s “Twere Well It Were Done Quickly” which provides a litany on how gaming communities decide criteria on effectively evaluating what is

communally acceptable in what is called a speed run. In this way, Student 7F is commenting on how Ricksand's article emphasizes a unique form of community input that other mediums do not necessarily possess. Student 7F exhibits a passive discussion of epistemology, something that we discussed throughout the course's entirety. Student 7F's explanation on how the meaning of cheating shifts to make room for speed running's differing view on something that in normal societal structures is deemed as unacceptable. This ties into Bonnie Ruberg's thoughts on a queer approach to gaming, and how playing a game differently than socially acceptable offers new and unique perspectives. Additionally, Student 7H addresses how speed run groups collectively decide what is allowed and what is deemed to be unacceptable, subliminally analyzing speed running through the perspective of collaborative composition. The community actively changes its rules, in turn changing the original text's experience itself. Through conversations like this I was able to discuss with the students the idea of canonization, and how societal ideals begin to form around what comes to be communally accepted as fact or fiction. Studying composition through the medium of gaming approaches the author/audience relationship through a different perspective that traditional texts might. Because of this students were able to come to understand that a societal canon, much like the rules of video games, are malleable and constructed by their contemporary society. Understanding this theoretical approach to community in relation to composition helped students understand broader concepts like how culture or societal structures construct rules and limitations. Although utilizing a concept specific to video games helped explain and contextualize broader, more complex systems like canonization, collaborative composition, and epistemology helped students gain a better grasp, through this, students grew comfortable referencing certain video games directly to express their thoughts rather than leaning on the academic text that was assigned for that week.

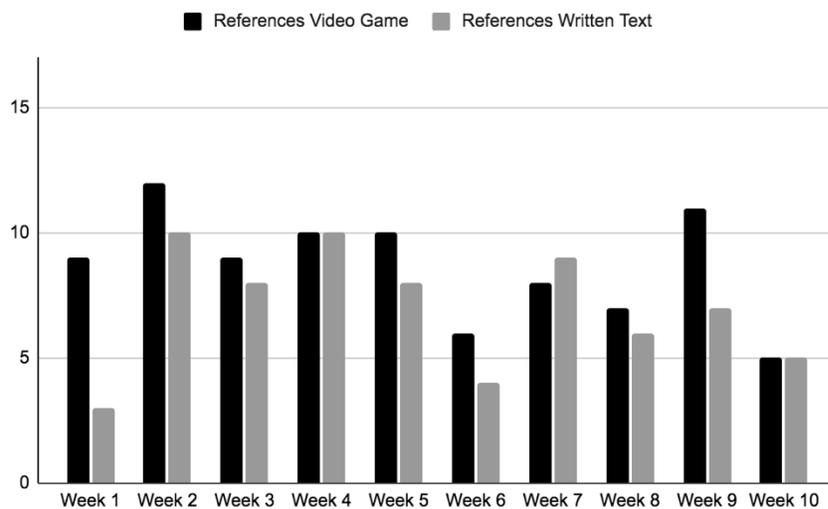


Fig. 5. Direct Video Game Reference Vs. Assigned Text Reference.

It is flawed to believe that student writing has quality only if it possesses the attributes of referencing the course’s content, but in terms of relevancy, I believed this perspective to be an accurate scope of how students actively engaged with that week’s content. With this data set it is important to note that these are not exclusive. Some students referenced both a video game and the written text for that week in their responses, and therefore contributed to both data sets. Each week students were given a written text to read alongside a video that usually included a specific video game being referenced. The first and last weeks had a low number of responses that contained either of these qualities. Week 1 may be due to students still trying to figure out collegiate writing, class expectations, or what the class’s concepts exactly are. They are ill equipped in terms of the course’s terminology, and are still developing their writing style, but are familiar with popular video games or games they have played themselves. This led for the opening week to have a much higher percentage of students just talking broadly about games they saw the first week’s readings exhibited through. Week 10, Difficulty and Accessibility, may be due to students having a fairly large project, the Tabletop RPG, due that same week, or the week’s content being more difficult or less engaging than others. This happens also with Week 6,

