# The Portfolio Manual

## *Introductory Reflexive Essay*

The first morning of class, I arrived at Park Hall an hour before the building opened. I am a commuter student, and it was the first time I had driven to the University of Georgia. I gave myself time to get lost, time for traffic, and time for the bus, but in all the time I had given myself, I hadn't given myself time to prepare adequately for the first day of English 1102. I assumed that college writing would be akin to high school writing, and that I would simply begin planning and writing essays as soon as they were assigned while spending little to no time worrying about them. However, I was proved very, *very* wrong, and for the first time in my life, I was pretty happy about being wrong. During the first few class periods, Ms. Hittel stressed the importance of the writing process, but like many students, I figured I could pull through the class without using this process. However, as we delved into our first assignment, I noticed that I had seen this process before- just under different circumstances. As an avid gamer who's played my fair share of role-playing games, I realized that the writing process was quite similar to how I worked through games. Surprisingly, there are actually many similarities between writing and gaming.

In most role-playing games (RPGs), the player sculpts their own worlds and characters. Because of the endless possibilities for gameplay, every gamer plays the game differently. Will the star of the show be a rogue with a penchant for thievery? Or perhaps a hero who protects even the meekest of creatures? Truly, a character's traits depend on the gamer's choices, and each gamer uses their own unique brand of logic and reasoning to make these determinations. Even when changing the characters of a game, a player still explores and experiences the main story line. I followed this same approach when I illustrated the core themes and values of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* while changing key elements in order to adapt the play to a film, which is exactly what Ms. Hittel asked us to do for our Drama Project. I used my own perspective and preferences to craft my adaptation of *Pygmalion*, which features Eliza Doolittle living as a Mexican woman in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, during the 1930s. Changing Eliza's ethnicity, as well as the setting of the play, allows me to capitalize on Eliza's imposed inability to have both freedom and esteem. My adaptation proves that Shaw's commentary on women applies to more than just twentieth-century England and also mimics the process of character and world creation that is essential to RPGs.

However, character creation is only one step in the RPG experience. Once a character and a world are established, a player must actually *play* the game. Most RPGs require players to make observations and use their

acquired information to solve problems and puzzles throughout the game. Often, a player will encounter an obstacle that seems impossible to conquer and must look back at their observations to find a solution. Every major quest in a game is part of the bigger picture, and it's not until the player has enough experience that they can begin to decipher this picture. They have to examine every scenario they face from a multitude of angles, and certain pieces of the overarching puzzle may not fit where they appear to. This idea of keeping an open mind to new perspectives is essential in my Poetry Project. Throughout the project, I examine how terms that appear mutually exclusive can be used to analyze the same poem. My main focus is the ambiguity of beauty and tragedy and how different observations of the same poem can lead readers to form different conclusions. With most games, there are many paths to victory, and with the poems in my anthology, there are many paths to forming a perspective. Not everything is as it appears at first glance, and as a reader and a gamer, it's important to refrain from forming opinions too soon.

One of the most efficient ways to maintain perspective is to incorporate new information as it presents itself. In my experience with RPGs, one of the most crucial aspects of a game is to improve a character. As the player progresses in the game, their character must adapt to fit new situations. They often need to develop new skills while simultaneously improving upon old ones. Essentially, a player must edit their character. A beginning character is akin to the first draft of an essay: the basics are present, but they need to be fleshed out and developed. A writer must successfully integrate new material into old material, sometimes keeping previous sentences, sometimes changing them, and sometimes omitting them entirely. As a gamer learns new information and explores new areas of a game, they may find that skills that once seemed important are now utterly useless. Similarly, a writer may find that a sentence or paragraph that they once felt was essential to their essay now seems to be inconsistent with their work. When playing a game, a player must modify their character as they go along, just as a writer must modify their paper. No character starts off with the ability to complete a game, and no first draft perfectly portrays the arguments a writer makes.

To get from one draft to the next, writers often need advice from their peers. Similarly, many RPGs have online or multiplayer components to enhance gameplay. Each player serves as the protagonist in their own story, but they work together and cooperate with other players in order to reach a common goal. Often, a player provides information and materials that are helpful to the other players. However, they can't play the game for them. Similarly, in the peer reviewing process, peers aid each other's "gameplay" without taking control. When playing an RPG and writing an essay, it's easy to overlook minor errors and occurrences. Luckily, this problem can be solved by communicating with peers. One person's strength may be another's weakness, and vice versa. By communicating

with each other and using their strengths to their advantage, gamers can help each other overcome obstacles, and writers can help each other bolster their arguments. Since no two gamers play a game the same way, each can recount the unique information they've collected. Likewise, with no two writers having the same perspective, they can use their differences to round each other out.

As I've gone through English 1102, I've had to do a lot of rounding out for myself. This entire semester has been a journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, and while it hasn't always been easy, it's definitely been worth my time. My Wild Card, entitled *The Evolution of Knightly Sinclair*, reads as a small look into my personal life and history. As a predominant character in most of my playthroughs of the RPG *Wizardry 8*, Knightly embodies my uncertainty in my own life. She has never quite fit into my party, and yet she's always there. She has a lot of potential, but neither she nor I have quite figured out what is to become of that potential.

English 1102 has been an exciting and impactful experience. Like any RPG, the obstacles were challenging but not impossible, and it was only when I trusted myself and my peers that I could truly succeed. I've learned my strengths and weaknesses as a writer, and as the protagonist in my own life, it's up to me to decide what I'll revise and what I'll keep the same. I've learned to treat life as an RPG: to keep an open mind, to not be afraid to change, and to ask for help when I need to. Without English 1102, I don't think I ever would have thought to apply these strategies to my life, and I've got to say, I think I'm a better person with them than without them.