

SM6328: ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM OF COMPUTER GAMES

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Analysis and Criticism of Computer Games

Subject Code

SM - School of Creative Media

Course Number

6328

Academic Unit

School of Creative Media (SM)

College/School

School of Creative Media (SM)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

Drawing on the paradigm of game studies, this course focuses on the methods, techniques, and vocabularies for analysis, interpretation and critical review of computer games, and the contexts and purposes in which these are used. Through lectures and hands-on exercises, involving analysis of computer games and secondary materials such as computer game reviews in the media, students will be provided with the skills and techniques to analyse computer games, the knowledge on which critical judgements and scholarly assertions can be based, and the vocabulary with which to express these. The games to be analysed range from mainstream AAA titles to contemporary independent art game projects. Upon completion of this course the students will be able to critically examine, evaluate and compare computer games, and, to situate a given computer game in the contexts of genre, history, aesthetics and technology and formulate their observations into an informed review. Students will also be able to identify and evaluate the categories and purposes of analysis and criticism itself (e.g. commercial product review, critique of an artwork, scholarly interpretation), and to partake in contemporary debates within the discourses of game analysis and criticism (e.g. concerning with the "gameness" of computer games). Teaching and learning activities are centred around lectures on the theories and methods of game analysis and criticism, supported by close-playing game analysis workshops during tutorials or as independent work.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if DEC-A1 DEC-A2 DEC-A3 app.)			
1	Apply the appropriate methods, techniques, theories, and vocabularies for analysis and critique of computer games		x	x	
2	Describe and reflect on the key positions in the debates concerning computer game criticism		x	x	
3	Identify and describe the different categories and purposes of game analysis and game criticism		x	x	
4	Generate their own scholarly informed and historically aware game analyses, critiques, and reviews		x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures	Lectures on game analysis and criticism, with in-class playings of games followed by discussion	1, 2, 3, 4	

2	Game analysis exercises, essays, and reflection papers	Independent game analysis and criticism exercises making use of assigned readings and resulting in short papers and/or presentations	1, 3, 4	
3	Final essay	Final essay: an analysis and/or a critique of a game (or in exceptional cases a series of games)	1, 2, 3, 4	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	In-class participation	1, 2, 3, 4	5	-	No
2	Presentations	1, 2, 3, 4	20	-	No
3	Short reflection papers	1, 2, 3, 4	30	-	No
4	Final essay (in-depth game review)	1, 2, 3, 4	45	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Minimum Continuous Assessment Passing Requirement (%)

0

Minimum Examination Passing Requirement (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

In-class participation (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre-class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to his/her peer members.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate class discussion and comment on other points
- In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret others' views with an open mind and ready to negotiate
- Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and synthesis with informed views
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class discussion and comment on other points
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret opinions effectively

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Attentive in in-class participation, listening with comprehension, but only infrequently contributing
- Adequate pre-class preparation but little familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Fair ability in interpreting opinions

Marginal

(D)

- Unmotivated to participate in class discussion or comment on other people's views
- Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Poor ability in interpreting opinions

Failure

(F)

- Unwilling to participate in class discussion and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher
 - No pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
 - Minimal ability in interpreting opinions
-

Assessment Task

Presentation (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation with their own argument and evidence from readings and notes. The threshold of 'discovery' lied in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal daily experience.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Rich, informative content, excellent grasp of the material with in-depth and extensive knowledge of the subject matter
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, and systematic exposition with a strong sense of narrative
- Superior presentation skills: distinct pronunciation, fluent expression and appropriate diction, exact time-management
- Critical analysis with insightful comments opening up new issues, or suggesting the ability to theorize

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Adequate content with firm grasp of the material that informs the audience on a subject matter
- Reasonable organization, balanced structure and composition
- Good verbal communication: comprehensible pronunciation, fluent expression and diction, fair time-management

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Adequate content with comprehensive grasp of the material demonstrating basic knowledge of the subject matter
- Fair organization, weak structure and composition
- Fair presentation skills: acceptable pronunciation, expression and diction, fair time-management

Marginal

(D)

- Weak content, loose grasp of the general ideas with some knowledge of the subject matter
- Poor organization, structure and composition
- Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, poor time-management

Failure

(F)

- Inadequate content, fail to identify the general ideas with knowledge of the subject matter
 - No organization, structure or/and composition
 - Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, minimal time-management
-

Assessment Task

Final Essay (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources, and to construct a well-organized argument and analysis. The threshold of 'discovery' lies in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal experience.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Excellent grasp of research material able to explain key concepts, assumptions and debates
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, distinct thesis, properly argued with strong narrative
- Insightful interpretation of the subject matter with distinct themes and thesis
- = Critical analysis with insightful comments opening up new issues, or suggesting the ability to theorize
- Ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools
- Strong bibliography suggesting breadth and depth of coverage and informed insights