the same week their Rhetorical Analysis essay was due. The numbers were relatively similar: 8.7 responses on average referenced a video game in comparison to a 7.0 average that referenced the written text. This may show a tendency for students to be more willing to portray their knowledge through the medium rather than addressing the concept directly, which can be detrimental to student understanding if used without some sort of connection to the curriculum's main concept. Although I wanted to stray as far from creative limitations on their composition as possible, from a pedagogical standpoint it may be worth requiring students to reference both the medium and the written text in order to receive full credit if the professor believes the students to not be actively engaging with rhetorical and compositional concepts. However, in this class's case it was clear to see through their writing and in-class discussion that they were making connections between the two on a weekly basis. I also wanted to observe how they would approach this connection with the fairly little guidance given to them in the response post's assignment description, which can be seen in Appendix C, and as the semester went on more and more students began to do so, as you can see in Fig. 6 below.

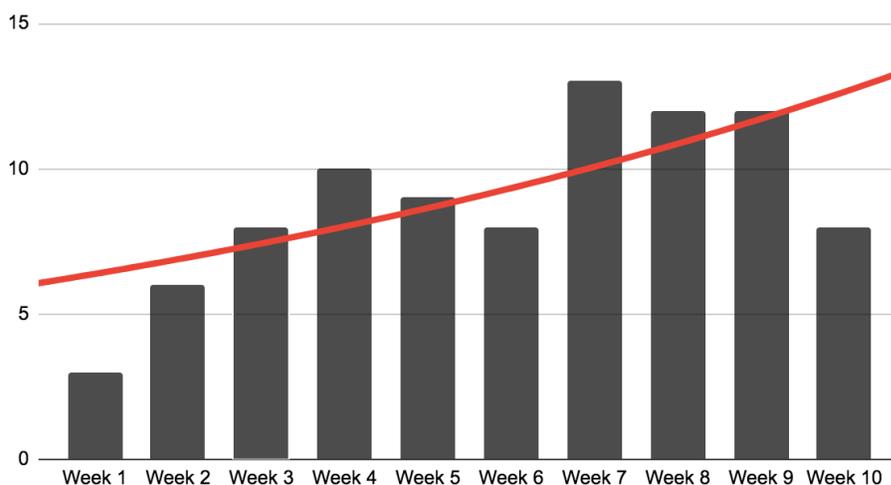


Fig. 6. Individual Student Responses That Utilized Unique Terminology by Week.

The trend line was used in tandem with the bar graph to express a somewhat consistent progression of students adopting compositional terminology to their own rhetoric. I coded “unique terminology” by taking certain terminology found in the written text we were discussing that week and scanning student responses to see if students themselves used them in their language. The unique terminology varies week to week, for example, the responses for Week 1 - “Audience and Intention” were scanned for the terms “audience, intention, speaker, invocation.” Variations of these words such as “invoked” for “invocation” were factored in as well. No more than 5 terms were scanned for at a time.

An interesting element of this class and how students approached their understanding of rhetoric and composition through video games was seeing students struggle to reevaluate their prior understanding of elements found in games and start to place them in line with composition. A lot of this struggle was shifting their concept of language:

“My biggest takeaway from this week's lectures and homework was the discussion regarding if text and voice chat between players in games are considered as composition. After the discussion in class, I went home and took a moment to really think about this concept. Initially, my argument was that only the text messages in video games count as composition because they become recorded data and can be used to alter the course and result of a specific match. (Student 7L)

The student continues to explain that their overall realization was that the text they needed to focus on was not simply the actual written communication between players, but what that communication was accomplishing. Student 7L’s response sheds light on how students shifted their ideas about these concepts from seeing a text as something solely found within writing into a broader concept. They began attempting to answer questions that Roozen posed,

trying to figure out what the game they enjoy playing attempts to accomplish with its audience. At first, they had a difficult time in integrating what they had perceived to be communication, team elements, and strategy as independent from the concept of what a text is/accomplishes. Because they had read Roozen prior to this, you can actively see the student try to figure this out through writing. Their answer changes a few times, not showing confusion, but more so a gradual wrestling with the vernacular of text, composition, and communication. My hope was that students would not only become more effective writers in general through this linguistic acquisition process, but to then go forward and integrate additional academic terminology into their own cognitive encyclopedia. If successful, students will progress into their next courses and future encounters with any text equipped with a different perspective on what that text means, what its goals are, what the target audience is, and if it succeeds in using rhetoric effectively. Not only did their language begin to change over the semester, I began to see students more frequently referring to a game as a text, the game's designer as its composer, and its player base as its audience.

