MEVIT4516 – Game Studies
Evaluation guidelines, spring 2026

The term paper consists of two assignments: an academic game studies essay and a journalistic game criticism text. The candidate must complete both parts. The assignments count equally towards the final grade. The candidate must ensure that the two parts are of approximately equal length in the paper (about 5 pages for each assignment). Significant discrepancies in this page distribution must not occur. The candidate must actively use and properly reference relevant syllabus literature (both the coursebook and articles) and other relevant sources throughout their paper. Standard academic rules for in-text references apply only for Assignment 1. The game criticism text has different rules (see below). Both assignments must meet at least the minimum requirements for a passing grade (E) for the candidate to pass the exam in its entirety. If one part is evaluated as an F, the entire paper receives an F.

Assignment 1 – Game Studies Essay

Choose one of the following course workshop topics:

- Game marketing and game journalism
- Game development and industrial practices
- Game design, technology and aesthetics
- Storytelling, narrative techniques and structures in games
- Game culture and game communities
- Diversity and representation in games and gaming

Explain briefly why this is an interesting and important general area for game studies to research. Then, define and focus on a specific topic within this general area that you are interested in discussing further. Formulate a research question and discuss how this topic is studied in a selection of relevant course syllabus literature and in 2 self-selected game studies articles outside the syllabus from 2021–2026. Reflect on current research issues or knowledge gaps and suggest how game studies can research the topic further to aid other scholars, the game industry, game developers and/or players.

This assignment has been slightly adjusted. Instead of a choice between three main areas, this year's assignment has a wider selection of topics based on the course workshops. The main function of this change is to clarify the available topics and allow for further topic specialization. Other than that, the assignment remains the same as previous years.

This is an open assignment which allows the candidate to discuss the topic they are most interested in, and they are required to use relevant syllabus texts and do research on the topic in other academic journals to find self-selected texts. The essay must not be styled and written as a traditional literature review or a project proposal. It should be a thematic research discussion using research and the candidate's own observations, evaluations and arguments. The candidate must formulate and answer a relevant research question. The overall essay should have good thematic consistency, clear arguments and reasonable academically grounded suggestions. The candidate is allowed to draw on relevant personal experiences if they are well connected to the academic discussion. It is crucial that the candidate discusses their chosen subtopic primarily from a game studies perspective. The candidate must not venture into a predominantly general thematic analysis or discussion (for example, primarily discussing game design as a profession or an art form in general instead of discussing game studies research and perspectives on game design). The reflection on current issues or knowledge gaps and suggestions for further studies should be reasonably connected to the candidate's sources and discussion in the essay.

"Game studies articles" refers to the theme and scope of individual articles, not to specific academic journals (such as Game Studies, Games and Culture, and Eludamos). The candidate is free to choose articles from a variety of academic journals, but the self-selected articles must be reasonably connected to the field of game studies and not be predominantly written within or for another field (such as psychology, sociology, literary theory or economics). The candidate does not need to state or reflect on how they found their self-selected articles.

The candidate's choice of subtopic for the core of the assignment is not limited to topics covered in the syllabus literature or in the class workshops. The workshop topic must be explained using the syllabus literature. Regardless of whether the chosen subtopic is covered explicitly in the syllabus literature or not, the candidate must place the subtopic clearly within one of the workshop topics. Subtopics can be relevant for and intersect with multiple main areas, but in this assignment the candidate must frame their subtopic within one specific workshop topic and structure the discussion accordingly. The candidate may acknowledge impact from or for the other workshop topics for contextualization purposes, but this should be kept short. If a candidate chooses a subtopic that is not explicitly covered by the syllabus literature, they must be evaluated on how well they manage to connect the subtopic to other relevant/intersecting topics in the syllabus literature. If the subtopic is not explicitly covered in the syllabus literature, the candidate must ensure that both self-selected articles cover it. Choosing a subtopic not covered by the syllabus literature is not a valid reason for not using the syllabus literature actively in the essay. If this occurs, it should be evaluated as deficient knowledge of the syllabus literature and the course's central themes.

Assignment 2 – Game Criticism Text

Write a game criticism text intended for a critical game journalistic website on a topic of your own choosing and in which you write from a game studies background. Adapt to the style and language of a particular website and incorporate perspectives from game studies (the course syllabus literature) in your text. Approach your subject through the lens of cultural journalism:

> Cultural journalism understands the audience as citizens and offers a critical perspective on contemporary culture and cultural commodities. This should on one hand enable them to engage with said cultural commodities on a deeper and informed level and on the other hand understand the influences of the production for profit on these commodities and culture at large. A critical game journalism should be cultural journalism (Prax & Soler 2016).

