

BIS 313 Main Assignment: Critical Let's Play

Predating livestreaming through Twitch and other platforms, Let's Play videos offer a creative form for expression and sharing game experiences. Like livestreaming, these are often videos of game playing, showing in-game action with voice-over narration or inset webcam video of player reactions. The main difference is that they're recorded and uploaded to a site like YouTube. There is an alternate type of Let's Play video, however, that includes edited and polished pieces, sometimes cut with other source video and images and extra voice over that examines specific moments of play. In scholarly tradition, this analysis blends emotional reactions with academic literature and interrogation of in-game events and representation. Sometimes called Academic Let's Plays, sometimes called video essays, we're calling them Critical Let's Plays in this course.

But Let's Plays actually existed before the rise of YouTube and other video sharing platforms! People would write about their game experiences and then post them to web forums, create websites for them, share them via livejournals, etc. (Check out this awesome one for Crusader Kings 3: [In the Shadow of Certain, Painful Doom](#))

Students will form teams of three to create a Critical Let's Play: 1) video, 2) some textual and visual form of analysis (like a magazine article or blog post possibly with embedded video), OR 3) a podcast with visual aids. This CLP can feature a video game, a tabletop game, an AR/VR game, or whatever game you want, or even a game series. The key, however, is to closely examine game play (emotion, reaction, habits, ritual, other in-room practice, visual representation, game mechanic metaphors, meaning derived from how the mechanics feel, etc.) through an academic lens, **referencing** the thoughts and work of other game scholars or critics. **Just doing a fan video for your favorite MOBA, BG, or CCG without critical analysis will result in a terrible CLP video.**

Many of the readings will provide a whole bunch of different ways of looking at games, but it will be up to teams to find a suitable game or games to record and which academic angles to use in examining the game. The recording or writing must be scripted and edited, and we'll be creating storyboards, drafts, and rough cuts to receive peer feedback before producing final videos, webpages, PDFs, or whatever. **The importance of getting started early cannot be stressed enough!** You will need to familiarize yourself with a bevy of games and literature about games and then to also continuously meet to work on the video or other production of your criticism. To do it well takes time. A lot of it.

Teams must work on this together, but the actual division of work does not have to be split evenly for all activities. **All students must co-write their main thesis**, but one student may opt to focus on video shooting and editing while another does the voice over and collects resources. A third student might do a deep dive into academic literature and support the others. That's just one example; there are many different ways of sharing the workload.

From past experience, I know many students can feel overwhelmed with the video work if all teammates have never done it before. However, also from past experience, **I know that the best work comes from student teams who are communicative and open about their struggles and willing to receive help from and give help to other student teams.** The assignments have been structured to try to support you at each step, but that means it behooves you to prioritize each step to stay on top of things during the quarter.

Tips for good teamwork [from Google](#):

- Make sure everyone is talking at roughly the same amount of time.
- Try to develop high social sensitivity, by reading each other's moods and emotions.
- Become friends and share personal information to create psychological safety.
- Also, work on [curbing defensiveness](#).
- Remember, often [the quiet ones have brilliant ideas](#).

Milestone	Items (due Thursdays unless otherwise noted)	Points
<p>Assignment 0: Team Contract</p> <p>We will form teams during the first week of the quarter. Each team will have a channel in Slack to use for the rest of the quarter. Teams may use other communication mediums in addition to Slack, but we will be using Slack for team↔instructor communications. (You should turn on notifications for when someone @s you.) That said, it does seem to help tremendously to move things to Slack if your team is having a hard time being responsive to each other since Mark and PFs can then hop in and work with you to coordinate better.</p> <p>Each team must also fill in a Team Plan/Contract and contact list so you all can reach each other during the quarter. (Just copy that Google doc into your team folder and fill it out.)</p>	<p>Due April 7 (Week 2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start using Slack channel to communicate • Team plan filled out (copy and put into your team's folder) = 2pts 	<p>2</p>

