

# Introduction to Game Studies

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course presents an introduction to critical game studies, focusing on digital games. In addition to analyzing games as interactive digital media artefacts, this course also introduces students to analytical tools to engage with game production, industrial entities, and player communities. Emphasizing the applicability of these tools, students will examine case studies drawn from a global context, focusing on the cultural, historical, political, and economic conditions in which they operate. As an introductory course, this course aims to introduce students to key texts that shaped the field of game studies while connecting them to contemporary issues that signal the future directions of the field.

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

- ✓ Define key concepts and theories in the field of game studies
- ✓ Explain how games represent us and the world around us, as well as the underlying forces that shape such representation
- ✓ Explain how the game industry functions as an agglomeration of institutions with a constantly shifting balance of power
- ✓ Explain how players engage with games in their daily lives and how they negotiate their identities in alignment with or against corporate entities
- ✓ Apply concepts and theories learned in this course to contemporary gaming issues.

**COURSE FORMAT:**

**Lectures:** Two 50-mins lectures per week

Monday and Wednesday: 9:30am – 10:20am at CYT G002

Contents within and beyond the assigned readings will be covered.

**Tutorials:** One 50-mins tutorial per week

T1A/B: Tuesdays 2:00 – 2:50pm / 3:00 – 3:50pm at LSK Rm 1033

T2A/B: Fridays 9:30 – 10:30am at Rm 2306 / 12:00 – 12:50pm at Rm 2404

Close game analysis in discussion with your peers as facilitated by TA.

**Primary Textbook:**

Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca. *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*, Fifth Edition. Routledge, 2024.

**ASSESSMENTS & GRADING:**

Assessment Task	Overall Grade Percentage	Due Date
Attendance	10%	Taken at the beginning of every lecture and tutorial
Quizzes	15%	Week 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13 Wednesdays end of lectures
Game Analysis Journal	15%	Week 4, 7, 10, 12 Mondays at 5pm
Game Design Presentation	15%	Week 10 & 13 tutorials
Midterm Exam	20%	April 1
Final Exam	25%	Spring Term Exam Period

- **Attendance (10%)**

Attendance at both lectures and tutorials is compulsory. Repeated unexcused absences will negatively impact your final grade.

\*A failed attendance grade could lead to failing the course overall.

- **Quizzes [once every two weeks] (15%)**

A short quiz will be given once every two weeks at the end of Wednesday lectures. These quizzes will be based on the readings as well as lecture contents for the two weeks that come before (e.g., a quiz given in week 2 will cover contents from week 1 AND week 2). These quizzes will be conducted in short-answer format.

- **Game Analysis Journal (15%)**

For this journal assignment, you will analyze your experience of playing a videogame of your choice. The game could be of any genre and on any platform. The journal entails four entries, each to be submitted chronologically at different points in the semester (Mondays 5pm in week 4, 7, 10, 12). Before you start playing, you should do some basic research about the game and its studio. In the preface, write about the rationale for your pick. In the subsequent entries, you should critically reflect on different components of the game through your play experience.

- **Game Design Group Presentation (15%)**

In a group of 5, you will form a development team and come up with a game pitch and present it during tutorials. A game pitch is like a proposal of ideas for a game that you could pitch to potential investors, such as game publishers, that your game is worth investing in. For this assignment, you should come up with the core concepts of a game based on one or more intellectual concepts you learned in the course. These ideas should be conveyed through PowerPoint slides that could be verbally presented in 10 minutes. You will present your game pitch twice during tutorials in week 10 and week 13.

- **Midterm Exam (20%)**

The midterm exam will cover all the readings and lecture contents up until that point. It will contain short and long answer questions.

- **Final Exam (25%)**

The final exam will cover all the readings and lecture contents throughout the whole course. It will contain short and long answer questions.

### **Statement on Assessment and Grading**

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing, and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Numeric percentile grades will be converted to letter grades using the following standard:

A+	97-100	Excellent Performance
A	93-96	
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good Performance
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Satisfactory Performance
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D	60-69	Marginal Pass
F	0-59	Fail

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Academic integrity and honesty are critical values in upholding HKUST's reputation as a community of scholars and its claim to the "intellectual property" created by staff and students. All students who join HKUST are therefore committed to an [Academic Honor Code](#).

Similarly, students are required to maintain the highest standards of [Academic Integrity](#). The University has zero tolerance for academic misconduct.

## **COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK**

Under normal circumstances, assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Students who have further questions about the feedback (including marks) should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

The University takes a proactive role in ensuring and cultivating a positive learning environment for students, where equal opportunities in academic and non-academic pursuits for each student are guaranteed.

The SEN Support under the Counseling and Wellness Center provides a wide range of support services and resources to ensure that all students have equality of opportunity, that they benefit equally from university life, and to cultivate a campus culture of inclusion.

If a student is diagnosed or suspects his/her difficulties are related to any type of SEN, he or she is strongly advised to self-identify and provide recent documentation of his or her SEN to SEN Support. Reasonable accommodations or adjustments will be worked out amongst student, instructor(s) and SEN Support. If SEN Support is not aware of a student's needs, please contact [sen@ust.hk](mailto:sen@ust.hk) to arrange a confidential discussion. All information is handled in the strictest confidence.

**WEEKLY SCHEDULES (Subject to changes):**

**Week 1: Course Introduction**

*February 2 & 4*

Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca. *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*, Fifth Edition. Routledge, 2024.

Simon et al. "Chapter 1: Studying Video Games." *Understanding Video Games*. Pg. 7-14.

Simon et al. "Chapter 3: What Is A Game?" *Understanding Video Games*. Pg. 33-62.

