ANSWERING THE CALL OF DUTY: COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY PROBLEMS, MULTIMODAL SOLUTIONS, AND GAMING LITERACIES

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ABSTRACT

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Acknowledging calls for future research involving video games and rhetoric and composition, this dissertation project answers those calls and furthers our understanding about playing video games as rhetorical action, but more importantly, this dissertation shows how a writing pedagogy based on gaming helps students better understand traditional and multimodal composition processes if the playing experience and the writing experience are considered together.

The dissertation situates video games within multimodal composition and as a result shows how multimodal principles are being demonstrated through an analysis of a variety of video games as case study examples. The dissertation reveals how students might realize connections between traditional and multimodal literacies easier and how instructors might solve common composition pedagogy problems through analyzing and adapting gaming literacy practices. The dissertation concludes with theorizing about how writing pedagogy based on gaming practices influences writing assessment with special attention toward student self-assessment and motivation.

As a collection of five chapters, this dissertation will help rhetoric and composition scholars understand video games as a form of multimodal composition. The dissertation will also help scholars approach playing video games as a rhetorical action and explore how contemporary composition pedagogy benefits from understanding how players work through video games using a variety of resources in print and electronic media.

Dedicated to Drs. Patrick Day, Joel F. Pace, Dennis G. Jerz, Patricia A. Quinn, and Monty Ernst,

for discovering my scholarly talents and providing opportunities for my talents to flourish.

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CHAPTER I. GAMING AS MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION

Introduction

The following dissertation project attempts to reveal relevant relationships between writing practices learned in composition classrooms and gaming practices learned from playing video games. The potential relationships between writing and gaming contribute toward designing a pedagogy intended to help students understand gaming as rhetorical action and a multimodal literacy related to traditional composition processes learned from writing courses. The first chapter is broken down into an Introduction locating video gaming as a popular entertainment medium deserving attention from rhetoric and composition as a field, which is begun with Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher's collection of essays titled *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century: Literate Connections*; a Purpose Statement; a brief introduction to *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* as a case study example; a Literature Review containing sources situating video games as multimodal composition in a digital form with alphabetic literacy origins; and a Chapter Breakdown with narrative descriptions of main ideas about the remaining four chapters.

For over three decades, video games remain an important popular culture medium embraced by a diverse population, mistakenly identified as young adolescents rather than a mixed audience consisting of adolescents and adults. The misunderstood association linking adolescents with gaming seems like an accepted relationship because many media sources continuously remind us that playing video games is an adolescent activity. For instance, Gavin Ogden recently reported in *Edge* about a study conducted by the NPD Group titled "Kids and Gaming 2009" which revealed that "of all kids in the U.S. aged 2-

17, 82% (55.7 million) are gamers" which is broken down further into kids age 2-5, 9-11, and 12-17 (n.p.). Although the NPD Group's findings show a strong relationship between younger audiences and their identity as gamers, an important consideration is not being taken into account before accepting this study's results, which is the age limit placed upon the participants. Ogden reports the NPD Group recruited 5,000 participants within the 2-17 age range using a survey approach, but given video games' previous history as an entertainment medium, this sample size is narrow and potentially misleading because an entire generation is left out from participation. If accepted, the NPD Group's findings show statistically that 18% of the gaming population in the U.S. is age 18 or older, which suggests a sharp decline in video game playing happening sometime in adulthood. The decline in interest and playing video games contribute to continuously associating video gaming with adolescence, but if this statistic is considered with a larger context in mind, then video games are a strong cultural force regardless of age.

A few contributing factors toward understanding video games' appeal may include: a player population who experienced video gaming from an earlier period maturing into adults and receiving more disposable income from their careers, a player population seeking an escape from reality for any given reason, or a player population who is fascinated with technology and constantly entertained through its use of visual and textual elements toward a specific goal. The mass appeal video games offer is something no one should ignore and current research within humanities is calling attention toward this popular medium and its possibilities for educational application, especially for rhetoric and composition as a discipline, as demonstrated with Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail

E. Hawisher's collection of essays titled *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century: Literate Connections*.

Selfe and Hawisher's collection presents thirteen different case studies featuring a range of video game players including college students and college professors from diverse ethnic backgrounds and economic classes, but also approaching video games with different levels of experience. Although participants in one chapter may seem extremely different when compared with another chapter in *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century: Literate Connections*, Selfe and Hawisher call attention toward an important intersection involving literacy and gaming with respect toward rhetoric and composition as a field, which must be explored further. The collection locates video games as literacy and shows potential relationships with rhetorical study through consistent attention given toward exploring identity issues resulting from player interactions as negotiated with the screen. The collection also makes important calls for future research further investigating video games within a rhetoric and composition context.

<div align="center">Purpose Statement</div>

Acknowledging calls for future research involving video games and rhetoric and composition such as ones presented by Iswari P. Pandey, Laxman Pandey, Angish Shreshtha in "Transcultural Literacies of Gaming" along with Debra Journet in "Narrative, Action, and Learning: The Stories of *Myst*," this dissertation project answers those calls and furthers our understanding about playing video games as rhetorical action, but more importantly, this dissertation shows how a writing pedagogy based on gaming helps students better understand traditional and multimodal composition processes if the playing experience and the writing experience are considered together (Selfe and

Hawisher, 2007). The dissertation uses Gunther Kress's definition of multimodality in

"Multimodality" from Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis's collection titled *Multiliteracies:*

Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures, which is given as "The appearance

of modes other than language in the centre of the domain of public communication" or

"to be constituted by a number of modes of representation" as an entry point to explore

gaming as an appropriate multimodal genre (183-184). Kress emphasizes a material

aspect involved with multimodal composition, but he warns in "Multimodality,

Multimedia, and Genre" that "The materiality of the different modes – sound for speech,

light for image, body for dance – means that not everything can be realized in every

mode with equal facility, and that we cannot transport mode-specific theories from one

mode to another without producing severe distortions" which seems like an important

caution for less explored multimodal genres to overcome (39).

     The dissertation situates video games within multimodal composition and as a

result shows how multimodal principles are being demonstrated through an analysis of a

variety of games including: *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, *God of War III*, *Fallout:*

New Vegas, and *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. The first chapter examines *Call of Duty:*

Modern Warfare 2 as a case study example. The dissertation reveals how students might

realize connections between traditional and multimodal literacies easier and how

instructors might solve common composition pedagogy problems through analyzing and

adapting gaming literacy practices. The dissertation concludes with theorizing about how

writing pedagogy based on gaming practices influences writing assessment with special

attention toward student self-assessment and motivation.

As a collection of five chapters, this dissertation will help rhetoric and composition scholars understand video games as a form of multimodal composition. The dissertation will also help scholars approach playing video games as a rhetorical action and explore how contemporary composition pedagogy benefits from understanding how players work through video games using a variety of resources in print and electronic media.

<center>*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*</center>

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 is a video game produced by Infinity Ward and Activision available on multiple gaming platforms (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC) and *Modern Warfare 2* is the sixth installment in an ongoing series. The game is classified as a First-Person-Shooter (FPS) and provides players with an offline single-player story mode along with an online multiplayer mode. *Call of Duty* (COD) games place a strong emphasis upon its online multiplayer element. Unlike other FPS video games, the *Call of Duty* series' attention is centered around its multiplayer element allowing players to interact with each other within a 3D virtual space for specific amounts of time, creating a solitary playing experience closely resembling the writing experience students encounter in a composition course.

<center>Literature Review</center>

Acquiring literacy through alphabetic writing is an important ability many of us learn from an early age and our contemporary culture highly values writing, but as Kress reminds us in *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy* using his daughter Emily as an example, writing remains related with oral culture. For example, Kress describes how his daughter Emily learns to write her name and focuses upon understanding how

Emily realizes which order her letters must appear in order to communicate her name.

Kress presents two possible explanations:

> One is that she remembers her name as a Gestalt, as a whole entity. The other is
> that she associates letters with sounds, and that she therefore *matches* letter-
> sequence to sound-sequence, matches the Gestalt of the letter-shape to the Gestalt
> of the sound-shape of her name (69).

Here Kress reveals an important cognitive process occurring within Emily's mind and shows how a relationship between sound and writing results in recognizing a proper letter order rather than maintaining a chaotic spelling. An interesting element involved with that process is noticing Emily drawing information from two different bodies of knowledge and synthesizing them in order to accomplish her goal of writing her name. In order to understand how print processes share a relationship with processes happening in a digital environment, attention must be turned toward visual elements, or semiotics as Kress and Theo van Leeuwen explain in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*.

For Kress and van Leeuwen, different aspects involved with meaning-making act independently as a semiotic mode, but also as a homogenous system, capable of producing multiple methods for arriving at a single outcome (230). Kress and van Leeuwen state that "means and processes of inscription can be changed while other aspects of the production of an image are held constant" (230). Although Kress and van Leeuwen's understanding about inscription are applied to a print example here, other interactive examples within a digital environment are also possible, such as playing video

games. However, new media literacy is not possible without its traditional print counterpart.

<div align="center">Choice, Process, and Customization</div>

An element of choice is an important element to understand how meaning is made while navigating electronic texts and choice is a driving factor, but choices are a representation of individual process, which Linda Flower and John R. Hayes explain in "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing."

Flower and Hayes clarifies a perpetual misunderstanding about composition as a linear process through distinguishing activities involved with composition from stage descriptions of writing because "they model the growth of the written product, not the inner process of the person producing it" so that "sharp distinctions stage models make between the operations of planning, writing, and revising may seriously distort how these activities work" and prevent us from understanding activities performed during composition without aid from new media technology. The misconception about writing as a linear process may be associated with stage descriptions about writing like planning, writing, and revising, but those stage descriptions act as conceptual organization hubs to classify different activities happening while writing. If stage descriptions about writing are intended to be concept organizers to discuss writing as manageable parts rather than an entirely recursive event, then attention must be redirected toward new media and multimodal composition because activities associated with those areas often involve meaning-making from multiple literacies and playing video games is no exception.

An example from *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* is when players create custom classes for his or her soldier in online multiplayer matches. Players are allowed to

customize numerous things about their soldier such as weapons (assault rifles, submachine guns, light machine guns, sniper rifles, riot shield), weapon attachments (red dot sight, silencer, acog scope, full metal jacket, extended magazines), equipment (frag grenade, semtex grenade, claymore, C4), special grenade (flash, stun, smoke), and perks (faster reloading, more damage per bullet, unlimited sprint, more accuracy), each category representing a different source of information with various sublevels allowing further choice and customization. A player customizes a class whenever he or she chooses specific options from those categories with a central idea in mind. For example, if a player wants a stealth soldier, then he or she may choose any weapon with a silencer (reduces range but keeps players invisible to radar when firing) and run with the Ninja Pro perk (invisible to heartbeat sensors and silent footsteps), which helps them not become detected by other players running around a map. The process leading up to understanding those choices result in a stealth class involve techniques similar to clustering because a player must consider all possible ideas and work with them in combination through trial and error. The class customization process as a whole helps us understand more about how our students represent themselves online as in-game avatars and how those identities relate with themselves in reality, as James Paul Gee explains in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literature* and *Why Video Games are Good for Your Soul*, but more importantly, examining class customization provides an opportunity to understand how our students begin creating knowledge within a multimodal environment using semiotic language (29-57). Here is a place where video games represent process and post-process elements simultaneously.

Games, Process, and Post-Process

For players, choosing different weapons, attachments, equipment, perks, or other customizable features for their soldier is a linear procedure because navigating on-screen menus and making selections is sequential in nature, but also universal across gaming platforms. For Flower and Hayes, a writer is participating in a planning process if he or she is able to form an internal representation of knowledge appropriate to the writing. Flower and Hayes describe internal representations as "likely to be more abstract than the writer's prose representation will eventually be" and recognize that "a whole network of ideas might be represented by a single key word" or "this representation of one's knowledge will not necessarily be made in language, but could be held as a visul or perceptual code […]" such as different pools of information available to a player customizing a class as our stealth soldier example above illustrates (372). The linearity and universal applicability involved with customization are two central concepts process theorists may embrace, as Gary A. Olson describes in "Toward a Post-Process Composition: Abandoning the Rhetoric of Assertion," collected in Thomas Kent's *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm* saying how "the process orientation, as we have conceived it, imagines that the writing process can be described in some way" and that "process theorists assume that we can somehow make statements about the process that would apply to all or most writing situations" which is true if writing as techniques able to be mastered are accepted like clicking through specific menus in order to accomplish a goal like customizing a soldier (Kent 8). However, as Olson continues explaining, such an understanding results in a "discourse of mastery and assertion" rather than "a more dialogic, dynamic, open-ended, receptive, nonassertive stance" as post-process scholars seeks to implement in composition studies (Kent 14).

The emphasis upon writing as mastery or a sequence of linear procedures is due to a loss of agency resulting from incorporating process into institutionalized higher education, which Barbara Couture calls attention toward in "Modeling and Emulating: Rethinking Agency in the Writing Process," but an alternative is possible through adopting post-process practices.

For Couture, embracing expression rather than mastery in writing is an important step toward reclaiming agency because "to master expression we strive to emulate others, to be like them, worthy of them, perhaps even better than them" whereas "To master a technique we employ a device, we model what our teachers or other masters do or have done" which places value upon product because a final draft is the end result rather than understanding how a writer creates that product. Couture explains how moving away from writing as mastery to writing as design involves understanding writing as an integration of human will and action rather than separate activities (Kent 31). Couture clarifies original goals process intended when she explains that "Emphasis on the process of writing renewed—or was intended to renew—our concern not only with helping students write better but also with helping them *be* better, that is, develop into better persons through achieving agency, the capacity to act and to make a difference among other persons for having done so" and that clarification is realized in video games whenever one player records his or her gameplay, comments on it, and then uploads his or her game to a medium like YouTube. However, such a goal is only possible through trial and error, much like how players customize soldiers for online multiplayer matches.

The mastery discourse Olson identifies is not something Couture overlooks when she describes how "The sequence was employed to help students develop techniques for

writing, a task easily separated from the complex process of *developing a person* who is writing, not just in this class, but all of his or her life" but the problem with the sequential nature is that "A single model for generating ideas, conducting research, and writing and revising a draft does not capture all the effective ways that human beings solve the problem of acquiring knowledge and communicating it to one another" and similarly, navigating menus and making selections during the customization process in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* is not evidence of agency alone.

<div align="center">Agency, Choice, and Rhetorical Situations</div>

Agency in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* with respect toward online multiplayer is present whenever players customize a class toward a purpose, as mentioned previously using a stealth soldier example, but being able to explain how those choices operate within the game fulfills agency from a post-process perspective. Couture explains why agency and communication is important saying that "Writers need to know how and why to choose a strategy, have confidence in its projected result, and implement it successfully. In other words, writers need to become subjective agents, making willful judgments effected in concrete actions that convey them successfully to others" which current *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* players fulfill in their commentated gameplay on YouTube and other similar venues. The end result is the creation of new knowledge through understanding relationships among sources that may not be obviously related. The relationship between agency and choice is a common interest shared between post-process and multimodal composition. The pursuit of examining agency and choice with respect toward video games provides an opportunity to understand how post-process pedagogy may be implemented more in composition classrooms. Video games like *Call*

of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 often include an in-game tutorial to help new players become oriented and comfortable with basic controls before presenting them with different rhetorical situations to work through. The fact that video games present its tutorials during play is important because such a presentation suggests that players are able to continuously assimilate new material and adapt their playing style to different rhetorical situations rather than experiencing a break between presentation and practice.

Players who play online multiplayer in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* are given numerous types of game modes for them to play such as Free-For-All (eliminate other players), Team Deathmatch (eliminate players on the other team), Headquarters Pro (gain control of a neutral base as a team), and other variants of these modes. All game modes allow a specific number of players to occupy a map (defined online virtual space) while following rules associated with the game type. An online multiplayer match runs for a specific amount of time and short intermissions occur between rounds as well as a new map being randomly presented with each round. Players navigate each map differently and become familiar with different routes through previous experience, but what makes a *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* multiplayer match unique is how each game type and each map represents a different rhetorical situation for players to work through. Our current understanding about rhetorical situations may be broken down into different parts including but not limited to audience, purpose, context, and message, but current understanding about rhetorical situations is indebted to Lloyd F. Bitzer, Richard E. Vatz, and Scott Consigny.

Bitzer opens discussion in "The Rhetorical Situation" describing a rhetorical situation as one that is a "a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an

exigence which strongly invites utterance" related with completing a situational activity through participation leading to the creation of meaning and character (5). For Bitzer, participation is key in a rhetorical situation and a similar argument may be made for video games and players. Bitzer points toward two important aspects involved with a rhetorical situation. First, a situational activity must be present, which is one way to consider each online multiplayer game mode in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* since all of the modes are objective based. However, each map is also its own rhetorical situation because each map is designed differently allowing various routes for players to run through while fulfilling the objective. Second, participation in order to resolve the situation is also required. A video game, much like a computer, software, or almost any technology, is unable to perform its duty or fulfill its purpose without participation from someone else. A player participates in a video game by interacting with a controller and each game assigns different actions to the controller's buttons and sometimes offers different preset configurations.

The rhetorical aspects involved with an online multiplayer match become visible when player interactions within that space using a customized class are considered. The different classes each possess different strengths and weaknesses based on an individual player's playing style or preference, which cannot be determined with certainty from one player to the next, but players are able to predict strengths and weaknesses using their perception as a guide. Vatz challenges Bitzer about the role of perception in the rhetorical situation saying in "Myth of the Rhetorical Situation" that "No situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it" and this challenge helps us understand how different

audiences interpret and respond from one situation to the next as a player may change his or her class between online multiplayer matches (154). Consigny agrees with Vatz's inclusion of perception when considering the rhetorical situation and extends that notion further saying "The rhetor discloses issues and brings them to resolution by interacting with the situation, revealing and working through the phenomena, selecting appropriate material and arranging it into a coherent form" and as a process this is what happens whenever a player creates or modifies a customized class (179). Players draw information from seemingly related bodies of information, chooses specifics about a class, and brings them together toward a purpose appropriate for his or her playing style.

For example, if a player chooses a specific class in one match and that player performs poorly, then he or she may make revisions to that class anticipating the next time he or she is faced with that rhetorical situation again. However, in order for him or her to make class revisions, he or she must access his or her structure of ideas involved with playing that game. Flower and Hayes identify such mental revision as a sub-process called organizing, which "takes on the job of helping the writer make meaning, that is, give a meaningful structure to his or her ideas" resulting in a revised class or playing style (372). The decisions involved with revising a particular class is influenced by the rhetorical situation, but organizing is also an influence, as Flower and Hayes further describes organizing saying it is "capable of grouping ideas and forming new concepts" which "allows the writer to identify categories, to search for subordinate ideas which develop a current topic, and to search for superordinate ideas which include or subsume the current topic" which helps us understand how players are able to rapidly make changes to classes within short intermissions between online matches (372).

The video game is a highly visual multimodal genre, especially when considering highly sophisticated games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, but interactivity is a quality that makes video games unique in a multimodal context and that relationship changes video games into cinematic new media objects. Previously, I suggested attention must be turned toward new media and multimodal composition because those areas involve meaning-making resulting from multiple literacies, but with video games we are able to witness multiple literacies happen within a hierarchy as Flower and Hayes explains happens during an act of composition saying "A hierarchical system is one in which a large working system such as composing can subsume other less inclusive systems, such as generating ideas, which in turn contain still other systems, and so on" and that "A given process may be called upon at any time and embedded within another process or even within another instance of itself" and our previous examples from *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* illustrate different processes players use at different times in response to different situations. Therefore, multimodal composition and video game playing are not analogous to one another because both involve multiple literacies working in a hierarchical system rather than a particular system like print dominating over another system like visual. However, one more important consideration is authority, which returns us to our discussion on the rhetorical situation. An underlying theme happening throughout Bitzer, Vatz, and Consigny is one focused upon individual authority within communicative interaction and understanding post-process's position helps overcome a potential hurdle for students if video games are integrated into our current composition classrooms.

Transmission vs. Transformative Model of Education and Oscillation

A conflict emerges from a post-process perspective on individual authority as Helen Rothschild Ewald explains differences between social constructionists and externalism when she cites Kent saying that "[…] social constructionists situate the writer's authority as an individual (although socially constructed) agent, who is *required to* assume a strategic attitude within the 'circulation of discourse in society' (Kent, "Formalism" 84-91)" which is different from externalist beliefs because "externalism allows the *individual* authority to assume rhetorical stances and to construct texts" allowing the subject to be seen as "an individually accountable agent in a way that social constructionism does not" which is one way to approach trial and error in video games (Kent 117). The social constructionist perspective grants writers, students, or players less agency and reduces agency, which steals accountability from them and denies understanding choices as rhetorical action, but externalism restores lost agency. Restoring lost agency is important not only because responsibility returns with it, but we also begin approaching consistent trial and error as a cycle of responsibility a player repeats with a controller, his or her screen, and his or her on-screen avatar. However, if gaming presents possibilities for agency-driven independent constructions of knowledge, then why such results may not be happening within current composition classrooms must be considered.

