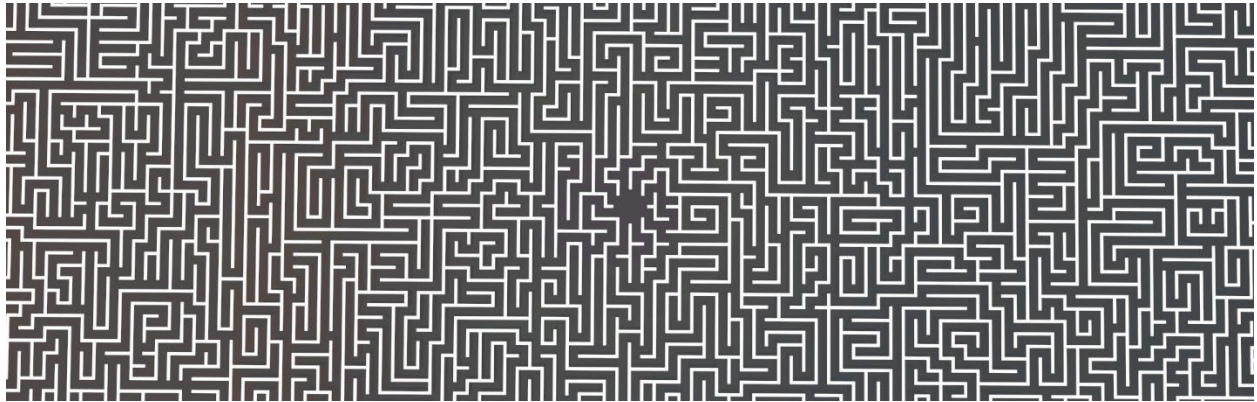


# VIDEO GAME RHETORIC



*The Beginner's Guide* (2015), Davey Wreden

Dr. Shane Snyder (You can call me Shane)

ENGL 1101, Fall 2024

Office Hours (Zoom or in-person by appointment): Hours on Canvas front page

Zoom: Link on Canvas

Email: See Canvas front page

## ENGL 1101 ENGL COMPOSITION I

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Writing area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I write effectively in different contexts?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- Students will communicate effectively in writing, demonstrating clear organization and structure, using appropriate grammar and writing conventions.
- Students will appropriately acknowledge the use of materials from original sources.
- Students will adapt their written communications to purpose and audience.
- Students will analyze and draw informed inferences from written texts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy
- Persuasion

## OVERVIEW:

Welcome to ENGL 1101, a course that is designed to help you become a more effective writer, thinker, speaker, designer, and collaborator. As part of the **WOVEN** (i.e., **W**ritten, **O**ral, **V**isual, **E**lectronic, and **N**onverbal) model, this course builds primarily upon your writing skills. Using video games as our analytical lens, we will cover rhetoric, process, critical thinking, argumentation, and writing genres. During this exceptionally short, fast-paced summer session, you will create two writing projects and one multimodal project.

Over the last few decades, popular conceptions of video games have transformed from living room novelties into persuasive works of art. While many video games often rely on cinematic language and literary conventions to tell their narratives, they are also armed with a powerful rhetorical weapon—interactive rule-based systems. For this course we will analyze, discuss, and experiment with these rule-based systems, as well as the artistic modes of representation that accompany them. Video games, like other artforms, are inherently political, ideological texts that reflect the cultural contexts that produced them. Consequently, this course is, in part, an argument for a way of seeing video games as meaningful cultural representations that shape and are shaped by the sociohistorical moment. Consider, for example, video game designers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman’s observation that we can discuss even something as rudimentary as Ms. Pac-Man, “as a powerful and positive feminist icon . . . Or we might view her as a very unfeminist symbol, a derivative character that equates lipstick and a hair bow with the female gender . . . as an ever-hungry symbol of capitalist consumption; or the marker of a historical moment when Japanese pop transformed global electronic culture” (500). Each of these interpretations is valid, and no two are mutually exclusive.