RPG Reflection Essay

The Tabletop RPG was assigned in order for students to better understand how their initial composition will change when it comes into contact with the audience, ultimately producing a form of collaborative composition. This project has an additional form of collaborative composition in that the students were placed into groups and had to work with their other group member's creative approaches in order to come to some sort of conclusion in how they were to present their narrative. Tabletop RPGs are a unique form of gaming that not many students had experienced prior to this project. Understanding how tabletop RPGs are played at first proved to be a large hurdle, but after I took a class session to prepare a "campaign," which

tabletop RPGs call short, contained sessions, students were able to better understand what was expected of them for their project. The groups were to come up with a common narrative beginning, characters, and settings for their players to play through. However, the students were at first uncertain that much of the story would be improvised due to allowing their players' choices to guide the storyline. The students would then lead a session of their own in separate rooms which I walked between as well as recorded so that I could listen to the parts I missed when I was not in the room. I wanted students to experience firsthand the transformation that happens when a text is presented to an audience, how that audience interacts with the text, and how it ultimately changes from what the original author intended. Through the player's interaction with the group's original text the narratives branched, took on new and students often claimed "More exciting moments than anything my group had previously prepared" (Student K). My hope being that the students would transfer this concept of collaborative composition to all aspects of their composition and others they come into contact with.

Collaborative composition proved to be a challenge to students at first. Creative directions clashed, and in some groups, students went against the assignment's prompt and designed storylines or characters that were unique to their own, thinking that their vision was best for the narrative. Something that could have been better explained pedagogically through the assignment's instructions is that the point of the assignment was not to create a great story, but to work collaboratively and experience collaboration on all fronts, some students struggled with this element because they may have not previously had experience with collaborative composition:

"...This project was a group effort... At first, we couldn't agree on what the main story was going to be...Instead of coming up with a whole story on my own, I had group

members to help me... Although, when I presented it was hard to get my players to follow these great ideas. The players were allowed to do whatever they wanted so it was hard to make them follow my great storyline. So in terms of composition, it was easy to come up with a narrative with my group. Following that narrative when I presented was very difficult.” (Student B)

Student B’s response begins well, but they focus more on the benefits that come with having more group members and display that they ultimately fail to relinquish the reins of creativity to their audience. They saw the players being allowed to do whatever they wanted as a negative element of story making. The student then performed poorly when the project was presented because they kept trying to force their original idea of how the narrative should go, which made the audience feel as though their input was invalid. Another student, Student A, found something like this to be more challenging than if they were just assigned an analytical essay:

“... I learned that doing a creative focused group project is harder than a group project based on facts or things learned about in a class and applying it to a topic of interest. The reason being, when everyone in a group is creative, or maybe some are not as creative as others, agreeing on ideas can be very hard to achieve.” (Student A)

Despite some of the problems of this assignment there were students who successfully understood and executed the assignment in a way that showed their greater understanding of how the text they created can come to interact with their audience. We had briefly discussed character development through an excerpt written by Christopher Rudolph Consorte on “Character Development of Dungeons and Dragons and Episodic Television” which Student F found useful:

“What helped the most for my group during the composition process, at least for me, was the document on [Consorte’s writing]. In particular, the section on how “dialogue can be

used as a tool to analyze how characters interact within their dramatic universe”

(Consorte 5) was very useful. Employing this ideology, at the core of our project, we were able to establish characters whose personalities were born from the interactions between the players.” (Student F)

The last line of Student F’s response encapsulates the purpose of the assignment perfectly, for students to see the collaborative process, create a new textual composition that can be dissected through both original intention and what it transforms into, and understand how those characters are situated, much like the students themselves in our own contemporary society, in regards to the structure around them. The students also referenced our first few weeks often in their reflections. The concepts of audience and authorial intention helped students view their position in both sides of the assignment, both as player and presenter:

“Another concept that immensely helped me with the RPG project was Audience and Intention from week 1. "Games do not change the rhetorical considerations of the audience, though they make this a much larger concern than it might otherwise be."

