

San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Literature
English 108-Gaming and Narrative, Section 01,

Fall-2022

Course and Contact Information

Instructor(s):	J. Michael Martinez
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Office Hours:	M/W, Noon-1pm and by appointment

Class Days/Time:	3pm PST – 4:15pm PST.
Classroom:	Boccardo Business Center 130

Course Description

This course studies the relationship between literary narrative theory and games, especially plots that branch and fork to produce different stories with different endings. From experimental writing to video games, how have game/books changed or reinvented the possible spaces of narrative? How can knowledge of narrative possibilities (theory) enrich our understanding of games? This course surveys a wide variety of interactive narrative material, including print, film, and, primarily, video games, engaging students in analyzing and attempting to create branching narrative structures.

Course topics include:

- branching narratives, branching fiction, interactive fiction
- Narratology
- cinematic video games
- storytelling games
- Geocaching
- Generating of our own Interactive fiction and Games

The questions this course engage may include the following issues: representations of power or ideology embedded in characterizations of sex and gender, class, race, and nationality, etc.; the reader's implied relation to the text alongside authorial "intent," when that can be established; whether ethics matter in relation to the creation and reception of literature; what roles expression and emotion play in the generation and interpretation of texts; whether literary or their corresponding cinematic texts, as art objects, are independent of external relations and depend purely upon a unique system of internal relations; how realms of "fact" and "fiction" may be mediated particularly through conventions/genre demarcations (sonnet, prose poem, field poetics, etc.), among other questions.

We will explore the art of the game with the aim of coming toward an understanding of knowledge production. It is a class about asking questions concerning difficult issues—both about the works themselves and how we, as a society, produce them.

Course Format

While in-person class meeting will regularly occur on Monday and Wednesday, requiring a computer and internet connectivity, students can also expect various classes to also contain an asynchronous component. I will be regularly assigning small group work and asking you to meet with me on Zoom one-on-one to check in about your participation and writing. Our class will be employing Canvas throughout the course.

Course Materials and Canvas

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found on [Canvas Learning Management System course login website](#). You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through MySJSU on [Spartan App Portal](#) (or other communication system as indicated by the instructor) to learn of any updates.

CANVASE SITE: <https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1484552>

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Students will demonstrate the ability to evaluate games and narratives based on branching.
2. Students will demonstrate the ability to discuss the variety of narrative possibilities for texts and games.

GAMES TO PURCHASE

- **MILK INSIDE A BAG OF MILK INSIDE A BAG OF MILK (GAME) ON STEAM: .99c**
- **RANDONAUTICA (GAME) PHONE APP: FREE**
- **ELSINORE (GAME) ON STEAM: \$9.99**
- **VALHEIM (GAME) ON STEAM: \$19.99**
- **TO THE MOON (GAME) ON STEAM: \$9.99**
- We will be looking at numerous games and interactive fiction available free online.

In order to save everyone money, I'm scanning and uploading our critical readings to CANVAS.

All required readings, whether online or in our books, must be brought to class.

Course Requirements and Assignments

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on.

Participation: while there may be lectures, the course will be organized as a single continuous discussion requiring everyone to voice their opinion. I allow for two excused absences before reducing 2.5% off one's overall final grade.

The quality of your class participation will be judged through the following: your effort at completing short assignments and, as necessary, sharing them; the effort you put into responding to the writing of your peers and

your willingness to share your thoughts with the class as a whole; and the effort you bring to reading critically. Use the following as guidelines for this portion of your final grade:

- To earn a “C,” do the minimum: read and prepare assigned readings so you are never at a loss if you are asked a question, but speak only when called upon, do “ordinary,” plain-vanilla presentations and responses. This is the “bottom line” for getting a “C” in this part of the course.
- To earn a “B,” prepare assigned readings thoroughly, initiate discussions about them by asking good questions or suggesting ways to interpret readings, do presentations that reveal that you have done good additional work that you can make both interesting and meaningful to our discussions, and participate actively in those discussions.
- For an “A,” take it up another level entirely: prepare readings thoroughly, find and talk about connections among them and among other aspects of culture (then and now), take a real leadership role in class discussions, including working actively to get others involved in the talk, make your presentations and responses “sparkle” by bringing to them something really special in terms of your own contributions, interests, skills, and abilities to think in broad even interdisciplinary terms. Most of all, remember that an “A” indicates the very best grade a person can get; that should tell you what sort of work you need to do to earn the grade of “A.”

If you miss class, contact a classmate for notes, reading assignments and handouts – or, better yet, check our Course Website.

All required readings, whether online or in our books, must be brought to class.

In class, you are being asked to respond to each other and to questions raised in class: I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANY DISRESPECTFUL CONVERSATION OF ANY MANNER WHETHER IN CLASS OR ONLINE. Participation is essential to this course: we will work both in large and small groups.

Final Project: Game and Pecha Kucha Presentation

For the final project in this course, students will create their own interactive fiction or video games using the theories, references, and examples from our course readings and discussions as the foundation. Students may work individually or in teams. The final project will be presented in Pecha Kucha style on our final exam meeting day in addition to submission of written materials. Students will have an opportunity to demo their work prior to the final meeting.

Presentations: during the semester you will pair up with a colleague to present critical thoughts on the day’s reading and game. Both of you must speak/present. Both of you will receive the same grade. A good discussion will include the following:

1. Introduction to the Game—Biography, Important Notes, Etc.
2. CONCISE Summary of Game/Reading
3. Identification of the Author’s Use of theory we are studying. This should be a close-reading that pays attention to a SPECIFIC passages of text/gameplay and explicates it for that week’s theoretic and/or references and avidly employs a previous theoretic. Talk to me before your groups presentation of the game and theoretic.
4. A discussion of the game/theoretic’s significance, with special attention to the deeper questions the events and reflections prompt.

