

MDST3704: Games & Play - Fall 2018

Professor: Dr. Sean C. Duncan

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2pm-4pm in 203 Wilson Hall or by appointment.

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Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 1pm-1:50pm in 235 Bryan Hall

OR

Tuesdays, Thursdays 11am-12:15pm in 328 Bryan Hall

Overview

Games have clearly become a major cultural, economic, and even political force. With a generation of college students having literally grown up with computer and video games, how should we make sense of what games are now, the many ways that people use them, and what kinds of meanings can be drawn from interaction within gaming cultures? In this course, we will explore the nature of these media, as well as engage in ongoing debates over their interpretation.

We will ground an introduction to this field through an investigation of games and play, from historical roots in ritual and play through analyses of participation in contemporary digital, virtual play spaces, as well as analog games. As part of this approach, we will engage with the evolving field of “game studies” – including approaches drawn from cultural studies, game design/interactive media design, and other forms of games research – discussing the history of early game systems such as the Atari VCS through to major subcultural events with political consequences (such as “Gamergate.”) Since studies of games move across multiple disciplinary boundaries, we will explore how fruitful understandings of these media are developed through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary investigations into them, balancing perspectives from the humanities, social sciences, and design fields.

Students will engage with games on multiple levels and engage with gaming *discourses* from multiple vantage points – we will learn how to talk about and read about games as fans, scholars, players, and designers. All students will gain rudimentary experience with game design through this course, with the intent of creating games that can help students work through issues raised by the course.

Through active and significant participation in this course, students will:

- Learn how to interpret and critique games as media, developing analytic arguments of the meaning of games in concert with observations of gaming practices
- Gain an understanding of the history of games, methods for understanding cultural practices involving games, and different perspectives on the production, analysis, and design of games

- Engage with game design, creating a small game prototype as a means of wrestling procedurally with topics raised by the course.

What This Course Is and Is Not

Game studies is an inherently *interdisciplinary* affair, and, as such, this course will have us wrestling with radically different readings from radically different disciplines, sometimes within the same week. Emerging interdisciplinary fields often require students to become comfortable with shifting perspectives – from critics, designers, fans, and scholars (many of whom wear multiple hats). Students should be prepared to engage with a wide range of discourses in this class, and also feel comfortable asking for context/clarification whenever any is needed.

While, as with most media studies courses, students benefit from some familiarity with the medium under study, this course is decidedly *not* designed to cater to “gamers.” While much of the existing study of games and play has privileged digital video games, the use of non-digital, art games, and folk games will be a *weekly* occurrence in this class. This is for two key reasons: First, as Aarseth’s 2017 reading in Week 1 shows, there is a current emphasis to broaden our conceptions of “games” beyond screens, better tying existing research in digital games to a broader range of “games” and play, irrespective of delivery medium. Second, the use of unfamiliar games can be a great leveler in courses such as this, providing students with topics of study and analysis that do not rely on their preexisting fan knowledge. If you’re unwilling to play games or dabble in designing games, you might want to consider a different course.

Additionally, the choice of games we will discuss in this course is intentionally designed to challenge students to look beyond their experiences with popular games and engage with a broader world of play. Students sometimes enter this course with gaming experiences formed in their youth – some students may be competitive esports players, game designers, or simply have devoted thousands of hours to gaming in their lives, but a significant portion of students know nothing about games, or haven’t played a game in years. Both of these sets of student experiences is valuable and important for the class, and we try to address this gap through the choice of games discussed and played in the course.

Specifically, we will spend the majority of our time looking at “indie” games, non-digital games, performative games, and otherwise lesser-known games than some AAA games you might be familiar with (e.g., *Fortnite*, *Call of Duty*, *Red Dead Redemption 2*). This is intentional for three reasons: (1) to push students out of consumerist perspectives driven by the AAA gaming industry and gaming press, which privileges games as consumable entertainment; (2) to provide students with a variety of provocative game mechanics, modalities, experiences, and alternate uses they may have not seen with a focus primarily on AAA games; (3) to provide a level playing field for all students, where students with a great deal of gaming experience will often be as new to the games played/discussed in class as students for whom games are an unknown. Students should adjust their expectations

accordingly – you will be challenged to learn about many different forms of “games” in this class, and challenged to regularly play them.