With these ideas in mind, the following questions animate this course: What is a game? How do we determine what does and doesn’t qualify as a “game”? Relatedly, what does it take to be considered a “gamer” (who gets to claim the title)? What makes a game persuasive? How can we use the language of video games to craft our own persuasive arguments? We will engage with games and readings that help us to answer these questions while investigating the audiences that play and discuss games. Our goal in this course is to learn how to read and understand video games, as well as the audiences and communities that consume and discuss them. In this class, you will write a review of a video game text, partner with a classmate to develop your own tabletop game concept, and, in a four- or five-person group, collaboratively design an interactive Twine narrative.

## COURSE-SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

- Learn to analyze the rhetoric of various texts—fiction and nonfiction—while also considering tone, audience, writer/creator/designer, argumentation, and aesthetic.

- Develop a process for composing primarily written projects, which includes editing, revising, and reflecting on your work.
- Improve upon multimodal skills. In the process, comprehend the affordances of each medium of communication (i.e. writing, visual design/art, oral communication, digital media, and nonverbal communication).
- Collaborate in pairs and groups to design content that is greater than the sum of its parts. By extension, learn how to delegate tasks and divide labor so everyone within the group contributes equally.
- Understand and appreciate the cultural impact of each form of communication.
- Approach each mode of communication with critical insight.

## COURSE TEXTS

The listed texts below are essential to engaging with this course's critical concepts. As such, the texts below are required. Luckily, only the top two texts cost money, while the rest are free. While I will do my best to accommodate where and when I can, some forms of accommodation may limit your engagement with the texts in crucial ways. I tried to keep costs as low as possible. Having said that, please alert me if you encounter any issues with purchasing.

- *Gone Home* (available for consoles and on Steam for PC and iOS)
- *Celeste* (available for consoles and on Steam for PC and iOS)
- Other free online games (TBD)
- Additional readings will be posted to Canvas (also free)

## REQUIRED EQUIPMENT

- A working computer
- Discord (Download the client and follow the link on the Canvas front page)
- An internet connection (preferably a high enough speed that you won't encounter issues uploading your content)

## COURSE POLICIES:

### ChatGPT:

By now, you've no doubt heard about (or even used) the controversial "AI" large-language model (LLM), ChatGPT. We will discuss ChatGPT at length in this course, but maybe not in the way you expect. While I confess the ubiquity of ChatGPT-written essays is frustrating as an educator who's responsible for making his students better writers and thinkers, I and many of my colleagues have learned to embrace inventive and unconventional uses of AI in our writing classes. By "inventive and unconventional," I mean that ChatGPT should be used only as a writing assistant, not as writer. I stress this because I've already had numerous students submit unaltered ChatGPT-written

essays since the program became public in early 2023. These essays are easy to spot (yes, even the pay-to-use GPT-4o) for reasons we'll cover in detail in class.

But for good measure, I'll explain here what ChatGPT does well and not so well. LLMs are useful for brainstorming ideas, workshopping grammar, experimenting with essay structures, ideating visual art, performing basic research, and even building skeletal foundations for worlds. But they're still terrible writers. LLMs like ChatGPT produce dreadfully dull essays that are little more than predictive, if occasionally convincing, assemblages of phrases. What they produce sacrifices deep insight for grammatical and stylistic sameness. They lack the human capacity to analyze a text (or even cite sources properly). They evince no thought, action, or choice. They're imperfect in their cookie-cutter, safe, totalitarian identicalness. This is why you're more interesting than a program that is pretty good at describing and summarizing information humans have already produced but terrible at coming up with original explanations themselves. Since this is a writing and communication course, it's vital that you do the work yourself. Show me you're making creative decisions in your writing, not ceding that labor to a program still in its nascency. College is, after all, designed to teach you how to think and write critically. Your job isn't just to score pretty letters on a transcript that won't get you very far in life (employers won't care that you got the A, but they will care that you can reflect your thinking in writing), but to become a better global citizen. Anyway, I'm not outlawing ChatGPT, but I am asking you to approach it critically.

**Participation:**

Participation is essential to a productive and rewarding college career. Learning new skills and discussing provocative ideas is a privilege, and we would do well to remember it. Think of the classroom as a laboratory for original thought. In this laboratory, I encourage us to test opinions in an open discussion forum without fear of a backlash. As such, I ask that everybody respect their peers as we discuss the course content. In other words, let's keep it productive. Don't insult or bully each other during our brief interactions, but absolutely do express your disagreements. To have meaningful discussions in class, it is vital that we learn to balance listening with speaking, even if we disagree with one another.

