

**WRITING 2540A:
WRITING FOR VIDEO GAMES
(Online / Asynchronous)**

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

DESCRIPTION

This course introduces the principles of video game writing and narrative design. Students examine how narrative meaning emerges through worldbuilding, interactive systems, character development, narrative structure, and player agency while developing an understanding of the creative, technical, and collaborative processes that shape contemporary game development.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have demonstrated the ability to

1. Understand and differentiate between interactive storytelling and traditional narrative;
2. Understand the terminology and definitions of video game narrative and design;
3. Understand the roles of the video game writer and narrative designer (and the distinctions between them);
4. Analyze how worldbuilding, game systems, character development, narrative structure, and player agency interact to produce narrative meaning in video games;
5. Understand the role of the writer within contemporary video game development and production;
6. Demonstrate a broad understanding of the creative, technical, and collaborative principles of narrative design, including how interactive stories emerge through the relationship between worldbuilding, systems, character, structure, and player interaction.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND GAMES

Note: there is no textbook for this course. Instead, students will access weekly readings on Brightspace under Lectures and Course Readings (offered by Weldon Library). (Cost: No Cost).

Students must select and play one (1) game from the approved course game list below. The game may be purchased through Steam or obtained as a physical copy and may be played on any platform on which the chosen game is available (e.g., PC, PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo Switch, etc.). All approved games are available on Steam, and the prices listed below reflect the current Steam price. Students who purchase their game through Steam and do not already have a Steam account will need to create one, which is free.

Citizen Sleeper. Jump Over the Age, Fellow Traveller, 2022. (Cost on Steam: \$25.99)

Disco Elysium. ZA/UM, 2019. (Cost on Steam: \$47.99)

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim. Bethesda Game Studios, Bethesda Softworks, 2011. (Cost on Steam: \$53.29)

Stardew Valley. ConcernedApe, 2016. (Cost on Steam: \$16.99)

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt. CD Projekt Red, 2015. (Cost on Steam: \$55.99)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Quiz 1 (1 Hour - Online)	(Week 4):	10%
Midterm Exam (2 Hours - Online)	(Week 7):	30%
Quiz 2 (1 Hour – Online)	(Week 10):	15%
Forum Discussions	(Ongoing Weekly)	10%
Final Exam (3 Hours In Person)	(TBA)	35%

NOTE THAT THE FINAL EXAM WILL TAKE PLACE IN PERSON

The Final Exam for this online class will take place in-person at Western. It is a closed book exam: no aids are permitted for the final exam. Electronic devices of any kind (including calculators, cell phones, and smart watches) are not permitted except in cases covered by University policy.

NOTE ON QUIZZES AND MIDTERM EXAM

All quizzes and exams will be completed online through our Brightspace course page. Additional instructions will be provided before each assessment.

Each quiz and exam is timed. The timer begins as soon as you officially start the assessment. Once the allotted time has expired, your work will be submitted automatically for grading. No additional time will be available after the timer ends.

Quizzes and the Midterm Exam may be started at any time during their scheduled week. For example, if the Midterm Exam is scheduled for Week 7, you may begin the exam on any day during Week 7. Regardless of when you start, you must submit the assessment no later than **11:59 p.m. on the Sunday of the scheduled week**. Assessments will not be available after this deadline.

ASSIGNMENT FORMAT

Quizzes, Forum Responses, and Exams must be submitted electronically via OWL Brightspace (Word doc). The Final Exam will take place in person and the exam and exam booklet(s) must be submitted to the professor in person.

BRIGHTSPACE FORUMS

Students are expected to complete a weekly Reflection and Discussion Exercise for each lecture. Responses must be between 200 and 300 words and submitted through the corresponding week's FORUM module on Brightspace.

Responses should be written in clear, well-organized prose that reflects an appropriate undergraduate standard of writing. Students are expected to present reasoned arguments supported by concrete examples, thoughtful analysis, and logical organization while demonstrating meaningful engagement with the course material. Responses should refer to specific games, examples, or ideas relevant to the prompt. Responses that are generic, overly vague, disconnected from the prompt, refer to fictitious or inaccurate examples, or fail to demonstrate critical engagement with the course material will receive reduced grades.

Reflection and Discussion prompts will appear at the end of each weekly lecture. Late forum submissions will not be accepted except in cases covered by University policy.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS/DUE DATES/ LATE SUBMISSION PENALTIES ETC.

In this course you will be required to submit the final version of each of your quizzes and exams electronically, through OWL Brightspace.

Late forum posts, quizzes, and exams will not be accepted and will result in a grade of 0% unless the student has arranged an extension with the professor and academic accommodations. To qualify for an extension, you must have a valid reason and contact your instructor *prior* to the deadline. Please see the medical accommodation policy below.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES

We do not meet formally as a class in an online course. Therefore, attendance and participation on the Discussion Board (Forums) are intertwined. While online classes are generally asynchronous, they are not self-paced. You must attend class (defined as logging into our OWL section) and participate by introducing yourself and posting questions and thoughts during the first week, and by posting (by participating in each week's set discussion topic) in subsequent weeks where a Discussion topic is indicated on this syllabus. Your class discussion grade will be based on whether you have sufficiently fulfilled the posting requirements outlined on the syllabus. In general, the grade will be determined by 1) the quality of your posts each week, 2) the frequency and number of quality posts made.