Required Texts

Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman, eds. *The game design reader: A rules of play anthology*. MIT press, 2006.

Macklin, Colleen, and John Sharp. *Games, design and play: A detailed approach to iterative game design*. Addison-Wesley Professional, 2016.

Plus: PDFs, online readings, and videos shared via Collab.

Plus: Digital and analog games, linked via Collab or available in the Wilson Hall game space (207 Wilson Hall; to be set up in September).

Weekly Breakdown

Note: This weekly breakdown is a *dynamic document*; the professor reserves the right to move readings, play activities, assignments and deadlines if need be, but will always record these changes on the live document. “TBD” Gaming Journal prompts will be determined by students and the professor during the week listed.

Part 1: Basic Concepts and Approaches

Week 1: Begins Aug 29th – [Week 1 Slides](#)

Read: Aarseth ([online](#)); Gaming Journal Sample ([PDF](#))

Discuss: What are the ways we should talk about games?

Journal: My Gaming Autobiography / “What are and aren’t games?”

Due: [Intake Survey](#); [Comment on syllabus](#)

Week 2: Begins Sept 3rd – Games as Art?

Read: Ebert ([online](#)); Parker ([PDF](#)); Anthropy ([PDF](#))

Play: [Every Day the Same Dream](#), [Dys4ia](#)

Note: MWF class has no face to face class this week (Sean out of town for card gaming research data collection); Tuesday/Thursday class will briefly meet, only on Tuesday.

Please check Collab for detailed instructions on this week’s online activities! Please post discussion answers to Collab forums by end of the week.

Journal: My Gaming Tastes / “Can games be art?”

Week 3: Begins Sept 10 - [Week 3 Slides](#)

Note: No class Monday (Sean out of town)

Discuss (on Collab forums!): Basic concepts, basic tools.
Read: Macklin & Sharp, **Ch. 1-2**; Caillois (in **S&Z**); Suits (in **S&Z**)
Play: *Understanding Games* pts [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)
Journal: Spaces of Possibility (see M&S, Ch1E3) / TBD

Week 4: Begins Sept 17 - [Week 4 Slides](#)

Read: Macklin & Sharp, **Ch. 3-4**; Sutton-Smith (in **S&Z**); Romero ([video](#)); **Optional:** Romero ([TED Talk video](#))
Discuss: What is play, and how do players affect what we consider “a game”?
Journal: Challenging Games (see M&S, Ch4E4) / TBD

Week 5: Begins Sept 24 - [Week 5 Slides](#)

Read: Macklin & Sharp, **Ch. 5-6**; Gee (“Cultural Models”; in **S&Z**); Hughes (in **S&Z**); DeKoven (in **S&Z**; skim)
Discuss: How do we consider games as culture?
Journal: Reverse Engineering (see M&S, Ch6E1) / TBD
Due: *Gaming Journal - First Check-In*

Part 2: From Design to Analysis

Week 6: Begins Oct 1 - [Week 6 Slides](#)

Read: Macklin & Sharp, **Ch. 9-10**; Hunicke, Leblanc, and Zubek ([PDF](#)); Bogost ([PDF](#))
Discuss: How do you start to learn how to design a game?
Journal: Brainstorming! / TBD
Assigned: Game Jam theme; Game Jam groups

Week 7: Begins Oct 8

Note: No class this week (Monday is Reading Day; Sean out of town for [UCI eSports Conference](#) on Weds, Fri)
Design: Games! Work in groups all week to design your games for the Game Jam
Read: Macklin & Sharp, **Ch. 11-12**
Journal: Sharing Design Notes / TBD

Week 8: Begins Oct 15 - [Week 8 Slides](#)

Design: Playtest your games all week, revising games accordingly
Play: Student-created Game Jam games!
Journal: Interpreting Playtesting / TBD

Week 9: Begins Oct 22 - [Week 9 Slides](#)

Read: Satwicz, Stevens, & McCarthy ([PDF](#)); Sudnow (in **S&Z**); Bogost ([online](#)); Duncan ([PDF](#)) – **Optional:** Duncan ([PDF](#))
Discuss: How do you analyze a game? Why observe others’ play?
Due: *Game Jam Design & Reflection (Friday)*