**Attendance:**

Ordinarily, the Writing and Communication Program's (WCP) common attendance policy permits four missed classes. That same policy states that missing eight classes may result in a failing grade, as determined by me and with the blessings of the Director of the WCP. I am keeping to this attendance policy, with the following major exception:

COVID-19 taught all instructors worth their salt that it's silly to force students to attend class when they're sick. If you come down with any kind of illness, I request that you remain home until it's safe to return to class. Even if you merely have a cold, I request that you err on the side of caution and heal at home. All I ask is that you alert me *in*

*advance* that you won't be attending class. If you don't alert me, the conventional attendance policy (see above) remains in effect.

### **Assignment Submissions:**

You will submit all your work to Canvas. You should submit all written assignments, whether they're smaller process documents or part of a larger project, in .docx format (Microsoft Word). I prefer .docx for the sake of consistency.

### **Late Work:**

I am willing to grant extensions under certain circumstances, but you must let me know at least two days (48 hours) in advance of the assignment submission deadline. Otherwise, all late assignments will result in a grade reduction of 5% for each 24-hour period (that means a calendar, not class, day) that it is late. Keep in mind that this policy does not (and cannot) apply to the final portfolio, whose submission deadline is non-negotiable.

### **Academic Honesty:**

As defined in the Georgia Tech academic honor code, plagiarism is the "Submission of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another person or persons, without adequate credit notations indicating the authorship." When you borrow an idea from somebody else and include it in your own work, even if that "somebody else" happens to be an AI program, you must give proper attribution to that author or program. This applies across all modalities of communication. For more information on academic honesty and best practices, go here:

<http://policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-affairs/academic-honor-code>

At the link, you'll notice there is, at present, no specific stipulation about LLMs. For that, you'll need to see my specific AI course policies above, which you can treat as both a plagiarism policy and an informal explanation for why AI isn't included in GT's academic honor code. In any case, keep in mind that I take plagiarism very seriously and will check your work if it makes me suspicious. Please make sure your work is entirely your own. If you are unsure of whether you've plagiarized something in your work (confusion is fine and mistakes happen—I've made them myself), don't hesitate to contact me. Wherever possible, I will not resort to punishment where diplomacy will do.

## **ASSIGNMENTS:**

Assignments are divided into small and large projects for which you will receive assignment sheets in advance. Small projects (or process assignments) are low stakes assignments like group discussion notes, proposals, peer reviews, and reflections. All these assignments, which comprise individual, paired, and group submissions, are integral to the process of building your larger projects (described in greater detail

below). In other words, consider all your small projects necessary means of conceptualizing larger projects. By the end of the semester when you begin assembling your portfolio, you will include much of the content from these process documents in your final portfolio.

- **Participation (10%):** I grade participation based on your collective efforts throughout the semester. This means speaking during class discussions, working with your groups, and attending class regularly. If you maintain an open mind and put in effort with all aspects of the course, you'll do just fine.
- **Group Discussion Notes (10%):** Starting **Week 2**, on some Mondays or Wednesdays (six times in all throughout the semester), you will get into your semester groups and, for up to twenty minutes (please no longer), collectively discuss a text or texts assigned for that week based on questions I will post to the board that day. During your discussion, you should assign one of your group members to take notes that do two things: **1.) answer guiding questions that I will project on the board and 2.) indicate who says what during your discussion.** Please take special note of the second item on this list, as groups have historically lost easy points for failing to identify speakers. You should **switch up the notetaker each week** to distribute the labor fairly. Only one group member should submit the completed notes to the assignment immediately following your discussion (it's designated as a group submission in canvas, so if one person submits, it's for all members of the group). This assignment has three practical functions: it holds you accountable for playing the games and doing the (very short) readings each week; it teaches you to take meeting minutes, which are detailed notes of items covered during a meeting (in this case group discussion); and it encourages you to both collaborate and practice your oral communication skills in group settings (you also get to build group solidarity).
- **Artifact 0 – Common First Week Letter (5%):** For this assignment, you will compose a 400-500-word letter, addressed to me, in which you will introduce yourself. This letter should do two things: tell a story about your history with writing, and reflect upon what that experience taught you about effective communication. For more information, see the assignment sheet posted to Canvas.
- **Artifact 1 – Critical Game Review [individual] (15%):** This assignment asks you to produce a well-researched, persuasive written review of a video or board game of your choice. This could be any game—mobile, console, PC, free-to-play, etc. Even if you don't have a wealth of experience with video games, I'd wager you've played something in the past that's worth writing a review about. To realize your vision, you will undergo a process leading up to the final artifact

