ENGL 4374: Game Studies

Fall 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

Faculty Profile

Doug Stark

Office Hours

Tuesdays, 3:00–5:00 p.m., 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 4374 - 001

Time and Place of Class Meetings

Monday and Wednesday, 4:00 PM – 5:20 PM (CT), in person. Primary classroom PH 103. Practical play meetings take place in The Basement as identified in the schedule.

Description of Course Content

Since its humble origins in mid-twentieth-century research labs, the video game has superseded film and TV to become the most lucrative mass medium of the twenty-first century. Around the turn of the millennium, academics established conferences, publication venues, and, ultimately, a field of research dedicated to games. This course introduces theories of and approaches to games by

charting a rough chronology from the field's attempts to define play and games to current topics like automation, environmental crisis, cozy games, and critical making. On the way, we cover formal and procedural approaches; representation; situated play; platforms; and game production. Each week, readings are paired with analog and digital games and practical research activities. Students work in stable research pods for play, two debriefs, and two short-form reels, while the final 3,000–4,000-word article remains individually authored. No prior affinity with games is required.

Prerequisites

C or better in ENGL 1301.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

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

1. **Define** and test contested concepts such as play, game, and videogame.
2. **Explain** major approaches in Game Studies and the problems to which they respond.
3. **Apply** game-studies approaches to games, players, platforms, histories, tools, and other research objects.
4. **Analyze** the design and experience of games using appropriate primary evidence.
5. **Synthesize** primary evidence and scholarly research to develop bounded, critically informed claims.
6. **Conduct** independent research culminating in an individually authored scholarly article.
7. **Critique** the powers that shape what it means to play and how games and knowledge about them are produced.
8. **Communicate** research responsibly in written, oral, and short-form media, including transparent documentation of material AI assistance.

Recording of Classroom and Online Lectures

Faculty maintain the academic right to determine whether students are permitted to record classroom and online lectures. Recordings, 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 commercially or shared with non-course participants except in connection with a legal proceeding.

As the instructor of this course, I prohibit recording classroom or online lectures unless other arrangements have been made with my consent. Permission to create an assigned reel does not authorize recording classmates or class discussion without explicit 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
Portfolio Checkpoints	30	Six required pod application sheets (4 points each) and four required training-badge submissions (1.5 points each). One or two rotating pod leads consolidate and submit each group sheet. The sheet records absences and provides space to explain unusual circumstances.	1–8	B1–B4; S1–S6
Debriefs and Reels	20	Each stable pod completes two whole-week debriefs and two accompanying short-form reels.	1–5, 8	Sign-up on Canvas
Article Development	15	Topic, research question, and initial sources (2.5); 750–1,000-word DiGRA-style extended abstract (5); Article Draft (5); and peer feedback (2.5).	2–7	Sept. 20; Oct. 18; Nov. 22; Nov. 23
Final Article	20	Individual 3,000–4,000-word article using APA style and scholarly-journal conventions, including an abstract, keywords, references, and a brief AI/source-use statement.	1–7	Dec. 8
Final Research Reel	5	A 60–90 second captioned explanation of the article's question, method, evidence, argument, and significance. The reel supplements rather than replaces the article.	5, 6, 8	Dec. 8
Participation and Attendance	10	Participation (5) and attendance (5). We have 29 scheduled class meetings; attend 26 and receive full attendance credit. The final online screening is a required assessment event.	1–8	Ongoing

Portfolio and Article Sequence

The badges are B1: Google AI Fundamentals; B2: Adobe Storytelling through Short-Form Video; B3: Google AI for Brainstorming and Planning; and B4: Google AI for Research and Insights. Students complete or share the application worksheets in class; rotating leads consolidate the pod's notes and submit one group sheet.

The 750–1,000-word extended abstract is modeled on the substantive DiGRA extended-abstract genre: it establishes the problem or question, object or corpus, scholarly conversation, method, developing analysis or argument, and contribution. The undergraduate article is a 3,000–4,000-word article that imitates scholarly-journal conventions. The article submission guidelines for the undergraduate/graduate journal Press Start will provide a model. Selected students may receive further publication mentoring when a project and venue fit justify it.