For Ewald, students participating in a writing course at a university are conflicted because "The postmodern subject, inscribed by language, is caught in a web of dominant discourses even as she or he tries to operate within and perhaps resist those discourses" which rejects notions about absolute truth being a goal so that "the paradox of postmodernist pedagogy is that giving up the notion of foundational truths requires a teacher to take on a different kind of authority" which might involve recasting him or

herself as an advanced peer rather than a so-called sage-on-the-stage (Kent 118). The problem Ewald identifies is one based on equating teaching with knowledge transmission, but such an approach cast students into an object position (without agency) rather than a subject position (with agency) (Kent 122, 125). Ewald proposes an alternative approach that exchanges traditional process moves for genre conventions when she states that "Writing instruction could be organized around discourse moves […] the focus on discourse moves even more naturally complements transactional models when these moves are defined by and subject to communicative interaction in the classroom" thus theory and practice work together rather than against one another as action and critical thinking (Kent 128-129).

Abandoning a previous understanding about writing and education and adopting a different approach, or process pedagogy, is a cause Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch advocates for in "Post-Process 'Pedagogy': A Philosophical Exercise" in the *Journal of Advanced Composition* when she advocates that "post-process theory encourages us to reexamine our definition of writing as activity rather than a body of knowledge, our methods of teaching as indeterminate activities rather than exercises of mastery, and our communicative interactions with students as dialogic rather than monologic" (120). For Breuch, writing and teaching as dialogic actions replace a transmission model of education for a transformative model based upon active participation in a collaborative fashion (124). Breuch clarifies post-process pedagogy's goal as not an outright rejection of process, but instead a rejection of believing writing is something requiring mastery (130). For Breuch, a transformative model may be best suited for a writing center environment because of its one-on-one interaction, but similar results may happen if

students within a composition class are attempting to communicate different messages about a shared experience such as playing a video game (144). If writing instruction and theory become more synched, then perhaps relationships between gaming and composition with respect toward hardware and screen become easier to realize.

The adoption of a transformative model of education as Breuch suggests is something video games successfully accomplish with players while they play using in-game tutorials, but also while they are not playing, which becomes evident when players are unable to progress further at any point. Players often consult a strategy guide in search of an answer to the particular rhetorical situation they cannot successfully work through. Video game strategy guides present players with walkthroughs for each part of a specific game as well as hints and tricks about different situations players may face, but strategy guides present its material in an accessible language and style that most composition handbooks may learn from as a teaching approach. Initially, a strategy guide approach to teaching writing may seem like a bad idea because students no longer need to work if all answers are provided, but an important consideration going overlooked is how players use strategy guides. Although strategy guides contain all necessary information to play through any game successfully from start to finish, players do not play a game with it from cover-to-cover because that is boring, but players are willing to consult with strategy guides when they are unable to continue. The strategy guide may explain or show them a solution to an in-game rhetorical situation, but the player must perform that solution before moving on, which allows them to assimilate that new information and adapt it for future situations. Therefore, strategy guides successfully embrace the

pedagogical concept of transparency without sacrificing critical thinking, which are ideas that may benefit contemporary writing pedagogy.

Richard Lanham draws a comparison between art and computer screens as an example of what he means when we look *at* an image in *Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*. For Lanham, looking at something such as a portrait hanging in an art gallery allows viewers to identify that image for what it is (an image), then a cognitive process happening at the surface of our mind is happening and viewers may think nothing more beyond that as implied when considering James Rosenquist paintings (45). However, looking *through* something means viewers are still looking at something except the image may prompt more critical thinking about that image, which is accomplished through an oscillation between reception and perceived perspective allowing for play because "This oscillation between use and ornament, between purpose and play, pops out everywhere you look in the history of computers and especially of private desktop ones. Play continually animates the operant purpose, indeed often becomes it" and such play or participation is happening whenever people read comics or acquire literacy through selecting available choices on preset menus within a computer program as displayed through its interface. As a result, Lanham points out, a dichotomy between criticism and creation happens through such an interactive process so that "you simply cannot be a critic without being in turn a creator" and that "This oscillation prompts a new type of teaching in which intuitive skills and conceptual reasoning can reinforce one another directly" which is something video games demonstrate well and composition struggles demonstrating within our current classrooms (107). Thus far, how textual and visual elements may persuade a reader or user experience through interactive

interface properties is explored, but not gaming and its implications for literacy in an increasingly multimodal culture. For video games and its applications, an important starting point is James Paul Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, which addresses potential possibilities using an application approach.

Video Game Learning Principles, Literacies, and Education Reform

Gee presents readers with descriptions and explanations about how different video games from various genres contribute to understanding about learning processes grounded within literacy. However, more important is Gee's list of 36 possible learning outcomes derived from playing video games and observing video game players and three of those outcomes deserve further investigation: Practice Principle, Achievement Principle, and Committed Learning Principle. Gee defines his Practice Principle as when "Learners get lots and lots of practice in a context where the practice is not boring (i.e., in a virtual world that is compelling to learners on their own terms and where the learners experience ongoing success). They spend lots of time on task" which sounds much like a shared goal with revision in composition; Gee explains his Achievement Principle saying "For learners of all levels of skill there are intrinsic rewards from the beginning, customized to each learner's level, effort, and growing mastery and signaling the learner's ongoing achievements" which suggests a relationship between gaming as multimodal composition and assessment; and Gee defines his Committed Learning Principle as when "Learners participate in an extended engagement (lots of effort and practice) as extensions of their real-world identities in relation to a virtual identity to which they feel some commitment and a virtual world that they find compelling" which is a constant struggle for composition with respect toward remaining relevant with

students (208). All three principles developed here merit further investigation along with theory, analysis, and application of the gaming experience itself, especially since gaming is a constantly changing and improving technology.

As an entry into understanding how recent scholarship about video games relates with rhetoric and composition as a field, aside from presenting sources revealing an interdisciplinary relationship, attention must be given toward looking at gaming as writing at an intersection with teaching. Cynthia L. Selfe, Anne F. Mareck, and Josh Gardiner provide necessary insight in "Computer Gaming as Literacy" from *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century* using Josh as an example. Selfe, Mareck, and Gardiner conducted a number of interviews over time with Josh, a 13-year-old gamer living in Michigan, attempting to understand potential educational benefits associated with gaming literacy practices. All three researchers assert that "Listening to what Josh has to say, we believe, can help us understand the personal values that one young person associates with the literacy practices of gaming. These values, I would argue, have to do with the formation of a commitment to personally selected, cross-cultural literacy communities, the ability to enact personal choice and political agency through and with literacy practices, and the opportunity to shape identity within literate environments" and here an important gap about gaming and composition is revealed (23). Notice how Selfe, Mareck, and Gardiner identify a personal value related with gaming as "the ability to enact personal choice and political agency" which implies gaming may be capable of helping players produce knowledge within a digital space or multimodal environment, however, since much scholarship about gaming and composition focuses upon literacy, that direction is a road less traveled. However, as mentioned previously, gaming successfully

engages players and helps them sustain a lengthy playing session with ease whereas

college composition struggles with accomplishing a similar outcome. Therefore, the

possibility that gaming practices may inform contemporary composition pedagogy

practices is apparent and must be pursued further.

Selfe, Mareck, and Gardiner describe Josh's gaming experience as active

participation within a world "enacting a set of literacy practices that exists beyond the

imagination of his parents and his teachers, attuned as they are to the postfigurative

tradition of print" which explains why Josh holds a positive attitude toward gaming while

adults and educators receive gaming and respond with a negative attitude (32). However,

gaming possesses a unique ability to motivate players toward active and sustained

engagement deserving further investigation because "In gaming environments, Josh felt,

he could make choices about what to do and what to learn—and then take responsibility

for the outcome of those choices [….] Gaming also provided Josh a very real exigence

for using language with individuals and groups outside the immediate circle of people he

interacted with in Escabana" and such findings derived from this study suggest that one

reason gaming is able to successfully engage players (especially younger players) is

because personal choice is involved with learning material such as a video game's

controls or gaining proficiency playing a video game (25). However, in order to fully

understand and implement gaming (or any multimodal genre) in an educational setting,

an educational reform seems necessary based upon current scholarship.

Gee identifies a significant problem with our current educational system in

comparison when he states that

Better theories of learning are embedded in the video games many children in

elementary and particularly in high school play than in the schools they attend.

Furthermore, the theory of learning in good video games fits better with the

modern, high-tech, global world today's children and teenagers live in than do the

theories (and practices) of learning that they see in school (7).

Obviously, video games are being neglected or ignored as a pedagogical resource as

mentioned above due to what Selfe, Mareck, and Gardiner identify as an

"intergenerational disjuncture" attributed toward living "on the wild border of a

cofigurative/prefigurative era" so that "they steadfastly abide by the mythic conventions

of the postfigurative literacy yardstick by which they themselves were measured," but

most importantly "rather than recognizing gaming as one of the very few models for

learning about life in a newly forming culture available to our youth, seem to consider it

to be a distraction from more formal (postfigurative) literacy practices" (28). Therefore,

reform is a necessary movement if the current educational system will ever embrace

gaming on its own merits, but imagining what that change involves is something scholars

are conflicted about.

For example, Kress believes in order for such a significant revision of the

educational system to happen, a number of issues must be addressed. Kress proposes

starting with reconsidering English's elitist literary attitude toward what he calls "high

culture" and "banal" as he states in *Literacy in the New Media Age* paraphrasing from

Writing the Future: English and the Making of a Culture of Innovation (1995) saying "I

suggested that the school-subject English needed an encompassing theory of text, in

which the texts of high culture could be brought into productive conjunction with the

banal texts of the everyday" which results in three significant changes (120). First, "That educational environment will deal with banal texts, culturally salient texts (from all the cultures represented in one society), and aesthetically valued texts, in all modes and in all kinds of modal combination," second, "Theories of meaning will have to be rethought and remade" so that "A newer way of thinking may be that within a general awareness of the range of genres, of their shapes and their contexts, speakers and writers newly make the generic forms out of available resources," and finally, "There will need to be a new evaluation and description of the resources for representation and communication, the means for making texts, which are available and in use in a particular society" (120-121).

The reform Kress is describing here seems like a most difficult undertaking of epic proportions worthy of being labeled a Crusade, but such change is not possible overnight, so an alternative perspective about how to begin change is needed since change is a slow process. Instead of taking up a charge with Kress's suggestions, an alternative route is proposed in *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century* when Selfe reminds us that

> Most teachers start small, often by identifying some immediate or local social, political, economic, or educational problem. This initial critical consciousness, in turn, provides the impulse to act, often in the context of one program, one classroom, an assignment, a community, or a single personal interaction with a student and his or her family (134).

In comparison, Selfe's plan for change starting with something small and manageable may seem like a proverbial drop in a bucket, but as gaming receives more critical academic attention, especially from rhetoric and composition, then a change as

significant as one Kress imagines above may become a reality. Therefore, identifying intersections among literacy, spaces, and composition is an important first step because rather than continuing examining gaming as literacy, a more beneficial route may be considering gaming as composition.

An important consideration before joining such a charge is remembering that pursuits involving writing and technology is not a new concept, as evidenced in Selfe and Hawisher's *Computers and the Teaching of Writing in American Higher Education: 1979-1994*. As a significant foundation and entry point to examine relationships between composition and computers, Selfe and Hawisher point out that one of the most significant advances computers made is when desktop models became affordable and accessible to people, which is an improvement from previous models that allowed interaction with punch cards and filled large spaces partly because of its need to use tape as a storage device. Selfe and Hawisher give special attention toward pedagogical applications involving computers saying that "Our concern for teaching is focused on the act of composing, the making of meaning, the production of discourse" and distinguishes composition as a unique pursuit within English studies because "Unlike many colleagues in English and in communication departments who focus their work on texts, we work with people as they compose texts" which acts as a mission statement that continues to be true and this dissertation project is no exception. The dissertation project proposed here enters into conversations at the intersection of writing as a rhetorical action, composition and computers, and understanding how knowledge is created. The proposed project distinguishes itself because its focus is upon gaming as a representative of both

technology and multimodal composition and shares a starting time period with desktop PCs that Selfe and Hawisher identify.

As desktops changed traditional writing practices because of its word-processing features, gaming consoles changed entertainment, beginning with Atari in 1972. As a pioneering home gaming console, Atari's 2600 provided an interactive experience involving software, a monitor, and a controller consisting of one button and a joystick or a dial. However, gaming consoles advanced once Nintendo entered the market with its Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in 1985. The NES worked with similar principles as an Atari 2600, but its innovations included a more interactive experience because games adopted narrative elements in addition to objective-based gameplay as shown with its launch title *Super Mario Bros.* As Mario, players worked through a side-scrolling adventure consisting of multiple stages and sub-stages with different challenges such as bottomless pits, power-ups, power-downs, all centered around a narrative of rescuing a kidnapped princess (which almost all subsequent Mario titles follow suit into the present).

The NES revealed a far more visual nature to gaming because of its use of color and game design elements defined within a narrative context. Nintendo and its NES became a dominant video game company with huge popularity leading to later generations of its console (Super NES in 1991; Nintendo 64 in 1996; Nintendo Game Cube in 2001; and Nintendo Wii in 2006). However, Nintendo found rivalry with Sony when the PlayStation (PS) launched with its subsequent systems (PSOne in 1994; PS2 in 2000; PS3 in 2006), whose PS2 remains the best-selling video game console of all time. The PlayStation advanced Nintendo's innovation through its use of discs to contain

games and that allowed designers to include more information for consoles to present in comparison with Nintendo's cartridge-based system. Selfe and Hawisher recognized possibilities with technological advancement in writing classrooms saying "The place of new technologies in English / writing classrooms is an important intellectual space for teachers, educators, and students to map" which earlier refers to PCs, but arguably video games are a space needing such mapping because of its parallel history with desktop computers (6). However, as mapping video games as an intellectual space rather than entertainment happens, we must also pay attention to how existing multimodal composition literacies are working within video games and a good starting point is Selfe's collection titled *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers*.

<p align="center">Writing and Gaming as Textual, Visual, and Aural Literacies</p>

Cynthia L. Selfe, Stephanie Owen Fleischer, and Susan Wright call attention toward specific multimodal composition literacies in "Words, Audio, and Video: Composing and the Processes of Production" and understanding the relationship between text, sound, and video provides important insight into how knowledge is created in games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*. Selfe, Fleischer, and Wright open with understanding traditional composition processes involved with textual production including but not limited to the following: "brainstorming, planning, and taking notes (often in digital environments); citing and documenting copyrighted material; typing a draft (often using a computer keyboard); creating a new document by combining parts of old documents; using an outline or a diagram to create a plan for (or a representation of) an essay…" and similarities reveal themselves when how a narrative dependent upon sound rather than words is composed is considered (13-14). Selfe, Fleischer, and Wright

continue discussing similar composing processes when video is included with sound and draws parallels between procedures for creating each document relating back to the traditional composition practices previously covered, but each modality presents its own challenges for instructors to handle within a classroom.

The challenges include some provided by technological limitations (which Selfe, Fleischer, and Wright call "affordances"), but some challenges are personal from an instructor viewpoint because he or she may be less familiar with composing or feeling comfortable with such texts. An instructor must somehow overcome his or her reservations about assigning multimodal projects, but a more difficult challenge may be presenting appropriate thought processes leading to creating knowledge in a multimodal context. For example, Selfe, Fleischer, and Wright suggest that "Students may need to learn how to think about, choose, and focus on topics in ways that take advantage of the particular affordances of sound, video, and still images" and "Students may have little understanding of, or instruction in, the semiotic, syntactic, or grammatical understanding of elements that make up sound or video essays" which suggest significantly more time is necessary for preparation if instructors assign multimodal projects in a composition class (18). Therefore, multimodal composition classes resemble pedagogical experiments and that angle is one John Branscum and Aaron Toscano address in "Experimenting with Multimodality."

For Branscum and Toscano, multimodal composition classes are spaces that encourage students to not only experiment, but also learn flexibility, whether through available technological means or creative demonstrations (83). An instructor attempting to create such a classroom space allowing creativity and flexibility are encouraged to

remain confident, compatible, creative, and cool, which are further broken down with attention toward instructors. Branscum and Toscano suggest that confidence is shown through remembering that each multimodal assignment appeals to a specific audience while fulfilling an identifiable purpose because "They depend on effective organization, arrangement, and details" leading into preliminary preparations involving compatibility. Branscum and Toscano encourage instructors to survey a class about previous experience with technology, but also to test any necessary equipment so students may easily use them toward completing a multimodal assignment and adapt accordingly (85). The creative element is brought out through an instructor's emphasis upon genres and approaches leading to project completion rather than reproducible writing abilities and demands flexibility from an instructor for successful results. An instructor must also remain calm due to unforeseeable technical difficulties and rather than become visibly frustrated, use those encounters as teachable moments through enlisting student assistance or another community learning technique (85). As mentioned previously, understanding writing as a meaning-making cognitive process combined with a production method used for communicating discovered meanings is necessary and such an understanding is broken down further through Stuart Selber's presentation of different literacies in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*.

Selber introduces three important literacies for successful digital courses to embrace and teach students to develop, beginning with functional literacy. For Selber, functional literacy involves students learning a specific software independently, which is important because "without the ability to work independently, some teachers argue, students will never learn to scaffold their learning and skills, to expand on their

knowledge of a piece of software" and this notion resonates with Gee's previous discussion about how video games demonstrate his Practice Principle (much time devoted toward a task in an unboring way) (Selber 30-31). As discussed previously, a *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* player playing an online match against other players will die numerous times while learning how to navigate maps and learn controls with a controller, but the player practices independent learning which may lead to self-assessment along with other benefits due to an intrinsic reward system inherent within any good video game. Selber continues his discussion about functional literacy using computer applications as an example and explains how each application includes "interface elements, collaborative writing and communication" along with "prototyping, thinking, and learning programs" which corresponds with traditional composition practices Selfe, Fleischer, and Wright mentioned earlier with multimodal assignments emphasizing audio and visual modes (36).

Selber realizes that based on his definition of functional literacy that little or nothing distinguishes a functionally literate person with someone who knows how to use a computer application, but he specifies a difference when he says "Unlike computer-mediated users, functionally literate users confront skill demands, collaborate online, and explore instructional opportunities" and those activities are demonstrated in video games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* through its online match reward system. A player is awarded experience points (XP) for kills during a match, but the game rewards additional XP and other bonuses such as camouflages and attachments for different weapons depending on how players kill each other. For example, Woodland camouflage is unlocked after 5 headshots; Digital is unlocked after 10 headshots; Urban is unlocked

after 30 headshots; Blue Tiger is unlocked after 75 headshots; Red Tiger is unlocked after 150 headshots; and Fall is unlocked after 250 headshots, each new challenge encourages a player to apply how he or she understands the different controls to do increasingly precise actions, thus demonstrating Selber's functional literacy because of an application aspect rather than sheer knowledge about the action. Selber moves from functional literacy to critical literacy while maintaining an attention toward understanding learning through a constructivist lens.

Selber simplifies constructivism and describes it as "a philosophy of learning based on the premise that learning is an active process in which students construct new knowledge based upon their current / previous knowledge" and this learning outcome may be fulfilled in video games when we look at different games within a specific genre. For example, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* is classified as a first-person-shooter (FPS) because of its purpose (kill virtual characters) from a first-person perspective (players only see their weapon extended on screen). If players pick up a different FPS video game, then he or she should expect similar controls compared with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* or whatever FPS he or she is previously familiar with. As a result from this understanding comes teacher-research and Selber supports teacher-research movements because those "attempt to build classroom activities in a learner-centered direction" which is an intersecting point Selber shares with Gee because Gee encourages situated learning and claims video games present students with those scenarios, but we understand them best as rhetorical situations as previously discussed with Bitzer, Vatz, and Consigny. Selber cites Gee and gives him credit for distinguishing between primary and secondary discourses, describing them respectively as "unconsciously acquired in

familial settings" and "consciously learned in schools and other highly formalized institutions that regulate language use ad behavior in ways that tend to maintain the social and political order" because one goal Selber desires is for primary and secondary discourses to become one and such synthesis leads to his concept of rhetorical literacy (97).

Selber believes rhetorical literacy is possible among students if it is grounded within praxis, which he defines as the "thoughtful integration of functional and critical abilities in the design and evaluation of computer interfaces," which is advanced beyond dualism with functional and critical literacy discussed above (145). Selber breaks rhetorical literacy down into separate parts beginning with persuasion and here things follow an Aristotelian model of argument (148). Once people understand how things are persuasive or able to persuade using Aristotle's model, then deliberation becomes possible and here again, a classical context is implied. However, Selber encourages deliberation toward solving or understanding interface design problems and points out how difficult deliberation may be when applied through different social constructions. Here video games are best approached from a design stance using online multiplayer maps in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* as an example. Selber cites Martin Rosenberg because he explains nonlinear systems as ones that "create rhetorics entrapped in the necessarily logocentric geometry of regulated time and space" which Selber clarifies saying "Such geometrical space can restrict movement, for example, by locating users within highly contextualized and historicized textual landscapes" dependent upon whether or not users accept or reject an interface designer's way of knowing how to navigate the space (171). Here again players navigate a virtual space in a video game

using the controller and their familiarity with controls communicated through button sequences and movement. If one goal is understanding how traditional literacies are maintained and manifested in new media (or rhetorical literacy as Selber presents from above), then what is at stake with such pursuits and what those mean for writing pedagogy are absolutely crucial, which means facing the problem of relevance with our students is important.

