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## ENGL 4375/CSE 4392: Game Analysis

Spring 2026

*As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule  
in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course.*

– Doug Stark

### Instructor Information

#### Instructor Name

Doug Stark, Ph.D. (he/him/his)

#### Office Location

[Carlisle 413](#)

#### Office Phone Number

817-272-2692

#### Email Address

[douglas.stark@uta.edu](mailto:douglas.stark@uta.edu)

#### Faculty Profile

[Doug Stark](https://www.uta.edu/academics/faculty/profile?username=starkdj) (<https://www.uta.edu/academics/faculty/profile?username=starkdj>)

#### Office Hours

Tu 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM and by appointment.

#### Communication Guidelines

Either chat with me after class or send me an email. I endeavor to respond within 48 hours.

### Course Information

#### Section Information

ENGL 4375/ CSE 4392 - 001

#### Time and Place of Class Meetings

[TH](#) 21, Tu 4:00 PM – 5:20 PM (CT), in person.

#### Description of Course Content

Why are games enjoyable? How do they make meaning? Which design techniques evoke feeling? This course prepares students to answer these questions by educating them in game analysis. From “perspective” to “sound,” and from “game feel” to “critical play,” each week examines a key game

design term through a blend of lecture, discussion, and hands-on play. Assignments include weekly “Syntheses,” group debriefs, and a final creative project: either a 10-minute video essay or a game design prototype. The course concludes with a mini showcase where students play or view one another’s work.

## Prerequisites

English majors must have earned a C or better in [ENGL 3350](#) and in one literature survey course ([ENGL 3340](#), [ENGL 3341](#), [ENGL 3351](#), [ENGL 3352](#), [ENGL 3361](#), or [ENGL 3362](#)). Non-English majors, apart from CSE majors, must have earned a C or better in 3 hours of sophomore literature ([ENGL 2303](#), [ENGL 2309](#), [ENGL 2319](#), [ENGL 2329](#)). For CSE majors, the only prerequisite is admission to the professional program.

## Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define key video game design terms
2. Explain the relationship between computer operations and user experiences
3. Understand how video games make meaning
4. Apply different concepts to the study of video games
5. Analyze the design and experience of video games
6. Synthesize empirical observations and analytical frameworks to generalize findings
7. Conduct independent critical and creative research
8. Evaluate the aesthetics and politics of video games
9. Exercise clear written, verbal, and visual communication skills

## Recording of Classroom and Online Lectures

Faculty maintain the academic right to determine whether students are permitted to record classroom and online lectures. Recordings of classroom lectures, if permitted by the instructor or pursuant to an ADA accommodation, may only be used for academic purposes related to the specific course. They may not be used for commercial purposes or shared with non-course participants except in connection with a legal proceeding.

As the instructor of this course, I elect to prohibit the recording of classroom or online lectures, unless other arrangements have been made with my consent.

## Assessment

### Assignments and Weightings

Grades will be posted on Canvas. There are 100 points on offer. Totals equate to final letter grades:

**A (90-100), B (80-89), C (70-79), D (60-69), E (50-59), F (<50)**

The instructor reserves the right to adjudicate whether averaging up is warranted (e.g. 89.5 may receive an A). Further information on all assignments will be provided on Canvas and discussed in class. Unless stated otherwise, every assignment is due by 11:59 p.m. CT on the listed due date.

Assignment	Points	Description	SLOs	Due
Syntheses	30	Weekly exercises.	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Every Sunday

				starting 1/25
Group Debriefs	10	<p>Twice during the semester, each group will serve as discussion leads at the start of class (5 points each time). Group Debriefs are 15–20 minute sessions designed to synthesize the previous week’s content and spark conversation. Groups should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Summarize 2–3 key insights from the week’s readings, screenings, lectures, or activities.</li> <li>2. Connect these insights to the broader themes of the course or to esports culture/industry more generally.</li> <li>3. Pose at least two open-ended discussion questions for the class to consider.</li> </ol> <p>Each group should prepare a handout or short set of slides. Grading will be based on clarity of synthesis, quality of questions, and ability to foster discussion.</p>	5, 7, 9	N/A
Project Proposal	5	A 2-page proposal (double-spaced) outlining the final project, accompanied by a 0.5-page work timeline. Students must also include an annotated bibliography of at least 3 scholarly sources and 3 precedents that provide background for their project.	6, 7, 9	3/8
Project Draft	10	Submit a draft deliverable for feedback: video essayists turn in a script and media plan; designers turn in a 3–4 page design document. All groups must additionally check-in with the instructor.	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	4/12
Final Project	35	7–10-minute video essay or video game.	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	5/3
Participation	10	Participation (5): Curious, courteous, and prepared participation during class. Attendance (5): We have 28 meetings, attend 25 and receive 100%.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9	N/A