Choose to write either an article, a feature story or a game review:

- An article or a feature story should critically examine and reflect on a particular case/topic relevant to the game industry, game journalism, game development, game design or game culture. Discuss possibilities, challenges and propose solutions to problems.
    - An article's main goal is to inform and have a more formal approach to the topic.
    - A feature story's main goal is to entertain and have a more narrative and subjective approach to the topic.
- A game review should critically analyze and evaluate a specific game title's gameplay, design and content. A game review is a subjective format. Your subjectivity must be balanced with the aims of cultural journalism. The goal of the review is to engage with the game as a cultural object/work, not as a product that you award a score to or recommend buying or not.

You must include a reflection note in which you discuss how you have designed your text, how you think your text fits with the chosen website, how you have chosen to use game studies perspectives, and how your text fulfills the aim of critical game journalism. Include links to 2–3 game criticism texts that you have used as inspiration for your own text. The inspiration texts must be from the website you have chosen to write for, and they must not cover the exact topic/angle or game you have chosen. The game criticism text should be 4 pages. The reflection note should be 1 page.

This assignment is about disseminating academic game studies knowledge in popular game journalistic formats. The most important evaluation aspect is how well the candidate can integrate and meaningfully use game studies knowledge in a game criticism text intended for a public format. The candidate must not be evaluated on whether they meet some criteria of being a game journalist/game critic or not, as this is not part of the course content or training.

As with Assignment 1, the assignment allows the candidate to choose the topic they are most interested in. The style and content in this assignment will differ greatly from Assignment 1. Here, it is important that the candidate styles their text to a specific game journalistic website and the journalistic genre of choice. The chosen website must be explicitly stated (either in the beginning or in the reflection note). The candidate's 2–3 enclosed links to inspirational texts must be used in the evaluation to assess how well the candidate adapts to the style and language of the specific website. The candidate must write in their own voice, they are not supposed to emulate the specific styles or traits of individual critics/journalists. The most important aspect here is how well the text fits within the overall ecosystem of the website and how well it reflects the chosen journalistic genre.

The candidate must be evaluated on how well their text follows the outlined principles of cultural journalism. The format and aims of cultural journalism are similar to academic discussion and analysis. The text must not be written from a consumer journalism perspective where the main goal is to score/rank games and recommend/not recommend purchases of games or services. The candidate is allowed to use different rhetorical and narrative devices such as humor and metaphors, but they must take care not to become unprofessional (for example, being overly personal, one-sided, or too satirical or flippant).

The text must clearly reflect that the candidate writes from a game studies background and can draw on relevant syllabus texts to strengthen their arguments and enlighten the reader. The method of referencing here differs greatly from traditional academic formats. Due to the game journalistic format requirements, the candidate should not explain terminology or use in-text references in the same way as in academic texts (see below for references rules).

The reflection note is part of the evaluation. While the game criticism text is the most important component, the reflection note is important for evaluating the relationship between the candidate's conscious choices and decisions and how well they have been incorporated into the text.

Reference rules for the term paper (from the assignment instructions)

Assignment 1 - Game Studies Essay

- Standard academic rules for the use and documentation of sources and references. Choose either APA 7th, Chicago author-year or Harvard as your reference style. You may not use a footnote reference style. In your text references, you are required to provide the page number (for sources that have page numbers) for both indirect quotations/paraphrases and direct quotations. This requirement applies regardless of the reference style you choose.

Assignment 2 - Game Criticism

- Exceptional rules for the use of sources and references. One of the goals of the assignment is to stay close to the game journalistic genre and format. As such, it might be artificial and intrusive with long explanations of terms and explicit references to academic texts or sources in a review or an article/feature story. There is no need for a "(Consalvo 2023: 227)" reference in a review, for example. As such, try to weave the game studies perspectives seamlessly into your text. You are of course allowed to explicitly mention academic terms or names of researchers, but it should be done in a more publicly accessible format. Your audience here is not other scholars. Use the reflection note to explicitly discuss how you incorporated game studies research from the syllabus, which academic sources you used and why.

Reference list

- One reference list at the end of the paper, which alphabetically lists all the sources you have cited in both assignments, and which is properly formatted in your chosen reference style.

AI rules/guidelines

- The term paper must be your own work. If you use AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot or Grammarly) to assist you in any capacity, you must include a statement at the end of the reference list in which you specify which AI tools you have used and for what purpose.

Syllabus literature spring 2026:

Books

Payne, Matthew T. & Huntemann, Nina B. (editors) (2019) *How To Play Video Games.* New York University Press.

This is an anthology with contributions from 40 different authors.