Journal: Well-Played Ideas / TBD

Part 3: Topics in Game Studies

Week 10: Begins Oct 29 - [Week 10 Slides](#)

Read: Bissell ([PDF](#)); Jenkins (“Narrative Architecture” in S&Z); Fine (in S&Z)

Discuss: Narrative, story, and performance

Journal: TBD/ TBD

Week 11: Begins Nov 5

Read: Vitelli ([online](#)); Scalia ([PDF](#)); Petersen ([PDF](#))

Discuss: Media, violence, and games

Journal: TBD/TBD

Week 12: Begins Nov 12

Read: Jenkins (in S&Z); *Feminist Frequency* videos; Chess & Shaw ([PDF](#))

Discuss: Gender and the toxic culture of gaming

Journal: TBD/TBD

Due: *Gaming Journal - Second Check-In*

Week 13: Begins Nov 19 – Draft Progress Week

Read: Student Well-Played Drafts

Discuss: How can we improve the arguments in Well-Played papers?

Note: No class Wednesday through Friday (Thanksgiving recess)

Journal: TBD/TBD

Week 14: Begins Nov 26

Read: always_black (in S&Z); Gray (online); Nakamura (PDF)

Discuss: Race, nationality, and gamer talk online

Journal: TBD/TBD

Week 15: Begins Dec 3

Read: Foer (PDF); Jenny, Manning, Keiper, and Orlich (PDF)

Discuss: What’s the future of sports and games? Course redesign task.

Journal: TBD/TBD

Due: *Gaming Journal - Final Check-In (Due Friday, December 3)*

End of term Reading Days: Sunday, December 9; Thursday, December 13; Sunday, December 16

Assignment Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Course Grade	Due Date
Gaming Journal			
- First Check-In	100	10%	9/24
- Second Check-In	100	10%	11/12
- Final Check-In	100	10%	12/3
Game Jam			
- Game	100	10%	Week of 10/22
- Reflection	200	20%	10/26
Well-Played Paper	200	20%	12/14 or 12/18*
In-Class Participation	200	20%	12/14 or 12/18*

* Note: Well-Played Papers and In-Class Participation Self-Evaluations are both due at the end of your final examination time:

- For the Monday/Wednesday/Friday section – **Friday, December 14, 2018 at 12pm**
- For the Tuesday/Thursday section – **Tuesday, December 18, 2018 at 12pm.**

Gaming Journal

Over the course of the term, each student will be responsible for keeping a “gaming journal” to help you to prepare for in-class discussions and use writing as an ongoing means of exploring course content. The journal will consist of three types of entries:

- *“Big” Questions* – Prompts chosen by the professor and assigned in the course syllabus ahead of time, addressing a key topic for the week. These should be anywhere between 500 and 1000 words apiece.
- *“Small” Questions* – Prompts chosen by the professor *and* students, assigned at the end of each week, addressing a topic that arose from class discussions. These should be anywhere between 250-500 words apiece.
- *Gaming “Diary” Entries* – Posts about your own gameplay, reactions to class discussions, or even discussion of outside readings that are relevant to the course discussions. These should be anywhere between 250-500 words apiece.

Each week of the course schedule will list *two* prompts – a “Big” and a “Small” question – and students are welcome to write about either, both, or neither for any given week. At three points during the term, however, these Gaming Journals will be collected and evaluated by the professor. At each “Check-In,” students will submit to the course Collab a PDF of their

Gaming Journals up to that date, including all previous entries, with all entries labeled with dates listed. While not all prompts need to be responded to, check-in will assume students have completed at least **three new** “big” question prompts, and at least **two new** “small” question or “diary” entries per check-in.

Gaming Journal entries can be informally written, should cite course readings if appropriate, and can serve as an ongoing means for students to work through the course topics through writing. As such, a more informal tone is fine for most entries, and feedback will cover the range of posts at each Check-In. Check-Ins will evaluate journals based on three criteria: (1) **relevance**; does each journal entry address a relevant topic drawn from the prompt or from a course reading/discussion?; (2) **insight**; does the student communicate any new insights or understandings of the course readings/discussions through their journal entries?; and (3) **clarity**; are the journal entries intelligible and clear?