<div align="center">Chapter Breakdown</div>

As an opening chapter, three essential media elements distinguishing multimodal composition from traditional composition (textual, visual, aural) using a historical approach calling attention toward three specific examples (comic books, music, and video games) are introduced before arguing video games as an appropriate multimodal composition genre. The initial chapter also begins arguing video game playing as multimodal composition because players engage gaming with multiple literacies working together as a hierarchical system rather than a specific literacy being privileged over others.

Moving from conversations about gaming as multimodal composition into writing pedagogy, Chapter 2 continues arguing how playing video games represents multimodal composition and reveals intersections as well as parallels between video games and traditional composition using *God of War III* as a case study example. The second chapter examines process pedagogy as a problem because of its stage-based approach and calls for a return to teaching writing as process using a problem solving approach. The second chapter calls attention toward process and post-process composition pedagogies,

but rather than presenting them as polarized classroom philosophies, I argue that post-process is a remediation of process.

Continuing from discussions about process and post-process pedagogy, Chapter 3 explores student and instructor conflicts of expectation in a college setting and suggests such conflicts lead to students demonstrating apathetic and resistant attitudes toward writing as a problem. The third chapter suggests such conflicts result from students casting themselves into inappropriate roles when compared with expected roles instructors imagine under ideal conditions. The third chapter offers scaffolding writing abilities of increasing difficulty as a solution because doing so encourages students to cast themselves into appropriate roles in college settings sooner. The third chapter uses *Fallout: New Vegas* as a case study example.

As a departure from considerations concerning classroom interaction, Chapter 4 examines first-year composition handbooks and explores possible reasons why students resist using them. The fourth chapter suggests handbooks suffer from problems such as content organization, comprehensive coverage, oversimplifying information, and overcomplicating information. The fourth chapter introduces how teaching composition using problem solving and scaffolding manifest themselves in a strategy guide format as an alternative to handbooks. The fourth chapter argues that a strategy guide approach to composition resembling video games' use of strategy guides is more accessible and helpful for students in comparison with current composition textbooks.

As a final chapter, I attempt providing potential writing instructors assistance with understanding how video games assess players in a general sense and attempt revealing how we might assimilate those practices into our composition pedagogy. The fifth

chapter explores how grading rubrics may be redesigned to focus on writing abilities and motivate students to write through engaging them in a positive feedback loop. The fifth chapter uses *Call of Duty: Black Ops* as a case study example. Finally, the fifth chapter closes with a presentation of potential limitations imposed upon scholarship involving video games as a result from negative cultural reaction toward gaming as a genre.

Conclusion

As scholars and instructors working within English studies identifying our research interests as rhetoric and composition, we face a persistent problem concerning our writing classrooms, which is a continuous need to present writing as a relevant practice among our students. Too often our students enter our composition classes with a traditional sense about what writing is and how writing functions within our society, but if students continue understanding writing as articulating words on a page using tools requiring manual labor, then writing risks becoming irrelevant rather than flourishing as a necessary ability. Catherine L. Hobbs and James A. Berlin remind us in "A Century of Writing Instruction in School and College English" that "[…] writing instruction has remained at the heart of the curricular decisions as to the kind of society we should advocate and the kinds of individuals we should encourage to make up that society" and thus far, I believe writing instruction successfully performs that task (248). However, one thing writing in its traditional form did not anticipate completely is how modern technology changes our society and everyone within it, which is shown whenever we integrate new technology into our everyday lives. If writing instruction is responsible for helping our students become good citizens living in society, then what happens if society

changes as a result of technology? Writing and writing instruction must adapt to our new technological society before it is able to help future students become good citizens again. Hobbs and Berlin present us with a timeline using assessments about writing and students beginning in 1984 when the National Assessment of Educational Progress "found that students in all levels needed to work on higher-level thinking" and that "Students' enthusiasm for writing was shown to consistently deteriorate as they moved through school," and in 1988 that "little overall change in a decade" happened resulting in "minimal levels of writing performance, although more writing was being done in schools," and again in 1992 that students "'continue to have serious difficulty in producing effective informative, persuasive, or narrative writing (3)'" (Murphy 283). All of these instances are signs of a literacy crisis our society continuously attempts overcoming through more education as if something is wrong with our students, but I believe these are signs that writing is already becoming irrelevant among them. However, now is not too late for us to imagine again writing instruction that helps students become good citizens living within society, but we must prepare them for a technological society. Therefore, investigations with multimodal composition and video games like this one involving *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* are important and may help us remediate writing instruction for its next significant challenge.

CHAPTER II. GAMING AS A PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS TECHNOLOGY

Introduction

If we consider some of our most popular entertainment media from the twentieth-century, particularly comic books, music, and video games, then we find an important shared relationship because all three incorporate textual, visual, and aural elements. For example, comic books use textual and visual elements as narrative and dialogue devices, but text depicted visually with font changes also fulfill an aural purpose as sound effects. Music uses text to present its lyrics and notes on a page, but aural elements including instruments or beats are introduced as lyrical enhancers, which rappers like Eminem exploit regularly as a hip-hop artist through his rhythmic delivery style. Music also incorporates visual elements as shown on album cover art and in booklets included with albums. Games use text as a narrative device, much like music and comic books, but text in gaming also communicates important on-screen information in real-time to help players play the game. The use of visual elements is a primary mode of communicating information within a virtual space made possible through a console and a television, but aural elements like soundtracks heard through speakers while players work toward completing a game are also used. For example, aural elements like sound effects in first-person shooter games like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, are cues players are able to make meaning from combined with information learned from sound, sight, and text resulting in improved performance in an online multiplayer match.

Although all three media use textual, visual, and aural elements, video games may be one media that uses all three simultaneously with equal importance when compared with other media. Unfortunately, as a western culture, we often react negatively toward

change involving entertainment media consumption. As new media emerges and gains popularity over time, a rift occurs among our population and we find ourselves as new media supporters or skeptics. The skepticism surrounding new media examples manifest itself as censorship because as Eric Nuzum explains in *Parental Advisory: Music Censorship in America* that "There are those in control and those who question or threaten that control" (6), therefore; "authority feels a need to suppress and control it" (6), in an attempt to satisfy a personal need for everything to remain the same. The support surrounding new and emerging media embrace possible change, but refuses approaching such change as destructive. However, understanding change as not destructive is an important point constantly lost in translation between opposing viewpoints. Because change is inevitable and new media encourages a re-evaluation of literacy practices, skeptics witness changes in supporters' behavior and deem those changes as undesirable, as evidenced in history when we consider how previous popular media forms including dime novels, movies, pulp magazines, and radio programs were received (Wright 87). A similar misunderstanding happens when composition instructors embrace technology and attempt integrating it with their courses. The attempt experiences resistance from multiple sources represented as university officials, but student reception is almost always positive, indicating an important opportunity nobody should ignore.

However, rather than paying attention to the negative stigma, a more important message is recognizing how powerful those media are in order to draw so much public attention to themselves and that power is why we must pay attention to them as rhetoric and composition scholars. The mass appeal and simultaneous use of textual, visual, and aural elements video games offer is something no one should ignore and current research

within humanities is calling attention toward this popular medium and its possibilities for educational application, especially for rhetoric and composition as a discipline. Another significant consideration is opening dialogue with university officials and maintaining strong relationships with them as an attempt to show potential change involving technology as non-destructive.

Rhetoric and composition scholars and instructors including but not limited to Peter Elbow, James Moffett, and Donald M. Murray are responsible for providing higher education with its current understanding about writing as an organic process rather than an end product, but implementing process within our college composition classrooms is often represented as sequential stages, resulting in a theoretical split as introduced last chapter with process and post-process camps. However, as western culture reacts negatively toward popular media, post-process seemingly dismisses process in its current stage-based approach rather than understanding process as an approach that evolved into a stage-based one from a problem-solving origin. The following chapter examines student engagement with writing as a problem and provides an analysis of process and its troubling evolution from being a problem-solving approach to a stage-based approach; calls for a return to problem-solving process pedagogy; and offers a solution based upon how process and problem-solving is used within video games. The following chapter uses *God of War III* as a case study example because it emphasizes solving puzzles with action and platform gameplay.

God of War III

God of War is a video game series produced by Sony Computer Entertainment exclusively available on PlayStation 3 and *God of War III* is the third console installment

in an ongoing series. The game is classified as Action-Adventure and provides players with an offline single-player story mode. *God of War* games present players with combat, puzzles, and platforming elements within a virtual space in a linear fashion because its emphasis is on narrative. The puzzles players experience in this game often involve multiple steps in order to solve them and progress. Players also encounter bosses (more difficult enemies) and players must defeat them in order to progress to the next stage.

<div align="center">Problem with Writing, Remediation, and the Late Age of Print</div>

Peter Elbow begins a discussion about writing process in *Writing Without Teachers* with describing a critical problem people experience with writing. Elbow describes that "Most people's relationship to the process of writing is one of helplessness" (12) because "they can't write satisfactorily or even at all" (12), and that "their efforts to improve don't seem to help. It always seems that the amount of effort and energy put into a piece of writing has no relation to the results" (12), which are accurate statements about people's attitude toward writing. The statements also apply to students learning about writing in a composition course. The problem writing experiences in a composition classroom from the beginning is a defeatist attitude about writing that some students possess and most people maintain as Elbow describes, but understanding this common problem is important because Elbow's solution involves students learning new behaviors and applying them to a writing task. As we explore this problem and Elbow's solution further, we must be careful and avoid assigning blame to the students for coming into composition classes with defeatist or negative attitudes because as composition instructors, we must share blame with them. Elbow articulates criticism students receive about previous attempts at writing because "…you didn't clarify your thinking ahead of

time; you allowed yourself to go ahead with fuzzy thinking; you allowed yourself to wander; you didn't make an outline" (14), reinforcing that defeatist attitude in students while upholding unrealistic criteria before drafting happens.

The criteria Elbow describes above is not unrealistic from our perspective because as composition instructors, we are committed to helping students develop critical thinking abilities and learning how reading and discussion assist with communicating thoughts in writing, but those values are due to our advanced training. Our training assists us with being comfortable in any writing environment, especially composition classrooms, but our training also grants us familiarity with a spectrum of different writing genres and appropriate abilities associated with those genres. Our students possess none of our abilities or advanced training; therefore; we design our composition courses so that students gain some of our abilities and training on a smaller scale, but more importantly students become more familiar with writing environments and recognize when to apply writing abilities in different rhetorical situations. The design we implement often involves assigning readings outside of class and discussing readings in class so students apply learned material from discussion into their writing outside of class as homework. The emphasis with this design is placed upon interactions between students and instructors during in-class discussion, but as Elbow suggests, the emphasis should shift from in-class discussion to application. Elbow explains this shift stating that "Instead of a two-step transaction of meaning-into-language, think of writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning—before you know any meaning at all—and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve" (15), and students

embrace such an approach through multimodal literacies rather than traditional academic discourse.

As instructors, paying attention to multimodal literacies and new media texts resulting from them is a worthy investment of time, energy, and effort from our perspective as rhetoric and composition scholars because as Cynthia L. Selfe reasons in "Students Who Teach Us: A Case Study of A New Media Text Designer" from *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*, "they are often richly textured with combinations of visual elements, sound, and words; they are interactive and often hypertextual, and they can be aesthetically pleasing in ways that other texts are not" (44), combined with increased accessibility and authoring opportunities technology allows, we are able to learn from our students using literacies familiar to them, helping us de-mystify traditional composition abilities through showing relationships between multimodal and traditional discourse. Selfe uses a student named David as her case study example and like Elbow, she believes our role as composition instructors change as our understanding about literacy changes over time.

Selfe describes David as a troubled first-generation college student from a low-income and underrepresented minority background who loves language and music. Despite family and personal problems in high school, David's experiences with computers helped him pursue independent study about different software packages and web design, yielding positive profitable results (45-48). However, as Selfe explains, "his skills in communicating in Standard English remained seriously underdeveloped—and his teachers in the English Department were very concerned about his ability to organize and write formal essays, his inattention to standard spelling, his inability to write

sentences that were grammatically correct according to conventional standards, and his problems with development and logical argumentation" (49), eventually resulting in David failing out of college "primarily because he couldn't produce a traditional essay organized according to the print-based literacy standards of linear propositional logic, Standard English, argumentative development, and standard spelling" (49). Although David's story ends unhappily, Selfe intends this story to be a success instead of a failure because lessons learned from it may be incorporated into our composition instruction and serve as a multimodal cautionary tale.

Selfe identifies several positive characteristics David develops describing them as an intellectual curiosity and more specifically as abilities to adapt, self-sponsor, and self-direct personal learning efforts motivated by a love of learning language and communication (50). Selfe's identification is important because without knowing David's story as a context, we might believe David is an ideal undergraduate student because desired goals like realizing a love of learning, pursuing further knowledge independently, applying critical thinking gained from courses and adapting that thinking to different situations are ones we desire our students to demonstrate in composition classrooms. However, we continue pursuing such goals with traditional literacy rather than examining and incorporating multimodal literacy to help students become more like David sooner. Understandably, Selfe reminds us about the long tradition between the university (particularly English courses) and print literacy, calling it a "major shaping force in the educational experiences of faculty members" (51), leading to the "ongoing formulation of their official grading and evaluation standards" (51), that also "affected the hiring decisions of the university […] and of the employers who hired its graduates" (51),

situating multimodal literacy in an unstable environment because print and computer literacies constantly compete with one another rather than work together. Despite fundamental differences between traditional and multimodal literacies, as Selfe's example shows with David, both literacies share common interests about specific goals students should be able to accomplish after completing a course or degree. However, as composition instructors, if we remember both literacies' common ground is writing, then an environment with traditional and multimodal literacies seems remediated rather than unstable.

Remediation is defined in Jay David Bolter's *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print* as instances with new media that involve "both homage and rivalry, for the new medium imitates some features of the older medium, but also makes an implicit or explicit claim to improve on the older one" (46), suggesting that anything we consider new media is not necessarily new, but rather an improvement upon its predecessor. Bolter's definition here might be mistakenly interpreted as an eradication of old media or writing practices due to incorporating technology, but eradication is only one possible outcome resulting from remediation. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin explain other outcomes remediation may fulfill in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* that "The digital medium can be more aggressive in its remediation. It can try to refashion the older medium or media entirely, while still marking the presence of the older medium and therefore maintaining a sense of multiplicity or hypermediacy" (46), or "the new medium can remediate by trying to absorb the older medium entirely, so that the discontinuities between the two are minimized" (46), but new media cannot completely erase old media because it is dependent upon that old media in order to be accepted and

used widely by consumers. Bolter and Grusin describe this symbiotic relationship as one desiring transparency because the "digital medium wants to erase itself, so that the viewer stands in the same relationship to the content as she would if she were confronting the original medium" (45-46), but since new media cannot become completely transparent, new media is accepted as an improvement based upon its predecessor. The relationship between old and new media that Bolter and Grusin point out here is important because we may adapt their concept of remediation and apply it to ideas involving writing instruction, but those applications are only possible if we realize that we are living in the late age of print as Bolter identifies in *Writing Space*.

Bolter, like many other new media enthusiasts and multimodal composition scholars, explain how computers lend themselves to all writing, especially ephemeral writing consisting of memos, business letters, or technical reports (2). However, without a doubt, computers signal a shift in writing and the combined shift and realization that computers are becoming increasingly involved with more visual forms of communication help us understand that we are living in a late age of print rather than witnessing the end of print in favor of digital production. Bolter describes benefits resulting from the shift in writing computers allows due to the fact that they "may make writing more flexible, but it also threatens the definitions of good writing and careful reading that have developed in association with the technique of printing" (4-5), and without recognizing those drawbacks and only embracing change computers bring with them an irresponsible utopic future vision remains because we forget that new media is always indebted to old media for critical reception. As a response, Bolter points out that "Although printed books, newspapers, and magazines can and do combine graphics with text, new digital media

seem often to favor graphics at the expense of text" (6), leaving us to question if alphabetic literacy effectively competes with increasingly multimodal literacy as if scholars and instructors must choose sides about new media versus old media.

Instead of understanding the shift computers allow in writing as a split calling for support from separate media camps, Bolter prefers negotiating both camps and does so successfully when he describes contemporary writing space as "generated by the interaction of material properties and cultural choices and practices" (12), or as a "material and visual field, whose properties are determined by a writing technology and the uses to which that technology is put by a culture of readers and writers" (12). Therefore; if our writing space is changed due to a combination of technological innovation and our choices about how to use it, then we are ultimately responsible for determining what purposes technology may fulfill or assist us with in our daily lives. Unsurprisingly, as a culture, we often choose entertainment purposes and Bolter understands those choices because "Our culture has chosen to fashion these technologies into a writing space that is animated, visually complex, and malleable in the hands of both writer and reader" (13), and we appreciate technology that is visually appealing and stimulating, but also interactive, all characteristics shared with video games and video game hardware. However, as we move through Bolter's late age of print and technology continuously becomes remediated, innovation alone is not enough to justify incorporating technology into our composition classrooms. If we desire successful integration of gaming technology with composition instruction, then accessibility might be a more viable option.

<div align="center">Computers, Composition, Commercialism, Consumption</div>

Janet Eldred and Lisa Toner recognize technology's role in changing cultural practices and explain how computers modify our understanding about writing in "Technology as Teacher: Augmenting [Transforming] Writing Instruction" describing how personal computers and improved accessibility through ownership forces composition instructors to reconsider traditional ideas about writing shared with teachers and students (Takayoshi and Huot 34). Eldred and Toner's observation reveals a relationship between technology and composition pedagogy based on accessibility, but here an emphasis is placed on application, rather than consumption and redirecting our attention is a step toward understanding rich possibilities technology makes available to composition for instructors willing to use it in their classrooms.

If we as instructors refuse understanding technology using an approach involving function and benefit, then not only do we practice emphasizing application with technology as Eldred and Toner imply above, we also overcome objections toward technology along commercial lines. Eldred and Toner paraphrase Peter Mortenson's warning reminding us about "our complicity in the sometimes harmful managerial practices and environmental consequences of manufacturing hard drives, paper suitable for laser and inkjet printers, and fiber optic networks" (34), suggesting what happens when people consider technology with a consumer context. Although I agree with Mortenson's warning as Eldred and Toner present it here and understand how commercialism and technology may produce negative results resembling resistance toward technology, I believe a strong potential positive result is being overlooked, especially since without commercialism consumption does not occur and multimodality is going unnoticed as a new literacy.

The establishment and integration of multimodal literacies resulting from new technology is an increasingly popular decision among composition instructors, but such a practice is not yet considered standard. A potential reason why multimodality is not standard practice within composition classrooms may be because instructors and students identify themselves using too strict roles. For example, an instructor might describe him or herself as a teacher without technology in his or her classroom and a student might describe him or herself as a consumer of technology, thus; creating an apparent binary between them much like how people initially react negatively toward emerging new media. However, a stronger approach available to both instructors and students is identifying themselves as both teacher and consumer of technology simultaneously because then their roles in a composition classroom become blurred since students as a whole are more technologically suave in comparison with instructors, but composition instructors are capable of showing students how multimodal literacy encourages and sustains critical thinking abilities along with other benefits. Therefore; our composition classrooms are potential team-based environments allowing students, instructors, and other instructors to reap benefits from as Richard Selfe describes in "Sustaining Multimodal Composition" from *Multimodal Composition*.

Selfe explains how team-based environments are helpful for instructors pursuing multimodal composition projects with students because sharing expertise, providing support, and offering strategies with each other assists with understanding success and failure when attempting different projects as well as revising teaching methods associated with those projects for future use (168). Selfe focuses primarily upon multimodal composition instructors, but as he continues explaining, his team-based environment

metaphor may be expanded substantially to include students, teachers, staff, administrators, and community members and opening dialogue among these different parties encourages sustaining a multimodal presence in composition classrooms because issues including curriculum revision, accessibility, and costs are discussed with instructional enhancement in mind (168). An important first step toward implementing such multimodal pedagogy practices is successfully integrating technology into our composition classrooms.

As previously discussed in the last chapter, incorporating technology or multimodal literacies does not guarantee results as Eldred and Toner caution us about because if instructors do not show relationships between technology and learning outcomes, then students are not able to see those relationships independently (114). I imagine any instructor who is hesitant about using technology might echo a similar reservation because a sense of risk is implied here, but like successfully finishing a video game, the rewards far outweigh the risk (Takayoshi and Selfe 4). The description of rewards or benefits mentions words, meaning standard alphabetic text, an essential yet antiquated condition no composition form overcome yet. The first step, though, is recognizing how remediation occurs within a late age of print context and consumerism starts us down that path.

As consumers who purchase and use new media products on a daily basis, we may understand discussions about the brief history of computers and gaming consoles from the previous chapter as examples of remediation, but attention must be given toward one particular console as a more specific example. For example, consider a PlayStation 3 (PS3), manufactured by Sony. As a third generation console bearing the name

PlayStation, a PS3 offers players a superior game console with its own growing library of games; Blu-Ray DVD player that also plays standard DVDs; PlayStation 2 (PS2) backwards compatibility through emulation; and CD playing capabilities. A PS3 also features a built-in hard drive for saving game data, wireless modem for online gameplay, and ports for up to seven PS3 game controllers. All of these features are improvements from its predecessor PlayStation 2. An original PS2 contained a console and one controller with no allowance for online play or more than two players at a time. If players wanted to play with four people on one machine, then an add-on is needed, along with more controllers and external memory cards. Additional hardware is also required for online gaming aside from necessary equipment to use an Internet connection from a computer. The first PlayStation system only allowed two players and offline game playing. Although each new version of a game console possesses its own unique features as persuasion for student-players to purchase it, some elements are unavoidable, or as Bolter calls it: remediated. The PS3 improved upon PS2 by including PS2's most popular features (four-player and wireless online game play), but it cannot eliminate the predecessor's library of games, despite building its own impressive library.