Articles

Aarseth, E. (2001). Computer Game Studies, Year One. *Game Studies*, *1*. http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/editorial.html

Blanco-Fernández, V., & Moreno, J. A. (2023). "Video Games Were My First Safe Space": Queer Gaming in the Animal Crossing New Horizons LGBTIQA+ Community. *Games and culture*. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231205638

Bringsjord, S. (2001). Is It Possible to Build Dramatically Compelling Interactive Digital Entertainment? *Game studies : the international journal of computer game research*, *1*. http://www.gamestudies.org/

Clarke, R. I., Lee, J. H., & Clark, N. (2017). Why Video Game Genres Fail: A Classificatory Analysis. *Games and culture*, *12*(5), 445–465. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015591900

Condis, M., & Morrissette, J. (2023). Dudes, boobs, and GameCubes: video game advertising enters adolescence. *Media, culture & society*, *45*(6), 1285–1302. https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437231159533

Consalvo, M. (2009). There is No Magic Circle. *Games and culture*, *4*(4), 408–417. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009343575

Crogan, P., Harvey, A., & Giddings, S. (2018). Indie Dreams: Video Games, Creative Economy, and the Hyperindustrial Epoch. *Games and culture*, *13*(7), 671–689. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018756708

Dennin, K. & Burton, A. (2023). Experiential Play as an Analytical Framework: Empathetic and Grating Queerness in The Last of Us Part II. *Game studies: the international journal of computer game research*, *23*(2). https://gamestudies.org/2302/articles/denninburton

Eskelinen, M. (2001). The gaming situation. *Game studies : the international journal of*

computer game research, *1*.

Fisher, H. D. (2015). Sexy, Dangerous—and Ignored: An In-depth Review of the Representation of Women in Select Video game Magazines. *Games and culture*, *10*(6), 551–570. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014566234

Harviainen, J. T., Brown, A. M. L., & Suominen, J. (2018). Three Waves of Awkwardness: A Meta-Analysis of Sex in Game Studies. *Games and culture*, *13*(6), 605–623. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412016636219

Pulos, A. (2013). Confronting Heteronormativity in Online Games: A Critical Discourse Analysis of LGBTQ Sexuality in World of Warcraft. *Games and culture*, *8*(2), 77–97. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412013478688

Ip, B. (2011a). Narrative Structures in Computer and Video Games: Part 1: Context, Definitions, and Initial Findings. *Games and culture*, *6*(2), 103–134. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412010364982

Ip, B. (2011b). Narrative Structures in Computer and Video Games: Part 2: Emotions, Structures, and Archetypes. *Games and culture*, *6*(3), 203–244. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412010364984

Jorgensen, K. (2019). Newcomers in a Global Industry: Challenges of a Norwegian Game Company. *Games and culture*, *14*(6), 660–679. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412017723265

Juul, J. (2001). Games telling stories? *Game studies : the international journal of computer game research*, *1*.

Keefer, K. H. (2023). Becoming Bayek: Blackness, Egypt, and Identity in Assassin's Creed: Origins. *Games and culture*, *18*(7), 940–958. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231152755

Kennedy, H. W., Harvey, A., & Giddings, S. (2018). Game Jam as Feminist Methodology: The Affective Labors of Intervention in the Ludic Economy. *Games and culture*, *13*(7), 708–727. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018764992

Monson, M. J. (2012). Race-Based Fantasy Realm: Essentialism in the World of Warcraft. *Games and Culture*, *7*(1), 48–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412012440308

Shaw, A. (2010). What Is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies. *Games and culture*, *5*(4), 403–424. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009360414

Mortensen, T. E. (2018). Anger, Fear, and Games: The Long Event of #GamerGate. *Games and culture*, *13*(8), 787–806. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412016640408

Nieborg, D. B., & Sihvonen, T. (2009). *The new gatekeepers: The occupational ideology of game journalism*. https://www.gamespace.nl/content/NieborgSihvonen09_TheNewGatekeepers.pdf

Prax, P., & Soler, A. (2016). Critical Alternative Journalism from the Perspective of Game Journalists. *Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*, *13*(1), 1–15. http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/critical-alternative-journalism-from-the-perspective-of-game-journalists/

Ruffino, P., Woodcock, J., Mukherjee, S., Wildt, L. de, Hammar, E. L., & Pelletier, C. (2021). Game Workers and the Empire: Unionisation in the UK Video Game Industry. *Games and culture*, *16*(3), 317–328. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412020947096

Ryan, M.-L. (2001). Beyond Myth and Metaphor: The Case of Narrative in Digital Media. *Game studies :*, *1*.