Reels and Optional Public Circulation

Every reel is submitted privately in Canvas and graded independently of publication. Lab Instagram publication is optional and may be declined without penalty. Selected work requires the UTA publicity release form plus a rights, attribution, captioning, accessibility, and third-party-material review before publication.

Grounds for Grade Reduction

Behavior: Inappropriate, overbearing, or disruptive behavior in classes, groups, or asynchronous platforms.
Lateness: late recurring assignments will not be accepted. Late one-off assignments receive a 1-point reduction per day. Extensions are granted case by case, but you must contact me several days in advance. Three late arrivals convert to an absence.
Sloppiness: assignments must include a title and the student's name and follow supplied formatting and style guidelines. Failure to do so will receive a 0.5-point reduction.
Lack of attention: devices are allowed only when they amplify learning. Inattention will damage the participation grade.
Absence: Seven or more absences may result in a failing grade for the course.
Dishonesty: Plagiarism, fabricated evidence or citations, or misrepresentation of AI-generated material may result in a failing grade for the assignment or 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
Week 1: Field	8/17 (#1) **What is Game Studies?**	8/19 (#2) **What is this class?** *Read* Aarseth, "Computer Game Studies, Year One" (2001), np Aarseth, "Two Decades of Game Studies" (2021), np *Recommended* Malazita, Rouse, and Smith, "Disciplining Games" (2024), np	8/23 **B1 and B2**

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
		Play (in class) *The Password Game* (Agarwal, 2023)	
Week 2: Definitions	8/24 (#3) **What is play?** *Read* Sutton-Smith, "Play and Ambiguity," in *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997), 1–17 *Recommended* Huizinga, "The Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon" in *Homo Ludens* (1955), 1–27	8/26 (#4) **What is a game?** *Read* Suits, "What Is a Game?" (1967), 148–156 *Recommended* Nguyen, "Agency as Art" in *Games: Agency as Art* (2020), 1–23	8/30 **B3 and B4**
Week 3: Taxonomy and Specificity	8/31 (#5) **What kinds of games are there?** *Read* Caillois, "The Definition of Play" and "The Classification of Games" (2001), 3–35 *Recommended* Trammell, "Introduction" in *Repairing Play* (2023), 1–20 *Watch (in class)* Alÿs, *Children's Games* (1999–present)	9/2 (#6) **What makes video games distinct?** *Read* Juul, "The Game, the Player, the World" (2003), 30–45 *Recommended* Galloway, "Gamic Action, Four Moments" (2006), 1–38	9/6 **S1**

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
Week 4: Procedurality	9/7 **Labor Day Holiday**	9/9 (#7) **Play session in The Basement** *Read* Bogost, "Procedural Rhetoric" (2007), 1–3 and 28–64 *Recommended* Sicart, "Against Procedurality" (2011), np *Play (in class)* *Phone Story* (Molleindustria, 2011) *We Become What We Behold* (Case, 2016) *The Best Amendment* (Molleindustria, 2013)	9/13
Week 5: Close Playing	9/14 (#8) **What is close playing?** *Read* Chang and Welsh, "Gaming Our Classrooms" (2025), 1–16 *Recommended* Mitchell and van Vught, "On Videogame Form" (2023), 45–75 *Debrief*	9/16 (#9) **Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Passage* (Rohrer, 2007)	9/20 **Article Topic Due**

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
Week 6: Close Playing II	9/21 (#10) **Can games be more than fun?** *Read* Ruberg, "No Fun" (2015), 108–124 *Recommended* Stang, "Too Close, Too Intimate, and Too Vulnerable" (2022), 230–238 *Debrief*	9/23 (#11) **Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Loved* (Ocias, 2010)	9/27 **S2**
Week 7: Situating Play	9/28 (#12) **How do we study play in context?** *Read* Taylor, "The Assemblage of Play" (2009), 331–339 *Recommended* Giddings, "Events and Collusions" (2009), 144–157 *Debrief*	9/30 (#13) **Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Roblox* (Roblox Corporation, 2006–present)	10/4
Week 8: Platform	10/5 (#14) **What is platform studies?** *Read* Apperley and Jayemane, "Game Studies' Material Turn" (2012), 5–25	10/7 (#15) **Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Roblox* (Roblox Corporation, 2006–present)	10/11 **S3**