Remediation as demonstrated here with Bolter and Grusin's understanding helps establish common ground between print and multimodal literacies, but it also helps us present new pedagogies (as we are exploring here with video games) respectfully, much like Elbow when he proposes thinking about writing process as a developmental process rather than a process involving two distinct steps. Elbow encourages writing from the beginning of a task or project and learning about other important components including research and revision along the way before returning to the writing to apply them, thus; a

recursive nature begins. Another benefit resulting from this recursive nature is how the time between learning through reading, discussing, and applying material is reduced and that is a concept video games demonstrate using tutorials like the one in *God of War III*.

<div align="center">Process, Problem-Solving, and Tutorials</div>

Elbow is responsible for starting important discussions about college composition as process and the developmental process model he introduces in *Writing Without Teachers* launches future research our field of rhetoric and composition associate itself with as scholarly interests. A few examples include recasting our role as instructors from stereotypical sage-on-the-stage lecturing about how writing works to discovering how writing works through practice and critical problem-solving, empowering students about writing so they may perform self-assessment and become independent writers capable of working with large amounts of material and communicating an argument, but for our purposes with gaming, Elbow's solution to the problem of writing is realized in a multimodal environment through video games. Elbow describes how a student may write without teachers and overcome his or her reservations or confidence problems associated with writing through an activity that we know as freewriting. If students freewrite, then they are immediately forced to confront the problem of writing while attempting to solve the problem through writing (18). The benefits students gain from this part of the process includes becoming familiar with how writing feels when he or she works with it, which is probably unfamiliar, but understanding the environment is the first step in Elbow's model and the first step to learning how to play video games.

Video games must overcome a similar first step whenever players play any game for the first time and because video games target a diverse audience of players, not all of

them may be familiar with a particular video game, or players who already recognize or play a specific gaming franchise like *Call of Duty* or *God of War* may be out of practice with abilities those games require in order to play and be successful. Therefore; games provide a tutorial and like Elbow's freewriting, players learn by playing from the beginning. James Paul Gee discusses in-game tutorials and how players interact with them to acquire a semiotic literacy when he introduces us to his Subset Principle in *What Video Games Have to Teach us about Learning and Literacy*. Gee describes the Subset Principle as instances when "Learning even at its start takes place in a (simplified) subset of the real domain" identified as training modules or tutorials (141). Gee continues explaining that "Once the game proper starts, the first episode (sometimes several early episodes) is almost always something of a training module, even though it may not be labeled explicitly as such. In this episode, things are less hectic and demanding than they will get later on" (123), thus; video games successfully implement scaffolding teaching methods in order to encourage abilities to accumulate and become available for players to apply to later rhetorical situations as discussed in the previous chapter. The purpose of the tutorial is not only familiarizing players with how to control their avatar, but also the environment their avatar may interact with, as Gee describes that "In the first episode, the player is rarely under any sort of time pressure and generally pays only a small price for mistakes. Usually no demanding enemies—often none at all—attack the player" (123), and that "this episode usually offers a concentrated sample of the most basic and important actions, artifacts, and interactions that the player will need to deal with throughout the game" (123), and although tutorials are separate from the main game, tutorials remain part of the story.

For example, *God of War III* is a popular video game exclusively available on Sony PlayStation consoles classified as an action-adventure game. As an example from a completely different game genre compared with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, players who are fans or are familiar with this series recognize distinguishing differences in comparison with first-person-shooters or other genres, including seeing the main character on-screen from a third-person perspective. The change from first-person to third-person perspective is important because being able to constantly see a protagonist on the screen assists with directing players' attention toward their character rather than only focusing on the surrounding environment like in first-person-shooters. As an action-adventure game, *God of War III* and other similar games are primarily narrative-driven, but players receive an interactive experience through watching in-game cutscenes, solving puzzles, and engaging in combat using rapid sequential button presses against hordes of enemies at different times. *God of War III* opens with production credits combined with a cinematic retelling about events from the first two *God of War* games accompanied with a voiceover narration, an important observation because *God of War II* ended with a cliffhanger showing its main character, Kratos, ready to storm Mount Olympus and finally satisfy his revenge against Zeus.

The tutorial presents a fully powered Kratos with his life, magic, and weapons at maximum, thus; players find themselves within a low-stakes environment that Gee states is essential for learning how to play from the beginning. However, because *God of War III* is considered a 3D adventure game with an equal emphasis upon combat and solving puzzles, players are attacked and shown how to fend for themselves through successfully executing button combinations starting with basic attacks. In the tutorial, players are

shown how to perform different actions using their controllers, but after successfully learning those abilities, players are presented with an opportunity to demonstrate proficiency with those abilities soon after practicing with them. As players progress through the tutorial, they are rewarded with cinematic cutscenes depicting Kratos's assault upon Mount Olympus, advancing the plot and continuing to help players become familiar with the visual environment and different scenarios they will encounter later on in puzzle solving.

During a different part of the tutorial, players find themselves in a room with only one exit, but that exit requires some climbing on vines growing on the walls. Unfortunately, a section of wall and vines is missing from the part players need to climb in order to get out. Players solve this puzzle through interacting with a part of the intact wall (by pressing R1) and rotating the part 180 degrees (moving the left analog stick while holding R1) before inserting it into the missing part on the other side of the room (moving the right analog stick) and climbing out. Notice that in order to solve the puzzle, players needed to recognize the climbable vine pattern, realize that a section of wall and vine is missing from the environment, and then synthesize smaller actions with that information. The player already learned several controls leading up to this puzzle and he or she must organize them as Elbow suggests students organize words written from freewriting so that seemingly disorganized amounts of information regroup and become reissued as new information with a shared relationship before becoming collected again and reissued on a repeated basis (24). If we consider each learned control gained from the tutorial as individual words and what happens after players play through the tutorial, then we witness Elbow's concept of breaking big problems down into smaller and more

manageable problems, but also organizing units of discourse and applying them based upon self-selection.

For Elbow, working with freewriting and monitoring personal progress through thought trains until a logical conclusion results initiates change and begins making alterations to our perceptions about writing because students must begin understanding that writing projects require multiple sessions and each session makes a small contribution toward finishing projects that seemed overwhelming at first (20). The approach Elbow describes here potentially modifies students' attitude toward writing and assists with solving the problem with writing we began with at the beginning of this chapter, but an essential component necessary for successful implementation is writing from the beginning, or writing for writing's sake and video games share this notion as Gee reminds us when he describes how learning begins with tutorials and continues in later episodes, which Gee calls the "Incremental Principle" or when

> Learning situations are ordered in the early stages so that earlier cases lead to generalizations that are fruitful for later cases. When learners face more complex cases later, the hypothesis space (the number and type of guesses the learner can make) is constrained (guided) by the sorts of fruitful patterns or generalizations the learner has found earlier (141-142).

Here Gee agrees with Elbow because both understandings about writing and gaming share a common thread about immersing students and players within something unfamiliar to them, whether a composition classroom or a video game, both experiences are dependent upon scaffolding new abilities based upon previously learned abilities and thus; students and players remain immersed. Gee elaborates on immersion and its effects

on learners playing video games because "learners are not always overtly aware of the fact that they are 'learning,' how much they are learning, or how difficult it is" (124), therefore; "even when they are learning (and since the domain gets progressively harder, they are always learning), they are still in the domain […}" (124), suggesting progressive learning occurs and as composition instructors we desire seeing similar results.

Another example from *God of War III* is a puzzle that players encounter around the halfway point in the game. During this episode, Kratos finds himself inside Poseidon's palace and he finds a woman who's being held captive and despite much protesting, players must solve a puzzle in order to free her. Players discover the puzzle in the next room shown below:

Figure 1. *God of War III*.

Here players must successfully navigate Kratos from his starting platform surrounded with spikes protruding from the floor to the lower center portal, but the path leading to the portal and the princess is lined with spikes (instantly killing Kratos upon contact).

Players begin solving this puzzle by double jumping (pressing X-X) and going through the portal on the right (right analog stick) so they come out the upper center portal and land on the platform over the spiked path to the desired portal. Once players land on the platform, the platform lowers itself slightly and the spiked floor lowers itself completely, thus; clearing a path to the desired portal. However, the platform does not lower itself enough to allow players to go through the lower center portal.

Players continue solving this puzzle by double jumping (pressing X-X) from the platform to the ledge on the left (right analog stick) and throwing the switch (pressing R1). Throwing the switch opens the gate on the left and extends platforms to the left and right of the starting platform. Once players return to the starting platform, then dogs appear and players learn how to grab (press circle) and kick them (release circle) instead of killing them with magic or weapons. Players must grab and kick four dogs through the portal to the right, making them appear on the platform, lowering it again and retracting the spiked floor. However, the platform must lower more, so players must go through the portal and appear with the dogs until they are able to enter the lower center portal.

The puzzle presented here represents a rhetorical situation as discussed in the last chapter, but this one is far more complicated than our earlier example in the tutorial. Notice how players are presented with everything needed to progress within that rhetorical situation without breaking immersion. As players work through increasingly difficult puzzles or learn more complex controls, they are demonstrating Elbow's notion about self-selecting and applying organized units of discourse and Gee's Subset Principle, but the progression players experience closely resembles what James Moffett identifies as growth sequences.

Process, Abstraction, and Observation

James Moffett agrees with Elbow about writing process in that it is not a two-step approach, but rather than presenting a version with a student focus, Moffett redirects attention to the instructor and offers an indirect criticism from a composition teacher's perspective if he or she attempts Elbow's solution when he explains how "Understandably, many teachers are looking for something that looks like a syllabus so they can seize on it and apply it directly to their classroom" (3), because "A neatly numbered sequence of directions to the students with some operating instructions for the teacher creates a powerful temptation" (3), and offers an alternative approach using sequential writing assignments in *Active Voice: A Writing Program Across the Curriculum*. Moffett's contribution beginning with this opening statement returns primary responsibility over material and solving the problem with writing to fellow composition instructors, but here we witness a significant change in understanding process because as composition teachers work with designing writing assignments and sequencing them, a previous emphasis on problem-solving fades away and becomes replaced with the beginning of process as we recognize it today: stage-based.

As a result of the changing understanding about process and as increasing numbers of composition instructors adopt Moffett's sequential writing assignment approach, Moffett often received criticism from his critics because many believed his sequential approach sacrificed critical thinking processes, allowing teachers to invest more time in other scholarly activities than teaching. However, as Moffett explains, those outcomes are completely unintentional when he states that "I tried very hard to show how *all* writing expresses ideas, regardless of mode, and how the higher abstractions teachers

look for in familiar essay form derive in stages from lower abstractions formulated more personally and fictionally at first" (4), but none of those intended outcomes are realized because we are more interested in discovering ways to increase efficiency with teaching while conserving personal energy for other scholarly pursuits. For Moffett, composition instructors are supposed to pay more attention to his concepts about abstraction rather than stages and sequence, because the order is intended to represent mental growth over long periods of time with a short-term goal of learning one discourse through experiencing another discourse made accessible when we teach students about observation (5).

Observation and abstraction are two important concepts Moffett designs his writing assignment sequence with process in mind because drawing inspiration for writing from personal observations help students fulfill learning outcomes that "entail increasingly sophisticated and artful decisions; assume a more and more remote audience; lead from vernacular style to literary style, from improvisation to composition; and open up for the student progressively higher realms of abstraction" (6), assisting with easing transitions from introductory composition courses to advanced composition or special topics composition courses. As a multimodal composition genre, video games represent excellent examples of abstraction derived from observation, especially because player progression depends on observation.

As discussed previously, players may not successfully work through a rhetorical situation that a video game presents to them, meaning players are returned to a point before that rhetorical situation and they are given another opportunity to work through it again. As a result, players realize that a different response is needed, but any new attempt

at working through the rhetorical situation is based upon previous attempts or observations and Moffett identifies such actions as abstraction. Moffett provides an example of abstraction with a fictional student example where "A student who writes down everything he is aware of at a given moment, selects out later some perceptions or memories or reflections, then writes these up as a composition for a purpose by organizing them according to *previous* abstractions" (16), forms his current frame of reference derived from short-term memory, but once that student finishes writing up his findings, then that short-term memory becomes a part of long-term memory similar to how rhetors work with rhetorical situations as Consigny and Vatz discussed last chapter. The difference here, though, is that the goal involves helping students discover an individual path through providing materials like course readings and facilitating self-direction so students solve the problem with writing on their own (Moffett 16). Our discussion about writing process with Elbow and Moffett shows us two different perspectives with understanding process as problem-solving, one that is student-centered (Elbow) and one that is instructor-centered (Moffett). However, as Donald M. Murray shows us, a common ground between student and instructor is possible without sacrificing problem-solving approaches.

<div align="center">Process, Play, and Surprise</div>

Murray provides us with a bridge and refines Moffett's writing assignment sequence and stage-based approach to process, but Murray emphasizes a different element from Elbow and Moffett. Murray explains his understanding about writing and its benefits made possible since "writing surprises, instructs, receives, questions, tells its own story, and the writer becomes the reader wondering what will happen next [...] we

write because we surprise ourselves, educate ourselves, entertain ourselves" (7), and although Murray is describing writing, his description is equally applicable to video games, particularly ones with a single-player campaign like *God of War III*. Murray calls attention to writing's ability to surprise and as long as students are able to remain surprised through writing, then students are encouraged to continue writing, much like how gamers are more than willing to invest substantial amounts of time into playing a video game because games are not boring as Gee discussed earlier. However, how writing establishes surprise and maintains it with students is something worth investigating further because if writing and gaming are able to demonstrate results individually, then working with them together seems like a more viable option for multimodal composition courses. An important step is dispelling a shared myth between writing and gaming and that myth is that both activities are easy.

Murray makes an observation about writing he realizes as a result of his research when he says in *A Writer Teaches Writing: A Complete Revision* that "I didn't realize then that the importance of writing lies in the fact that it is not easy, and should not be" (9), which is a shared misconception about gaming because many people who are unfamiliar with gaming or lack experience with games often believe that playing video games is easy and requires little or no practice in order to become proficient. However, from a gamer perspective, players find challenge with games appealing because different games within a series like *God of War* or completely different games like *Call of Duty* offer opportunities to acquire new multimodal literacies and new surprises for players to discover through play.

For example, we discussed how players are rewarded in *God of War III* with new cutscenes depicting events leading to Kratos fulfilling his need for revenge against Zeus, demonstrating an oscillating role players assume between writer and reader as Murray describes here. Although story scenes may be a primary motivator for gamers to play through *God of War III*, players are also rewarded for exploring all possible paths in any stage, often with a longer life bar, magic meter, or item meter in exchange for finding certain hidden treasures. Players discover such treasures through departing from a prescribed path the game provides and sometimes failure results and players must start over from a previous point. Murray, like Gee, believes failure is something preventing us from realizing our full potential as writers and gamers, so "We must learn, to teach writing, the necessity of failure and the advantage of failure. We are afraid to fail; our students are terrified by failure. They have been taught, by teachers and parents, the press, and their own instinct that everything must be done perfectly the first time" (9), and those conditions do not result in good writing or allow good writing to occur. The apparent paralysis students experience due to fears about failure creates non-ideal conditions for good writing to happen, but it also prevents students from understanding that "All writing is experimental in the beginning. It is an attempt to solve a problem, to find a meaning, to discover its own way towards meaning" (9-10), hence why Murray encourages students and instructors to continue using the process model since that model creates common ground between them that may be modified once it is understood.

Murray agrees with Moffett about students needing previous experience to draw from while writing, but for Murray, experience needed to accomplish a writing task is not necessarily gained from observation alone. For Murray, a wider repertoire of information

is necessary because "The writer needs an inventory of facts, observations, details, images, quotations, statistics—all sorts of forms of information—from which to choose when building an effective piece of writing" (10), and such information may be learned through research, but also through seeing relationships among information gained from research, an important ability we are able to help students with because of our advanced training. Murray also agrees with Elbow's concept of writers showing each other movies of their mind, which seems like careful observation about how people respond to writing when listening to a writer share it because writers may imagine and assume another identity and begin understanding how an assumed identity feels and reacts within different situations (15).

The possibility Murray describes here for writers presents us with potential scenarios made possible when students combine research information with surprise, but from this possibility we may derive contemporary composition concepts like audience awareness. The problem with writing remains the same, though, and a stereotypically negative attitude preventing such opportunities from becoming reality among students. Murray agrees with Elbow in that writing for writing's sake is an important part of the solution because "Writing, unlike art, music and sports, has not been a matter of play for our students—at least not since the earliest grades of school. They have to write to reexperience that essential play" (17), and "When they are in the game, we can begin to help them plan so they will write before they write" (17), suggesting that planning is a missing component in the writing process discussion.

Conclusion

Murray introduces planning as an essential organizational stage that helps students perform abstraction as Moffett calls it in *Active Voice* or self-selection as Elbow desires in *Writing Without Teachers* because planning will show students "a way through all the material that the writer has collected, material that both enriches and confuses" (43), but "Planning does not necessarily reveal only one way to write the piece, but several ways that can be tested by a draft" (43), as an important distinction to make about the role of planning in stage-based process because most students believe writing is formulaic and results in one proper response to a task or problem. However, as revealed through examining problem-solving processes involved with different video game genres (First-Person-Shooter and Action-Adventure), students are able to approach problems in gaming with multiple solutions in mind and a similar outcome in college writing is possible as long as we recognize those solutions result from multiple synthesized literacies. Therefore; as composition instructors, we must develop projects that encourage successful results from applying literacies using an association process rather than stage-based process. Adopting association processes help students realize writing is an organic activity involving personal choice, but students must first cast themselves as willing participants as required in post-process composition practices and role-playing video games.

CHAPTER III. GAMING AND ROLE-PLAYING AS LEARNING

Introduction

As composition changes over time, our definitions and qualifications about what constitutes an act of writing are constantly changing and calling upon scholars and instructors to investigate technologies, methodologies, and pedagogies with hopes of discovering innovative approaches. As a result, instructors teaching composition adopt and adapt new discoveries into their classrooms so that writing resonates with students as an important component within higher education, but also as something with potential application beyond composition classes. Rhetoric and composition scholars and instructors who recognize writing as a constantly changing activity and identify with causes such as helping students approach writing similarly classify themselves as post-process and respond to the process movement discussed in previous chapters.

Helen Foster reminds us about Kent's post-process theory and calls our attention toward students and instructors when she explains in *Networked Process: Dissolving Boundaries of Process and Post-Process* that Kent's theory forces us to re-imagine the student-teacher relationship because knowledge is found within ourselves as subjective knowers rather than passive receptacles (9). According to Foster, adopting Kent's theory and successfully re-imagining relationships between students and teachers may result in an extreme outcome because if we abandon Plato and Aristotle as theoretical foundations, then "Traditional writing and literature courses would thus cease to exist and we would work, instead, as mentors who co-construct meaning with students," (9), which seems like a drastic transaction because a systematic change within higher education is necessary and unlikely to happen. Instead of targeting higher education as a whole or

colleges, post-process scholars work with implementing change through first-year composition, but not everyone agrees about what change is needed. Foster summarizes different positions from various camps within post-process theory calling for change as reformation, abolition, programmatic change, or changes at a disciplinary and institutional level forcing a re-evaluation of education as a whole (5). As an important site of contention among post-process scholars, calling for change on a grand scale with first-year composition shares similarities with multimodal composition scholars' calls for integrating technology into composition classrooms and how integration should happen. For example, as presented in an earlier chapter, scholars like Gunther Kress call for an immersive approach and other scholars like Cynthia L. Selfe suggest a gradual approach over time within classrooms.

Foster identifies an important pedagogical point that complements Selfe's scaffolding approach when she re-defined our role from composition instructors into mentors who help students create meaning and such an outcome seems more possible because our classrooms represent a local level capable of yielding significant results. However, I prefer calling our re-defined role an "advanced peer" because "mentor" implies a distance between students and instructors, but "advanced peer" lessens the distance separating students and teachers due to advanced training and experience. A common misconception about students in writing classes is an alleged apathy toward writing in general, but also a seemingly open resistance toward doing course readings, participating in class discussions, and practicing writing through homework assignments or papers, which is a scenario previously explored from an instructor perspective in the last chapter, but revisiting this scenario from a student perspective helps us understand

how to overcome apathy and resistance toward writing when approaching those problems with identity in mind. The following chapter examines student apathy and resistance toward college writing as a problem and identifies a conflict of identity and expectation from student and instructor perspectives; contextualizes cognitive processes associated with gaming and writing as hypertext structures; and offers a solution based upon gaming literacy practices players use while playing a Role-Playing-Game (RPG). The following chapter uses *Fallout: New Vegas* as a case study example in order to illustrate what instructors might learn from RPGs.