submission that includes research annotations, a proposal, a peer review, and a reflection.

- Process assignments (Annotations, Proposal, Rough Draft plus Peer Review, and Reflection) – 5%
  - Final Artifact – 10%
- **Tabletop Game Concept [Paired] (20%):** Now that you have applied some of the rhetorical ideas we covered to an existing game, you will pair with one or two classmates from your semester design group and leverage your knowledge to develop a concept for (but not design) a playable tabletop game. You should view this assignment as both an artistic and a technical document. It's artistic in that you'll develop a basic story context, characters, and objectives. It's a technical document because its goal is to teach a specific audience of players (kids, adults, or all ages) how to set up and play the game. The document should be divided into sections commonly found in tabletop board game rulebooks—story, objective, setup, game pieces, rules, a gameplay example, and a win condition. You may also consider adding other sections, if applicable, like character or enemy profiles. To prepare for this assignment, we will do two in-class activities involving board games. Apart from the rulebook's structure (i.e., the sections it should include), this project is open-ended to encourage creativity.
  - Process Assignments (Proposal, Artist Statement Rough Drafts, Peer Review, and Reflection) – 5%
  - Final Artifact – 15%
- **Artifact 3 – Interactive Twine Narrative [Group] (20%):** Your third major project will entail synthesizing what you've learned throughout the course to create a collaborative (i.e., group) interactive Twine narrative that you can choose to adapt from one of your group's tabletop game concepts. Twine is an easy-to-use and learn freeware program that enables users to craft text-based games of choice. You will collaborate with a group to design your own basic mechanics and story paths.
  - Process Assignments (group proposal, rough story map or outline, peer-review playtest, and reflection) – 5%
  - Final Artifact – 15%
- **Final Portfolio (20%):** In lieu of a final exam, you will compile a portfolio of your work completed for the course. The portfolio is due during our final exam date. I will post an assignment sheet that details everything you should include in your portfolio. You must complete your portfolio to pass the course.

## GRADE BREAKDOWN:

A+	98-100	You've produced exceptional work throughout the semester. You consistently followed assignment instructions and paid great attention to detail in your work.
A	94-97	
A-	90-93	
B+	87-89	You produced above average work, finished all or almost all of your assignments, participated in class frequently, and generally followed assignment instructions.
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	While you could have done a better job of following instructions and participating in class, your work was of average quality and worth a passing grade overall.
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	You rarely followed instructions, only sometimes participated, and produced below-average work throughout the semester.
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	You rarely, if ever, participated in class and either never turned in your work or turned in poor quality work.

## CAMPUS RESOURCES:

### Naugle CommLab:

Located in Clough Commons, Suite 447, the Naugle CommLab is a resource for every student at Georgia Tech to seek help with their multimodal assignments. The CommLab specializes in virtually everything this course covers. If you find that the WordPress or Wix tutorials I post don't adequately help you to design your group's website, the CommLab can render you the assistance you need. For more information, visit their website: <http://communicationcenter.gatech.edu/>

### Dean of Students and Counseling Center:

College is a stressful time that can exacerbate anxiety and depression. There's no shame in seeking help from mental health professionals if you need it (I've been there and had to seek help myself!). You can seek help in the following two ways:

- Office of the Dean of Students: <https://grandchallenges.gatech.edu/office-dean-students>
- The Counseling Center: <https://counseling.gatech.edu/>
- CARE (24/7 counseling on the phone): <https://care.gatech.edu/>

### Accommodations:

Georgia Tech supports students through the Office of Disability Services. Any student who may require an accommodation for a documented disability should inform me privately during the first week of class or as soon as you become aware of your



disability. Anyone who anticipates difficulties with the content or format of the course due to a documented disability should arrange a meeting so we can create a workable plan for your success in this course. The Office of Disability Services serves any Georgia Tech student who has a documented, qualifying disability. Official documentation of the disability is required to determine eligibility for accommodations or adaptations that may be helpful for this course. Please make sure I receive a Faculty Accommodation Letter form verifying your disability and specifying the accommodation you need during the first week of class.