<p>Note: Unless otherwise noted, each assignment for the main project is to be done as a team. For all team assignments, Mark reserves the right to grade individuals differently depending on level of effort and team evaluations.</p>		
<p>Assignment 00: Meeting Notes (posted to Slack) Each team is expected to meet at least once every three weeks to work on this project. <i>While</i> holding team meetings, take copious notes! Please use this Team Meeting Notes template to format your notes.</p> <p>Each meeting should have roughly this agenda:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check in with each other and make sure everyone is okay 2. Go over the agenda 3. Review what work has been done since the last meeting 4. Discuss any issues 5. Work on stuff together if time allows and it makes sense 6. Assign tasks to do before the next meeting <p>Each team should post their notes to their team Slack channel and one person on each team should submit the notes to Canvas as well. Each one is worth a point.</p> <p>It helps A LOT if you approach group work with compassion, generosity, and curiosity. Don't assume things about each other, and be genuinely curious about their lives. If anyone seems to be participating less than they should be, figure out how you can help them stay on top of their work by asking what they need rather than just yelling at them or not saying anything and building up resentment.</p>	<p>Due every three weeks <i>(three total, but submitting more is welcome!)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. April 21 2. May 12 3. June 2 	<p>3</p>
<p>Assignment 1: LP Review Find a Critical Let's Play video (like one of the ones in our syllabus) and write a one-page review as a team. The review is to be done in one Google doc in the team folder. It should be written as you would a normal paper (or actually think about game reviews that you see in magazines or online gaming sites), and it should include:</p>	<p>Due April 14 <i>(Week 3)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LP Review = 2pts • Individual reflection = 2pts 	<p>4</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who produced the video and what game did they choose? • What's the main thesis of their video? Who do they reference if anyone? • Describe how the video was produced. How many cuts are there? What other sources are spliced into the video? How are specific moments highlighted? etc. • Suggest at least one way the video could be improved. • Each student should also write a short reflection on what you learned from watching the video both in terms of the content but also the form of the video. Also, include any thoughts for possible topics for the CLP you'll be working on. <p>Getting full points for the reflection depends on thoughtful writing, linking the story to course themes or other resources, connecting ideas with personal histories, or otherwise expressing meaningful connectedness.</p> <p>Don't just answer the bullet list like a webform; use the list so you know what you need to include at minimum, but format it like a proper review. Pretend you're submitting this to a journal or as a sample of writing for a job application. Include your names and the date at the top, etc.</p>		
<h3>Assignment 2: CLP Idea</h3> <p>Each team will write a one or two-page idea in a Google doc in their team folder for a CLP to work on for the quarter. The idea pitch is called a "pitch" because you're throwing in a proposal for an idea that you really hope the rest of us like and support. Try to provide enough detail so that we can make a fair assessment of how excited we should be for this project. Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • game details: title, genre, year made, platform • potential thesis or main argument • potential academic sources to draw from for doing the analysis with a sentence describing each one and why it's useful. Try to include at least three. • who will be doing the recording, playing, editing, etc. for the production of the video or blog post or whatever • whether and what additional video will be required (such as interviews, recording other players, etc.) 	<p>Due April 21 (Week 4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial idea (aka pitch) = 2pts • Team eval 1 = 2pts <p>Team Evaluation Each student should submit via Canvas a quick check-in on how the team is doing overall and how each other member specifically is doing. Use this Team Evaluation Template.</p>	<p>4+</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what other resources will be required (such as art, voice-over, screenshots, etc.) <p>Need inspo? Check out a playlist from previous years and examples in the Examples folder!</p> <p>In addition to all of this, any student who leaves thoughtful comments or feedback on other teams' pitch documents may receive an extra point or two, depending on how many they do within about five days. Just email or message Mark to let him know which teams you did this for!</p> <p>Any team that doesn't receive full points but then revises their document after receiving feedback will have the assignment regraded! Just let Mark know that you've made revisions.</p>	<p>The evaluation is a chance for you to be hypercritical of the process so far with an eye towards improving your team culture. Reflecting this way is an invaluable skill, and you all should share with each other when appropriate to try to coordinate and communicate better as a team. This is worth more than just one point for a reason; it should demonstrate thoughtful reflection on your team. I do take evaluations into consideration when I calculate grades.</p>	
<h3>Assignment 3: Script and Storyboard</h3> <p>Create a new Google doc, and write an outline or script for your CLP that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an introduction to the game and your main thesis, • a logical sequence to your argument (each point should lead to the following point), • make references to academic literature or other game scholars within your script, and • details about what will be shown during different parts of the script, as in a catalog of videos, screenshots, etc. that you'll need (also, see below). 	<p>Due May 5 (Week 6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Script and/or outline = 2pts • Flowchart and/or storyboard = 2pts • Annotated list of references = 1pt 	<p>5</p>