Sarah Stang. (2019). "This Action Will Have Consequences": Interactivity and Player Agency. *Game studies: the international journal of computer game research*, *19*(1). https://gamestudies.org/1901/articles/stang

Sotamaa, O. (2021). Studying Game Development Cultures. *Games and culture*, *16*(7), 835–854. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211005242

Tompkins, J. E., & Martins, N. (2022). Masculine Pleasures as Normalized Practices: Character Design in the Video Game Industry. *Games and culture*, *17*(3), 399–420. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211034760

Schott, G., & Thomas, S. (2008). The Impact of Nintendo's «For Men» Advertising Campaign on a Potential Female Market. *Eludamos*, *2*(1), 41–52. https://doi.org/10.7557/23.5971

Tom Welch. (2018). The Affectively Necessary Labour of Queer Mods. *Game Studies*, *18*(3). http://gamestudies.org/1803/articles/welch

Zagal, J., Ladd, A., & Johnson, T. (2009). *Characterizing and understanding game reviews* (s. 215–222). ACM. https://doi.org/10.1145/1536513.1536553

Support resource

Wolf, M. J. P. & Perron, B. (eds.) (2023). *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*. Second edition. New York, NY: Routledge.

- This is last year's coursebook, and it is not an official syllabus source this year. Some texts from this book have been referenced in lectures. The candidate may cite some relevant texts from this book, but may not use it more than the syllabus literature.

Grade guidelines for exams at master's level at IMK

A (Excellent)
Very clear and well-reasoned presentation, precise and clear language, consistent and correctly implemented reference use. Convincing with regard to factual knowledge and very good knowledge of the relevant research literature, also beyond the course curriculum. If the exam includes a research question, this / these must be clearly formulated. The research question(s) should be addressed in the assignment, supported by analysis, argumentation and documentation. The paper makes explicit and very well articulated use of theory. Theoretical perspectives are relevant, and presented and discussed in an independent manner. Empirical analysis (if included) is at a high level, in line with academic standards. Very interesting perspectives. Demonstrates excellent understanding of key concepts and consistent use of these in the presentation. Clear, independent and interesting reasoning. Fulfills the formal requirements of the exam. Partly outstanding and original work that proves a very good understanding and handling of theoretical and, if applicable, analytical, themes. High level of knowledge. The candidate demonstrates excellent judgement and a high degree of independent thinking.

B (Very good)
Satisfies most, but not all, of the criteria in category A. This grade assumes a coherent and well formulated argumentation and very good knowledge of the course curriculum. Relevant use of theory, very sound judgment and high degree of independence. Clear language, sound structure and an informed relationship between form and content. If the exam should include a research question, this / these must be clearly formulated and addressed in the assignment. Strong coherence between the research question, theory and data. Theory should be clearly presented and relevant to the research question. Solid overview of the academic field. Fulfills the formal requirements of the exam.

C (Good)
A good answer on most important points. Explains the utilized theory reasonably well. The candidate shows good knowledge of the syllabus literature, and sound judgment and independence. If the exam should include a research question, this / these are relevant, but may be somewhat incomplete or vaguely formulated. Exams graded with a C may also display factors such as: Some vague and imprecise use of language, partly inconsistent use of concepts, some unclear structure, some inadequate presentation of facts or theoretical perspectives. Fulfills the formal requirements of the exam, with some minor exceptions. A good performance in most respects.

D (Satisfactory)
The exam is completed in accordance with the given question, but has several major and significant shortcomings. Some of the content is relevant, but the answer also contains parts that

are irrelevant, unnecessary, incorrect or deficient, with some shortcomings associated with central aspects of the academic field. Adequate knowledge of key parts of the course syllabus, but significant weaknesses in theoretical and / or empirical parts. Does not use the course syllabus independently. Too limited and / or short according to the time available for completing the exam. Exams graded with a D may also display factors such as: Unclear and imprecise use of language, inconsistent use of concepts, unclear structure, somewhat incorrect or incomplete presentation of facts or theoretical perspectives, poorly explained and unclear presentation, incorrect or inconsistent use of references. Fulfills the formal requirements of the exam, with some exceptions.

E (Adequate)
Does not answer the exam question(s) beyond a minimum level. Displays deficient command over the course's central themes. Poor argumentation and does not demonstrate sufficient knowledge. Only a minimum of the relevant parts of the course syllabus are reflected in the exam answer. Exams graded with an E will have major and significant shortcomings, both in terms of knowledge and reasoning. The exam answer will display many of the points mentioned in the last section under level D, in addition to clearly lacking in detail and academic maturity. Fulfills the formal requirements of the exam, with some exceptions.

F - (Fail)
Does not answer the exam question. Does not document knowledge of key areas in the course syllabus. Does not document knowledge of the central themes of the course. Appears unfamiliar with the field of knowledge, imprecise / immature language, unclear reasoning, unclear structure, lack of judgment and independence. Fails to fulfill the formal requirements of the exam.