<div align="center">*Fallout: New Vegas*</div>

Fallout: New Vegas is a video game produced by Bethesda Softworks available on multiple gaming platforms (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC) and *New Vegas* is the fourth installment in an ongoing series. The game is classified as an RPG, but a more accurate classification is a hybrid genre with elements from First-Person-Shooter (FPS) and RPG. *Fallout* games present players with a post-apocalyptic future resulting from nuclear warfare, and players assume the role of a character who emerge from a fallout shelter called a Vault. RPGs like *Fallout: New Vegas* provide opportunities to create that onscreen character as an avatar and customize that avatar's physical appearance, mental traits, and skills through assigning a specific amount of points on a periodic basis. The character players become in *Fallout: New Vegas* is a Courier who is shot in the head and left for dead out in the Mojave Wasteland while delivering a package. The Courier is rescued, and he or she must track down his or her killer, recover the lost package, and learn why the package is important. RPGs often feature a central narrative players must work through in order to complete the game, but unlike other video game genres, an

emphasis is not placed upon working through the game in a linear fashion. Instead, RPGs focus upon exploring a virtual world and completing quests players discover through interacting with people or finding locations. An RPG such as *Fallout: New Vegas* offers numerous quests that are not associated with the central narrative (called sidequests) and completing those optional sidequests help players improve their avatar because players are rewarded for doing more than the bare minimum.

<p align="center">The Problem with Writing Revisited</p>

As previously discussed, instructors possess advanced training from graduate school and that training allows them to value reading, discussion, and writing, but most students lack those values at the start of their undergraduate career. An incoming freshman faces an exceptional challenge from higher education because he or she is one who must "learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (60), as David Bartholomae describes in "Inventing the University," especially when compared with experiences from high school. For Bartholomae, an unintended distance between students and instructors is created because instructors are ones who accept and successfully complete that challenge, and students are ones who will accept and complete that challenge, but higher education also demands different expectations from undergraduate students. Bartholomae continues explaining how accepting and completing higher education's challenge starts when students appropriate or are appropriated by our specialized discourse through a relationship we may interpret as give-and-take or trial-and-error (61).

The reason interpreting such a relationship as a dialectic is understandable is because instructors imagine an ideal student who possesses abilities Bartholomae describes above, but also someone who is able to write from a position of privelege while balancing personal motives and reader expectations in writing (64-65). However, students imagine a different persona for themselves and different expectations are associated with that role, which is why students seek a balance between personal history, convention, and discipline history through imitation (Bartholomae 61). As composition instructors, we find ourselves in a unique position to help students achieve that balance, but we must understand what role our students cast themselves because alleged apathy or resistance may result from a conflict of roles within an unfamiliar system.

James Berlin echoes similar sentiments with respect toward teaching composition when he says in "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" that "Rhetorical theories differ from each other in the way writer, reality, audience, and language are conceived—both as separate units and in the way the units relate to each other," (766), which are concepts discussed previously when we situated playing video games as working through multimodal rhetorical situations. However, Berlin also hints at an important element involved with learning composition that we recognize as identifying relationships between ideas drawn from sources and then describing and explaining those idea relationships to diverse audiences. The process involved with being able to identify, describe, and explain relationships with ideas and then use them to make new meaning is most students experience difficulty and frustration expressed as open resistance. Berlin recognizes such a teaching scenario and describes the experience from a student perspective as one that consists of "a different world with different rules about

what can be known, how it can be known, and how it can be communicated," (766), which is why composition instructors are "tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it" (766). As a result, students express apathy because they understand writing in a first-year composition course as a mechanical skill able to get them through classes and advance their potential professions after graduation (766). As an alternative to seeing teaching from a privileged position as implied through a power difference between instructors and students, Berlin prefers reimagining our purpose as composition instructors as one in which "we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill that is meant as a simple complement to the more important studies of other areas. We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering and making sense of it" (766), which is a goal we strive to achieve as instructors. However, something preventing us from fulfilling that goal is our students' diverse identity in a constant struggle to become one authentic self.

For Berlin, much like Bartholomae, our students' identity is a social construction formed from interactions among individuals, communities, and environments, but as Berlin points out in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," an identity that is also unstable because personal histories and cultural moments also influence identity creation (489). Our students develop their own histories and experience their own cultural moments within composition courses, but such exposure is often limited since expression happens through discussion or interaction with other students during group work, and receiving exposure consistently contributes more toward students creating a personal identity. For example, an RPG-player playing a game like *Fallout: New Vegas* learns quickly how his or her Courier is impacted through interactions with individuals,

communities, and environments because a player's actions positively or negatively affect the Courier's reputation among different factions populating the Mojave Wasteland.

The game presents players with two primary communities (New California Republic and Caesar's Legion) and several minor communities associated with them such as the Brotherhood of Steel. If a player completes quests issued to his or her Courier from characters affiliated with New California Republic (NCR), Caesar's Legion, or Brotherhood of Steel, then the Courier's reputation increases with respect toward that community because "the ways in which the subject understands and is affected by material conditions is circumscribed by socially-devised definitions, by the community in which the subject lives" (489). In exchange communities might offer the Courier special services such as being able to radio for help during combat from nearby New California Republic soldiers because "The community in turn is influenced by the subject and the material conditions of the moment" (Berlin 489). However, if a player completes quests for an opposing community such as NCR's rivals the Brotherhood of Steel, then again the Courier's reputation improves with the Brotherhood of Steel but the Courier's reputation with NCR is diminished. Another important aspect is how the Courier is dressed when players encounter people in the environment because other characters may react with hostility toward the Courier if he or she is dressed like an opposing faction and players must kill the hostile character or be killed.

An essential component to successfully managing reputation for a *Fallout: New Vegas* player is agency as completing quests triggers positive or negative results from different communities, but supplying agency to students in a composition classroom proves difficult because of their alleged apathy toward writing in general. The completed

quest outcomes are presented after the game considers whether or not the Courier is presenting a positive or negative identity with a specific faction and then figures whether or not the Courier's actions are consistent with that identity. As composition instructors, we assess whether or not our students' actions are consistent with our imagined ideal undergraduate students' identity, as demonstrated through things like whether or not students read assign readings, participate in class discussions, and practices writing abilities independently through homework assignments. A student who is performing those actions successfully develops a positive classroom reputation and might be rewarded because classmates might request assistance from them during workshops. However, a student who is not performing those actions develops a negative classroom reputation and such an outcome may be unintentional. A student's classroom reputation (much like the Courier's in-game reputation) is salvageable, but often requires changes in action over long periods of time. For example, actions like reading, discussing, and practicing help overturn a negative reputation in a composition classroom, much like completing more quests for a desired faction in *Fallout: New Vegas* improves the Courier's reputation. However, students may not realize their actions must be changed and we believe students who do not understand that part are apathetic.

Apathy represents a chronic problem composition instructors face whenever we teach composition courses because our students appear not interested, unwilling to invest time and energy into writing as an activity, or refuse to see composition as anything other than a hurdle for them to overcome in order to graduate. However, maybe our students' behavior is not true apathy, but rather an acted out reaction against higher education and its current pedagogical practices. James Paul Gee addresses apathy and calls it boredom

in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* when he describes

educators' reactions toward video games, saying "Educators often bemoan the fact that

video games are compelling and school is not. They say that children must learn to

practice skills ('skill and drill') outside of meaningful contexts and outside their own

goals" (66), and approaches adopting a similar "skill and drill" outlook are ones

composition rebels against. Gee explains further with his testimonies about students who

respond well when exposed to such pedagogical practices and admits students do find

such approaches helpful, but "usually because they trust that it will lead them to

accomplish their goals and have success later in life. In turn, they believe this thanks to

their trust in various authority figures around them (family and teachers) who have told

them this," (66), which sounds much like Berlin's understanding about this scenario

playing out in composition classrooms.

As a result of seeing themselves like cogs working within a machine, students

deny themselves access to their full potential because as Berlin mentions, "students begin

to see the economic and social system that renders them powerless as an innate and

unchangeable feature of the natural order" (490), which leads them to believe change is

an impossible outcome. Thus, "they support the very practices that victimize them—

complying in their alienation from their work, their peers, and their very selves" (490),

and continues through their college experience and manifests itself as apathy or resistance

because students refuse understanding college as anything more than a continuation of

high school. Our goal, then, must be as Berlin cites Ira Shor stating that "students must be

taught to identify the ways in which control over their own lives has been denied them,

and denied in such a way that they have blamed themselves for their powerlessness,"

which begins through creating a liberating classroom (Berlin 490). For Berlin, liberatory classrooms are ones that treat learning as a dialogue or transaction between students and instructors rather than an investment from instructor to student because then us composition teachers and our students work together in order to shape content and create study materials (491). However, before we look outside of our classrooms, we must first help students recast themselves in our classrooms.

Our students might not willingly adopt identities as ideal undergraduate students, especially within a composition classroom, but students willingly adopt a different identity whenever they play any video game classified as a Role-Playing Game (RPG). An important misconception about students casting themselves into roles within our classroom is that only two identities are present (student and instructor). Actually, as James Paul Gee's theory about gamer identities helps us see, three different identities are at stake and the third identity becomes apparent when a player and an avatar work together within a game. If we consider how a player works through RPGs, then a cognitive process resembling hypertext structure reveals itself and a return to problem-solving process (the first element of my gaming pedagogy) is demonstrated and adds learning through association as the second element of my gaming pedagogy.

As a reward, players receive experience points (XP) each time an action or quest is completed successfully, and XP contributes toward leveling up their character, which allows players to help their avatar improve with different skills. As a result, players become willing participants and readily adopt a prescribed role whenever they play an RPG like *Fallout: New Vegas*. A similar outcome is possible when students come into our composition classrooms as long as both students and instructors cast themselves

properly and avoid conflicting expectations as much as possible. Therefore, I propose that instructors cast themselves as advanced peers because doing so helps students feel comfortable with the role of ideal undergraduate student we imagine as instructors, but without sacrificing their own identities as Bartholomae clarified earlier. But even as we explore possibilities with casting ourselves as advanced peers, we must be cautious because such attempts often result in failure.

John Trimbur's "Taking the Social Turn: Teaching Writing Post-Process" identifies two problems compromising instructors as advanced peer from being a potential solution. One problem involves attempting to help students feel empowered and to take ownership over their writing. Trimbur points out that this goal fails because "students often reinscribed the authority that process teachers were trying to vacate" (110) and students worked on developing an "authorial persona of self-revelatory personal essays written in a decidedly non-academic style" (110). Foster adds that this goal also oversimplifies writing as an act and allows teachers to "assume that they could inhabit some culturally pristine space from which to bestow an authentic language upon their students" (10), which also contributes toward understanding where instructor expectations are imagined and a distance between students and instructors originates. Another problem Trimbur addresses is when instructors attempt becoming a facilitator or co-learner because successfully casting us as one of these roles is done through sacrificing teacher authority. As a result, students realize their writing is exchanged with instructors for a grade and elements such as "sincerity" and "authenticity" are rewarded through imitation because students are "learning a genre their teachers had failed to name" (110), which makes critical transparency with respect toward pedagogy more

culprit than us relinquishing authority. An important model of how expectations and roles might be mediated between instructors and students is considering how students as players adopt a role in *Fallout: New Vegas*.

<div align="center">Avatars, Students, and "Students"</div>

Avatars are individual representations of players in video games such as *Fallout: New Vegas*, often allowing users individual customizations, including possible configurations for hair and facial features or dress options. The customizations available to players also consist of choices about gender, name, body shape, height, and build among others. Players modify their avatar using a series of menus and adjustable scrollbars reflecting choices made about appearance such as long or short hair and light or dark skin. An avatar, then, may be understood as a "text" resulting from avatar creation, which constitutes a multimodal act of composition since text and image are synthesized in order to produce an avatar.

Our inclination toward understanding avatars as composed "texts" is understandable as Johndon Johnson-Eilola explains in "Negative Spaces: From Production to Connection in Composition" because "We value connection, but only secondarily. We still think of the text as a relatively coherent body of information with determinable bounds produced by an author of one sort or another" (455). Notice how Johnson-Eilola calls our attention toward textual production resulting from an act of composition with an emphasis upon process. The desire for procedures and steps toward a goal like constructing an avatar or writing a text is one we cannot escape regardless of medium, but we may see an emerging relationship along process lines, which Johnson-Eilola describes by saying "We teach writing as a process, but primarily as a way to map

more clearly a final product: the text, the best draft, produced at the end of the writer's struggle to make meaning. We want to point to *something*, written by *someone*" (455). Avatar creation reflects that outcome because players most often design their avatar so it resembles them in reality. Representing a player within a virtual space as different customizable parts in synthesis and created through choices a player makes during customization gives players a role and an identity to identify with while playing the game. As a digital representation, avatars created such as those found in *Fallout: New Vegas* allow players to express themselves in a visual and virtual space, but the relationship between a player and an avatar is deceptively simple, as James Paul Gee argues.

Gee approaches avatar creation and identity as crucial elements involved with encouraging learning because "All learning in all semiotic domains requires taking on a new identity and forming bridges from one's old identities to the new one" (45-46), which is made possible because "Video games recruit identities and encourage identity work and reflection on identities in clear and powerful ways" (45-46), using linear narrative aspects creatively in a tutorial. Previously I discussed how games like *God of War III* and *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* provide players with a tutorial at the beginning of the game that helps orient players to the game's controls, and as a result players work through a narrative simultaneously. *Fallout: New Vegas* presents players with a tutorial as well, and its tutorial advances plot, but a player's interactions with onscreen menus featuring different decisions expressed as dialogue options or decision descriptions also help with developing his or her avatar's initial statistics associated with traits and skills needed to complete different quests in the game.

For example, avatar creation in *Fallout: New Vegas* involves managing the Courier's primary characteristics (Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, and Luck). Each characteristic is associated with different skills the Courier may possess while playing the game such as overall hit points, increasing how many skill points may be distributed when the Courier levels up, or increasing how many actions the Courier may perform during combat. If a player desires his or her Courier to be one who is focused upon defense, then he or she might assign more points toward Intelligence or Endurance because those characteristics impact the Courier's proficiency with skills like Medicine, Health, and resistance to poison and radiation. However, if a player desires the Courier to be more focused upon offense, then investing more points toward characteristics such as Agility, Perception, or Luck is helpful because those characteristics are associated with proficiency using Guns, Energy Weapons, Explosives, and makes critical hits easier to score in combat. Another possibility is improving in all skills equally (through investing only in Luck) or desiring a Courier who is as non-violent as possible. If a player feels a non-violent Courier is important, then devoting more points toward Charisma is helpful because the Courier's Speech skill is associated with that characteristic. All of these decisions assist with how many points are initially invested into different skill proficiencies the Courier possesses from the beginning of the game and managing skills is the second part involved with creating an avatar in *Fallout: New Vegas*.

Once players establish their Courier's characteristics, then skills also factor into avatar creation because skills determine what type of Courier the player is playing with at the start of the game. Players are awarded a specific number of skill points whenever they

level up and those points are assigned to skills, but no more than 100 points may be assigned to any skill. A Courier may develop proficiency in thirteen different skills (Barter, Energy Weapons, Explosives, Guns, Lockpick, Medicine, Melee, Repair, Science, Sneak, Speech, Survival, Unarmed). As described earlier, a player's desires for their Courier is important here as well because different skills allow offensive, defensive, or non-violent solutions to present themselves at appropriate times in the game. For example, Couriers who are more interested in offense focus upon skills like Guns or Energy Weapons while Couriers who are more invested in defense focus on skills like Medicine, but certain quests might be more difficult to finish. A non-violent Courier is one who becomes invested in a more diverse number of skills such as Lockpick, Speech, or Science, but might struggle with hostile encounters. A student is faced with similar decisions to make about him or herself with respect to personal desires about learning to write and what possibilities are presented in composition courses.

For example, students who commit themselves to a single overall desire expressed as learning how to write or improve personal writing ability in general often experience difficulty with subscribing to learning writing through process pedagogy because of its scaffolding nature. If students (much like a player whose Courier focuses upon offense or defense) commit themselves to learning select writing abilities, then successful results with holistic assessment becomes extremely challenging because those students are unable to address diverse audiences or approach different rhetorical situations with writing using diverse writing abilities since their understanding about writing is too narrow (much like how an offense or defense Courier cannot complete certain quests). However, if students commit themselves to understanding writing as a culmination of

different writing abilities and realize that each new writing ability builds from a previously learned ability, then they struggle less with holistic assessment because they understand writing within a much larger context and possess a diverse repertoire of writing abilities (much like a non-violent Courier invested in multiple abilities rather than one or two). As demonstrated through our discussion here, avatar creation is a diverse process, but it does represent an intersection of expectations and personal histories between players and avatars. Initially, we might believe only two identities are involved with playing video games as we believe only two identities are present in our composition classrooms (students and instructors), but Gee describes three possible identities derived from a dialectic relationship between a player and an avatar and we similarly find three identities at work within a composition classroom.

    For Gee, a "virtual identity" is one's self-representation within a virtual world and that virtual self possesses certain abilities and limitations when compared with other identities such as other characters or enemies within the same virtual space. If we recall our earlier scenario with students and instructors in a classroom, then we find a parallel example through considering the ideal undergraduate student as a virtual identity that I identify here as "student." The "student" an instructor imagines results from fulfillment of his or her expectations with respect toward the university as Bartholomae described earlier, but this is an imagined identity, much like a virtual one players experience in video games.

    Another identity is the virtual identity's counterpart called a "real-world identity" who is identified as the player working through a game using hardware like a controller, TV, gaming console, or similar equipment. Our composition students are perfect

examples of real-world identities because as Bartholomae pointed out earlier, our students possess individual histories and other unique characteristics. However, instead of playing through a video game, students are writing papers using materials we select such as textbooks or course packs rather than controllers and consoles. Both virtual and real-world identities in video games share a symbiotic relationship because an avatar may possess abilities and limitations due to game design, but an avatar is dependent upon a player in order to demonstrate those abilities since a player uses a controller as an instrument to interact with the virtual world. Most video games only focus upon this relationship between virtual and real-world identities, but RPGs like *Fallout: New Vegas* allow Gee's third identity (projective) involving how an avatar develops beyond its initial statistics over time to appear and interact with virtual and real-world identities (49-51).

Gee describes a projective identity as one resulting from the virtual and real-world identities forming an intersection consisting of an avatar's abilities and limitations along with a player's desires about what personality and history an avatar experiences. The identities become shared because "Since these aspirations are *my* desires for Bead Bead [Gee's avatar in *Arcanum*], the projective identity is both mine and hers, and it is a space in which I can transcend both her limitations and my own" (51). Exploring this projective identity is where a potential solution to student apathy and resistance lies because instructors are able to help students become "students" we imagine.

All three identities involved with playing video games are revisited and clarified when Gee discusses them again in *Why Video Games are Good for Your Soul*, but instead of locating each identity with respect toward the gaming experience, Gee provides insight into how relationships are formed when a virtual identity and real-world identity make

contributions to forming a projective identity. Gee recognizes that avatars possess specific abilities and players also possess specific abilities, but struggled previously with describing and explaining how both sets of abilities become hybrid once a player begins using his or her avatar in the game, other than calling it a projective identity. Gee redefines that relationship and claims those identities are mediated through "gaming expertise" (42), which is represented as a player's previous experiences with playing video games along with an avatar's prescribed abilities. The combined identity once known as a projective identity then becomes an "authentic professional" and that perspective is one our students may adopt if we help them combine their student and "student" identity through encouraging them to develop writing expertise (52). As a result, students successfully become student-"student," or as Bartholomae describes an undergraduate "who can successfully manipulate an audience (or, to use less pointed language, the writer who can accommodate her motives to her reader's expectations) […] who can both imagine and write from a position of privelege" (64-65), and do so with discretion.

However, creating an identity as a writer proves itself as challenging as creating an avatar in *Fallout: New Vegas* because both identities are malleable over time. Johnson-Eilola proposes a possible solution resulting from contextualizing composition as a creative act, and something similar happens whenever players customize an avatar in *Fallout: New Vegas* through making decisions about how to distribute skill points earned whenever they level up. However, deciding what an avatar looks like or how it behaves within a virtual world is one cognitive process involved with playing RPGs, but a different cognitive process is involved when we consider how players solve problems

with their avatar. Another important process involved with RPGs is developing an understanding about how players complete quests because the cognitive process closely resembles multimodal literacy as represented in hypertext and such activity is an example of creative problem solving.

<center>Navigating Hypertext, Problem Solving, and Completing Quests</center>

A linear cognitive approach is an expectation most students develop over time and maintain whenever they come into our composition classrooms. However, because writing possesses its own genre characteristics guiding usage and effective communication with a diverse number of meanings and possibilities, students' linear expectations are shattered. John Slatin describes linear expectations as a result from interpreting texts as unchangeable objects in "Reading Hypertext: Order and Coherence in a New Medium" stating "because a text looks like a permanent thing, because readers expect to begin at the beginning and end at the end and to know which is which […] because readers expect to get from beginning to end *via* a clearly-marked route" (156), so that "Much of his or her effort goes into figuring out the correct sequence for the material that's going to be presented" (156), and students struggle because writing (especially multimodal composition) allows more than one solution to any problem. For Slatin, writers are unable to see into a reader's mind and determine what a reader is thinking at any moment, but through combining persuasion and communication, writers are able to help readers make predictions about sequential events or else "they start to feel lost, which makes them start to feel nervous, which makes them want to put down what they're reading" (156), and RPGs like *Fallout: New Vegas* address those concerns when presenting players with a quest to complete.