(Wood 125). When working on the project, I spent a lot of time thinking about how my composition will relate to the audience. I wanted my story to head towards a specific end goal, but what happened from the start to end did not matter so much and could be left more up to the player...The audience and intention concepts helped me understand what I needed in my composition for my audience in order to achieve the end goal that I wanted for my RPG session.” (Student H)

Student H was able to acknowledge games as a medium rather than as a form of popular culture we were inspecting. This allowed them to think of the assignment as composition, something they were actively participating in crafting on both ends. One aspect of this response that I worry

about is how the student expresses they thought “a lot” about how their composition will relate to the audience. Although that is an important element, overtly prioritizing your audience might often yield ingenuine forms of composition. This hyper focus on one’s audience was something that led to be the primary struggle students had with both their reflection essay and the Tabletop RPG project in general. Because the audience was not a passive one, something that students are used to experiencing with their composition, they often prioritized the audience’s role rather than their role as the composer. For example, students would try to control their audience’s reactions to their composition rather than allow the audience to interact with the world and characters the group had created. However, the students that relinquished control after creatively composing the characters, plot, and setting, were able to see the process as a collaborative one, where composer and audience interact in order to create the text and its meaning.

Guided Interview

The guided interview asked questions that could not be organically addressed within the course’s assignments. My hope was that students would answer genuinely about the class as a whole, as this was performed at the end of the semester, and did not affect their grade, providing me with a more accurate representation of how the students felt about using gaming as a medium to address composition. I wanted to hear directly from the students, give them time to assess their own thoughts about the class through additional reflection, and speak their mind openly on whether or not they believed certain aspects of the course to be beneficial to their overall understanding of composition.

For question #1: “How do you feel about utilizing gaming to discuss composition and rhetoric?”

Student A’s response reflected that of my original goal: To meet students where they already have something in common with composition, whether they know it or not, and use that medium to convey elements of composition in a practical manner: “I felt that connecting composition and rhetoric to gaming made the subject relatable to me and easier to understand because of that connection I already had to video games” (Student A). This comment reflects much of how our in-class discussions normally went. I would present them with rhetorical elements, and oftentimes students would remark, “Oh that reminds me of [some game]” or “I saw that all the time in [another game], I just didn’t know that’s what the composer was trying to do.” One trend of student responses was to comment on their previous composition courses, and the difference they noticed:

“Using gaming to discuss composition and rhetoric kept me a lot more engaged throughout the semester than I would have been in a more traditional English class. Personally, I always found it hard to stay engaged in English classes because a lot of the texts and content from traditional English classes did not interest me. Using video games to discuss composition and rhetoric made a lot of the concepts easier to understand as well as easier to engage with when doing the homework or working on projects/essays in class.” (Student H)

This phenomenon of losing student engagement due to the course’s content is unfortunately not unique to any educational focus specifically; however, it is uplifting to see that even though the course’s focus was something that this student confesses was not something they had much interest in, they were still able to stay engaged while working on their progression in their

compositional ability. If this course accomplished nothing other than the prior sentence, I would consider it successful in helping first-year composition students navigate through both their academic and personal career of writing.

Another common thread was students shifting their original view of gaming as something unprofessional and ineffective in its ability to communicate to audience into a form of art similar to music, movies, novels, and other forms of composition worthy of dissecting: “Utilizing games... in this day and age should definitely be encouraged as we live in a constantly evolving civilization. These two platforms are both created by people to make a statement through their art pieces, so the answer, in short, is I feel like they should be discussed” (Student L). This shift in student thought opened students up to the idea that the form of media that they were most actively consuming did have meaning, messages, and certain societal structures being either constructed or maintained within them. One response that I thought to be both humorous and troubling was Student O’s response:

“Utilizing gaming... to discuss composition and rhetoric has been incredibly effective and engaging, particularly due to the fact that these topics are something that interest me. Analyzing these forms of media provides a different viewpoint than analyzing something like literary texts do, which allows for individuals to develop a different skill set when it comes to discussing composition and rhetoric.”