- Visit: Smithgall Student Services Bldg, Suite 210 on 353 Ferst Drive
- Email: [adapts@vpss.gatech.edu](mailto:adapts@vpss.gatech.edu).
- Call: 404-894-2563 (V); 404-894-1664 (TDD); 404-894-9928 (fax)

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE:\*\*

Week	Readings, games, videos, etc.	Assignments/activities
1	<p><b><i>Common first week: Introducing the course, understanding multimodal communication.</i></b></p> <p>M 8/19 – Introductions, syllabus, Artifact 0, and Canvas shell</p> <p>W 8/21 – Discussion: Rhetoric, process, modality, and the rhetorical situation; ChatGPT benefits and issues; Introducing Artifact 1</p> <p>F 8/23 – Workshop: Artifact 0 Letter</p> <p><b>Read for Wednesday:</b> WOVENText Ch. 3 (Link on Canvas)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Wednesday by 11:59PM:</b> Fall 2024 Access Survey</li> </ul>
2	<p><b><i>Game rules/game literacies/group assignments</i></b></p> <p>M 8/26 – In-class play: <i>Zork</i> (a text adventure) / Discussion: Defining a “game”</p> <p>W 8/28 – Group Notes 1 (Juul ch. 1) / review genre conventions / audience awareness / summary vs. analysis / creating and constructing an argument</p> <p>F 8/30 – Annotation examples / Workshop: Review Annotations</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Juul Ch. 1 (Canvas)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Tuesday by 11:59PM:</b> CFW Letter and Reflection</li> <li>• <b>Due Wednesday after class:</b> Group notes 1</li> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Review Annotations</li> </ul>

3	<p><b><i>Rules, Story, and Play</i></b></p> <p>M 9/2 – Labor Day (no class)</p> <p>W 9/4 – Activity: Board Games</p> <p>F 9/6 – Board Game Activity debrief / Workshop: Review Proposal</p> <p><b>Read:</b> No reading this week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Review proposal</li> </ul>
4	<p><b><i>Rethinking Interactive Narratives</i></b></p> <p>M 9/9 – In-Class Play: <i>Stanley Parable</i></p> <p>W 9/11 – Group Notes 2 / <i>Stanley Parable</i> and Juul (ch. 5) discussion</p> <p>F 9/13 – Crafting an arguable thesis statement / Workshop: Rough Draft</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Juul ch. 5 (Canvas)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Wednesday after class:</b> Group Notes 2</li> </ul>
5	<p><b><i>Peer Review Week and Introducing Artifact 2</i></b></p> <p>M 9/16 – Introducing artifact 2 / Read in class: Chomsky, Roberts, and Watumull / ChatGPT activity / Workshop (if time): rough drafts</p> <p>W 9/18 – Why peer review? / The art of providing constructive feedback / Peer review day (turn in rough draft prior to class)</p> <p>F 9/20 – Workshop: Incorporate classmate's feedback and finish review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Tuesday by 11:59:</b> Peer review</li> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59:</b> Final Game Review</li> </ul>

