Part I

Rubric and Reflection, Cosplay / Social Media project

Intro to Game Studies

Prof. Garrison LeMasters, IMS211a|b|c Fall 2021

# Rubric Overview

## About

For this project, I have incorporated a diverse set of practices and recommendations from groups like the Digital Harbor Foundation (Baltimore, MD), RISD (Rhode Island School for Design), and SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design), into this "Reflective Rubric."

As I've suggested previously, my belief is that "game studies" is less a coherent academic discipline than it is a moment where the idea of "academic discipline" itself begins to collapse.

Many (but not all!) college courses are committed to the task of helping you either (1) to understand and master curated "knowledge domains," or (2) to foster scientific, civic, expressive, or critical mindsets. These can be good things!

But much of what we see in Game Studies suggests that conventional approaches to thinking about (for example) video games, game fandom, and player communities are likely to fall short of achieving any kind of meaningful understanding of these new media.

We are unlikely to solve that problem ourselves, but my goal is to work with you to identify how we might "think different" about the world in which we find ourselves. This project represents such an opportunity.

# Process

These broad categories are attempts to identify areas of experiment and growth within our "interventions." They may be useful to you as you look for opportunities to fine-tune or expand on your effort so far. My suggestion is that you use these categories to review and polish your Process Book prior to delivery: Are entries in your Process Book (effectively a "maker's diary") reflective of these categories?

NB: These categories begin with the simplest and work to the most complicated. You may find the last few are especially challenging.

PORTFOLIO EXTRA: Ideally, one or more entries from your PROCESS BOOK might make for good portfolio content. As you are reflecting on your identity as a maker, a designer, and a thinker, consider how this content might look as a PROCESS ILLUSTRATION in your portfolio.

## Iteration

Are you satisfied with your first idea or first attempt at doing a thing, or do you revisit and revise initial efforts and ideas repeatedly? Can we trace in your practice the growth of technique, insight, understanding? In other words, do you look for ways to deepen your engagement with your own ideas?

## Logistics & Management

Working with others is always challenging in unexpected ways, and requires concessions and creativity of a different sort. To what degree have you fostered consensus or worked through disagreement productively? Have you leveraged others' strengths and insights in a way that furthers your own contributions? Do the separate parts of your group's work remain separate and unrelated, or has the group worked to successfully blend them together?

## Invention & Appropriation

To what degree do you reinterpret or appropriate the assignment in a productive fashion? When you encounter difficulties or questions, do these derail your work or are they catalysts for novel, meaningful outcomes? How well do the process and/or the product cohere with your own curiosity or passions?

## Episteme & Techne

Episteme (knowledge) and techne (craft, art) have a long and complicated relationship. University courses ("Applied..." and "Theories of...") often keep them at a distance. Similarly, consider the 19th C aphorism "Gentlemen do not work with their hands." Our "interventions" insist that those distinctions (e.g., "theory versus practice") are problematic. Ask yourself, for example: How has *praxis* (making, doing, creating) offered insight or challenged what I know? How successfully have you leveraged "making" as a form of inquiry (a means of asking questions, doing research)?

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# Media Output

One of the signal qualities of an "intervention" is its public, material nature: Among other things, it recognizes that knowledge is social (sorry, Descartes).

Drawing on the "remediative" insights of cosplayers -- whose intuitive experiments with social media telescoped the reach and impact of their passion -- I asked you to build your project with the goal of digital presentation.

It is important to remember, then, that the focus here is not *explicitly* on the costume, weapon, or facial makeup, per se, but on *how you have captured and presented them via digital images, video, and so on*.

Here is a simple set of questions to ask as you gauge the quality of your output. Like all rubrics, this is meant as a point of departure, not a final metric.

## *Legibility*

How "legible" (readable, discernable) is your final product? Are the photos clear, well-lit? Where the subject of the photo is non-obvious, have you added a useful caption?

## *Intentionality*

What are you attempting to communicate, and to whom?

## *Technical Clarity*

Do technical issues with the photos "get in the way" of understanding what you have built, or do they aid the viewer in understanding your approach?

## *Variety*

Are some photos devoted to context, others to story? Do some photos focus on interesting details about production, process, texture, group work? Do some photos indulge in the fantasy of superhero narrative itself? Are there "telling details" made clear in your photos that would an expert on your (period, hero, style, etc.) would appreciate?