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
	Recommended Nieborg and Poell, "The Platformization of Cultural Production" (2018), 4275–4292 *Debrief*	*Recommended* Joseph, "Battle Pass Capitalism" (2021), 68–83	
Week 9: Production	10/12 (#16) **What is game production studies?** *Read* Keogh, "Introduction" in *The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist* (2023), 1–16 *Recommended* Nielsen and Chia, "Speculators Inside the Slop Factory" (2026), 1380–1400 *Debrief*	10/14 (#17) **Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Roblox* (Roblox Corporation, 2006–present)	10/18 **Extended Abstract Due**
Week 10: Historical Representation	10/19 (#18) **Play session in The Basement** *Read* Shaw, "The Tyranny of Realism" (2015), np *Play (in class)* *The Oregon Trail* (MECC, 1985) *When Rivers Were Trails*	10/21 (#19) **How do games shape historical consciousness? (asynchronous)** *Watch* Bird, "Representation and Reclamation" (2020), np	10/25 **S4**

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
	(Indian Land Tenure Foundation and LaPensée, 2019) *Debrief*		
Week 11: Posthumanism	10/26 (#20) **What is a posthuman approach to play?** *Read* Fizek, "Interpassive Play" (2022), 15–30 *Recommended* Chia and Ruffino, "Politicizing Agency in Digital Play after Humanism" (2022), 309–319 *Debrief*	10/28 (#21) **Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Universal Paperclips* (Lantz, 2017)	11/1
Week 12: Ecocriticism	11/2 (#22) **What is an ecogame?** *Read* Chang, "Introduction: Edge Effects" in *Playing Nature* (2019), 1–16 *Recommended* Abraham, "The Periodic Table of Torture" in *Digital Games After Climate Change* (2022), 179–236 *Debrief*	11/4 (#23) **Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Half-Earth Socialism* (Tseng et al., 2022)	11/8 **S5**
Week 13: Cozy	11/9 (#24)	11/11 (#25)	11/15

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
Games	**What makes a game cozy?** *Read* Waszkiewicz and Tymińska, "Cozy Games and Resistance Through Care" (2024), 7–16 *Recommended* Krzywinska et al., "Coziness in Games" (2025), 1–19 *Debrief*	**Play session in The Basement** *Play (in class)* *Wanderstop* (Ivy Road, 2025)	**S6**
Week 14: Critical Making	11/16 (#26) **What is Critical Making?** *Read* Ratto, "Critical Making" (2011), 252–260 *Recommended* Flanagan, "Introduction to Critical Play" and "Designing for Critical Play" in *Critical Play* (2009), 1–16 and 251–262 *Debrief*	11/18 (#27) **Design session in The Basement**	11/22 **Article Draft Due**
Week 15: Revision	11/23 (#28) **Peer Review** *Due*	11/25 **No Classes Scheduled**	11/29

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
	Peer Feedback, 11:59 p.m.		
Week 16: Contribution	11/30 (#29) **Course Review** *Read* Malazita, Rouse, and Smith, "Disciplining Games" (2024), np *Debrief*	12/2 **Student Study Day**	12/6
Week 17: Final Projects	12/7 **Final Exams**	12/8 **Final Projects Due, 11:59 p.m.** 12/9 **Online Reel Screening, 2:00–4:30 p.m.**	12/13

Read, Play, and Watch: Unless specified as "in class," readings, watchings, and playings must be completed before the class session they correspond with. Graduate students complete all items labeled Recommended; undergraduates may also read or view them. All required readings will be available through Canvas or the linked course Google Drive; students do not need to purchase them. Canvas contains assignment instructions and access links. Games will link from Canvas or be accessible in The Basement.

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. Slides do not reproduce collaborative research activity or replace pod obligations.