The reasons being that this student believes the skill set they developed within this class to be different than something they would traditionally receive if the class had not used gaming or a medium. This means that they either did not understand that this course discusses the same concepts as any other first year composition course, or that gaming proved to be so effective that they were tricked into learning something they may have detached themselves from if not

communicated through something they enjoyed prior to entering the classroom. This returns to the concept that we as educators and administrators of the FYC experience have influence over student learning even prior to them coming to the first day of class. Students will see a medium that they believe to have a strong connection with and will come into the class ready to write, discuss, and learn more about something they identify with.

For question #3: What skills regarding composition do you believe this course has taught you?

In asking this question I wanted to further investigate whether students prioritized discussing things they learned that were in relation to writing rather than gaming. I wanted to confirm that students did not fall prey to the pitfall of solely thinking about the medium and disregarding elements of writing, even if they had done so effectively through their assignments. Thankfully, not one student responded, even partially discussing anything they learned directed towards video games. All of the responses were based on increasing their knowledge of either rhetorical practices or compositional elements, “It taught me how to compose an interactive story. Also how to break down rhetorical concepts from interactive media” (Student Q). This response checked multiple theoretical boxes that showed they learned something both practical and creative, and also something analytical and epistemological. I wanted students to experience both critical and creative elements of composition through their readings and assignments, hopefully leaving the class with an increase in their skillset regarding both forms of composing. Student J’s response further confirms that beginning the class discussing audience and intention carried its weight in their minds through the entirety of the class: “This course has taught me that when writing a composition, it is important to know your audience. It is important that you know who will be reading your paper or watching your video, or playing your game, because that should play a factor in how you write or design it.” Although this student’s view about the rhetorical

concept of their audience only partially communicates why an audience is a large part of the composition process, they still progressed in their understanding that their work and the work of others is something that exists beyond its initial creation.

For question #4: Do you feel as though you would have learned more about rhetoric and composition without the topic of gaming being involved?

Although this element has already been discussed prior to this question, I wanted to ask students directly if they felt like using gaming helped in their overall understanding of the subject.

Although 73% of replies stated they felt they would have learned less about rhetoric and composition if it had not been communicated through a medium like gaming, what I found primarily in their responses instead was that if the class had been focused on something else as the medium they felt they would have learned less: “I probably would not have taken this class if it were centered on some other kind of rhetoric like “traveling” or “romance”. I am familiar with [how] video games work so learning about the rhetoric behind them was easier for me to understand” (Student P). Student P’s response highlights how delicate the process of using a medium is in actuality. Students do not always get to choose the classes they take due to registration issues, and if this medium had been something other than the student had prior interest in the professor would then have to fight multiple battles attempting to convince their students that the medium is worth discussing and that compositional elements are of importance within them.

For question #5: What benefits do you believe discussing gaming has brought to the course?

I wanted to see if there were any unforeseen components using gaming brought into student learning. What I mainly found in their responses were similar to their peers' responses in prior questions, that video games offered "an alternative way to view games, [that] aren't just something you do for fun that are mindless... [G]ames are more complex and this course proved how much thought goes into each tiny detail" (Student N). Although the course was not primarily focused on cultural and societal issues, students found value in discussing concepts like identity and representation that we had discussed through Andray Domise's commentary about his experience growing up playing games, "I think it made us think creatively and critically about the games we've played. We covered topics of sexism, racism, gender roles, and accessibility in video games, and going forward, we can take those discussions into different parts of our lives" (Student P). Student P touches on elements of teaching for transfer at the end of their response, which came naturally through discussing epistemological studies of how societal issues like "sexism, racism, gender roles, and accessibility" pervade composition and human interaction.

For question #6: What drawbacks do you believe discussing gaming has brought to the course?