You must receive either undocumented or documented academic consideration in order to be accommodated for missed posts. You may only use the undocumented consideration option once each term. If you face an extended and prolonged absence then you must discuss it with your academic advisor in your home faculty, and submit documentation to support your request for academic consideration. (See Academic Consideration policy below.)

Note: a class meeting missed in order to write a test, exam, or other form of 'make-up class' in another course will count as non-attendance, and will attract penalties as defined above if applicable. Instructors at the University of Western Ontario shall not require a student to write a make-up test or similar at times which conflict with that student's other scheduled class times. If you are asked or 'required' to do this, you should immediately contact an academic counsellor in your Dean's office. If you elect to miss a class in order to write such a test, that is your choice; your absence will not be excused.

SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES, INCLUDING PLAGIARISM

Scholastic Offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, which can be found here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using

quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently Western and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

NOTE: In this course, the use of AI (such as automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) for quizzes, forum posts, or exams is prohibited in all cases. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and/or other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of **Academic Accommodation**.

PREREQUISITES

Open to all students with no prerequisites

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION AND RELATED MATTERS

University policy on academic considerations is described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation. Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline. For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests through the Student Absence Portal, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:

https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline. All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation, which may include a Student Medical Certificate. Recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make one Academic Consideration request without supporting documentation in this course. However, the following assessments are excluded from this, and therefore always require formal supporting documentation

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain

help.

Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519-661-3030 (during class hours) or 519-433-2023 after class hours and on weekends

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays and should give reasonable notice in writing (email), prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Statement on Gender-based Sexual Violence

Western University is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca

Other Student Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support and Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Please

note

Students must initiate all requests for Special Exams, Incompletes, or Aegrotat standing through the Dean's office of their home faculty.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

All instructor-written materials (e.g. PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course, and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses, without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Readings:

- SYLLABUS (Read Syllabus from Start to End)
- LECTURES: Week 1

WEEK 2: THE ROLE OF THE INTERACTIVE STORYTELLER

Readings

- LECTURES: Week 2
- COURSE READINGS: From *Dramatic Storytelling & Narrative Design: A Writer's Guide to Video Games and Transmedia*, Ross Berger
 - "Roles and Responsibilities" (19-33)

WEEK 3: NARRATIVE DESIGN AND MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS: THE "RULES" AND THE "SKIN"

Readings LECTURES: Week 3

- COURSE READINGS: From *Narrative Design for Mobile and Live Games*, Valentina Tamer
 - "Introduction to Interactive Storytelling" (33-46)

WEEK 4: INTRODUCING WORLD BUILDING, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Readings:

- LECTURES: Week 4

****QUIZ 1****

WEEK 5: WORLDBUILDING IN NARRATIVE DESIGN: ESTABLISHING THE WORLD OF THE GAME

Readings:

- LECTURES: Week 5
- COURSE READINGS: From *The Game Narrative Toolbox*, Heussner, Tobias, et al.
 - "Worldbuilding." (51-77)

WEEK 6: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN NARRATIVE DESIGN (PART I)

Readings:

- LECTURES: Week 6
- COURSE READINGS: From *The Ultimate Guide to Video Game Writing and Design*
 - Dille and Zuur Platten, “Writing Compelling Game Characters” (65-88)

****READING WEEK****
(NO CLASS)

WEEK 7: REVIEW

Readings:

- LECTURES: Week 7

****MIDTERM EXAM****

WEEK 8: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN NARRATIVE DESIGN (PART II): PROTAGONIST AND ANTAGONIST

Readings:

- LECTURES: Week 8
- COURSE READINGS: From *The Ultimate Guide to Video Game Writing and Design*
 - Dille and Zuur Platten, “Game Properties and Franchises” (111-118)

WEEK 9: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Readings:

- LECTURES: Week 9
- COURSE READINGS: From *Video Game Storytelling*, Evan Skolnick
 - “The Three-Act Structure” (12-26)
 - Forum Workshop

WEEK 10: WRITING DIALOGUE: FROM SCRIPTS TO SPREADSHEETS

Readings:

- LECTURES: Week 10
- COURSE READINGS: From *Professional Techniques for Video Game Writing* Ed. Wendy Despain
 - Despain, Wendy “Game Script Formatting” (11-18)

****QUIZ 2****

**WEEK 11:
BREAKING ONTO THE SCENE**

Readings:

- LECTURES: WEEK 11
- Special Guest Video (Week 11)
- COURSE READINGS: From *Professional Techniques for Video Game Writing* Ed. Wendy Despain
 - Despain, Wendy “Getting Writing Jobs in Video Games” (1-9)

**WEEK 12:
WRAP UP / EXAM PREP**

Readings:

- LECTURES: WEEK 12

**FINAL EXAM (IN PERSON)
DATE, TIME, AND PLACE
TBA**