Completing quests in *Fallout: New Vegas* and other RPGs is an activity players invest significant amounts of time into accomplishing because RPGs require at least 50 hours committed to finish the entire game. As mentioned earlier, RPGs present players with a main quest narrative, such as the Courier seeking revenge against his or her killer, but also optional sidequests players receive from characters he or she discovers while working through the main quest. A player may spend at least an hour or two completing any quest in *Fallout: New Vegas*, and video games, like writing, somehow avoid Slatin's scenario described above where readers abandon a text or stop playing a game. Therefore, quests in RPGs like *Fallout: New Vegas* usually begin with a single objective, which is often finding a location and doing something simple.

For example, one NCR sidequest players may attempt is called "There Stands the Grass!" which is issued to the Courier from Dr. Thomas Hildern at Camp McCarran. Initially, what starts as a simple single objective expands out into a network of objectives that are related, much like how web pages are linked together through hyperlinks. The players' solutions result from them networking specific bits of information with their avatar's expertise as Gee described earlier using the Courier's inventory and skillset. The player is tasked with entering Vault 22 and downloading data from a terminal inside. If the player successfully completes a given quest objective, then he or she is presented with a new objective until the quest is completed, and XP is rewarded from the character who issued the quest. Completing the quest linearly results in two objectives being accomplished and a minimal amount of XP rewarded as follows:

- Enter Vault 22 and download the research data

- Return to Dr. Hildern at Camp McCarran with the research data

However, because RPGs reward its players for exploring and gathering information through interacting with other characters before making decisions or completing quests, more objectives may reveal themselves and players spend more time working through the quest in exchange for more XP in the end. The difference between receiving a minimum and maximum amount of XP is determined through whether or not players approach quest objectives linearly like lists or as networked nodes. As players investigate quest objectives within RPGs, players discover their quest objectives change, which requires revision in order to complete the quest and receive the most amount of XP.

An RPG player understands revision as an action demanding more time invested into completing a quest and willingly pursues completing the quest anyway. The reason players actively pursue quest completion despite the game requiring more time and effort is because players accept a gaming experience as something malleable. However, students struggle with understanding writing as a similarly changeable experience, as evidenced through decisions made during revision. Students might focus on making local revisions rather than working with global revisions and returning to the local revisions later on. In exchange for addressing minimal revisions, then, composition instructors reward students with fewer points as RPG players are rewarded minimal amounts of XP for completing quests without investigating the objectives further. If we return to our "There Stands the Grass!" quest, then we witness players performing local and global revisions through play because both actions are understood as networked rather than unrelated independent abilities. For example, if the player interacts with Dr. Williams before leaving Dr. Hildern's lab, then he or she learns that another character named Keely

may be hurt or dead while attempting the same quest. The Courier may investigate and new optional objectives are added to the quest as follows:

- Enter Vault 22 and download the research data

- (Optional) Find Keely, a researcher who has gone missing at Vault 22

- Return to Dr. Hildern at Camp McCarran with the research data

Once players find and enter Vault 22, their decisions about which task to complete first positively or negatively influences the quest's outcome, depending on whether or not the Courier downloads the information first or rescues Keely. The door leading into the room containing the research data is open unless players find Keely first.

For positive results while completing this quest, the Courier needs to download the information first and rescue Keely because once players rescue her, she adds more optional objectives to the quest and the Courier must help her ignite gas on the fifth floor without dying in the fire. Keely provides players with new quest objectives as instructors give students specific revision tasks through comments and those revisions call for a written response from students. Here is where choice and problem-solving become most important because the game does not tell players how to ignite the gas other than using grenades Keely provides (if players listen through her entire speech). Similarly, as composition instructors, we do not necessarily tell students exactly how to solve revision problems we notice in student writing. However, our students possess specific writing abilities to assist them with revision, and a Courier may use items in his or her inventory to complete quest objectives. For instance, once players arrive on the fifth floor, they have different options for igniting the gas, not just grenades. The Courier may ignite the gas using grenades, plasma weapons, sticks of dynamite, or using C4 and a detonator,

which are solutions available if players successfully realize those items solve the problem of igniting the gas and they have them in their inventory. Another important part about successfully accomplishing this quest is realizing that the room with the research data is the only room on the entire floor that will protect the Courier from the fire after igniting the gas until the flames extinguish themselves. The final completed quest objectives look like this then:

- Enter Vault 22 and download the research data found there

- (Optional) Find Keely, a researcher who has gone missing at Vault 22

- Meet Keely at her base of operations on the second level

- Find the vents Keely is pumping gas through and somehow ignite the gas

- Return to Keely and let her know the spores have been purged

- Return to Camp McCarran and tell Dr. Williams that Keely is safe

- Return to Dr. Hildern at Camp McCarran with the research data

The last thing to consider before leaving "There Stands the Grass!" is realizing none of the optional revisions are possible unless the original quest objectives change and that change forces players to continuously revisit the original quest objectives. The ripple effect revision creates is another concept students struggle with, but this struggle is related with whether or not students understand writing as something with changing properties, especially when research is involved. Incorporating research into the writing process closely resembles players discovering new quest objectives because new information learned from sources establishes new nodes within an already existing network of knowledge, thus creating a structure resembling hypertext.

George P. Landow identifies networked web pages as a hypertext, which he defines in *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization* as "text composed of blocks of text—what Barthes terms a *lexia*—and the electronic links that join them" (3), a definition that challenges traditional literacy practices associated with print media. For Landow, hypertext represents an alternative medium to print allowing users to interact with texts through choice, demonstrated whenever users click on an available hyperlink. The role of choice is most important for understanding how literacy practices change because as Landow explains, "Although you cannot change my text, you can write a response and then link it to my document. You thus have chosen your reading path, and […] you, like all readers, will choose individualized paths […]" (3), because granting a user choice about which web page to visit next or choice about which other possibilities may be linked to an existing hypertext challenges traditional print reading methods developed from engaging with print materials.

Landow's hypertext theory may seem like a linear understanding about online culture because of its relationship with traditional literacy practices mediated through a computer, but if we consider Landow's theory as a cognitive process, then we find a strong similarity with an invention strategy our composition students may already be familiar with: clustering. As numerous composition textbooks show us, clustering (or mapping) is an invention technique that begins with a central idea and other ideas that may or may not be related with that central idea, which is represented visually as nodes protruding from the idea being considered on paper. A student is able to consider and reconsider different supporting ideas freely, much like how users click a hyperlink within a web page and instantly find him or herself reading a related text, joined in concept by

the hyperlink. The web page a user originates from and all other linked web pages expose a user to various sources of information and a user creates meaning from understanding how a hyperlink relates different sources of information.

Landow presents nine different linking techniques and each linking method presents an increasing amount of choice to a user, which is important because as Landow describes, "Full hypertextuality in a reading environment depends, I argue, on the multisequentiality and the reader choices created not only by attaching multiple links to a single lexia but by attaching them to a single anchor or site within a lexia" (15). This is a point other scholars interpret as an opportunity for users to become co-authors when engaged with a hypertext as Espen Aarseth expands Landow's concept in *Cybertext* (15). Aarseth attempts clarifying Landow's theory about hypertext saying that "The activity of hypertext reading is often portrayed, in contrast to codex reading, as a kind of co-authorship, with the reader creating her own text as she goes along" (77) and because readers create a text through navigating hyperlinks "The engaged hypertext quickly turns into a dense, multicursal labyrinth, and the reader becomes not so much lost as caught, imprisoned by the repeating, circular paths and his own impotent choices" (91). A misunderstanding about hypertext and how users interact with hyperlinked examples is revealed here because Aarseth interprets a user's hypertext reading experience as one based upon creating a text, but creation differs from choice, which is something Landow recognizes as a misinterpretation when he addresses general misconceptions associated with hypertext clarifying that

> Hypertext, which creates an active, even intrusive reader, carries this convergence
> of activities one step closer to completion; but in so doing, it infringes on the

power of the writer, removing some of it and granting it to the reader. These shifts

in the relations of author and reader do not, however, imply that hypertext

automatically makes readers into authors or co-authors—except, that is, in

hypertext environments that give readers the ability to add links and texts to what

they read (125).

Nevertheless, scholars such as Aarseth and others who similarly interpreted

Landow's hypertext concept as one allowing users to become co-authors eventually

discovered new media as a genre deserving investigation, beginning with Aarseth's

Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature. Aarseth borrows hypertext elements from

Landow, but Aarseth places an emphasis upon exploring possibilities for investigating

digital spaces rather than understanding how lexias may be electronically connected

together through hyperlinks.

Aarseth prefers identifying some hypertexts as examples of "cybertext" instead,

which he describes saying

A cybertext is a machine for the production of variety of expression […] when

you read from a cybertext, you are constantly reminded of inaccessible strategies

and paths not taken, voices not heard. Each decision will make some parts of the

text more, and others less, accessible, and you may never know the exact results

of your choices; that is, exactly what you missed (3).

Here Aarseth provides an alternative approach toward understanding Landow's hypertext

concept because choice is not represented as multiple pathways stemming from a

particular anchor point, but rather, pathways demanding exploration from a reader or user

navigating a virtual space. Aarseth presents us with a few actions made possible if we

reconsider a user's experience with cybertext as an exploration because "the cybertext *is* a game-world or world-game; it *is* possible to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths in these texts, not metaphorically, but through the topological structures of the textual machinery" (4), which suggests readers may be able to traverse a text using hypertext practices. Landow acknowledges Aarseth's use of ergodic literature, but like hypertext, ergodic literature is problematic "since it's not clear that the reader's 'eye movement' and turning pages, which result from intellectual effort, are in fact trivial—a point Aarseth himself seems to accept when he emphasizes Barthes's point that readers can skip about a page (78) (Landow 42). Therefore, Aarseth's contribution is not best represented as an investigation into textual literacy practices, but as an examination of possibilities within a virtual space instead. Aarseth offers a good example when discussing how users participate in a Multi-User Dungeon (MUD).

Aarseth explains why users are attracted to a MUD or its contemporary counterpart an RPG, attributing its appeal to different motivations driving a user's interaction with a MUD, including "The use of anonymity, multiple nicknames, identity experiments (e.g., gender-swapping), and a generally ludic atmosphere suggests that the participants are out not to strengthen their position in society but rather to escape (momentarily) from it through the creation of an ironic mirror society that will allow any symbolic pleasure imaginable" (144), which allows users to interact with other users and receive feedback from those other users.

As a real-world MUD, our composition classrooms represent a space allowing students to learn about their eventual "student" identity and practice becoming student-"student" with assistance from composition instructors through scaffolding writing

abilities intended to help students cast themselves appropriately into the student-"student" role. As mentioned previously, one potential benefit from successfully becoming student-"student" is a good reputation among peers and instructors and a similar benefit is available to users in MUDs.

Aarseth claims that a user's reception is based upon his or her familiarity with an MUD because "If the player is experienced, well known to the other players, and familiar with the MUD, the type of interaction might be very different from that of a new, inexperienced, and incognito player" (152) which are factors remaining true within currently available console video games.

Conclusion

For Aarseth, a MUD acts as a window and a user's experience is based upon how familiar a user is with operating functions within a MUD environment, but no explanation is given about how a user gains familiarity with a MUD. A user interacts with a MUD as a virtual space using an interface made possible by technology represented as an input device (keyboard and mouse) and an output device (monitor) and a similar situation is presented when players play games using a controller and gaming console (input devices) with televisions (output devices). If we accept MUDs as virtual spaces granting users access through an interface made possible through technology and our classrooms are real-world MUDs, then we must consider what interface our students use to interact with writing outside of the classroom. A primary resource readily available to students and composition instructors is a composition handbook, which is a text supposedly written for students and intended to be used by students, but most students resist doing assigned readings. Initially, that problem may be attributed to students

casting themselves in the wrong role as discussed here. However, as I will discuss in the next chapter, another problem may be composition handbooks in general since students are reluctant to refer to it for help, but gamers do not hesitate to consult video game strategy guides for help.

CHAPTER IV. GAMING AS A STRATEGY GUIDE APPROACH TO

COMPOSITION

Introduction

As composition instructors, we are tasked with a unique and absolutely necessary challenge because we must help students learn about writing in college, which starts with first-year composition courses and continues throughout our students' undergraduate careers. The students who enter our composition courses are ones who are unfamiliar with or inexperienced with college environments and a significant challenge for them is learning about college and its expectations as well as discovering their own place within that context. However, as I previously discussed, our role as college writing teachers allows us opportunities created within our classrooms to assist students with finding an appropriate identity and improving their writing in college.

Our challenge as instructors teaching writing involves assisting students with learning about college writing processes and conventions, but becoming proficient with writing is an activity that requires students to practice independently outside of our classrooms. As a response toward this challenge, composition instructors prepare writing courses offered each semester by proposing new courses, creating new lessons, writing new handouts, revising old materials, or revising reading selections. All of these preparations are intended to help students learn important concepts and abilities associated with college writing and encourage them to continue working with them outside class meetings, but students often resist practicing with writing and reading assigned selections.

The resistance toward reading and practicing writing in composition courses is related to how content is handled from an instructor and student perspective, but also with resources made available to students, such as handbooks. The following chapter provides an overview about how content in composition courses differs from content in other college classes because an emphasis is placed upon creating information along with analyzing and interpreting information; a textual analysis of three different composition handbooks with widespread adoption identifies problems preventing students from accessing and consulting them while writing; and a strategy guide alternative to handbooks based upon how video game players use video game strategy guides while playing.

<p style="text-align: center;">The Problem with Content</p>

For most college courses, content consists of important information related to a specific course acquired through readings, handouts, lectures, experiments, or discussions, and student participation is expected. Students actively engage with these acquisition methods and become proficient in retaining learned information from different sources because instructors periodically test how much information students are retaining using some evaluation method. However, under these conditions, learning information happens because material is being transmitted from one source (teacher, textbook, classmate) to another (student) in a linear fashion from one class meeting to another. A distance between students and instructors begins because an instructor's responsibility within this context is supplying necessary information. The responsibility of communicating information causes problems because as Paulo Freire describes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless,

static, compartmentalized, and predictable" (57), or a teacher "expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students" (57), and an instructor may be unaware of the distance being created because he or she must "cover" material in most class meetings. If an instructor accepts responsibility to "cover" important information, then he or she teaches students using narration, which Freire explains as something that "leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content" and students become "containers" or "receptacles" requiring "filling" from an instructor by default (58).

For Freire, an instructor performs self-assessment under these conditions based upon how well he or she fills those receptacles and students perform self-assessment based upon their willingness to be filled (58). However, prescribing an amount of willingness to students learning within such an environment and using it as an assessment criteria is misleading as Freire describes it here because "willingness" suggests that students choose whether or not they absorb material like a sponge, which is not how contemporary composition instructors teach writing. Freire identified classroom conditions we are discussing here and labeled it a "banking" concept of education because students are only able to receive, store, or file learned information; therefore, as Freire explains:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat (58).

The reason most college teachers benefit from presenting material under these conditions is because content within those classes is being learned as factual information. Students

learning material within educational environments implementing Freire's "banking"

concept are denied opportunities to develop critical thinking abilities because "The more

students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical

consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of

that world" (Freire 60). Those students experience great difficulty with writing since

composition courses require critical thinking and creating meaning rather than simply

comprehending information. Unfortunately, our students are unable to realize their

struggles with writing result from underdeveloped critical thinking and inexperience with

meaning making because many believe learning is a one-way transaction between them

and their instructors. As an attempt to assist students with independent learning within

our composition classrooms, instructors select handbooks and assign readings from them,

but a textual analysis of three specific handbooks (chosen because all of them are widely

adopted) reveals problems deserving our attention.

<div align="center">The Problems with Handbooks: A Brief Textual Analysis</div>

Composition handbooks make themselves readily available to writing teachers

and almost every major textbook publisher offers at least one of them bearing their name

on it. Each year, new handbooks and new editions of already existing handbooks are

featured at significant academic conferences devoted to rhetoric and composition as a

field, which are often accompanied by small marketing teams making themselves

available to answer questions from conference attendees. For the purposes of this chapter,

I am only considering three different handbooks, but all three of them enjoy wide

adoption among English departments in our country, and all of them are full editions

rather than shorter versions, which might omit or lack some information in comparison.

The three handbooks being analyzed here are Bedford St. Martin's *The St. Martin's Handbook 6th Edition*, Wadsworth Cengage Learning's *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook 4th Edition*, and McGraw-Hill's *The McGraw-Hill Handbook 2nd Edition* and each handbook presents unique problems such as content organization, comprehensive coverage, oversimplifying information, and overcomplicating information.

<div align="center">Problem #1: Content Organization</div>

A significant problem all three handbooks suffer from is content organization. The chart below lists how each handbook's content is divided into significant parts:

St. Martin's Handbook	*Writer's Harbrace Handbook*	*McGraw-Hill Handbook*
• Part 1: Art and Craft of Writing • Part 2: Critical Thinking and Argument • Part 3: Research and Documentation • Part 4: Print, Electronic, and Other Media • Part 5: Effective Language • Part 6: Sentence Grammar • Part 7: Sentence Clarity • Part 8: Sentence Style • Part 9: Punctuation • Part 10: Mechanics • Part 11: For Multilingual Writers • Part 12: Academic and Professional Writing	• Part 1: Writing and the Rhetorical Situation • Part 2: Research • Part 3: Disciplines and Documentation Styles • Part 4: Grammar • Part 5: Effective Sentences • Part 6: Usage • Part 7: Punctuation • Part 8: Mechanics	• Part 1: Writing and Designing Texts • Part 2: Common Assignments across the Curriculum • Part 3: Researching • Part 4: Documenting across the Curriculum • Part 5: Writing Beyond College • Part 6: Grammar Basics • Part 7: Editing for Grammar Conventions • Part 8: Editing for Clarity • Part 9: Editing for Word Choice • Part 10: Sentence Punctuation • Part 11: Mechanics and Spelling • Part 12: Guide for Multilingual Writers • Part 13: Further Resources for Learning

Figure 2. *St. Martin's Handbook / Writer's Harbrace Handbook / McGraw-Hill Handbook.*

All three handbooks dedicate at least three sections to writing or understanding important topics related to writing, such as critcal thinking or presenting possible writing assignments composition instructors might include in a writing course. The first few sections in each handbook include discussions about defining writing and argument, conducting research, and documenting sources, which are the most important sections for students because writing is presented as a process, and different activities students participate in over the course of completing a paper are emphasized. However, each handbook's remaining sections are organized around grammar, ESL issues, or writing across the curriculum, which are given significantly less attention when compared with other handbook parts. The reason those sections are unnecessary is not because those topics are not important, but because those topics are only important to rhetoric and composition scholars and writing teachers. The topics covered in the remaining parts of these handbooks are important to composition instructors because each topic represents an initiative being championed by various rhetoric and composition scholars, but students generally do not share our enthusiasm or passion about writing or rhetoric and composition. All three issues covered in the remaining parts of these handbooks may also be handled with students on a case-by-case basis or through assistance with a writing center.

Another important observation related to how content is organized within handbooks is noticing their use of cross-referencing in descriptions and explanations about material. For example, Cheryl Glenn and Loretta Gray present readers with a brief description about diverse audiences saying that "When you are writing for a diverse audience, you too need to establish what the members are likely to have in common in

order to make appropriate word choices (chapters 34-36) and include appropriate details (3f(1))" (13) with two cross-references directing readers toward other sections within the handbook. The cross-references are presented immediately after key words readers should use as locators after turning to those sections, therefore, those key words act as nodes within a network and establish a relationship similar to links within a hypertext. As a result, handbooks attempt presenting a non-linear reading experience, but such attempts are futile because handbooks' primary medium is print and cannot escape the confines of the page nor work against established reading conventions without assistance from technology, which is how students react when they encounter unconventional textual formats. Although print is capable of representing hypertext and multimodality as media, we cannot expect our students to comprehend and investigate such an understanding as undergraduates in first-year composition, but such issues are completely appropriate at the end of their undergraduate career because necessary critical thinking abilities are developed. Another potential argument about why handbooks use cross-references rather than providing additional information as logical follow-ups related with an idea is that readers interacting with cross-references are practicing critical thinking abilities, but such a possibility is unlikely since students struggle with changing conventions and expectations, which is due in part to them casting themselves in the wrong role as I previously discussed in Chapter 3. Because students come into our composition classes with underdeveloped critical thinking and limited understanding about making meaning through communication, handbooks are designed with comprehensive coverage to address those potential issues. However, comprehensive coverage is another shared problem working against handbooks.

Problem #2: Comprehensive Coverage

Handbooks offer readers comprehensive coverage because audiences may not be familiar with critical thinking and communicating using various media as essential elements to write successfully in college, but providing extensive amounts of information about writing in general prevents handbooks from being accessible due to their attempts at satisfying two different audiences. For example, Lunsford describes in her preface to *The St. Martin's Handbook 6th Edition* that "As I've incorporated new material, I've been careful not to lose sight of the mission of any handbook: to be an accessible reference to students and instructors alike" (v) and Glenn and Gray state in their preface to *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook 4th Edition* that their goal is "[…] a handbook dedicated to providing both teachers and students with the ease of reference and attention to detail that have made the Harbrace handbooks the standard of reliability" (xviii). The problem with providing a reference intended to be used by two audiences is establishing and maintaining a balance of information because as I discussed in previous chapters, writing instructors possess advanced training granted to them from graduate school courses and experiences, but undergraduate students do not. Unfortunately, balancing amounts of information for both audiences results in some information being oversimplified and other information overcomplicated.

