- Chapter -

3302

Advanced Writing in Technical Professions

During my second year as a Computer Science and Game Design major at Northeastern University, I decided to take an English course called Advanced Writing in Technical Professions. As someone who is seeking a career in game development, I decided to utilize my time during this class to learn as much as possible about writing about games. Effectively communicating one's ideas is essential in any profession. This course helped me become more proficient in communicating my ideas about games in various forms. More specifically, I learned a great deal about how to offer judgments with significant supporting evidence and communicate technical knowledge clearly and concisely to various audiences.

In addition to summarizing information and spreading knowledge, writers must be able to offer their own opinions in order to engage and persuade readers. However, simply offering these judgments is not enough; in order to effectively persuade readers, writers must provide

sufficient evidence to support their claims. One of the most important things I learned in Advanced Writing was how to offer such judgments more effectively.

In one of my earliest papers of the course, titled "The World Needs Heroes: How Blizzard Entertainment Entices its Readers," I did not support my judgments very effectively. In the paper, I analyzed the discourse of a successful game company's press release to understand how the company gets readers to purchase its games. In my rough draft for the paper, I made a judgment that, "the style and language is geared toward exciting its audience rather than objectively informing." However, I provided insignificant evidence to support this claim. I simply mentioned a few occurrences of words geared towards excitement in the document, which was not significant enough to suggest that the style of the entire press release was one focused more on exciting readers than informing. Therefore, I was not successful in persuading readers to consider my point.

However, throughout the course, I learned very much about how to provide stronger supporting evidence for my claims. In my last paper of the course, titled "The Effectiveness of Educational Games as Part of K–12 Curricula," I supported each of my claims with ample and significant evidence, making it my strongest writing of the semester. One judgment I made regarding educational video games was that "the players' prior knowledge is a significant factor into how effective the game is [in

teaching]." To support this claim, I offered evidence from three separate studies on educational games that indicated a correlation between students' prior knowledge and overall retention from playing the game. By providing strong evidence, readers are more likely to be convinced of the judgments made in the paper.

Knowing how to target writing to specific audiences is another incredibly valuable skill I learned in Advanced Writing. It is very important for a writer to understand who will be reading the content she produces in order to frame the content such that it is engaging and insightful to that audience.

The second document we wrote in the course was a reference document targeted for professionals in our respective disciplines. I chose to write a reference document for professional game developers who use the Unity game engine software. My paper, titled "Unity 5 Lighting: Best Practices for Efficiency," outlined tips to make lighting run more quickly and efficiently in Unity. I believe my paper was successful in providing technical information to a technical audience. Though I assumed that readers of my paper would be professional users of Unity, I mentioned this clearly in my intro by stating, "This article is critical for developers who have intermediate to advanced experience with Unity…" I also continued to include hyperlinks throughout the document, pointing

readers to other reference documents in case they didn't know certain terminology or concepts I discussed in my document. For example, I mentioned "light probes" several times; if a reader did not have sufficient experience in Unity to know what these are, she could follow the hyperlink to learn about it before continuing further in my document. Additionally, I provided frequent "Quick Tips" in separate boxes that offered additional information for anybody who didn't have certain knowledge or wanted to learn more about a topic. By stating the intended audience in the beginning, providing several hyperlinks to other reference documents, and offering tips, I believe that this paper was very effective in providing information to a technical audience.

Writing for a popular audience, however, is very different. For our third assignment, we were asked to write about a technical topic for a more general audience. I chose to write a profile on the very successful game developer and founder of Valve Corp., Gabe Newell. The most difficult part about writing this piece was finding ways to frame the technical content such that it was engaging to a non-technical audience. I feel that I did this quite successfully by providing an engaging intro and using more exciting language. My intro was meant to capture people's attention by stating, "At first glance, Gabe Newell looks like the epitome of a gamer who spends all of his time in the basement munching on cheese puffs, gulping down

Mountain Dew, and becoming a Level 99 Wizard. However, his look isn't the only thing that has made him an icon of the Internet and gaming community." I believe that this introduction sparks curiosity in readers and leaves them wanted to read further. By offering a judgment on Gabe Newell's appearance and then explaining that he is an icon, readers become curious as to why this man is important. Also, the casual language creates a friendly tone and engages a popular audience.

One thing I definitely could have improved on, however, was my explanation of technical aspects. In my rough draft, I offered very little explanation for my technical knowledge, mentioning "PC digital downloads" several times without understanding that some readers may not understand what this means. In my final draft, I made sure to explain that this simply meant downloadable computer games. Still, I did not provide sufficient explanation for various other technical concepts. I mentioned that one of the reasons Gabe Newell's company was so successful was that his service offered, "DRM in a much less intrusive way." Though I did explain what DRM was, I did not sufficiently explain how this point revolutionized the computer gaming industry. Therefore, a popular audience may not have understood the impact that Gabe Newell had on the industry. Nevertheless, as a result of writing this profile, I have learned very much about how to engage

readers and explain technical content to a non-technical audience.

Overall, I have learned several valuable lessons in Advanced Writing that will help me to effectively communicate my ideas to others. These skills will be incredibly useful in my professional life as a game developer when I need to write anything from a press release to a reference document to a blog post. I will continue to offer arguable judgments that I support with strong evidence. I will continue to pay thoughtful attention to the perspectives of my audience. By doing so, I will continue to become a more effective writer and communicator.

Acknowledgements