Required Articles and Excerpts Available on Canvas

Aarseth, Espen. "Computer Game Studies, Year One." Game Studies 1, no. 1 (2001): np.
Aarseth, Espen. "Two Decades of Game Studies." Game Studies 21, no. 1 (2021): np.
Apperley, Thomas H., and Darshana Jayemane. "Game Studies' Material Turn." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 9, no. 1 (2012): 5–25.
Bird, Ashlee. "Representation and Reclamation: The History and Future of Native Americans in Video Games." Invited lecture, 2020: np.
Bogost, Ian. "Procedural Rhetoric." In *Persuasive Games*, 1–3 and 28–64. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.
Caillois, Roger. "The Definition of Play" and "The Classification of Games." In *Man, Play and Games*, 3–35. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
Chang, Alenda Y. "Introduction: Edge Effects." In *Playing Nature*, 1–16. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

Chang, Edmond Y., and Timothy J. Welsh. "Gaming Our Classrooms." In *Video Games, Literature, and Close Playing*, 1–16. New York: Routledge, 2025.
Fizek, Sonia. "Interpassive Play." In *Playing at a Distance*, 15–30. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022.
Juul, Jesper. "The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness." In Level Up: DiGRA 2003 Proceedings, 30–45.
Keogh, Brendan. "Introduction." In *The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist: Why We Should Think Beyond Commercial Game Production*, 1–16. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023.
Malazita, James, Michael Rouse, and Dietrich Smith. "Disciplining Games." Game Studies 24, no. 1 (2024): np.
Ratto, Matt. "Critical Making." The Information Society 27, no. 4 (2011): 252–60.
Ruberg, Bo. "No Fun: The Queer Potential of Video Games that Annoy, Anger, Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt." QED 2, no. 2 (2015): 108–24.
Shaw, Adrienne. "The Tyranny of Realism: Historical Accuracy and the Politics of Representation in Assassin's Creed III." Loading… 9, no. 14 (2015): np.
Suits, Bernard. "What Is a Game?" Philosophy of Science 34, no. 2 (1967): 148–56.
Sutton-Smith, Brian. "Play and Ambiguity." In *The Ambiguity of Play*, 1–17. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
Taylor, T. L. "The Assemblage of Play." Games and Culture 4, no. 4 (2009): 331–39.
Waszkiewicz, Agata, and Marta Tymińska. "Cozy Games and Resistance Through Care." *Replay* 11 (2024): 7–16.

Recommended Articles and Excerpts

Graduate students complete all Recommended readings and viewings listed in the schedule. These materials are optional for undergraduate students.

Abraham, Benjamin. "The Periodic Table of Torture." In *Digital Games After Climate Change*, 179–236. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.
Chia, Aleena, and Paolo Ruffino. "Politicizing Agency in Digital Play after Humanism." Convergence 28, no. 2 (2022): 309–19.
Flanagan, Mary. "Introduction to Critical Play" and "Designing for Critical Play." In *Critical Play*, 1–16 and 251–62. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
Galloway, Alexander R. "Gamic Action, Four Moments." In *Gaming*, 1–38. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
Giddings, Seth. "Events and Collusions: A Glossary for the Microethnography of Video Game Play." *Games and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2009): 144–157.
Huizinga, Johan. "The Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon." In *Homo Ludens*, 1–27. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.
Joseph, Daniel. "Battle Pass Capitalism." *Convergence* 27, no. 1 (2021): 68–83.
Krzywinska, Tanya, et al. "Coziness in Games: Second Homes, Audiences, and Esthetics." *Games and Culture* (2025): 1–19.
Mitchell, Alex, and Jasper van Vught. "On Videogame Form." In *Videogame Formalism*, 45–75. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023.
Nguyen, C. Thi. Chapter 1 of *Games: Agency as Art*, 1–23. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
Nieborg, David B., and Thomas Poell. "The Platformization of Cultural Production: Theorizing the Contingent Cultural Commodity." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 11 (2018): 4275–4292.
Nielsen, Daniel, and Aleena Chia. "Speculators Inside the Slop Factory: Shovelware and Financialized Game Development in Roblox." *International Journal of Communication* 20 (2026): 1380–1400.
Sicart, Miguel. "Against Procedurality." Game Studies 11, no. 3 (2011): np.