Each Check-In is worth 100 course points (10% of the total course grade), with the total Gaming Journal worth 300 course points (30% of the total course grade).

Game Jam

At the middle of the term, students will engage in a group game design project. Using a prompt provided during the week of October 1st, students will join groups of 4-5 students to brainstorm, design, playtest, and redesign a game (either non-digital or digital, depending on the skills present in each student group). The game will follow the “Global Game Jam” (<http://globalgamejam.org>) model in which all groups will attempt to make games that fit a specific theme (determined by the professor), while incorporating other design elements of each group’s choosing (“diversifiers,” e.g., making a game that is playable while blindfolded).

The game itself will be assessed on three key criteria: (1) **creative interpretation**; how clever/original/inventive is this game’s interpretation of the Game Jam theme? (2) **polish**; how finished and refined are the game’s activities, procedures, mechanics?; (3) **components**; how well are the final game pieces/art assets implemented? The goal of this is to quickly prototype and make a complete, polished game. The game (assessed as a group) will be worth 100 points, or 10% of the total course grade.

Additionally, with the turn-in of this game, each student will submit a written reflection on the game design process. In this reflection, students will be expected to summarize their experiences with the game jam, including all stages of the game’s design (brainstorming, designing, playtesting, revising). Reflections will also meaningfully incorporate assigned game design texts. Students will describe differences and similarities to the characterizations of game design and design processes described by Macklin & Sharp, Hunicke, Leblanc, & Zubek, Schell, among others. The reflection is an opportunity for each student to “step back” from the design of their game, and to discuss the ways that the game illustrated tensions present within the game design practitioner literatures presented in the course. Reflection papers

should total approximately 1000-1200 words, with the word count not including the works cited/references section or any included figures.

Games will be submitted either digitally or physically, while individual Reflection papers will be submitted as PDFs via Collab.

Well-Played Paper

For the final major assignment, students will engage in an extended analysis and observation assignment, intended to serve as the culmination of the course. For this assignment, students will assess the “well-played” nature of a game – a term that comes from a series of books and a journal from ETC Press, “a forum for in-depth close readings of video games that parse out the various meanings to be found in the experience of playing a game.”

Students will emulate essays for this journal, albeit in truncated and abbreviated form, both addressing an *interpretation* of the “meaning” of the game, while also incorporating *the play* of the game. That is, students will be tasked with playing a game, developing a “take” on that game (building upon existing game study literatures drawn from the Salen & Zimmerman book or elsewhere), then gathering observations of play to potentially confirm or challenge their budding analyses.

While there will be only one graded stage for this assignment, there will be two additional, ungraded stages where students will receive meaningful feedback on their Well-Played papers. First, students will make an informal “pitch” via the Collab forums for a perspective they’d like to take in investigating a game. A list of games appropriate for this assignment will be provided to all students before the pitch is due, and students will, in their pitches, choose a game from the list that they’d like to study, frame a research question that they’d like to address with their study, and connect their research question to a specific reading drawn from the Salen & Zimmerman textbook. Next, during the week of November 19th (just before Thanksgiving recess), students will share drafts of their Well-Played papers, gaining valuable feedback from peers to help shape the final papers.

Potential games appropriate for this assignment include a mixture of independent games, AAA games, and tabletop games. The range of games available to be chosen for this assignment will be limited to the ones on the final list (provided to students in September), and will be limited to a total of eight games total.

The final game list (as of October 17th; pending acquisition of these games) will include:

- *Kentucky Route Zero [Steam]*
- *Gone Home [Steam]*
- *Transistor [Steam]*
- *Portal 2 [Steam]*
- *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild [Switch]*

- *Celeste* [Switch]
- *Night in the Woods* [Switch]
- *Arkham Horror: The Card Game* [Card Game]
- *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective* [Board Game]
- *Spirit Island* [Board Game]

Students should feel free to research any/all of these games, and all students will be asked to express preferences on which game they would like to play during the early part of the term. However, the current list is tentative and dependent upon logistical issues (to make all games available to all students) which will be resolved before the end of September. Regardless, near the beginning of the term, a gaming space will be set up in 207 Wilson Hall for students to access these and other games used in the course.