<p>There should be enough for a strong argument and video that'll last about 10-15 minutes (longer is okay if need be; shorter is okay, too; it really depends on how succinct you will be). I think this means an outline would be about one or two pages long, while a script would probably be about 1000-1500 words.</p> <p>Also, create a flowchart or visual storyboard for the whole video detailing each scene and include a link to it from the Google doc. You can do this using draw.io or storyboardthat.com or any other platform or tool to show us the plans for the video's scenes or cuts. If you're writing a blog post or magazine article, replace this with a wireframe or sketch of your visual design or magazine layout.</p> <p>After the above, include a list of references with a sentence describing each source and why it's useful. For the most part, this will be similar to the list in your pitch document, but we're assuming you've now had time to read those sources and determine whether they are actually useful for you and you may have found other sources to include.</p>		
<p>Assignment 4: First Draft CLP</p> <p>Assemble a rough cut or rough draft of your Critical Let's Play. This could include placeholder clips and non-final voice over and very rough edits, but the content should basically be all there. We'll share these videos and writings in class and give each other feedback.</p> <p>Also, create a new Google doc for a mid-point debrief write-up that includes some of what you had in your script document but cleaned up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● what your main argument or point is, ● which academic literature or other sources you ended up referencing in making your point (with a sentence describing each source and why it's useful), ● your thoughts on how the edits you've done serve to make your point, ● screenshots of your work and storyboard, etc., ● a link to your script document, and ● whether there are any parts you are unsure about and would like feedback on. 	<p>Due Tuesday, May 17 (Week 8)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First draft video in time for class screening = 3pts ● midpoint debrief and documentation of project = 2pts ● individual reflection = 2pts ● Team eval 2 = 2pts <p>We'll use your Google doc to leave feedback for each other so name it something that makes</p>	<p>9</p>

<p>At the end of the document, each student should write a short reflection that talks about their role in the team, the types of activities and decisions they have made during the creation process, and what they've learned so far. Be as detailed as possible! Doing this well gets 2 points. If this is not detailed, I'll assume you didn't do much and adjust your grade accordingly.</p>	<p>it clear that it's the doc for us to look at.</p> <p>Examples of previous student work can be found in our drive.</p>	
<p>Assignment 5: Feedback (Individual) and Response</p> <p>We will all provide feedback and notes to each other during the week-long screening of the first drafts. Do this by commenting in their Google doc and then messaging Mark in either Canvas or Slack with an indication of which teams you commented on. Each student is expected to give feedback on three other projects for up to 2 points each.</p> <p>Generally, to count, we're looking for good in-depth feedback, not short unhelpful comments. Focus on structure, flow, mood, clarity, etc., and whether there are other sources of literature that you know of that they should reference. Then also describe any issues or clarifications that need to occur and other ideas that you have to improve the overall experience and its academic rigor.</p> <p>Response: Each team will then copy the feedback they received into a new Google doc, categorize and clump / sort the responses, and then write a short summary of the feedback. The write-up should then provide some thoughts on how to refine the CLP based on the feedback. Treat this like a paper.</p>	<p>Due May 19 + 26 (Weeks 8+9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback (individual in other teams' google docs) = 2pts x 3 • Summary of feedback and possible responses in a Gdoc = 2pts <p>Examples can be found in our drive.</p>	<p>8</p>
<p>Assignment 6: Refined CLP</p> <p>Upload your finished video to Vimeo or YouTube or publish your final writing piece, and be ready to share it in class during the last week of instruction. It should be as polished as you can make it with no glitches or audio issues.</p>	<p>Due Tuesday, May 31 and Thursday, June 2 (Week 10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finished video (ready for class) = 3pts • Final report = 3pts 	<p>10</p>

In addition, **create a new Google doc** for a **final report** featuring a debrief and documentation of the process which is due later in the week. It should include:

- an introductory statement of intent: what you were trying to do with the video in terms of how it was shot and put together and in terms of what you're saying and the argument you're trying to make,
- whether you thought you were successful and what sorts of things you tried that went well and what could've gone better,
- how the final video is different than your draft one,
- a list of your academic references at the end with a sentence for each, and
- generally any additional details you can provide that give us an insight into your creation process.

Also, include any artifacts from the whole process that you would like to highlight or share (flowchart, storyboard, screenshots of scripts, photos of yourselves meeting up, etc.) and describe what they're examples of or in which stage of the process they were created.

Basically, pretend you're letting someone know how you made the CLP. Write for a general audience who doesn't know anything about the assignment. Make it look pretty and comprehensive and generally as polished as possible (and for christ sake, remember to put your names on the document, etc. i.e., treat it as a formal report.)

At the very end of the document, each student should write a short reflection that talks about their role in the team, the types of activities and decisions they have made during the creation process, and what they've learned so far. Be as detailed as possible! Doing this well gets 2 points. If this is not detailed, I'll assume you didn't do much and adjust your grade accordingly.

Any team that doesn't receive full points but then revises their document after receiving feedback will have the assignment regraded if done in a timely manner! Just let Mark know that you've made revisions.

- Individual reflection = 2pts
- Team eval 3 = 2pts

Examples of previous student work can be found in our drive.