Stang, Sarah. "Too Close, Too Intimate, and Too Vulnerable." Critical Studies in Media Communication 39, no. 3 (2022): 230–38.
Trammell, Aaron. Introduction to *Repairing Play*, 1–20. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023.

Required Games

The course will provide or coordinate required access. Do not purchase a game unless instructed to do so in Canvas.
The Password Game. Neal Agarwal, 2023. Browser.
Children's Games. Francis Alÿs, 1999–present. Video archive.
Phone Story. Molleindustria, 2011. Mobile/browser archive.
We Become What We Behold. Nicky Case, 2016. Browser.
The Best Amendment. Molleindustria, 2013. Browser.
Passage. Jason Rohrer, 2007. PC/Mac/Linux.
Loved. Alexander Ocias, 2010. Browser.
Roblox. Roblox Corporation, 2006–present. PC/Mac.
The Oregon Trail. Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium, 1985. Apple II.
When Rivers Were Trails. Indian Land Tenure Foundation/Elizabeth LaPensée, 2019. PC/Mac.
Universal Paperclips. Frank Lantz, 2017. Browser.
Half-Earth Socialism. Francis Tseng et al., 2022. Browser.
Wanderstop. Ivy Road/Annapurna Interactive, 2025. PC/console.

University Policies

UTA students are encouraged to review the current Institutional Syllabus Policies. This page includes policies concerning course access, disability accommodations, Title IX, academic integrity, student feedback, and final assessments.

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

Attendance

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. I will take attendance at every class meeting. Because pod research, debriefs, and peer review cannot be reproduced by reading slides alone, contact me as early as possible about anticipated absences and coordinate any pod obligations.

Generative AI Use in This Course

The use of Generative AI (GenAI) in course assignments and assessments must align with the guidelines established by the instructor. Unauthorized or undisclosed use may constitute a breach of academic integrity.
This course permits cited and documented GenAI use for approved research tasks such as brainstorming, search-term development, organization, comparison, and revision. AI output is not a scholarly source or citation authority. Students must verify every source and item of evidence, distinguish their own decisions and prose from material AI assistance, protect private and copyrighted material, and remain responsible for every claim, quotation, citation, and interpretation. Every article includes a brief AI/source-provenance statement. Fabricated citations, false claims of verification, undisclosed generated prose, or submission of AI output as independent research will be treated as academic-integrity violations.

Academic & Wellness Resources

Academic Success Center

The Academic Success Center offers tutoring, mentoring, supplemental instruction, and other services at no additional cost: Academic Success Center.

The English Writing Center (411 LIBR)

The Writing Center offers free face-to-face and online appointments for any phase of UTA coursework: Writing Center appointments. Graduate-student and faculty services are also available.

Academic Plaza

The Library's second-floor Academic Plaza offers a central hub of academic support services.

UTA CARE Team

UTA's CARE Team helps students experiencing academic, emotional, psychological, or other difficulties and coordinates appropriate support. Submit a referral through the Behavior Intervention Team page. In an immediate emergency, call UTA Police at 817-272-3003 or dial 911; the MAVS TALK 24-hour crisis line is 817-272-8255.

Student Services

Current accessibility, health, counseling, military/veteran, recreation, and student-life services are available through UTA Student Affairs.

Librarian to Contact

Librarians by academic subject can assist with scholarly searching, databases, citations, and course reserves: Librarians by Academic Subject.

Safety Information & Resources

Emergency Exit Procedures

If an emergency requires evacuation, leave the classroom or The Basement by the nearest safe exit and follow university instructions. Do not use an elevator. Faculty and staff will assist students in selecting the safest route and arranging assistance for individuals with disabilities. Room-specific exit directions will be reviewed when the primary classroom is confirmed.

MavAlert System

The MavAlert system sends emergency information to subscribed phones and email accounts. Manage alerts through UTA Emergency Management.

Emergency Phone Numbers

For an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at 817-272-3003 from a non-campus phone or 2-3003 from a campus phone; you may also dial 911. The non-emergency number is 817-272-3381.