Student Q's response unfortunately validated a fear I had in using a medium that students might see more so as a 'fun' activity rather than an academic one: "It's easy to get wrapped up in the game... and spend a lot of time talking about why we think a game is good rather than talking about its composition. Those two things overlap but are distinct." It can be very easy for students to unknowingly stray from composition due to excitement or feeling as though their general thoughts about video games relate to the in-class discussion. Often, I actively tried to

combat this by consistently circling back, asking students to think about what elements of composition are at play in those aspects of gaming they are excited to discuss. This turned a potentially hazardous roadblock of compositional understanding into deeper, more effective moments of teaching where students were able to see that if they were excited about something, it meant that the composer had successfully done something within their composition. Because students were asked to research games for their analytical essays they often mentioned it was difficult to find credible, scholarly sources due to certain games not being seen as worthy of academic discourse: “Games are not analyzed as much as their traditional rhetorical counterparts. While there are many great sources out there that analyze gaming, it simply still needs more time and recognition to generate more studies and analysis” (Student L). This often occurred if students wanted to write about a smaller game, one without much communal recognition. This happens also with other literary courses if the professors choose to include a writer’s voice that they believe brings something of value to the course, but is not widely recognized or published; so although this could be potentially problematic for students that are still trying to figure out how to research, it seems to be a problem beyond that of using a medium to discuss composition. In these moments I shifted my focus of teaching composition generally into a more specific training on how to effectively research, something that other FYC courses provide as well.

Conclusions

The students often declare, throughout all of the methods used, that their understanding of these concepts would be much more difficult to obtain if gaming had not been utilized to discuss rhetorical and compositional concepts. Oftentimes the students employed game language, theory, playstyles, characters, storylines, and a plethora of other rhetorical artifacts to articulate what they were trying to explain or understand about the practice of composition. Due to many

students remarking that they would have previously had little interest in composition until they viewed it through the screen of gaming, which then encouraged them drastically to study composition and rhetoric, it can be stated that using gaming as a popular medium was an effective pedagogical approach to teaching first-year composition. The students discussed societal structures and expectations that they had investigated through an epistemic perspective in their in-class discussions, response posts, and critical rhetorical analysis essays. These writings often directly referenced theories like Bogost's procedural rhetoric, Bonnie Ruberg's queer approach to gaming, and Martin Ricksand's approach to speed running. They came to understand literary concepts like canon through how a group of individuals comes to decide what should be encouraged and what should not. Pedagogically inspired by Roozen, the students truly dissected the idea of what a text is, and what it should accomplish in their creation of role-playing games, emerging from the other side of that experience claiming that they did not know composition could be so engaging or group oriented. Students engaged with real world issues and actively changed their understanding of themselves and the culture they live in, employing the argument put forth by George, Lockridge, and Trimbur that students should learn to critique the culture around them in order to "become better writers and readers as citizens, workers, and critics of their culture" (98). In every method used at least one student, sometimes the vast majority of students, commented that their understanding of audience and intention was drastically changed due to the perception of composition with the tabletop roleplaying game as the conduit for this understanding. These students will take the concepts they came to understand in this course and employ them throughout their studies, many stating that these concepts have permanently altered the way that they view a passion of theirs.

Through this course I have found that when a student enjoys what they are learning about, they are exponentially more engaged, critical, and receptive to the content at hand. This research shows that utilizing a popular medium in order to address composition proves more effective and accessible for first-year students. The wide majority of students claimed that they understand more about composition and rhetoric now than they ever would have if the lens of gaming, or another medium they enjoy, had not been employed.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Tabletop RPG One-Shot Session Instructions

You will participate in a collaborative creative process through the making of a Tabletop RPG One-Shot Session.

What is a "Tabletop RPG One-Shot Session?"

It is a 50-minute presentation in which your group will utilize designed characters for your audience to play, equipped with certain traits/personalities/items that they are able to use to participate in your narrative. You and your group will design these characters, along with an exposition that places your audience (your players) in a specific setting: Time period, location, time of day, etc.,

You do not need to come up with an entire narrative, just the beginning. It is better to approach this assignment through a loose overarching idea of where you will want your characters to end up. The majority of the session's time will be spent allowing your players to make choices presented to them as they experience the world you have created for them. This means you should design some dilemmas or choices prior to your session to present your players with. The more odd, the better. You are attempting to create a world in which your players can be creative.

Your group, on the day of the presentation, will be split into three classrooms in the library. You will all be the leaders of your own session, and guide your players through the exposition. From there, your audience will experience the dilemmas you have previously prepared and their choices will guide the session. If you begin to struggle with the improvisation aspect of the presentation I recommend just asking generalized questions like, "where do you want to go next? Who do you want to talk to? What do you want to ask them? What tools do you have to use?" and so on. I will also be walking from classroom to classroom, so if you need help I will gladly help get you and your players back on track.