Each final Well-Played paper will be approximately 1200-1500 words long, and will be assessed on three key criteria: (1) **argument**; is the student's analysis of the game well-supported and well-argued? (2) **recounting of play**; were the play observations carried out appropriately, and do they help address/challenge/illustrate the central questions the student is asking?; and (3) **clarity**; does the student clearly describe their analysis and incorporate play observations clearly?

Final Well-Played papers will be due at the end of the final examination period for each section:

- Monday/Wednesday/Friday section – **Wednesday, December 12, 2018 at 12pm**
- Tuesday/Thursday section – **Tuesday, December 18, 2018 at 12pm.**

In-Class Participation

Key to any course on games is participation – actually, key to *games'* success at all is participation! In this class, all students are required participate in daily activities in the class. This entails, at the barest minimum, regular attendance, coming prepared (with all relevant materials), active listening, and lack of distraction. However, this does not entail *good* attendance, and so *active participation* is required of all students in the class. This entails, but is not limited to:

- Asking questions of other students
- Raising challenges to perspectives brought up in readings
- Asking questions of the professor
- Relating personal experiences relevant to the course discussions.

Please note the order I listed the previous activities, as they are (typically) in order of preference. That is to say, seminars work best when students are talking to *one another* and are focused on the course readings. Asking clarifying questions of the professor are of course

fine, but seminars are not lectures and students should be prepared to engage in the meaning-making process themselves and with other students first. Personal experiences are great to share when they help to unpack or challenge a perspective from the course readings, but are lousy when they take the class off on a tangent or otherwise distract us from the tasks at hand.

Students are expected to come with laptops or iPads if they have them, but this is not necessary for participation in the course. Laptops should always remain **closed** unless the professor has explicitly stated that they can be opened – handwritten notes have been shown to lead to better retention, and so all students are encouraged to bring paper and a writing instrument to class.

Attendance is not required for the course, though it will be regularly taken. Regularly missing class or missing stretches of class *will* negatively impact a students' participation grade. If a student is concerned about their attendance, please see the professor to discuss the impact their absences may have had on their participation grade.

Because active participation is such a key part of the course, it is worth a relatively large 20% of the total course grade (200 course points), which will be assessed at the end of the term. Students will, at the end of the term, have the opportunity to write a short participation self-assessment (over Collab) which will allow each student to alert the professor to anything they may have missed over the term.

Course Policies

Grading Scale

All letter grades in this course will follow the following system:

A+ = 97.0%-100%	A = 93.0%-96.9%	A- = 90.0%-92.9%
B+ = 87.0%-89.9%	B = 83.0%-86.9%	B- = 80.0%-82.9%
C+ = 77.0%-79.9%	C = 73.0%-76.9%	C- = 70.0%-72.9%
D+ = 67.0%-69.9%	D = 63.0%-66.9%	D- = 60.0%-62.9%
	F = 0.0%-59.9%	

Attendance

Attendance is highly encouraged and will greatly enhance your own and others' class experience. However, there are no penalties for non-attendance unless it results in a lack of participation. Attendance will be periodically recorded, but does not correspond directly to a course grade. If you must be absent, you may employ other participation strategies before,

during, or after the missed class (including posting to course forums and contributing to the course wiki).

In case of expected absences, advance notice is very much appreciated. In case of unexpected absences, no documentation is required, though a significant number of absences may prompt a conversation about how to ensure your success in class participation.

Assignment Submission Guidelines

Unless otherwise stated, all assignments are due via the course Collab site at 9am Eastern on the day that they are due. No late papers will be accepted whatsoever. If an extension is desired, students must negotiate the paper extension with the instructor at least two full days before the paper is due. All papers must be submitted via the appropriate Collab link (and following instructions within the Assignment link for formatting/submission details).

Papers should be submitted to Collab only as PDF files. Assignment links that involve submitting an attachment will be limited to PDF filetype submissions. For Mac users, please select “Save as PDF...” in your word processor’s print dialog to create a PDF; for PC users, please use a Word to PDF converter (several are available online) if you are unable to convert to PDF format on your computer. Links to Google Docs, Word files and Pages files will not be accepted for papers, unless otherwise stated.