6	<p><b><i>Rhetorical Case Study: Queering the Narrative / Games and Social Criticism</i></b></p> <p>M 9/23 – Activity: Build first artifact portfolio page / Group Notes 3 (<i>Gone Home</i> and Kopas) / Begin discussion (if time)</p> <p>W 9/25 – Discussion cont’d: <i>Gone Home</i></p> <p>F 9/27 – Brief lecture on <i>Gone Home</i> and Kopas / Workshop: Tabletop Game Proposal (paired)</p> <p><b>Play:</b> <i>Gone Home</i>  <b>Read:</b> Merritt Kopas – “On <i>Gone Home</i>”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Monday after class:</b> Group Notes 3</li> <li>• <b>Due Tuesday by 11:59PM:</b> Artifact 1 Reflections</li> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59:</b> Tabletop Game Proposal</li> </ul>
7	<p><b><i>“Serious” Games and Newsgames</i></b></p> <p>M 9/30 – In-class play: See Canvas / Discussion</p> <p>W 10/2 – Discussion: Holcomb, game rules, and rulebooks as a form of technical writing / Artist Statements (why do them?) / Taking personal accountability</p> <p>F 10/4 – Workshop: Tabletop Concept OR individual artist statements</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Jeremy Holcomb – Chapter 6 “Writing Effective Rules” (Canvas)</p>	<p>Nothing due this week</p>
8	<p><b><i>A Brief History</i></b></p> <p>M 10/7 – Group Notes 4 / Atari games (see canvas Week 8 Module) / Discussion</p> <p>W 10/9 – Violence, advertising, and the Cold War / Ludonarrative dissonance (does it withstand scrutiny?)</p> <p>F 10/11 – Workshop: Rough Drafts</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Clint Hocking – “Ludonarrative Dissonance in <i>Bioshock</i>”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Monday after class:</b> Group notes 4</li> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Artist statement rough drafts (group document, individual contributions)</li> </ul>

9	<p><b><i>Case Study 2: Challenge as Rhetoric / Disability Narratives in Games</i></b></p> <p>M 10/14 – Fall Break (no class)</p> <p>W 10/16 – Group Notes 5 (<i>Celeste</i>) / Discussion: <i>Celeste</i></p> <p>F 10/18 – <i>Celeste</i> cont'd / Peer Review Day (submit rough drafts prior to class)</p> <p><b>Play at home:</b> <i>Celeste</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Wednesday after class:</b> Group Notes 5</li> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Peer review</li> </ul>
10	<p><b><i>Conference week (Zoom office)</i></b></p> <p>These meetings are optional for your two- or three-person group. I will look over your Tabletop Board Game rough drafts in advance of our meeting and discuss possible directions for your projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Artifact 2 Final Draft</li> </ul>
11	<p><b><i>Introducing Twine / Artifact 3 / Audiences</i></b></p> <p>M 10/28 – Activity: Build Artifact 2 portfolio page / Introduce Artifact 3</p> <p>W 10/30 – Introducing Twine / Playing with Twine</p> <p>F 11/1 – Workshop: Twine proposal and/or learn Twine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Tuesday by 11:59PM:</b> Artifact 2 Reflections</li> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Twine proposal</li> </ul>

12	<p><b>Capabilities of Twine / Audiences</b></p> <p>M 11/4 – No class (it’s my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and I will be out. Also, don’t forget to vote on Tuesday—if you’re eligible!)</p> <p>W 11/6 – Group Notes 6 / Discussion: GamerGate and what it signifies, Chess and Shaw</p> <p>F 11/8 – Workshop: Twine story map or outline</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Shaw and Chess: “A Conspiracy of Fishes...”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Wednesday after class:</b> Group Notes 6</li> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Twine Story Map or Outline</li> </ul>
13	<p><b>Widening Our View of Audiences</b></p> <p>M 11/11 – Activity: GTAV, race, and cultural stereotypes</p> <p>W 11/13 – Workshop: Rough draft of your Twine Narrative</p> <p>F 11/15 – Peer Review Playtest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Peer review playtest</li> </ul>
14	<p><b>Final Conference Week (Twine Narratives)</b></p> <p>This conference week is mandatory for your full group. Please attend a remote meeting during the time I will designate for your group the week prior.</p>	
15	<p><b>Thanksgiving Break! (Treat Monday as a workshop day. I will be in my virtual office in case you need assistance)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Friday by 11:59PM:</b> Twine Narratives and Artifact 3 Reflections</li> </ul>
16	<p><b>Final Instructional Week</b></p> <p>M 12/2 – Twine game showcase / final portfolio instructions / Closing comments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due Tuesday by 11:59PM:</b> Twine Narratives and Artifact 3 Reflections</li> <li>• <b>Final Portfolios due Wednesday 12/12 by 11:59</b></li> </ul>

***\*\*I reserve the right to change aspects of the syllabus if it becomes necessary.***