## Grounds for Grade Reduction

- Inappropriate, overbearing, or disruptive behavior in classes or on asynchronous platforms.
- Lateness: Late weekly assignments will not be accepted. Late one-off assignment submissions will receive a 1-point reduction per day late. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis, but you must contact me *several days in advance* of the deadline. Three late arrivals to class will convert to an absence.
- Sloppiness: All assignments should include a title and the student's name and adhere to supplied formatting and style guidelines. Failure to do so will receive a 0.5-point reduction.
- Lack of attention: We allow devices in class, but only if they amplify your learning. Inattention will damage your participation grade.
- Seven or more absences may result in a failing grade for the course.
- Plagiarism in any mode of assessment will result in a failing grade for the course.

## Grade Grievances

Any appeal of a grade in this course must follow the procedures and deadlines for grade-related grievances as published in the current [University Catalog Grades and Grading Policies](#).

## Course Schedule

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
<b>Week 1: Introduction</b>	1/12 (#1) <a href="#">What is game analysis?</a>	1/14 (#2) <a href="#">Where is the Basement? (B04)</a>  <i>Read</i>  Fernandez-Vara, "The Whys and Wherefores of Game Analysis" in <a href="#">Introduction to Game Analysis</a> (2015), 1-22.  <i>Play</i> (in class)  <a href="#">Pong</a> (Alcorn, 1972) <a href="#">Pacman</a> (Iwatani, 1980) <a href="#">LIM</a> (Kopas, 2012)	1/18 <b>Nothing due</b>
<b>Week 2: Design</b>	1/19 <b>MLK Jr. Day (No Class)</b>	1/21 (#3) <b><u>Game design workshop in B04</u></b>	1/25 <b>S1</b>

		<p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Zubek, “Introduction” and “Elements” in <a href="#"><i>Elements of Game Design</i></a> (2020), 14-36</p>	
<b>Week 3: Flow</b>	<p>1/26 (#4) <b><u>How do you make players flow?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Chen, “Flow in Games (and Everything Else)” (2007), 31-34</p> <p>Soderman, “An Introduction to the Ideology of Flow” in <a href="#"><i>Against Flow</i></a> (2020), 27-63</p> <p><i>Watch</i> (in class)</p> <p>Student video essay sample.</p>	<p>1/28 (#5) <b><u>Video editing workshop in TBD</u></b></p>	<p>2/1 <b>S2</b></p>
<b>Week 4: Thinking and Feeling</b>	<p>2/2 (#6) <b><u>How do you make players feel?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Isbister, “A Series of Interesting Choices” in <a href="#"><i>How Games Move Us</i></a> (2016), 1-42</p>	<p>2/4 (#7) <b><u>How do you make players think?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Flanagan, “Introduction to Critical Play” and “Designing for Critical Play” in <a href="#"><i>Critical Play</i></a> (2009), 1-16, 251- 262</p> <p>Flanagan, “<a href="#"><u>Games Change How We Think</u></a>” (2018)</p>	<p>2/8 <b>S3</b></p>
<b>Week 5: Perspective</b>	<p>2/9 (#8) <b><u>What is perspective?</u></b></p>	<p>2/11 (#9) <b>Play session in B04</b></p>	<p>2/15 <b>S4</b></p>