**Week 2: Game Analysis—Games as a Media Text**

*February 9 & \*11 (Quiz)*

Simon et al. "Chapter 5: Video Game Aesthetics." *Understanding Video Games*. Pg. 123-158.

Simon et al. "Chapter 7: Narrative." *Understanding Video Games*. Pg. 205-235.

**Week 3: Game History—Hegemony and Bias**

*February 16*

**\*NO CLASS on February 17, 18, & 20** (Lunar New Year)

Simon et al, "Chapter 4: History," *Understanding Video Games*. Pg. 63-120.

Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins. "Introduction: Why We Are Debugging." In *Debugging Game History: A Critical Lexicon*, edited by Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins. The MIT Press, 2016. Pg. XIII-XVIII.

**Week 4: Videogames in and as Culture—Who, What, and How**

*February \*23 (Journal) & \*25 (Quiz)*

Simon et al, "Chapter 6: Video Games in Culture," *Understanding Video Games*. Pg. 159-204.

Adrienne Shaw. "What Is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies." *Games and Culture* 5, no. 4 (2010): 403-424.

**Week 5: Games as Soft Power—Pokémon and Globalization**

**March 2 & 4**

Anne Allison, "Pocket Capitalism and Virtual Intimacy Pokémon as a Symptom of Post-Industrial Youth Culture," in *Asian Popular Culture: The Global (Dis)continuity*. Pg. 197-212.

Koichi Iwabuchi, "How 'Japanese' Is Pokémon?" in *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*. Pg. 53-79.

**Week 6: Games and Nation – JRPG as a Genre**

**March 9 & \*11 (Quiz)**

K. T. Wong, "Is Kingdom Hearts a JRPG? The Racialized Labor of a Japanese Anti-auteur's Disney-Licensed Videogame," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 63.5 (2024): Pg. 77-100.

Mia Consalvo, "Console Video Games and Global Corporations: Creating a Hybrid Culture," *New Media & Society* 8.1 (2006): Pg. 117-137.

**Week 7: Game Industries—Deciphering Behind-the-Scenes**

**March \*16 (Journal) & 18**

Simon et al, "Chapter 2: The Game Industry," *Understanding Video Games*. Pg. 15-29.

Aphra Kerr. "Chapter 2: Going Global? The Value, Structure and Geography of the Digital Games Industry." In *Global Games: Production, Circulation and Policy in the Networked Era*. Routledge, 2017. Pg. 27-63.

**Week 8: Game Production—Triple-A and Indie**

**March 23 & \*25 (Quiz)**

David B. Nieborg. "How to Study Game Publishers: Activision Blizzard's Corporate History." In *Game Production Studies*, edited by Olli Sotamaa and Jan Švelch, 179-195. Amsterdam University Press, 2021.

K.T. Wong. "Globalization and Heterogeneity: Locating the Malaysian Indie Game Production Culture." *Media Industries* 11, no. 1 (2024): 35-56.

**Week 9: Midterm Exam**

**March 30 & \*\*April 1 (Exam)**

HUMA 1221  
HKUST Spring 2026

Midterm exam will be conducted on Wednesday (April 1) during class time.

**\* NO TUTORIALS for this week**

### **Week 9.5: Midterm Break**

**\* NO CLASS from April 3-10**

### **Week 10: Women in Games—Gender and Feminism**

*April \*13 (Journal) & 15*

**\*April 14/17 Tutorials: First Game Design Presentation**

Amanda Phillips. Chapter 1: “Of Dickwolves and Killjoys: Feminism and Interpretative Violence in Gaming Communities.” In *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture*, 27-65. New York University Press, 2020.

Liu, Tingting, and Zishan Lai. 2020. “From Non-Player Characters to Othered Participants: Chinese Women’s Gaming Experience in the ‘Free’ Digital Market.” *Information, Communication & Society* 25 (3): 376–94.

### **Week 11: Queerness in Games—Identities and Beyond**

*April 20 & \*22 (Quiz)*

Bo Ruberg. “Introduction.” In *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*. New York University Press, 2019. 1-28.

Bo Ruberg. “Introduction: Rethinking (Queer) Worldbuilding through Video Games.” In *How to Queer the World: Radical Worldbuilding through Video Games*. New York University Press, 2025.

### **Week 12: Playing as Chinese—Race and Labor**

*April \*27 (Journal) & 29*

Zixue Tai and Fengbin Hu. “Play between Love and Labor: The Practice of Gold Farming in China.” *New Media & Society* 20, no. 7 (July 2018): 2370–90.

HUMA 1221  
HKUST Spring 2026

Huan He. “Chinese/Cheating: Procedural Racism in Royale Shooters.” In *Made in Asia/America: Why Video Games were Never (Really) about Us*, edited by Christopher B. Patterson and Tara Fickle, 217-231. Duke University Press, 2024.

### **Week 13: Esports—Competitive Gaming as Spectator Sports**

***May 4 & \*6 (Quiz)***

***\*May 5/8 Tutorials: Second Game Design Presentation***

Borowy, Michael and Jin, Dal Yong. “Mega Events of the Future: The Experience Economy, the Korean Connection and the Growth of eSport.” In *Mega Events and Globalization: Capital and Spectacle in a Changing World Order*, edited by Richard Gruneau and John Horne, 206–219. Routledge, 2016.

Keung Yoon Bae. “‘Too Many Koreans’: Esports Biopower and South Korean Gaming Infrastructure.” In *Media Technologies for Work and Play in East Asia: Critical Perspectives on Japan and the Two Koreas*, edited by Micky Lee and Peichi Chung, 205-228. Bristol University Press, 2021.

***\*\*Final Exam (Date TBD)***