

**GAME 332 Story Design for Computer Games**  
**Fall 2017 – Section 002**  
**Monday 1:30 – 4:10 PM, Art and Design Room 1018**

**Instructor and Contact Info**

- Instructor: Josiah Lebowitz
- Office: Art and Design, Room 2015
- Office Phone: 703-993-8823
- E-Mail: jlebowi2@gmu.edu
- Office Hours: Monday & Thursday: 12:00 – 1:30 PM and On Request
- General Notes: Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns, or just to chat about the course, games, and the like. **The best contact method is e-mail.** I will normally reply to all course related e-mails with 24 hours (48 hours during weekends and holidays). I am generally available for phone calls and in-person visits during my office hours, but it's still best to check ahead of time and let me know when you want to come by. Phone conversations and in-person meetings can be arranged at other times if necessary.

**Course Description**

Analysis of current computer game story design theory. Focusing on, but not limited to, narratology, ludology, critical theory, psychology, philosophy, and other related topics, students will engage various techniques in analyzing and refining game narrative. Use of narrative structure and new media for designing computer game scenarios and stories. Traditional narrative techniques (text stories, novels, films) will be examined, as well as translations of the traditional to interactive, non-linear modes of communications.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students who complete this course will:

- A. Explain the basics of story creation and writing including story structure and character types.
- B. Explain the different types of interaction used in game stories.
- C. Demonstrate a solid understanding of what story types are best suited for video games and why.
- D. Develop story ideas suitable for use in games.
- E. Develop proper branching dialogue trees.
- F. Demonstrate the ability to expand a story idea by creating character and world info, backstory, and other supporting documents to create a story bible.

**Statement on RS Designated Courses**

This class is designated as a Research and Scholarship Intensive Course, which means that students are given the opportunity to actively participate in the process of scholarship and will make a significant contribution to the creation of a disciplinary-appropriate product. Students will create original content for games while researching best practices for writing in the game industry and reflecting on their own creative process.

**RS Student Learning Outcomes**

As an RS course, the class includes the following student learning outcomes:  
Students who successfully complete GAME 332 RS will be able to...

1. Create an original scholarly or creative project.
2. Communicate knowledge from the project through public presentation or the publication.

Engage in scholarly inquiry by:

- Articulating and refining a question: How do my experiences and knowledge inform my perception of story in games? In light of current trends in the games market and popular culture, what is considered “good” writing for games and how might we define it? How do storytelling, collaborative writing, and narrative design enhance the skills I hope to use post-graduation?
- Applying appropriate conventions of the discipline: What does good game writing do and who is producing it? How is this work identified/recognized? What does this recognition indicate?
- Situating the creative work within a broader context: What are the cultural implications of narrative in games today? To what extent do social constructs, ideology, identity, and current events affect content in game narrative?

### **Requirements and Evaluation**

GAME 332 RS, Story Design for Computer Games satisfies the Writing Intensive requirement for Computer Game Design undergraduate majors and is also part of the Film and Video Studies Screenwriting concentration (SCWR).

Students should come to class prepared to discuss any and all material covered in the assigned readings. Classes will consist of lectures, discussions, videos, hands-on gameplay, and group activities.

Students will show their knowledge and mastery of the material via writing projects and similar assignments. These assignments will be spread evenly throughout the semester. A schedule and assignment list is included in this syllabus. Further details can be found on Blackboard.

All references and quotations used in writing assignments must be cited in APA format.

Students’ final grades are calculated by comparing their scores to the maximum possible score. The breakdown is as follows:

- 65% - Projects and Assignments
- 25% - Final Story Bible & Presentation
- 10% - Attendance / Class Participation

A: 90–100 B: 80–89.9 C: 70–79.9 D: 60–69.9 F: 0–59.9

**Course Schedule and Assignments**

<b>Start Date</b>	<b>Section Name</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
8/28	The History of Game Stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> </ul>	9/3
9/4	Structure and Characters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• Game Narrative Review Assignment</li> <li>• Character Assignment</li> </ul>	9/17
9/18	Emotion and Interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• GNR Assignment Peer Review</li> <li>• Character Assignment Peer Review</li> <li>• Dialogue Assignment</li> </ul>	10/1
10/2	Interactive Traditional Stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• Dialogue Assignment Peer Review</li> <li>• Story Outline Assignment</li> <li>• Revised GNR</li> </ul>	10/15
10/16	Endings and Branches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• Story Outline Assignment Peer Review</li> <li>• Quest Assignment</li> </ul>	10/29
10/30	Opening Things Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• Quest Assignment Peer Review</li> <li>• Setting Assignment</li> </ul>	11/12
11/13	Which Type of Story is Best <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• Setting Assignment Peer Review</li> <li>• Narrative Design Assignment</li> </ul>	11/26
11/27	What Players Want <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading Assignment</li> <li>• Final Story Document</li> <li>• Story Presentation and Box Copy</li> </ul>	12/17

**University Holidays**

9/4 (Mon) Labor Day

10/9 (Mon) Columbus Day

11/22 – 26 (Wed – Sun) Thanksgiving Break

### **Required Texts and Materials**

Interactive Storytelling for Video Games: A Player-Centered Approach to Creating Memorable Characters and Stories

By Josiah Lebowitz, Chris Klug

ISBN: 0240817176

### **Assumptions**

It is assumed that students are familiar with APA formatting or resources that contain such guidelines for writing assignments. It is also assumed that students have regular access to email and the Internet. Any issues with email or Blackboard access should be taken up with university ITU. Finally, it is assumed that students are familiar with and have regular access to Microsoft Word.

### **Late Work**

Unless otherwise noted, all quizzes, assignments, and projects must be submitted no later than 11:59 PM on their due date. Anything submitted after this time will be considered late. They can still be turned in for credit, but for each day a quiz or assignment is late your score will be reduced by 5%. Unless otherwise noted, the final turn in date for late assignments and quizzes is one week after their original due date. After that, they will automatically receive a score of 0.

Late work will only be accepted without penalty in the case of a documented medical illness or another serious extenuating circumstance. In such cases, please contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss the situation.

### **Class Participation**

Students are expected to actively engage in class discussions and activities. While reading assignments and lecture notes will be made available online, in-class lectures and activities will contain additional information, allow students hand-on time with a wider variety of games, and also offer opportunities to earn bonus points via in-class assignments and challenges.

The use of laptops, tablets, smart phones, etc. is allowed in-class for the purposes of note taking, following along with the lecture material, and participating in certain activities. However, all devices must be in silent mode and used in a way that does not disrupt the class or otherwise disturb fellow students.

### **Online Participation**

All course assignments and due dates can be found on Blackboard, along with announcements, lecture notes, and other important information. Many of the assignments must also be submitted via Blackboard. Therefore, it is recommended that students familiarize themselves with Blackboard at the start of the semester and check it regularly. If you have any non-technical questions about Blackboard and how it's utilized as part of the course, don't hesitate to ask.

### **E-Mail Policy**

Students must use their MasonLIVE or gm.u.edu email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

**Students With Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see the professor and contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

**Honor Code**

*To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code:* Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

Students are expected to follow all University policies and guidelines. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

**University Catalog**

Students are to be aware of the policies listed in the University Catalog: <http://catalog.gmu.edu/>.

**GMU Add/Drop Policy**

It is the student's responsibility to check to verify that they are properly enrolled as no credit will be awarded to students who are not. University dates concerning withdrawal can be found in the academic calendar and are not negotiable by the professor.