	<p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Gaboury, “Perspective” in <i>Debugging Game History</i> (2016), 452-460</p>	<p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p> <p><i>Perspective</i> (DigiPen, 2012)</p>	
<b>Week 6: Rule</b>	<p>2/16 (#10) <b><u>What is a rule?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Montola and Stenros, “Introduction” and “Formal Rules” in <i>The Rule Book</i> (2024), 1-20 and 21-56.</p> <p><b>Debrief 1 by X</b></p>	<p>2/18 (#11) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p> <p><i>Baba is You</i> (Hempuli, 2019)</p>	<p>2/22 <b>S5</b></p>
<b>Week 7: Mechanic</b>	<p>2/23 (#12) <b><u>What is a mechanic?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Sicart, “<u>Defining Game Mechanics</u>” (2008)</p>	<p>2/25 (#13) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p> <p><i>Portal 2</i> (Valve, 2011)</p>	<p>3/1 <b>S6</b></p>
<b>Week 8: Loop</b>	<p>3/2 (#14) <b><u>What is a loop?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Guardiola, “Gameplay Loop” (2016), 1-6</p>	<p>3/3 (#15) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p> <p><i>Hades</i> (Supergiant, 2020)</p>	<p>3/8 <b>Proposal Due</b></p>
<b>Week 9: Spring Break</b>	<p>3/9 <b>Spring Break (no class)</b></p>	<p>3/11 <b>Spring Break (no class)</b></p>	<p>3/15</p>
<b>Week 10: Sound</b>	<p>3/16 (#16) <b><u>Why is sound important?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p>	<p>3/18 (#17) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p>	<p>3/22 <b>S7</b></p>

	<p>Gibbons, “Game Audio” in <i>Debugging Game History</i> (2016), 213-221</p> <p><i>Recommended</i></p> <p>Wark, “Battle (On <i>Rez</i>” in <i>Gamer Theory</i>, 126-130.</p>	<p><i>Rez Infinite</i> (Mizuguchi, 2016)</p>	
<b>Week 11: Feel</b>	<p>3/23 (#18) <b><u>What is “game feel”?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Swink, “Defining Game Feel” in <i>Game Feel</i> (2009), 1-34</p>	<p>3/25 (#19) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p> <p><i>Nidhogg</i> (Messhof, 2014)</p>	<p>3/29 <b>S8</b></p>
<b>Week 12: Time</b>	<p>3/30 (#20) <b><u>What is game time?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Zagal and Mateas, “<u>Time in Video Games</u>” (2010), 844-864</p>	<p>4/1 (#21) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p> <p><i>Superbot</i> (Superhot Team, 2016)</p>	<p>4/5 <b>S9</b></p>
<b>Week 13: Macrostructure</b>	<p>4/6 (#22) <b><u>What is a macrostructure?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Zubek, “Macrostructure” in <i>Elements of Game Design</i> (2020)</p>	<p>4/8 (#23) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p> <p><i>Fortnite</i> (Epic, 2017)</p>	<p>4/12 <b>S10</b></p> <p><b>Draft Due</b></p>
<b>Week 14: World</b>	<p>4/13 (#24) <b><u>What is worlding?</u></b></p> <p><i>Read</i></p>	<p>4/17 (#25) <b>Play session in B04</b></p> <p><i>Play</i> (in class)</p>	<p>4/19 <b>S11</b></p>

	Cheng, “Introduction” and “Worlds and Worlding” in <i>Emissaries Guide to Worlding</i> (2018)	<i>Journey</i> (Thatgamecompany, 2012)	
<b>Week 15: Workshop</b>	4/20 (#26) <b>Final project workshop in library</b>	4/22 (#27) <b>Final project workshop in library</b>	4/26
<b>Week 16: Submission</b>	4/27 (#28) <b><u>LDOC Review</u></b>	4/29	5/2 (Saturday) <b>Final Projects Due</b>
<b>Week 17: Showcase</b>	5/4 <b><u>Showcase 2-4:30 pm</u></b>	5/6	

**Read, Play, and Watch:** Unless specified as “in class,” readings, watchings, and playings must be completed before the class session they correspond with. All watching and reading will be accessible through the course’s Google Drive. Video games will either link from the syllabus or be accessible in [The Basement](#). Finally, remember that all texts and games have been paired intentionally. **Make sure to read before you play so you can think about why a given text has been paired with a given game.**

**Slides:** I create extensive slides for posterity. If you miss a session, reviewing those slides closely – playing included videos and games, thinking through posed questions, and taking notes – will prepare you for the next class.