Problem #3: Oversimplifying Information

A common topic handbooks cover is one involving contextualizing writing within some kind of situation, whether a rhetorical situation as Glenn, Gray, and Lunsford present it in their handbooks, or as a writing situation as Maimon, Peritz, and Yancey prefer calling it. Previously, I discussed how rhetoric and composition scholars derive the

rhetorical situation through tracing research from Vatz, Bitzer, and Consigny, but here I am calling attention to how handbooks present that scholarship. For example, Lunsford provides an explanation for a rhetorical situation, saying that "As a writer or speaker, you must think about the topic or message you want to get across, your relationship to the audience you are writing for, and the context you are writing in" (36). Maimon, Peritz, and Yancey explain a writing situation with more detail in *The McGraw-Hill Handbook 2nd Edition* because for them, a writing situation is something writers respond to:

> All communication arises because something is at stake (the exigence). The audience receives the message. Audience members may be friendly or hostile to the writer's message, and their cultures and backgrounds will influence their reactions. Your purpose may be to inform them or to move them to action. Context includes the means of communication, current events, and the environment in which the communication takes place (22).

However, Glenn and Gray describe a rhetorical situation differently because their description is much more concise and focuses upon understanding a rhetorical situation as a process associated with writing rather than independent parts brought together because all three involve writing. Glenn and Gray describe a rhetorical situation in *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook 4th Edition* in contrast saying that:

> The writer in a rhetorical situation is the person who identifies the exigence, the reason or problem that impels that person to write or speak in the first place. When purposeful language can resolve the exigence, the situation is rhetorical. The writer then prepares a message (information delivered through visual or verbal means) with the purpose of resolving the exigence (4).

Notice how language assists with comprehension in each example above. The description Lunsford provides addresses readers directly because of her use of "you" throughout the example and doing so unintentionally creates a reading scenario resembling Freire's "banking" metaphor of education since readers are unable to respond directly to an author after receiving information. Maimon, Peritz, and Yancey also use "you" in their example, but their explanation attempts to present a rhetorical situation from a general observation perspective. All three examples simplify a significant and complex issue within rhetorical history with their descriptions and explanations along with showing graphics with them to oversimplify the concept. However, Glenn and Gray's description creates a local context from its opening sentence referencing a writer and an exigence. The description continues referring to those already established parts instead of addressing readers directly or attempting to make connections between readers and the world around them. A descriptive approach like Glenn and Gray's presents information as concisely as possible and allows scaffolding to happen leading to a stronger understanding because new information is being built upon old information. However, not all information presented by handbooks lends itself easily to scaffolding due to overcomplicating.

Problem #4: Overcomplicating Information

A common concept covered in handbooks suffering from overcomplicating is paragraph development. As composition instructors, we understand developing paragraphs as a process occurring when writers introduce general information and support it with more specific information related with a main idea, which is also how handbooks describe that process. As a follow-up, handbooks often present numerous methods available to readers in order to develop paragraphs, but each method is handled

independently with no relationship to understanding paragraph development as its own process or as a sub-process of writing. For example, Lunsford introduces narration, description, illustration, definition, division and classification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, process, problem and solution, analogy, and reiteration as logical patterns available to students working with paragraph development (116-123). Each paragraph development pattern is described with a specific purpose and context in mind along with showing cross-reference points, but some explanations contain contradictions when compared with general descriptions about how paragraphs function as shown below when Lunsford explains Description below:

> Description uses specific details to create a clear impression. In the following descriptive paragraph, the writer includes details about an old schoolroom to convey the strong impression of a room where "time had taken its toll." Although a topic sentence may be unnecessary in such a paragraph (7b), sometimes a topic sentence at the beginning (as shown in italics) helps set the scene. Notice as well how the writer uses spatial organization (5e1), moving from the ceiling to the floor (117).

If a potential student is consulting this handbook looking for assistance with developing a paragraph, an explanation like this one might confuse the student because sometimes a topic sentence is necessary and unnecessary, but no additional information is being given about how to identify when a topic sentence is needed or not.

Glenn and Gray present an alternative explanation about paragraph development relying on simpler description and explanation when they state that "There are certainly times when a long paragraph makes for rich reading, as well as times when a long

paragraph exhausts a single minor point, combines too many points, or becomes repetitive [….] Short paragraphs can also, however, indicate inadequate development" (45) but like Lunsford, Glenn and Gray continue their explanation with cross-reference points when they say "There will be times when you can combine two short paragraphs as you revise (chapter 4), but there will be many more occasions when you need to lengthen a short paragraph by developing it with specific details or examples" (45). Instead of providing that information when a student might need it, handbooks depend on cross-reference points and expect students to review those points in order to synthesize information being presented here with information presented in other parts. Unfortunately, those actions are ones performed by composition instructors because we are familiar with those practices due to our advanced training received in graduate school, but our students are usually seeking information about a specific concept and prefer not searching through an entire handbook to understand a single topic or ability. Readers consulting a handbook are looking for information about what paragraph development is and how to demonstrate that ability, but reading so many different methods and examples overwhelms students and discourage them from consulting a handbook for other writing matters.

As mentioned previously, showing every way of performing a writing task within a handbook stems from handbooks' desire to provide comprehensive coverage as a genre, but its intended audience of students resist reading and consulting this reference due to the problems I identify here along with others not discussed. Therefore, an alternative reference is needed, and I believe presenting material about writing in a strategy guide format closely resembling strategy guides video game players use while playing games

will create a reference students find accessible and be something students willingly consult as necessary.

<div align="center">A Strategy Guide Solution to Handbooks</div>

A strategy guide is a reference video game players are familiar with and use while playing games. Strategy guides are inexpensive reference materials related to specific video games, and all of them target one audience (players) and fulfill one purpose (help players play through a video game), unlike composition handbooks, which attempt satisfying multiple audiences (students and instructors) and fulfilling multiple purposes (first-year-composition courses and beyond). Although video game strategy guides focus on a single audience and purpose, much like handbooks, strategy guides are committed to providing comprehensive coverage. However, a significant difference between handbooks and strategy guides is that gaming guides work within a local context because each guide focuses on one game. The local context encourages players to consult it because all of them know its material is directly related with a specific game, but it is the combination of local context and purpose that makes strategy guides accessible in comparison with handbooks. A video game player consults a strategy guide while playing because he or she encounters a problem that is unable to be solved independently and no other options are available. If composition instructors provide students with a strategy guide about writing modeled after video game strategy guides, then our students will have a truly accessible reference that solves problems handbooks suffer from.

<div align="center">Solution #1: Content Organization</div>

The content I present students in my strategy guide is organized around my first-year composition course as a local context with my students as its audience. As I

discussed in previous chapters, our students come into our classrooms with varying levels of writing experience and cast themselves into the wrong role to be successful in college writing courses, so whenever we present them with materials we must be able to address those issues related to organization. For example, my strategy guide presents students with a simple overall organization dividing its information into five sections associated with five papers my students must complete over the course of a semester: Observation, Arguing for a Position with Sources, Analyzing Causes, Analyzing Texts, and Evaluation (Kuechenmeister 1). An organization scheme featuring divisions named after paper projects helps establish a personal relationship between my guide's content and my students because each paper project is a concrete unit students identify with and assign value toward. The overall organization also assists with accessibility when students are seeking help with something related with a paper because they must remember which paper is giving them difficulty rather than struggling with interrogating themselves about what writing process or process stage is giving them difficulty as a handbook expects.

The simple organization structure introduced here also helps me because any content I present under these divisions must be limited to them, but within each division, it is possible to focus on necessary writing abilities and scaffold them. However, as I present material related with each paper in my guide, I classify my information by identifying paper components as simply as possible using headings such as "Introduction," "Topic," "Thesis Statement," "Body Paragraphs," "Counterargument," and "Conclusion." The reason I subdivide each strategy guide section with those headings is because doing so helps students recognize common components involved with writing papers in college that may be applied to courses other than first-year

composition. Another benefit is that students may quickly find helpful information related to overcoming a problem they experience while working on specific parts of a paper, much like how video game strategy guides organize its content around different stages players play through, but then specific objectives associated with those stages are covered with clearly marked subdivisions. For example, a game might be divided into five stages overall, and each stage contains five sub-stages players must complete in order to clear the stage. If I experience a problem that I cannot solve within the game, then I refer to a strategy guide, but I must be able to identify what stage and sub-stage of the game I am struggling with. Similarly, I imagine my first-year composition course with that organization scheme, so that each paper represents a stage and each paper section represents a sub-stage. The strategy guide I provide must mirror that organization scheme so that students may find helpful information with ease like a player consulting a video game strategy guide. Revisiting those writing components in each section allows me to scaffold new writing abilities associated with them while encouraging reference as a recurring action toward application as an ultimate goal. The scaffolding my strategy guide relies on is essential to overcoming the comprehensive coverage problem I discussed earlier.

<div align="center">Solution #2: Comprehensive Coverage</div>

As a purpose, comprehensive coverage is a shared concept between my strategy guide and composition handbooks, but the difference is how that concept is handled in each instance. For handbooks, comprehensive coverage involves oversimplifying some information and overcomplicating other information, which discourages students from accessing its information rapidly and regularly. As an alternative, my strategy guide

provides students with comprehensive coverage about each paper, but I present my information using a combination of short and concise paragraphs with visual aids starting with an understanding about the problem that the paper is calling to be solved. For example, my first paper is Observation, and I describe the problem as shown below:

> The paper calls upon us to visit my office and write an argument about who I am or what I am like as a person. Students sometimes feel strange writing about their instructor because they are afraid of being wrong, hurting my feelings, or some other understandable reason. None of those things happen with this paper as long as your claims are supported with evidence (Kuechenmeister 1).

The opening description here is important because from a student perspective, I am satisfying two initial curiosities (what do I write about and how do I start), but I am also addressing some important issues preventing students from being as successful as possible from the beginning. Now students' attention is focused upon understanding the part of the description that I did not elaborate on here. The next part continues the description about visiting my office with an explanation about observation as shown below:

> **Observation.** We meet as a class at my office and I allow you to enter and observe in groups of four or five for ten minutes at a time. The important abilities to learn from observation are attention to detail and recognizing patterns.

Observation Writing Tip
Students often bring a notebook and a pencil or pen, but others bring a digital camera or take pictures with their cell phone.

Observation Writing Tip
Students who observe using a digital camera in my office believe taking pictures is enough for memory recall when they work on writing paragraphs, but pictures only show what is in my office.

| **Observation Writing Tip** |
| Students who observe using a pencil or pen and paper are able to remember items from my office, but because they took notes about how items relate with each other, then those students struggle less with writing paragraphs in this paper. |

| **Observation Writing Tip** |
| The best approach is a combination of a pencil or pen and paper with a digital camera because then item recall is more reliable without sacrificing attention to detail and pattern recognition. |

(Kuechenmeister, *Strategy Guide*, 1).

Here again I give students a brief description and explanation about observation with a notation about important abilities they should learn from this experience and then I proceed with discussing different observation methods as well as advantages and disadvantages to using those methods. However, unlike a handbook, I do not discuss all of that information as a lengthy paragraph or across multiple pages. Instead, my strategy guide shows that information as a series of tip boxes. Handbooks often implement tip boxes as extra assistance available to students, but most tip boxes provide students with a series of questions intended to encourage students to learn through Socratic method, which is not how contemporary composition instructors teach writing in the classroom. The problem with handbook tip boxes is in order for students to use that information, they must disengage from writing as an activity to interrogate themselves and neither activity seems relevant in students' minds.

Implementing a tip box layout like in my strategy guide assists students with managing large amounts of information through reducing processing time, but this layout is also helpful because students with different levels of writing experience also benefit.

For example, if a student is already familiar with what observation is and its benefits, then he or she still finds tip boxes helpful because that information relates with a specific observation. If a student is unfamiliar with observation and never conducted one before, then he or she finds my description, explanation, and tip boxes helpful. The scaffolding is revealed when tip boxes are read in order from top to bottom because I name two observation methods in the first box (writing utensil and digital camera) and subsequent boxes elaborate on each method before showing how both methods may work together.

The presentation tactics my strategy guide employs assists students with overcoming specific problems involved with completing each paper, but because my descriptions and explanations are not lengthy in comparison to handbooks, students are not disengaged from the writing for long periods of time. Therefore, students spend more time on task and continue practicing with writing. As mentioned earlier, most composition students coming into our writing classrooms are less experienced with developing critical thinking abilities and overcoming handbook problems such as organization and comprehensive coverage are important first steps, but any handbook alternative must provide solutions to oversimplifying and overcomplicating information.

Solution #3: Oversimplifying Information

As a problem introduced earlier, oversimplifying information often involved reducing significant issues that rhetoric and composition scholars recognize as important (like the rhetorical situation) from books and journal articles to a paragraph and a graphic, which is supposed to streamline our students' comprehension after being exposed to that material. Although oversimplifying information helps students understand complex concepts and processes easier, practicing reduction methods on our material and

presenting them as products in handbooks does not encourage students to struggle with abstract ideas and apply them as learned material, which are essential elements to encourage critical thinking development. As composition instructors, we wrongly assess our students' problem with learning writing as a comprehension issue resulting from a failure to consume information rather than an application issue resulting from a lack of opportunity to practice with learned information, which results from misunderstanding the role of context in our classrooms. For teachers, our classrooms represent a local context or low-stakes safe environment James Paul Gee encourages because students learning within a safe environment are free to practice, and invest significant time into completing projects. For students, our classrooms represent a space where isolated events like class meetings occur, as James Berlin implies when he encourages us to help students understand writer, reality, audience, and language as independent concepts and concepts able to work together. However, we must provide students with a context while helping them acquire successful college writing processes, which is something my strategy guide invites because my guide allows students to learn and practice important abilities through application and create opportunities allowing our students to invest significant amounts of time into adopting those processes. The benefit of adjusting our pedagogical perspective from consumption to application is that we are then in a better position to realize how writing might create a satisfying feedback loop similar to ones experienced by video game players while playing games.

A popular activity resembling a feedback loop explored in most handbooks and my strategy guide is creating and maintaining a research journal. I introduce this activity

as part of my Arguing for a Position with Sources paper and I scaffold it much like I did

with observation using tip boxes as shown below:

Arguing for a Position with Sources Writing Tip
Students often struggle with organizing information from sources and their own thoughts about a topic. Try keeping a research journal while working with different sources. A research journal entry reminds students about what source is being used and any helpful information for citing the source in a draft (chapter name, page number, author).

Arguing for a Position with Sources Writing Tip
How a research journal organizes and presents information is entirely up to the student, but a student should be able to understand two things when he or she looks at a research journal entry. First: information borrowed from a source. Second: personal thoughts about the information.

Arguing for a Position with Sources Writing Tip
A good practice using research journals is writing down any interesting passage students read in a source and page numbers. Students find writing down page numbers help with recalling information or checking information again before using it as a draft. Writing down passages that make students think or read again also helps with recall, but doing so also helps practice using information from sources to support main points of the argument, which is what body paragraphs should communicate to an audience. Students should also attempt explaining to themselves why they wrote down specific passages in order to bring together source information and personal thought.

(Kuechenmeister, *Strategy Guide*, 5).

All three tip boxes present keeping a research journal as an activity involving two distinct

steps: First, copy significant passages. Second: follow-up with personal commentary as a

response to the passages. Handbooks introduce research journals in a similar fashion, but

I am attempting to encourage students to create a personal feedback loop in order to

spend more time on task. Therefore, my first tip describes how a research journal assists

with keeping track of important details students need when integrating source

information into their arguments during drafting, which promotes paying attention to

detail along with personal reaction toward the text. The second tip box reminds students that creating critical responses toward what they read is important because doing so prevents them from being receptacles passively being filled with information since their critical responses are derived from interacting with the information rather than blindly accepting it. A dialectic relationship between students and material is formed at this point and students are providing themselves with feedback about what they read, but it is not yet a loop, which is why my third tip box is important. The last tip box encourages students to practice writing down significant passages and then spending some additional time explaining to them in writing why those passages are important to their argument before continuing to read a specific source. Many students respond positively toward my strategy guide's approach and found it extremely helpful because they frequently kept a separate window open on their computer alongside their draft. The students described my strategy guide's content as thorough, but simple, which helped them write better and more efficiently because they referred to the guide when necessary rather than writing and reading the guide simultaneously.

Initially, we might attribute the looping of feedback to performing those actions, but looping actually happens due to how much time students remain in contact with writing throughout the activity. The completion of those actions creates satisfaction within them and writing becomes more like play rather than work as long as students remain engaged with writing processes resembling feedback loops. Although students might be capable of actively interacting with learned material and investing significant amounts of time into completing writing tasks with personal satisfaction, we must be able

to reinforce their efforts and satisfy their overwhelming desire for correctness, but we must do so without overcomplicating our information.

Solution #4: Overcomplicating Information

An unfortunate side effect of participating within Freire's "banking" model of education is that students believe everything boils down to one correct answer, which is a common outcome in college courses other than composition, but our current attempts to overcome this side effect using handbooks is unsuccessful because handbooks present multiple approaches to solving writing problems. The reason handbooks show more than one solution to a writing problem is because doing so supposedly helps students realize that writing does not concern itself with mechanical procedures and simple answers like other subject matter. However, our students are not coming to that realization and find themselves overwhelmed whenever we present multiple solutions because we are giving them overcomplicated information instead of suggested concrete examples.

Composition handbooks often address this issue through including several annotated student paper examples scattered throughout its contents, but those examples do not resonate with students because those papers are responding to assignments different from the ones our students are working on for us and disengagement happens. As an alternative use of example, my strategy guide presents students with sample writing from previous students, but each example shown is associated with a necessary writing ability required to solve a specific writing problem. My strategy guide features two different types of student writing samples. The first type is a small sample from one student as shown below from a section referring to body paragraphs:

Observation Student Paper Example
The office is relatively plain from the white painted walls to the empty shelves and file cabinet, but by looking at the top of Mr. Bobby's desk and seeing several comic books, one may begin to see a love for childhood mementos and opinion may begin to change. Bobby seems to favor the DC Comics TM super heroes Green Lantern and Superman, which are the ones that stick out the most. Three different signed issues of *Green Lantern*, a copy of the final issue of *Super Powers*, and the 50 years of Superman *Time* Magazine cover sit on his desk in little plastic covers.

(Kuechenmeister, *Strategy Guide*, 3).

For instances when I show students one example, I provide a follow-up explanation about the example and how it refers back to my brief description for the writing ability being covered, as shown below with reference to the student paper example above:

The student paper example above introduces an idea moving from general (office description) to specific (my desk in the office). The example includes detail (Green Lantern, Superman, Super Powers comics and Time magazine) and shows readers a pattern (3 signed issues of Green Lantern, Super Powers final issue, Time magazine cover) related with a main idea from the thesis statement (childhood mementos) (Kuechenmeister 3).

The explanation I provide here gives students general information about body paragraph characteristics such as presenting information from general to specific and including specific details as supporting evidence, much like a handbook, but I also help students understand the thought process this student performed when I reference specific details within the example. My goal whenever I show an example and an explanation in my strategy guide is to expose students to abstract concepts (writing sample and instructor explanation) and help them practice seeing relationships between them by guiding

students through the example. However, other times I prefer showing students more than one example with no follow-up explanation in my strategy guide.

The second type of example found within my strategy guide is larger in scope because I present students with more than one example associated with the writing ability being covered as shown below from a section teaching about counterargument:

Evaluation Student Paper Examples
Example #1: It might seem that an audience is an important criterion in making an album successful. An audience is not the most important criteria in which an album becomes successful. Not everybody might not like the reggaeton beat. Not everybody might be a fan of Don Omar. For that reason, an audience is not the main criteria in demonstrating the success of an album. **Example #2:** Not everyone may see the interpretation presented here as accurate. One might state that the game is simply the same as the first two *Fallout* games. However this is not true because not only does Brudvig state the game is so open ended that virtually anything is possible, but the game also takes place 30 years after the previous game. One might also say that games like *Call of Duty 4* and *Gears of War 2* are better. However these are only a matter of opinion and the amount of play time one can have with *Fallout 3*. A third opposition statement might be the fact that the improvements and features listed are not enough to merit purchasing the game. **Example #3:** One thing that some fans of music, or Coldplay in general, might disagree with is the fact that the reviewer compared Chris Martin, the lead singer of Coldplay, to Bono. The author also compared the band and the sound to U2. Some may disagree and think that Coldplay is very unique and have a sound like no other band. They might strongly disagree and think that U2 sounds nothing like Coldplay. Some of the lyrics and maybe a few songs sound similar but as a whole, the band is unique and has a totally different sound.

(Kuechenmeister, *Strategy Guide*, 24).

Here I am presenting students with more than one example, but because my strategy guide never includes complete papers from previous students, I am able to select the most appropriate samples relating with the writing ability I want students to learn. My student paper example selection process involves choosing writing (with written permission) from an "A," "B," and "C" student and showing samples from them together assists

students with understanding how more than one answer is possible to solve a writing

problem, which is a shared goal between handbooks and my strategy guide, but my

presentation does not result in overwhelming students using overcomplicated

information. As mentioned earlier, I deliberately withhold providing a follow-up

explanation when I show more than one example because doing so gives students an

application opportunity to practice analyzing previous students' writing independently.