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# Delivery

For this project, we're looking to capture cosplay in a social-media-friendly fashion. But -- as should always be the case in everything you do -- you're also looking for good material to include in your portfolio.

A portfolio is an evolving project that is never finished. It may be that this material, for example, is only part of your portfolio for a short time, until something you like better comes along. But what is most important as you're getting started is that your portfolio is not starved for content.

Each member of your team will hand in their own version of your project. **You'll deliver it to me, via Canvas, as a single glorious multi-page PDF file.** Before you hand it in, you'll open it up in an app OTHER than the one you built it in, just to make sure it looks great.

# Deliverable Contents

1. Your PROCESS BOOK (see the Rubric and Reflection sheet). This book will be absolutely unique to you. As I review the pages, I should see evidence of the considerable time you've devoted to the project;
2. Four or Five photos (or a link to short videos (or other media) hosted online) that your group shot, edited, and curated. These photos will probably be the same for everyone in your group (but each of you should include them in your own deliverable, anyway).
3. Be sure your name and the name of everyone in your group is clearly indicated on the first page.

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# Useful hints and tips: Photographing your work

The practice of photography is not limited to the moment of image capture. It extends well prior to that moment, and well beyond. None of this is to say that accidents and serendipity cannot play a part in what you do (wherever possible, they should). But "opportunity" (that is, *accident*) "favors the well-prepared:" Aim for the latter, and hope for the former.

Here are a few things to think about when photographing your work

## Prep

1.  Do you know how to use your equipment? Spend some time getting to know your camera's settings.
2.  Scout the locations ahead of time: The places we think we know well often look very different when you look at them as a photographer or videographer.
3.  Pack ahead of time. Don't waste time running back to your dorm because you forgot something important.
4.  Plan to be on-site for no more than 45 or 50 minutes -- everyone's attention flags.
5.  Prepare for several scenarios: Your "A" scenario, a "B" scenario, and a last-ditch backup "C" scenario. Start with your best ("A") and go to the others if you have time and/or need to head off in a new direction.
6.  Identify (with accompanying photos, sketches, etc.) the poses that you'd like to capture. Again: Modeling is tough, so go over the material with your model(s) ahead of time and look for some agreement over how it should play out. Keep those photos with you for consulting on-site.

## On-Site

### *Immediacy*

Digital media offers immediacy. Take time to review at least some of the output during the process. Does the background clash with the tone you are trying to set? Do you need to provide better lighting? (You almost always need to provide better lighting).

Don't be distracted by the immediacy of digital media. Do not look at your first photo and think, "Looks good, we're done." When something works well, look for opportunities to experiment or change things up. You will (almost) never be happy with the first image or the first take. Also, don't spend too much time scrutinizing each shot: Once you know things are working well, just focus on creating more content (better choices!).

### *Models*

Over millions of years, your audience has evolved an astonishing ability to look at someone's face in a photograph and know whether they are happy or uncomfortable; that insight will color everything else they see in that photo.

People are always (and I mean ALWAYS) self-conscious about being photographed or recorded. You can't change that, but you can work to lessen the impact. During the photo/video session, at least, EVERYONE OFF-CAMERA needs to understand that the ONLY thing that matters is the happiness of EVERYONE ON-CAMERA. If they are content, and feel good about what they are doing, it will be obvious in every frame you record.

While not every photo needs to include a human subject, understand that our social nature means that we prefer photos of people over, say, pictures of bricks, or cars, or swords. And (again) where possible, faces are immeasurably important.

## Accidents

While carefully posed material is great for your portfolio, social media thrives on accident and weirdness. Don't immediately throw out strange poses or goofy shots.

## Process

Don't hesitate to record the whole process to video, and then edit it down to a 60-second highlight video that tells a coherent story about the process. People love to go behind the curtain, especially when it feels like something is being revealed.

## Post-Process

1. Photo-editing is hard work. Give it the time it deserves.
2. Curation is 50% of the process. Go through and rank your photos in piles. Only spend time processing the best of the best (but make sure you save the originals of everything, always).
3. As you are selecting photos, pick ones that work well together. Look especially for creating a comprehensive sense of the work you've done: Long shots, posed shots, extreme closeups, etc.
4. If there is someone in your group who is already practiced in the craft, make use of that familiarity if you can. Sit on edited photos for a couple of days, going back to them once and awhile, to see if you still feel the same way about them as you did during your initial edits.