### Required Articles and Excerpts Available on Canvas

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Judith LeFevre. “Optimal Experience in Work and Leisure.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56, no. 5 (1989): 815–22.

Fernandez-Vara, Clara. “The Whys and Wherefores of Game Analysis.” In *Introduction to Game Analysis*, 1-22. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Flanagan, Mary. *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.

Flanagan, Mary. “Games Change How We Think.” *TEDxCambridge*, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1yEvYOB5FA>.

Gaboury, Jacob. “Perspective.” In *Debugging Game History*, 452–60. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Galloway, Alexander R. “Gamic Action, Four Moments.” In *Gaming*, 1-38. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

- Gibbons, Trudi. "Game Audio." In *Debugging Game History*, 213–21. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Isbister, Katherine. "A Series of Interesting Choices." In *How Games Move Us: Emotion by Design*, 1–42. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016.
- Jagoda, Patrick, and Peter McDonald. "Game Mechanics, Experience Design, and Affective Play." In *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, 174–81. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018.
- Montembeault, Hugo, and Bernard Perron. "Focalis-action." *Journal of Game Design and Development Tools* 5 (2018): 1-19.
- Montola, Markus, and Jaakko Stenros. *The Rule Book*. Helsinki: University of Tampere Press, 2024.
- Soderman, Braxton. "An Introduction to the Ideology of Flow." In *Against Flow*, 27-63. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2020.
- Swink, Steve. *Game Feel: A Designer's Guide to Virtual Sensation*. Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2009.
- Wark, McKenzie. "Battle (On Rez)." In *Gamer Theory*, 126–30. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Zagal, José P., and Robert Zubek. "Time in Video Games." *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 10, no. 1 (2010): 844–64.
- Zubek, Robert. "Narrative Patterns." In *Elements of Game Design*, 1-20. New York: Routledge, 2020.

### **Required Games Provided by the Library**

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- Journey*. Directed by Jenova Chen. PlayStation 3. Thatgamecompany, 2012.
- Her Story*. Directed by Sam Barlow. PC, iOS. Sam Barlow, 2015.
- Nidhogg*. Directed by Mark Essen. PC, PlayStation 4. Messhof, 2014.
- Portal 2*. Directed by Gabe Newell. PC, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3. Valve, 2011.
- Rez Infinite*. Directed by Tetsuya Mizuguchi. PlayStation 4. Enhance, 2016.
- Superhot*. Directed by Piotr Iwanicki. PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One. Superhot Team, 2016.
- Undertale*. Directed by Toby Fox. PC, PlayStation 4, Switch. Toby Fox, 2015.
- Zork I*. Developed by Marc Blank and Dave Lebling. PC. Infocom, 1980.

## **University Policies**

UTA students are encouraged to review the institutional policies and informational sections below and reach out to the specific office with any questions. To view this institutional information, please visit the [Institutional Information](#) page, which includes the following policies, among others:

- Drop Policy
- Disability Accommodations
- Title IX Policy
- Academic Integrity
- Student Feedback Survey
- Final Exam Schedule

## Attendance

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Attending class sessions is a critical predictor and indicator of student success. The University of Texas at Arlington does not recognize a single attendance policy but encourages faculty to establish class-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I will take attendance for every class session.

## Generative AI Use in This Course

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The use of Generative AI (GenAI) in course assignments and assessments must align with the guidelines established by the instructor. Unauthorized use of GenAI could result in breaches of academic integrity. Instructors bear the responsibility of clearly delineating the permissible uses of GenAI in their courses, underscoring the importance of responsible and ethical application of these tools.

The [UTA Office of Community Standards](#) articulates the university's stance on [academic integrity and scholastic dishonesty](#). These standards extend to the use of GenAI. Unauthorized or unapproved use of GenAI in academic work falls within the scope of these policies and will be subject to the same disciplinary procedures.