You must prepare a visual aid for this presentation. You may make a Powerpoint presentation. I will be evaluating these Presentations for their depth and sophistication, your abilities to engage the class, your speaking dynamics—volume, clarity, rate, etc., and your overall professionalism.

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction,

preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

Important Due Dates

- **Sept. 5th:** Monday, Labor Day - Campus Closed (L)
- **Sept. 7th:** Group Presentations Assigned
- **Nov. 11th:** Friday, Veteran’s Day - Campus Closed (V)
- **Nov. 23rd:** Wednesday, Non-Instructional Day – (NI)
- **Nov. 24th-25th:** Thanksgiving Holiday - Campus Closed.
- **Dec: 5th:** Last Day of Instruction - Last Day of Classes
- **108 Finals Day:** Final Project Due

Final Examination or Evaluation

The course will complete with each student turning in a final portfolio of their written work. More information will be provided nearer the time the assignment is due.

Grading Information

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A plus</i>	<i>96 to 100%</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>93 to 95%</i>
<i>A minus</i>	<i>90 to 92%</i>
<i>B plus</i>	<i>86 to 89 %</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>83 to 85%</i>
<i>B minus</i>	<i>80 to 82%</i>
<i>C plus</i>	<i>76 to 79%</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>73 to 75%</i>
<i>C minus</i>	<i>70 to 72%</i>
<i>D plus</i>	<i>66 to 69%</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>63 to 65%</i>
<i>D minus</i>	<i>60 to 62%</i>

- 3 short critical papers (3-5 pages) 30%
- Pecha Kucha presentation of Final Project 10%
- Final Project: Narrative Game 30%
- Class Participation (including use of Perusal to comment on text, class participation, in-class writing, and assignments) 30%

Total 100%

Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog (“The Grading System”). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

Department of English and Comparative Literature Student Learning Goals

This course supports several of the English Department’s Student Learning Goals. The Department of English and Comparative Literature seeks to foster the intellectual development of its majors by encouraging study of literature and writing—whether creative, technical, or other professional writing. The Department strives to make its majors familiar with a wide range of works of British, American, and World literature, including folk and popular forms; and with the nature of the canon and of canon-formation, including issues of culture, history, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9](#), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available

student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [Syllabus Information web page](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>). Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Important Sites:	
CANVASE SITE: https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1484552	

English 108 Gaming and Narrative, Fall 2021

(As the course progresses, we may get off schedule--this is natural—as such, our daily assignments may be revised as necessary with fair notice given by email or in class).

Please be sure to have completed the assigned reading **before** that day’s class.

WEEK ONE:	First Day of Class: Course Overview, Introductions, Objectives
August 24	Module One: Narrativity in Games
WEEK TWO: August 29	Module Two: HyperFiction
August 30	Module Two: Roland Barthes-Death of the Author
WEEK THREE: September 5	NO CLASS: LABOR DAY
September 7	Module Three: Digital Poetry
WEEK FOUR: September 12	Module Three: Walter Benjamin—Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction
September 14	Module Four: DEPRESSION QUEST (ONLINE)
WEEK FIVE: September 19	Module Five: Interactive Fiction
September 21	Module Five: Interactive Fiction Paper One due
WEEK SIX: September 26	Module Six: Surrealism: MILK INSIDE A BAG OF MILK INSIDE A BAG OF MILK (GAME)
September 28	Module Six: Surrealism: MILK INSIDE A BAG OF MILK INSIDE A BAG OF MILK (GAME)
WEEK SEVEN: October 3	Module Seven: Location Based Games: Randonautica
October 5	INTRODUCTION TO TWINE
WEEK EIGHT: October 10	Module Eight: ReVisioning Hamlet, Gender & perspective: ELSINORE (GAME)
October 12	Module Eight: ReVisioning Hamlet, Gender & perspective: ELSINORE (GAME)
WEEK NINE: October 17	Module Nine: Sound in Games
October 19	Group Work Day for Game Design Paper Two Due
WEEK TEN: October 24	Module 10: Civilization and Development Games: on Coloniality in gaming

October 26	Module 10: Civilization and Development Games: on Coloniality in gaming
WEEK ELEVEN: October 31	MODULE 11: Community Construction: VALHEIM (GAME)
November 2	MODULE 11: Community Construction: VALHEIM (GAME)
WEEK TWELVE: November 7	MODULE 11: Community Construction: VALHEIM (GAME)
November 9	MODULE 12: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND ETHICS: PAPERS, PLEASE! (GAME)
WEEK THIRTEEN: November 14	MODULE 13: LACAN AND DESIRE: TO THE MOON (GAME)
November 16	MODULE 13: LACAN AND DESIRE: TO THE MOON (GAME)
WEEK FOURTEEN: November 21	Group Work: Final Project Paper Three Due
November 23	NO CLASS: NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DAY
WEEK FIFTEEN: Nov. 28	MODULE 14: CINEMATIC CHOICES: BANDERSNATCH (MOVIE)
Nov. 30	Group Work: Final Project
LAST CLASS MEETING: DECEMBER 5TH.	Final Meeting: PECHA KUCHA PRESENTATIONS
108 Finals Day	FINAL Project DUE