The lack of complete student paper examples also encourages students to use my strategy

guide as a quick reference, therefore, students experience minimal disengagement from

writing in comparison with a handbook and spending more time on task results. Although

many advantages have been discussed here about offering a strategy guide about writing

as an alternative to a handbook, a significant disadvantage must be addressed before

moving on and considering what video games have to teach us about writing assessment.

Conclusion

A possible objection associated with developing a strategy guide for writing is its

use of student writing examples as models. The concern surrounding models from a

composition instructor's perspective is the misconception that we are supposedly "giving

students the answers" whenever we show them examples. If we show students successful

writing as reference, then students may be tempted to commit acts of plagiarism by

stealing that writing and submitting it as their own. As a college instructor, I agree with

such a suspicious assessment, but as a composition instructor, I also recognize that

concern is true in college courses presenting content following Freire's "banking"

metaphor for education. As I distinguished earlier in this chapter, "content" is handled

differently in writing classes because composing involves creating information rather

than consuming it, and our students also understand that difference. If a student requests an example, then he or she is not asking us to "give them the answer" as we mistakenly interpret. Instead, he or she is asking us to provide them with an example because that student relates best with something concrete rather than abstract. The student wanting a concrete example in a composition class plans on using that example as a suggestive starting point for his or her own version. The important aspect of that scenario is not what we imagine our student might do with our example, but rather, why our student wants an example at all.

None of the insights offered here about handbooks and strategy guide alternatives are possible without considering video games and things associated with playing video games as valid scholarly pursuits, as evidenced by published scholarship from rhetoric and composition scholars such as Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher, James Paul Gee, Anne F. Mareck, Josh Gardiner, Debra Journet, and Pamela Takayoshi, along with others exploring future possibilities with video games. Despite significant contributions from established scholars, academic scholarship with video games continues facing an important hurdle because English studies in general hold reservations about such topics. The reservations and skepticism toward new media, especially video games, prevents progress and researching video games proves to be a constant and discouraging uphill conflict as a result. However, before addressing negative receptions toward video games as scholarly research, gaming is capable of helping us better understand how to accomplish writing assessment goals such as helping students perform self-assessment.

CHAPTER V. GAMING AS WRITING ASSESSMENT AND SELF-ASSESSMENT

Introduction

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, composition teachers could design and distribute a strategy guide about writing as a valuable reference available to students outside of class meetings, but another possibility must be explored further with instructors and students in mind as a final consideration. The previous chapters examined the relationship between students and instructors within composition classrooms, particularly first-year composition, with special attention toward understanding problems associated with composition pedagogy from an instructor or student perspective. For the purposes of this chapter, special attention is given to the instructor perspective rather than looking again at instructors and students because composition instructors are charged with performing writing assessment, which is an important activity happening outside of the classroom without student presence.

Although students are not always present while instructors assess their writing, if we must adjust our pedagogical practices as suggested in Chapter 4, then our assessment practices must also change. A significant goal associated with writing assessment is learning how instructors evaluate student writing and provide feedback so that students improve their writing, but more importantly, perform self-assessment. For video games, self-assessment is not a new concept in comparison to rhetoric and composition, which is evidenced whenever players receive on-screen information (scores, cut scenes, rank increases, challenge completions). Players receive information from video games as a response to their actions and games, much like we respond to our students' writing, but a significant difference is that video games are able to evaluate players' performance

instantly whereas students must wait a certain amount of time before seeing results. The ability to respond and evaluate instantly is an advantage gaming holds over composition at the moment, but technologies such as Google Docs and other real-time online collaboration programs are helping composition gain lost ground and make similar possibilities a reality as those programs evolve over time.

For rhetoric and composition, students performing self-assessment is an elusive goal because assessment concerns itself with quantifying performance, but writing is an abstract activity and resists quantification due to its emphasis on processes and recursive action from start to finish. Therefore, "writing assessment" struggles because it must strike a balance between equating performance with concrete indicators, but without losing its emphasis on understanding abstract processes and making meaning. However, if we attempt focusing on evaluating writing abilities rather than processes, then striking that balance becomes more probable than previous attempts. The following chapter explores evaluation in rhetoric and composition and shows how video games contribute to our current understanding about writing assessment; presents an analysis of *Call of Duty: Black Ops'* online multiplayer challenge system as a potential future direction for continued scholarship with gaming; and discusses limitations associated with pursuing gaming as valid scholarly research.

<div align="center">

Call of Duty: Black Ops

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Call of Duty: Black Ops is a video game produced by Treyarch and Activision available on multiple gaming platforms (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC) and *Black Ops* is the seventh installment in an ongoing series. The game is classified as a First-Person-Shooter (FPS) and provides players with an offline single-player story mode along with

an online multiplayer mode. *Call of Duty* (COD) games are more renowned for their

online multiplayer experience because players assume the role of various soldiers and

attempt fulfilling different objectives in solo or team formats within a virtual space. As

discussed in Chapter 1 with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, players are able to

customize his or her soldier through creating classes and choosing from different

weapons, attachments, and perks, but *Black Ops* distinguishes itself from its predecessor

(*Modern Warfare 2*) by rewarding players with COD Points as well as Experience Points

(XP) for completing challenges and leveling up over time. Players use COD Points to

purchase new weapons, attachments, and perks as they become available at

corresponding levels. *COD* games also offer players "Prestige Mode" after Level 50,

which means players sacrifice all of their customizations and XP to start over again at

Level 1, but their profile appears with a unique emblem and players may repeat "Prestige

Mode" 15 times. Most *COD* players willingly prestige multiple times, and understanding

what motivates them helps us learn how to adapt our writing assessment practices and

possibly receive similar results.

<div align="center">Motivation, Feedback, and Assessment</div>

As discussed in previous chapters, a shared misconception between gaming and

writing is both activities may be performed with little or no practice, but an important

correlation between performance and practice is improvement and only assessment is

able to reveal progress in either activity. Our students are people with personal histories

and experiences with writing and people who miscast themselves in college because their

initial expectations about college courses include too much dependency upon instructors

supplying them with necessary information rather than pursuing information

independently. As a result, students believe learning is a one-way transaction between them and their instructors, which makes improvement difficult to see or realize as Edward M. White explains in *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating* because "Writers (like all learners) improve when they can internalize evaluation – when they can themselves see what needs to be changed and how to make those changes" (50). White makes an important distinction when he defines "internal evaluation" as something happening when students are able to realize what is "wrong" with their writing and revise accordingly rather than allowing readers to misinterpret the definition and believe improvement results from students taking their evaluations personally. Unfortunately, composition students struggle with shifting their emphasis from understanding grades as a reward for producing a product to grades as a reward for learning a process resulting in a stronger product.

The struggle our students experience while learning how to shift their priorities in our composition classrooms is a natural and expected reaction in higher education, but some students might possess a certain amount of fear associated with grades (especially in writing classes) as White explains:

> The purpose of the grade and comment was to reward virtue and punish vice, and the moral overtones of the conflict led naturally to harshness. Students who did not show evidence of good writing were socially and morally offensive, wasting the time of the university and the professor. The teacher's red pen symbolized the scarlet letter, which on English papers was rarely an "A." It demonstrated the moral offense of the "errors" it excoriated and the pain of the teacher who was forced to mark them (51).

The concern here is not necessarily that an evaluation happened, but rather how an evaluation is conducted and how students might react to that evaluation. A grade issued under these conditions acts as negative reinforcement because writing is a personal activity and people identify strongly with their writing. As Brian Huot explains in *(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment*, "When we grade or test writing, the student receives some score, grade, or label. Although the articulated judgment is based upon writing, the person is the object of that articulation" (62). But writing is also a time-consuming activity and negative reactions are especially impactful because the grade is a reflection of the student's self and assigns no value to the amount of time that student invested into the paper. Therefore, a student internalizes that evaluation and becomes more discouraged, creating a negative feedback loop.

Establishing a positive feedback loop is an important concept shared between gaming and writing assessment. For James Paul Gee, three important motivating factors must be in place before learning and improvement with learning becomes evident, as stated in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*:

1. The learner must be enticed to *try*, even if he or she already has good grounds to be afraid to try.

2. The learner must be enticed to *put in lots of effort* even if he or she begins with little motivation to do so.

3. The learner must *achieve some meaningful success* when he or she has expended this effort (58).

All three elements are present in *Call of Duty: Black Ops'* online multiplayer and are intended to reward players positively while using scaffolding techniques in order to

encourage players to invest time into playing and improving. For example, a new player starting at Level 1 is not given many options toward customizing his or her soldier, so he or she must play using preset classes containing weapons, attachments, equipment, and perks until he or she reaches Level 4. If a player reaches Level 4, then he or she may customize his or her soldier from a variety of options, but not all options are available at once. As players continue increasing their level, previously unavailable options become available, such as unlocking killstreak rewards at Level 10. The increasing amount of customization options in exchange for earning XP through playing gives players reasons to try or invest time and effort into playing the game's online multiplayer component and staggering its rewards demonstrates scaffolding while establishing a feedback loop based on leveling up. However, leveling up requires increasing amounts of XP, so other methods must also be employed to fulfill Gee's remaining motivational factors such as *Call of Duty*'s challenge system.

The challenge system implemented in *Call of Duty* games offers players more opportunities to earn XP and level up faster by completing challenges while playing and doing so encourages significant investments of effort from players. Challenges are organized into 14 categories with seven devoted to player customization options (primary weapons, secondary weapons, attachments, grenades and equipment, perks 1-3); six devoted to in-game actions or events (basic, game modes, killstreaks, medals, elite, and finishing moves); and one devoted to tracking lifetime totals. Each category is divided and subdivided into menus as shown below:

Figure 3. *Call of Duty: Black Ops.*

Here is an example showing player progress working with Assault Rifles. The player is

shown two primary sets of information organized under "Assault Rifle Summary" and

"Assault Rifles" with the total number of headshots and kills using any weapon from the

Assault Rifle category being tracked in one information set while specific rifles are

tracked on an individual basis in another information set to the left. On the right-hand

part of the screen players see the most important information associated with a specific

challenge being highlighted. For a gamer, these screens are used for self-assessment

because players frequently check their progress toward completing different challenges

in-between online matches, but for a rhetoric and composition scholar, these screens

represent a multimodal grading rubric. The player is able to see a numerical overall

percent score and a numerical progress indicator within parentheses, read a description

about the task being evaluated, and know how much XP is rewarded in exchange for completing that task.

The first information set shows us an example of video games performing holistic assessment on the player because evaluating progress toward these challenges involves collecting various performances represented as individual assault rifles and evaluating them together as a single result. Holistic assessment is currently a desirable evaluation practice because such an assessment takes into consideration more than one factor and allows students to succeed despite their writing possessing potential problems, which is beneficial, but Huot warns us that "we must not lose sight of the fact that holistic scoring is a product of the same thinking that produced the indirect tests of grammar, usage and mechanics. That is, like multiple choice tests, holistic scoring was developed to produce reliable scores" (24). As mentioned earlier, striking a balance between quantifying and valuing writing process is difficult, but as *Call of Duty*'s challenge system shows here, it is possible to do so because playing a game is arguably as abstract as writing a paper.

However, an important difference when comparing writing assessment and gaming assessment is noticing what criteria is being privileged. Notice in the previous example that the challenge description reads "Get 75 kills with Assault Rifles," which is a clear criteria stating an achievable goal after players make an initial investment of time in order to fulfill the challenge. Gee recognizes transactions using time as currency in exchange for a reward as an essential event leading to players spending time on task because such events follow the "amplification of input principle," which means great output results from little input (60). The output or assessment of players successfully completing challenges and leveling up in *Call of Duty* is expressed using a number of

different aural, textual, and visual means. For example, when a player finishes this challenge during an online match, then he or she sees text appear briefly on the screen with a visual backdrop and a short rock guitar riff plays, which all indicate that a challenge or level is completed and a certain amount of XP is rewarded. All three cues players receive whenever challenges are completed provide positive reinforcement and complete the feedback loop while giving those accomplishments meaning. The loop then starts over because players are issued that challenge again, but each subsequent attempt gradually increases the necessary number of kills and amount of XP rewarded and progress is tracked using numerical data along with visual data shown as the filling progress bar, which scaffolds players to continue playing.

Another factor contributing toward scaffolding players is how choice works in games like *Call of Duty* other than when players customize their soldier. A player, like a writer, must feel like he or she possesses choices during their playing or writing experience and the challenge system encourages those feelings through its wording of challenges and its use of in-game COD Points. A similar result happens when composition instructors adopt an instructive evaluation approach, as Huot describes:

> Instructive evaluation involves the student in the process of evaluation, making her aware of what it is she is trying to create and how well her current draft matches the linguistic and rhetorical targets she has set for herself, targets that have come from her understanding of the context, audience, purpose and other rhetorical features of a specific piece of writing (69).

For Huot, students being able to become involved with an instructor's evaluation is important because allowing students to make choices related with their grade promotes

them associating self-assessment with revision as a necessity toward accomplishing an established goal, but an instructor still makes final evaluations, much like how video games present players with choices, but the game itself makes evaluations.

For example, returning to my previous figure showing assault rifle challenges above, only an M16 is available because that player's level is not high enough to unlock other weapons in that category. However, achieving a high enough level and unlocking other weapons is not enough information for the game to evaluate the player's performance using that weapon since it is not yet purchased and assigned to a class. The COD Points introduced in *Black Ops* helps distinguish this installment from previous *Call of Duty* games because before COD Points, the game began evaluating performance as soon as an option is unlocked, but now players must earn COD Points and spend them as in-game currency in order to customize his or her soldier. As players choose different elements within each custom class and spend COD Points, they are performing self-assessment because they are self-selecting criteria they want the game to be evaluating in addition to environmental elements the game is already evaluating, but the game itself makes final evaluations much like an instructor in Huot's description.

Future Direction

As a final consideration in bringing my discussion about composition pedagogy problems and solving them using multimodal theories and practices combined with gaming literacies to an end, I believe a potential future direction for such scholarship in rhetoric and composition is exploring the possibility of designing a grading rubric based on the *Call of Duty* challenge system, which might be possible if we continue focusing on writing abilities and articulate them like *Call of Duty* challenges. An important step

toward such a realization is attempting to simplify an already existing grading rubric (if

available). For example, shown below is my version of a grading rubric used in my first-

year composition course focusing on abilities in a similar organization as my strategy

guide from Chapter 4:

Introduction
- Background information provided about subject being discussed.
  - What should the audience need to know about the general topic?
- A clear and focused thesis statement presented.
  - What object is being written about?
  - What is arguable about the object?
  - Which main points will be explained as argument support?
- Background information provided about the object.
  - What does the audience need to know about the specific topic?

Body
- All paragraphs are developed with detailed information and shown in a logical order.
  - Which main point should the audience know about first?
  - Which points should the audience know next?
  - Which main point should the audience know second?
- A formal tone is used.
  - Did all questions become revised into statements?
  - Is the language respectful toward the audience?
  - Did the writing revise all questions asked into statements?
- All transitions show relationships between ideas, paragraphs, and borrowed information while guiding the audience through the argument in a logical order.
- All points are explained in the writing's voice using borrowed information from sources as support.
  - Does the writing's voice provide a transition into quotes (short and long)?
  - Does the writing use double quotation marks around short quotes propely?
  - Does the writing use single quotation marks when quoting material being cited in a source properly?
  - Does the writing format longer quotes as a flush indented block with no font changes?
  - Did the writing choose quotes because its point cannot be stated clearer?
  - Does the writing's voice transition out from quotes (short and long)?
  - Does the writing show a parenthetical citation properly?

- - - If a transition is given naming an author and a title before a quote, then a page number is shown in parentheses.
    - If a transition is given but does not name an author and a title, then the author's last name and a page number are shown in parentheses.
- All authors are named using first and last name on first reference and last name only afterwards.
- All main points and supporting points relate with the clear and focused thesis statement as much as possible throughout.
- Counterargument
  - Does the writing's voice anticipate possible opposite views?
  - Does the writing's voice address opposite views without bias?
  - Does the writing's voice overcome opposite views without bias?
- Conclusion
  - Does the writing review its main points related with the subject introduced at the beginning of the paper?
  - Does the writing propose possibilities for future study about the subject?
- Works Cited
  - Does the writing format each citation for each source properly?
    - Alphabetical order using author's last name when possible.
    - No bullets, numbers, or roman numerals with each entry.
    - Entries use a hanging indent (click-hold-drag the lower triangle on the top ruler of a Word document. Slide lower triangle half an inch to the right).
  - Does the writing include all necessary parts for each citation?
    - Author
    - Title (shorter works use double quotation marks and longer works are *italics*)
    - Translator
    - Editor(s)
    - Publication information
    - Page number(s)
    - Type (print, web, film, DVD…)
    - Access date

(Kuechenmeister, *Paper Revision Checklist*, 1).

The example above presents students with a checklist-style quick reference that is

organized according to sections of a paper, and each main bullet point gives a description

about a specific ability I am evaluating for in that particular part. The descriptions offered

are as straightforward as possible, like a *Call of Duty* challenge description, but without

giving any specific guidance toward how to show that ability. The lack of specifics in these ability descriptions is deliberate because not supplying specifics allows students to develop critical thinking abilities as well as continuing practicing with problem solving. For instance, the previous challenge example provided a description stating, "Get 75 kills with Assault Rifles," but offered no specifics about how to complete that challenge. A player might fulfill that challenge using any Assault Rifle he or she chooses to equip his or her soldier with, but other options are possible as well, such as stealing a killed opponent's assault rifle and using it. A similar wording encourages writers to describe and explain information in order to fulfill an outcome using various means. If students' writing is demonstrating that ability, then they have nothing to worry about, but if students' writing struggles with showing ability, my sub-bullet points are intended to help them diagnose their problem through answering questions in a Socratic fashion.

The next step is revising this rubric further so that no Socratic questions are present (because students reported those are unhelpful when combined with the strategy guide) and only abilities appropriate for each paper is shown while others remain "locked," presenting each ability with a visual progress bar as well as a numerical indicator, and assigning a scaffolding amount of points as a reward in exchange for a number of times the ability is demonstrated. However, all of these ideas and revisions merit further exploration with future projects and future scholars pursuing work along these lines in rhetoric and composition, but some serious limitations imposed upon it from a cultural perspective toward gaming as valid scholarly work make further progress difficult.

Conclusion: Limitations

My previous chapters included investigations into our composition teaching practices and calling for process pedagogy to return to its problem-solving origin along with embracing its current stage-based existence; our misconception about student apathy and resistance as deliberate actions in our writing classrooms rather than a conflict of identity from student and teacher perspectives; and our adopting of handbooks with a belief that those references are accessible materials for students. However, rather than identifying these problems and dismissing them after explaining them at length, previous chapters examined each problem and revealed them to be more complex than originally imagined. Previous chapters also offered solutions to each problem derived from analyzing writing processes and processes associated with playing video games and special attention was given to a variety of games used as case study examples.

Although video games (like any new media genre) attract a negative cultural reception as discussed in Chapter 2, nobody denies how much influence video games seem to have on society, as Ian Bogost notices when he says in "Persuasive Games: Exploitationware" on *Gamasutra* that "People know that there's something magical about games. They don't always express that opinion positively, but even condemnations of video games acknowledge that they contain special power." The special power Bogost attributes to video games is a driving force behind understanding gaming as an act of literacy and approaching it in ways that are beneficial within fields like rhetoric and composition.

The resistance experienced whenever scholars pursue video games as a scholarly pursuit is a behavior stemming from the negative cultural reaction toward games. For example, an academic scholar might reject video games as a valid topic because he or she

does not play them, or sees them as some herald bringing forth the destruction of print and traditional literacy, or some other absurd nonsense. As technological evolution and concepts from rhetoric and composition like Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's remediation show us in *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, new media is always paying homage to older literacies while simultaneously innovating them, so that only leaves inexperience with playing games as a possible culprit at the moment (60). As audience members reading or hearing information about video games, playing them is never a requirement because people like myself realize that most scholars are not gamers and we will provide necessary information before showing our research results or findings, but reservations or skepticism toward receiving such information will discourage people like me from coming forward and showing what is possible with games.

Another audience member concern is a constant fear that researching games means playing games, which is not necessary for readers or listeners to follow the work, but it is absolutely crucial for the researcher. For example, previous chapters explored different literacy practices and processes players acquire from playing games, and then drew comparisons between them and ones associated with writing in order to ultimately improve writing instruction. However, discovering parallels between those activities and revealing how those findings impact and benefit important topics valued within rhetoric and composition is impossible if the researcher is not playing games. A gamer might be playing the game just to have fun, but a scholar-gamer plays a game in order to apply his or her advanced training and determines whether or not it is applicable, not simply to have fun with it. An additional concern that audience members may experience while

reading or listening about a video game as scholarly research is that it might seem trivial or unnecessary to provide descriptions and explanations about game content, but calling out specific episodes or events from a game is no different than when a literature scholar cites specific passages from a text. The difference between citing a text and a game is that games require more context information in comparison. All of these hurdles must be overcome if scholarship along these lines is going to continue and thrive.

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