As the instructor of this course, I have adopted the following policy on Student use of GenAI: **Cited use of GenAI, which means that** this course permits the use of Generative AI (GenAI) as a resource for completing assignments. However, transparency is crucial, students are required to explicitly cite any GenAI tools they utilize in the creation of their work. This citation requirement allows for the acknowledgment of the collaborative nature of GenAI in the learning process while enabling the assessment of student learning to remain focused on the achievement of the course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

## Academic & Wellness Resources

### Academic Success Center

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The Academic Success Center (ASC) includes a variety of resources and services to help you maximize your learning and succeed as a student at the University of Texas at Arlington. ASC services include supplemental instruction, peer-led team learning, tutoring, mentoring, and TRIO SSS. Academic Success Center services are provided at no additional cost to UTA students. For additional information visit: [Academic Success Center](#) (<https://www.uta.edu/student-success/course-assistance>). To request disability accommodations for tutoring, please complete this [tutoring request form](#) (<https://www.uta.edu/student-success/course-assistance/tutoring/request>).

## The English Writing Center (411LIBR)

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The Writing Center offers **FREE** tutoring in 15-, 30-, 45-, and 60-minute face-to-face and online sessions to all UTA students on any phase of their UTA coursework. Register and make appointments online at the [Writing Center](https://uta.mywconline.com) (https://uta.mywconline.com). Classroom visits, workshops, and specialized services for graduate students and faculty are also available. Please see [Writing Center: OWL](http://www.uta.edu/owl) (http://www.uta.edu/owl) for detailed information on all our programs and services.

## Academic Plaza

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The Library's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor [Academic Plaza](http://library.uta.edu/academic-plaza) (http://library.uta.edu/academic-plaza) offers students a central hub of support services, including IDEAS Center, University Advising Services, Transfer UTA and various college/school advising hours. Services are available during the [library's hours](https://library.uta.edu/hours) (https://library.uta.edu/hours) of operation.

## UTA CARE Team

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UT Arlington is committed to the safety, success, and well-being of our students. To support our community, UTA has created a CARE Team, which is a dedicated group of campus professionals responsible for helping students who could benefit from academic, emotional, or psychological support, as well as those presenting risk to the health or safety of the community. If you know of someone experiencing challenges, appearing distressed, needing resources, or causing a significant disruption to the UTA community, please submit a [CARE Referral](#) by visiting the [Behavior Intervention Team](#) (https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/dos/behavior-it) page. You may also submit a referral for yourself if you would like additional support.

NOTE: If a person's behavior poses an immediate threat to you or someone else, contact UTA Police at 817-272-3303 or dial 911. If you or someone you know needs to speak with a crisis counselor, please reach out to the [MAVS TALK 24-hour Crisis Line](https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/caps/crisis) (https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/caps/crisis) at 817-272-8255 or the [National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](https://988lifeline.org/) (https://988lifeline.org/) at 988.

## Student Services

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Everything you need to make the most of your time as a student (and beyond) is all on campus. Below are a few resources to get you started.

- [Student Services Home](#)
- [Student Access and Resource \(SAR\) Center](#)
- [Military and Veteran Services](#)
- [Health Services](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Activities and Organizations](#)
- [Recreation](#)

## Librarian to Contact

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Each academic unit has access to [Librarians by Academic Subject](https://libraries.uta.edu/research/librarians) (https://libraries.uta.edu/research/librarians) that can assist students with research projects, tutorials on plagiarism, and citation references, as well as support with databases and course reserves.

## Safety Information & Resources

## Face Covering Policy

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Face coverings are not mandatory; all students and instructional staff are welcome to wear face coverings while they are on campus or in the classroom.

## Emergency Exit Procedures

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Should we experience an emergency event that requires evacuation of the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located on your left after going left out of classroom EE 109. When exiting the building during an emergency, do not take an elevator but use the stairwells instead. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

## MavAlert System

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The MavAlert system sends information to cell phones or email accounts of subscribed users in case of an emergency. Anyone can subscribe to MavAlerts at [Emergency Communication System](https://www.uta.edu/uta/emergency.php) (<https://www.uta.edu/uta/emergency.php>).

## Emergency Phone Numbers

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In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at **817-272-3003** (non-campus phone), **2-3003** (campus phone). You may also dial 911. Non-emergency number 817-272-3381