

The ABCs of Online RPCs (Role-Playing Courses)

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Humor, mystery, adventure—these are essential characteristics of Information Age courses. In the not-too-distant future, it will be common practice for courses to be designed like video games. In a global economy dominated by the video game generation, edutainment will inevitably supercede both education and entertainment. Some people believe that the merger of education and entertainment will diminish education. To the contrary, and perhaps more importantly, it will improve entertainment. Since typical students spend nearly as much time playing video games as they do in class, this is an exceedingly important goal.

The industry statistics on video games are both staggering and revealing:

- Sixty percent of all Americans age six and older, or about 145 million people, play computer and video games.
- The average age of a game player is 28 years old.
- Forty-three percent of game players are women.
- The vast majority of people who play do so with friends and family. (Almost 60% of frequent game players play with friends, 33% play with siblings, and about one-quarter play with their spouse and/or parents.)
- Computer and video game software sales grew 8% in 2002 to \$6.9 billion and are expected to show strong growth over the next few years.
- In 2002, over 221 million computer and video games were sold, or almost two games for every household in America.
- All games are rated by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), and 68% of games are rated “E” for Everyone.
- Over ninety percent of all games are purchased by adults over the age of 18.
- Sixteen of the top 20 best selling games in 2002 were rated “E” for everyone or “T” for teen.
- Fifty-six percent of the most frequent computer and video game players have been playing games for six or more years, while 60 percent expect to be playing games as much or more ten years from now as they do today. (Interactive Digital Software Association, 2003)

The focus of this workshop was on online educational games. The advantages of online educational games include:

- multi-media sensory stimulation
- person-person (multi-player) and/or person-machine (single player) interaction
- asynchronous (players can play at any time and place) and/or real-time interaction
- 24-7 availability
- nearly infinite resources (the entire Internet)
- individualization (players can interact with learning materials at their own pace and in their own style)

- replayability (players can make mistakes and replay poorly understood situations as often as desired)
- instant and automated record-keeping, feedback, and diagnosis
- format familiarity (today's students are inveterate game players)

This workshop was aimed at people who want to push the envelope of instructional design instead of just converting F2F (face-to-face) courses into online courses. During this workshop, participants learned the elements of online course and game design and how to integrate these two disciplines into a role-playing course (RPC). The presenters shared their own successes and failures in this process from their perspective of a decade of online course and educational game design. They offered useful principles and tips to guide participants who want to develop their own RPCs or want to assist others in developing RPCs. Participants left the workshop with 1) an understanding of the elements, processes, and principles of online course and educational game design, 2) a generic outline for creating RPCs which includes numerous links to helpful online resources (see below), 3) their own well-developed outline for creating their own online educational game, 4) a network of instructors with the same interest in online educational games, and 5) a realization that the future of online courseware is tied to its edutainment value.

The workshop began with a tour of the world's first online RPC (role-playing course), EAF 228: Social Foundations of Education, which is located at <http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/rpriele/eaf228>. This course was developed by the presenters in 2000 and nearly 1,000 students have enrolled in it since that time. EAF 228 was used as a model of online RPC design. The genesis of the course was explained, the “nuts and bolts” of the course were demonstrated, and the elements and principles of online course and game design were discussed.

Next the presenters discussed good and bad game design by demonstrating various popular and unpopular video games and video game systems. Strategies and techniques for incorporating good game design into online courses were offered and the limits of transferring video game design elements to an online environment were explored. Participants were then allowed to interact with the games to get a feel for video game design and play.

The presenters then proceeded to explain the three stages of online RPC creation as outlined below (this outline is available online at <http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/rpriele/eaf228/abc.htm>):

Stage 1: Pre-Design

Learn about Video Games (Types, Structure, Organization)

- Visit Video Arcades (Observe [Games](#) and [Behaviors](#))
- Watch/Play Video Games ([Myst](#), [Zelda](#), [SimCity](#))
- Make Friends with Gamers (In-Person and [Online](#))
- Explore Online RPCs ([EAF 228](#))

Unlearn Traditional Course Design (Focus on the Internet)

- Non-linear ([Up](#), [Down](#), [Sideways](#))
- Multi-media ([Images](#), [Animation](#), [Videos](#), [Music](#), [Sound Effects](#))
- Interactivity ([Input](#), [Feedback](#))
- Asynchronous ([Anytime](#), [Anywhere](#))

Re-Organize Your Time (This is a lifestyle change)

- Delivery ([No more F2F](#))
- Grading ([Automated and Web-based](#))
- Record-keeping ([Automated and Web-Based](#))
- Development ([Continuous](#))

Stage 2: Design

Create a Story (Allegory)

- Plot ([Conflict](#), [Resolution](#))
- Characters ([Descriptions](#), [Images](#), [Voices](#), [Relationships](#))
- Setting ([Map](#), [Timeline](#))
- Other Details ([Symbols](#), [Poetry](#), [Songs](#), [Cosmology](#))

Create Quests (Assignments)

- Objectives ([Integrated with Story](#))
- Resources ([Websites](#), [Search Engine](#), [Message Board](#), [Previous Students](#), [Instructor](#))
- Barriers ([Exams](#), [Puzzles](#), [Essays](#), [Websites](#))
- Evaluation ([Levels](#), [Deadlines](#))

Create Official Player's Manual (Multi-purpose)

- Instructional ([Introduction](#), [Story](#), [Objectives](#), [Strategies](#))
- Technical ([FAQs](#), [Trouble-shooting](#))
- Political ([Credits](#), [Guest Book](#), [Resources](#))

Stage 3: Post-Design

Identify Helpful Websites (Free and Copyrighted)

- Conceptual ([Video Games](#), [Subject Matter Content](#))
- Artistic ([Text](#), [Images](#), [Animation](#), [Music](#), [Sound Effects](#))
- Technical ([JavaScripts](#), [Java Applets](#), [DHTML](#), [Other Tools](#))

Identify Critical Skills (If you want it done right)

- Conceptual ([Computer Game Design](#), [Instructional Design](#))
- Artistic ([Writing](#), [Typography](#), [Graphic Design](#), [Sound Design](#))
- Technical ([Dreamweaver](#), [Photoshop](#), [Flash](#))

Identify Friendly Experts (It's not what you know, but who you know.)

- Conceptual ([Educators](#), [Gamers](#))
- Artistic ([Writers](#), [Poets](#), [Graphic Artists](#), [Musicians](#))
- Technical ([HTML Writers](#), [Web Designers](#))

After the three stages of online RPC creation were clearly explained, the participants were then collectively and individually assisted by the presenters in the development of an outline for their own

online RPC. The workshop ended with a sharing session during which the participants shared, brainstormed, and networked with each other.

Reference

Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA). (n.d.). Top ten industry facts. Retrieved June 1, 2003, from <http://www.idsa.com/pressroom.html>

Biographical Sketches

Dr. Rod Riegle is a professor of education at Illinois State University. He earned a B.A. in education from Wittenberg University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in philosophy of education from Ohio State University. Dr. Riegle is the author of 4 books and 50 articles on a wide variety of topics on every level of education. He has made more than 50 national and international presentations to scholarly organizations and has served as a consultant on information technology to over 40 educational organizations. In 2000 he designed and taught the world's first online course that is an educational game.

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