If you miss a Collab deadline and are locked out from submitting an assignment, you should *never* send the late paper via email. All papers submitted via email will be ignored and will *not* count toward your course grade. The lack of any late paper submissions should be an impetus to submit your work well before the Collab deadline and not work up to the deadline; if you miss the Collab assignment link deadline, you will earn a zero grade for that assignment, as there will be no opportunities to submit any late work that is not negotiated ahead of time.

A Brief Note on Academic Writing

Though this course is about games, students will be held to the standards of academic writing in all fields. That is to say, please familiarize yourself with common writing mistakes, including but not limited to:

- The difference between “there,” “their,” and “they’re”
- Proper use of colons and semicolons
- Common misspellings – e.g., “loose” for “lose”
- Keeping paragraph sizes short and digestible (no paragraphs longer than a page, ever)
- Only citing dictionary definitions when a paper is actually about a dictionary.

Writing that is unclear, contains multiple grammatical, typographical, or logical errors, or is otherwise so difficult to read that it impedes the grading of the paper will be returned to the author ungraded for revision before grading. Students are encouraged to meet with the

instructor during office hours to address any concerns they might have about their writing well before a paper submission deadline.

Technologies in Class

Use of tablets, laptops, and phones in class is permitted only for access purposes, for note taking (particularly on the Course Wiki), for participation in class discussions, for select class activities/gameplay, and for building off of content discussed in class (ie., using Google or Wikipedia to research a new concept). The use of technology for social media, for other coursework, or for shopping is highly discouraged. Laptops and other mobile devices should be off unless the professor instructs you to use them; if your technology misuse distract others (including the instructor), you will be asked to put your devices away.

Academic Dishonesty and Honor Pledge Violations

In a course such as this in which the majority of course assessments are papers, academic dishonesty is largely an issue of plagiarization rather than other forms. Plagiarizing another's work (whether it's a fellow student or other academic writing) is an extremely serious offense. Any suspected case of plagiarization will earn the student a zero grade on the assignment and will be instantly reported up through appropriate channels. If you are unfamiliar with the University's honor committee and process for suspected honor code violations, please refer to <https://honor.virginia.edu/> .

Disability Services

We strive to create an accessible class for a range of dis/abilities, in addition to offering accommodations through the Student Disability Access Center. Students should feel free to contact the instructor to discuss any needs that may arise should students face truly unusual challenges during the semester. The University of Virginia strives to provide accessibility to all students. If you require an accommodation to fully access this course, please contact the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC) at (434) 243-5180 or via email at sdac@virginia.edu. If you are unsure if you require an accommodation, or wish to learn more about their services, you may contact the SDAC at the number above or by visiting their website at www.sdac.studenthealth.virginia.edu .

More Course Policies! A FAQ.

Q: I'm really not happy with the grade I got back a few weeks ago. Can't I just revise it and resubmit it now?

Please read your feedback promptly and if there was an error in how your assignment was scored, alert me immediately so I can rectify it. If there was an error in how you interpreted the prompt, that is not a justification for a rewrite. If you believe there was a mistake in how I assessed your paper, that is potentially a legitimate justification for a rewrite. I will not regrade any assignment beyond one week after the paper was returned.

Q: I missed the deadline by a couple of minutes and now the Collab link is closed. Is it okay if I just email you my paper instead? I'll just go ahead and email you, I bet that'll be fine, right?

Nope, like I said in the syllabus, no late submissions will be accepted, and *no* submissions sent over email will be graded whatsoever. All assignments must be submitted via Collab or in class (when appropriate). If you miss a submission deadline by even one minute and Collab locks you out from the assignment link, you will receive a zero for that assignment. No exceptions. You must plan ahead and always submit your assignments early to avoid any last second internet hiccups, Collab problems, and so on.

Q: I'm only 1/10th of a percentage point from the next highest grade. Will you please just bump me up a grade? This will really impact my GPA, so please bump me up, okay?

You should never email at the end of semester asking for your course grade to be bumped up a letter grade simply because you want the higher letter grade. Doing so is a waste of your time and effort, and actually works against you. I will assume that any student who asks for a letter grade increase without a justification is only seeking the higher grade and has not attended to other, relevant course policies. All final grade cutoffs (90%+ = A; 80.0%-89.9% = B, etc.) are firm. If you earn, say, an 89.9%, it will be recorded as a B+. There has to be a hard cutoff somewhere, and so to be fair to all, there will be no rounding up.