Think back to our conversations about collaborative composition, audience, the idea of what a text is, and how it changes when coming into contact with an audience. Use these concepts to guide your creative process. Work with your group, they are there to help. Be kind to others' creative ideas, and do not dominate the creative process with your own. The initial design process will be a give and take interaction between you and your group members, so be sure to respect their ideas as you would want your own to be respected.

Appendix B - Tabletop RPG Reflection Essay Instructions

You will write a 4-5 page reflection essay discussing your experience with the Tabletop RPG from start to finish. Your essay needs to be Times New Roman, 12pt font, MLA style, and should include a Works Cited.

The intention for this essay is to look back at your Tabletop RPG project through the lens of composition. You will need to directly reflect upon the concepts below:

1. Initial expectations

(What did you think the project was, what did you think it was going to be, when did you feel like you understood the goal of the project?)

2. Easiest/difficult aspect of composing your narrative

(Composition is not usually a group effort, but how did that affect the process of composing a narrative both within the structures of your group leaders and then with your players?)

3. The session itself

(Were there any hiccups? What went well? What characters flopped and which excelled? Why? Was the narrative too rushed, was it free-flowing? Did you feel like your group bit off more than they could chew in terms of story length? Don't use this section to complain about your players, talk specifically about what you chose to do as a compositionist.)

4. What went well, what went wrong?

(About the process overall, not just specifically about the session. If you were going to do this project again, what would you do differently?)

5. What concepts/theorists in this class helped in the composition process?

(Looking over the course schedules/modules might help here. Make sure to quote directly from at least 2 of the sources we used in class.)

6. How did the Tabletop RPG project help you better understand the concept of rhetoric?

(How did it change your concept of rhetoric?)

7. In one sentence beginning with "Rhetoric is..." define what you have come to believe rhetoric to mean in regards to the sphere of gaming.

(This section only needs to be one sentence.)

Appendix C - Discussion Post Instructions

Each post should be at least 200 words.

The purpose for these assignments is to reflect back upon our conversations and source material to analyze what you thought stood out to you. This post is for you to reflect back on how you think this week's elements benefit your analysis of composition going forward. These posts are required in order to prepare for our discussion for that upcoming class period.

The point distribution for each post will begin at 3 points. You will begin each response post with those 3 points, and be deducted a point for missing any of these three categories: 200 word requirement, relevant to the week's content, and turning in your response on time. Try to use these informal responses to tie together aspects of prior readings, analyze quotations from the texts, and provide your own opinions on how what we are learning in class that week applies to your own experience with composition and gaming. Feel free to respond to your classmates, but it is not required.

Appendix D - Guided Interview

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: Rhetoric and Composition Survey

Today, you will be participating in an interview. The goal of the interview is to gain insight into how much your understanding of rhetoric and composition has transformed over the course of the semester. This survey is part of an IRB-approved study that seeks to add to academic discourse surrounding rhetoric and composition. This survey is anonymous and does not contribute to your course grade in any way.

1. How do you feel about utilizing gaming/cinematics to discuss composition and rhetoric?
2. What has been the most challenging part of this course?
3. What skills regarding composition do you believe this course has taught you?
4. Do you feel as though you would have learned more about rhetoric and composition without the topic of gaming/cinematics being involved?
5. What benefits do you believe discussing gaming/cinematics has brought to the course?
6. What drawbacks do you believe discussing gaming/cinematics has brought to the course?
7. What is something you would do differently as the professor of this course?
8. How do you believe the assignments of the course contribute to your knowledge of rhetoric and composition?
9. What is something you believe this class has overlooked?
10. How would you rank what you believe to be the effectiveness of utilizing the discussion of gaming/cinematics in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the course's theories?
 - Extremely effective, I would not have understood the course's content if not through the medium of gaming/cinematics.
 - Effective, discussing the course's content through the medium of gaming/cinematics helped, but was not crucial to my understanding.
 - Indifferent
 - Ineffective, often I was confused when discussing the course's content through the medium of gaming/cinematics.
 - Extremely Ineffective, discussing the course's content through the medium of gaming/cinematics actively hindered my understanding.
11. Do you have any additional questions/comments?