Good

(B+, B, B-)

- Firm grasp of materials, able to explain key concepts and assumptions
- Reasonable organization, balanced structure, adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Clear ideas which keep to the point, clear-cut subject, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Organized bibliography which can be utilized in accordance with the topic

Fair

(C+, C, C-)

- Comprehensive grasp of materials, able to explain key concepts
- Fair organization, weak structure, adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Relevant points to the subject matter, fair ability to interpret opinions
- Unorganized bibliography which can be utilized in accordance with the topic

Marginal

(D)

- Loose grasp of materials, cannot explain key concepts
- Poor organization and structure, weak content, limited use of resources
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions
- Insufficient and/or unorganized bibliography

Failure

(F)

- Poor grasp of materials
 - No organization and structure, inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources
 - Irrelevant points to the subject matter, minimal ability to interpret opinions
 - Irrelevant bibliography
-

Assessment Task

In-class participation (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre-class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to his/her peer members.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate class discussion and comment on other points
- In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret others' views with an open mind and ready to negotiate
- Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and synthesis with informed views
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues

Good

(B+, B)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class discussion and comment on other points
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret opinions effectively

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Unmotivated to participate in class discussion or comment on other people's views
- Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Poor ability in interpreting opinions

Failure

(F)

- Unwilling to participate in class discussion and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher
- No pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Minimal ability in interpreting opinions

Assessment Task

Presentation (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation with their own argument and evidence from readings and notes. The threshold of 'discovery' lied in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal daily experience.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-)

- Rich, informative content, excellent grasp of the material with in-depth and extensive knowledge of the subject matter
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, and systematic exposition with a strong sense of narrative
- Superior presentation skills: distinct pronunciation, fluent expression and appropriate diction, exact time-management
- Critical analysis with insightful comments opening up new issues, or suggesting the ability to theorize

Good

(B+, B)

- Adequate content with firm grasp of the material that informs the audience on a subject matter
- Reasonable organization, balanced structure and composition
- Good verbal communication: comprehensible pronunciation, fluent expression and diction, fair time-management

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Weak content, loose grasp of the general ideas with some knowledge of the subject matter
- Poor organization, structure and composition
- Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, poor time-management

Failure

(F)

- Inadequate content, fail to identify the general ideas with knowledge of the subject matter
 - No organization, structure or/and composition
 - Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, minimal time-management
-

Assessment Task

Final Essay (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources, and to construct a well-organized argument and analysis. The threshold of 'discovery' lied in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal experience.

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- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, distinct thesis, properly argued with strong narrative
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(B+, B)

- Firm grasp of materials, able to explain key concepts and assumptions
- Reasonable organization, balanced structure, adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Clear ideas which keep to the point, clear-cut subject, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Organized bibliography which can be utilized in accordance with the topic

Marginal

(B-, C+, C)

- Loose grasp of materials, cannot explain key concepts
- Poor organization and structure, weak content, limited use of resources
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions
- Insufficient and/or unorganized bibliography

Failure

(F)

- Poor grasp of materials
 - No organization and structure, inadequate content, no/irrelevant use of resources
 - Irrelevant points to the subject matter, minimal ability to interpret opinions
 - Irrelevant bibliography
-

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

game studies, game analysis, game criticism, game hermeneutics

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Journal articles
2	Aarseth, E. (2004). "Playing Research: Methodological approaches to game analysis." In: Game Approaches Conference 28-29 2003 Spilforskning.dk 2004. ISBN 87-990066-1-8
3	Aarseth, E. (2012) "A Narrative Theory of Games." In FDG 2012 Proceedings of the International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games 129–33. Raleigh, North Carolina: ACM Press.
4	Consalvo M. & Dutton, N. (2006). "Game analysis: Developing a methodological toolkit for the qualitative study of games." Game Studies 6 (1)
5	Elverdam C. & Aarseth, E. (2007) "Game Classification and Game Design." Games and Culture 2 (1): 3–22.
6	Leino O.T. (2012). "Death Loop as a Feature." Game Studies 12 (2)
7	Malliet S. (2007). "Adapting the Principles of Ludology to the Method of Video Game Content Analysis." Game Studies 7 (1)
8	Wolf, M.J.P. (1997.) "Inventing Space. Toward a Taxonomy of On- and Off-Screen Space in Video Games." Film Quarterly 51 (Fall): 11–23.
9	Books
10	Dovey J. & Kennedy, H.W. (2006). Game Cultures: Computer Games As New Media: Computer Games as New Media. McGraw-Hill.
11	Egenfeldt-Nielsen, S., Smith, J.H. & Tosca, S.P. (2013) Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction. Routledge.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Nil