Q: Is it okay if I send you a link to a Google Doc for this paper? Or how about a Word file, my other professors are fine with Word files? No wait, I forgot, I have Pages, how about I use Pages? I'll just use Pages, I'm sure that'll turn out okay.

All papers must be submitted in PDF format. Word files, Pages files, Google Doc links, whatever else you might have, will not be accepted. Only PDFs will be accepted. This may seem arbitrary but helps maintain your formatting choices for me to assess, avoids the danger of passing along any kind of Word macrovirus or similar problem, and helps expedite grading (PDFs can be quickly opened and graded by me inside a browser).

Q: Can you read a draft of my paper? It's a pretty rough draft.

Of course, I'd love to, but I won't read papers sent over email. If you bring a printed draft to office hours, I will make every effort to read the paper with you. I strongly suggest, however, that all students identify ahead of time which section you'd like the most feedback on, to help me prepare to give you detailed feedback on it. I encourage all students to take papers well ahead of time to the UVa Writing Center (<https://virginia.mywconline.com/>). All written work must be free of major typographical, grammatical, and logical errors; if a paper is too difficult to understand due to sloppy writing, it will be returned with a grade of zero.

Q. You really seem to dislike email. I thought professors and older people really liked email? I'm confused. Are there other ways to contact you?

From the professor's perspective, email is essentially a series of messy and hard to follow communication streams with multiple students, and I tend to dislike using it because it stretches communication with students over multiple threads. I certainly won't use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or other social media means to communicate with students enrolled in my courses. I prefer to have all communication run through the Collab site as much as possible for a few reasons – it keeps all of the course materials in one place for me to more easily grade, it provides you a simple place to access all announcements and course files, and it's a record of our interactions. I will respond to student emails within 48 hours, but will not respond to any emails sent after 5pm until the following day (I have small kids, I'm not checking email at night). Similarly, I will not respond to student emails sent over a weekend until the next Monday.

Q: I'm really not comfortable talking in class; I like small group discussions sometimes but the whole class discussions aren't something I like. Will I do well in this course? I'd be much more comfortable talking to you in your office hours than participating in class! How about that? Can we substitute me coming to your office hours for in-class participation?

“I didn't talk in class because I prefer small group discussions” is not a legitimate excuse for failing to participate in a class, I'm sorry to say. There are times that the course will provide small group opportunities to discuss readings, but all students need to step up and participate in the whole group discussions as well. All of my courses attempt to use modified seminar discussion styles, regardless of the size. These courses must involve active and persistent participation from all students, regardless of the size of the course. Course participation – interaction with other students' ideas, discussion in the class session, and supporting/challenging ideas presented in the class discussions -- is necessary for a seminar to work. “Active listening” is helpful but does not completely replace verbal communication in large- and small-group settings in class.

Also, meeting with your professor in office hours does *not* count towards a student's seminar participation. Quite the contrary, as even though individual meetings with faculty in office hours are strongly encouraged, they are considered additional individual mentoring sessions, as they do not contribute directly to a seminar discussion. A student participation self-evaluation in 2018 said: “My contributions to participation were from listening to and learning from my peers.” Again, I have to emphasize that this is not participation as conceived of in this course – active listening is wonderful, but only listening to students and internalizing is consuming their work, not creating your own.

Q: I think I might have emotional or cognitive conditions that could impact my performance in the class. What should I do about this?

If you suspect you have any issues (social anxiety, depression, undiagnosed learning disability, physical disabilities, or otherwise) which could impact your course participation and performance, *please* find assistance. It is incumbent upon you to seek out University resources to document any challenges you might face. Your instructor is not qualified to diagnose any such impediments, and University documentation formally compels me to make sure that I give you all the accommodations you need. If, at the end of the term, you claim that an undiagnosed social anxiety kept you from participating in the course, you will not be given any leniency in your course participation grade. I do not attempt to be unsympathetic, but just mean to acknowledge that these are very serious and real challenges that many students face, and for fairness, I can only provide accommodations for those students who are willing to address the issues they have. If you suspect you have a condition that might impede your performance, you must seek out University offices to be documented and assisted.