

## ENGL 557 / 757: Persuasive Gaming

### Crafting and Boss Monster Battle: Cthulhu (Gaming Discourse Community Essay)



#### Monster Stats

**Name:** Cthulhu

**Type:** Great Old One

**XP:** 200 (50 for Abstract and 150 for Essay)

**Description:** Little is known about this deity. Police reports from a raid on a cult that worships Cthulhu describe statues of the monster as “a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind.”<sup>1</sup>

#### Weakness

Cthulhu has no known weaknesses. You must do research in the ancient Scrolls of Axe in order to make a plan to try to defeat Cthulhu.

#### Strategies for Crafting and Battle

In his influential essay “The Concept of Discourse Community,” John Swales defines “discourse communities” as “groups that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals.” He goes on to define six characteristics for identifying a group as a discourse community (all quoted from his article, available on Canvas):

1. **A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.** These public goals may be formally inscribed in documents (as is often the case with associations and clubs), or they may be more tacit. The goals are *public*, because spies may join speech and discourse communities for hidden purposes of subversion, while more ordinary people may join organizations with private hopes of commercial or romantic advancement. In some instances, but not in many, the goals may be high level or abstract. In a Senate or Parliament there may well exist overtly adversarial groups of members, but these adversaries may broadly share some common objective as striving for improved government. In the much more typical non-adversarial discourse communities, reduction in the broad level of agreement may fall to a point where communication breaks down and the discourse community splits. It is commonality of goal, not shared object of study that is criteria!, even if the former often subsumes the

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<sup>1</sup> Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu,” p. 134

latter. But not always. The fact that the shared object of study is, say, the Vatican, does not imply that students of the Vatican in history departments, the Kremlin, dioceses, birth control agencies and liberation theology seminaries form a discourse community.

2. **A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.** The participatory mechanisms will vary according to the community: meetings, telecommunications, correspondence, newsletters, conversations and so forth. This criterion is quite stringent because it produces a negative answer to the case of 'The Cafe Owner Problem' (Najjar, personal communication). In generalized form, the problem goes as follows: individuals A, B, C and so on occupy the same professional roles in life. They interact (in speech and writing) with the same clientele; they originate, receive, and respond to the same kind of messages for the same purposes; they have an approximately similar range of genre skills. And yet, as Cafe owners working long hours in their own establishments, and not being members of the Local Chamber of Commerce, A, B and C never interact with one another. Do they form a discourse community? We can notice first that 'The Cafe Owner Problem' is not quite like those situations where A, B and C operate as 'point.' A, B and C may be lighthouse keepers on their lonely rocks, or missionaries in their separate jungles, or neglected consular officials in their rotting outposts. In all these cases, although A, B and C may never interact, they all have lines of communication back to base, and presumably acquired discourse community membership as a key element in their initial training.

Bizzell (1987) argues that the cafe owner kind of social group will be a discourse community because 'its members may share the social-class-based or ethnically-based discursive practices of people who are likely to become cafe owners in their neighborhood' (1987:5). However, even if this sharing of discursive practice occurs, it does not resolve the logical problem of assigning membership of a community to individuals who neither admit nor recognize that such a community exists.

3. **A discourse community uses its participatory [or interactive] mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.** Thus, membership implies uptake of the informational opportunities. Individuals might pay an annual subscription to the *Acoustical Society of America* but if they never open any of its communications they cannot be said to belong to the discourse community, even though they are formally members of the society. The secondary purposes of the information exchange will vary according to the common goals: to improve performance in a football squad or in an orchestra, to make money in a brokerage house, to grow better roses in a gardening club, or to dent the research front in an academic department.
4. **A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres [to further its goals].** A discourse community has developed and continues to develop discursal expectations. These may involve appropriacy of topics, the form, function, and positioning of discursal elements, and the roles texts play in the operation of the discourse community. In so far as 'genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them' (Martin, 1985:250), these discursal expectations are created by the *genres* that articulate the operations of the discourse community. One of the purposes of this criterion is to question discourse community status for new or newly-emergent groupings. Such groupings need, as it were, to settle down and work out their communicative proceedings and practices before they can be recognized as discourse communities. If a new grouping 'borrows' genres from other discourse communities, such borrowings have to be assimilated.
5. **In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.** This specialization may involve using lexical items known to the wider speech communities in special and technical ways, as in information technology discourse communities, or using highly technical terminology as in medical communities. Most commonly, however, the inbuilt dynamic towards an increasingly shared and specialized terminology is realized through the development of community-specific abbreviations and acronyms. The use of these (ESI, EAP, WAC, NCTE, TOEFL, etc.) is of

course, driven by the requirements for efficient communication exchange between experts. It is hard to conceive, at least in the contemporary English-speaking world, of a group of well-established members of a discourse community communicating among themselves on topics relevant to the goals of the community and not using lexical items puzzling to outsiders. It is hard to imagine attending perchance the convention of some group of which one is an outsider and understanding every word. If it were to happen—as might occur in the inaugural meeting of some quite new grouping—then that grouping would not yet constitute a discourse community.

6. **A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise.** Discourse communities have changing memberships; individuals enter as apprentices and leave by death or in other less involuntary ways. However, survival of the community depends on a reasonable ratio between novices and experts.

For this assignment, you will identify and analyze a gaming discourse community of your choosing. Your community can be a digital/virtual group or a “real world” group.

### The Assignment Steps

1. Perform secondary research to find out what has been written about different discourse communities, especially gaming discourse communities and especially ones similar to the discourse community you intend to observe.
2. Write a proposal/abstract of **1 to 2 double-spaced pages** that describes your anticipated discourse community, offers a rationale for your selection, and provides a plan and timeline for completing the essay.
3. Consult the “Guidance on Conducting Observations and Writing Field Notes” handout available on Canvas. Observe members of the discourse community while they are engaged in a shared activity. Take detailed field notes: What are they doing? What kinds of things do they say? What do they write? How do you know who is in and who is out of the group?
4. Collect anything members of the community read, write, or say (their genres). Anything is the key word: brochures, newsletters, reports, etc. or even very short things like forms, notes, and text messages. Be sure to ask permission before collecting genres that might be private to the community. I have a digital voice recorder which you may check out, or you may use your phone to record conversations; however, the focus should be on written documents.
5. Consult the “Sample Interview Questions” handout available on Canvas. Interview at least one member of the discourse community. Again, you need to take very detailed notes—you don’t want to accidentally misquote or misrepresent. In fact, I encourage you to record your interview and then transcribe the recording. In your interview, you might ask questions such as, “How long have you been here?” “Why are you involved?” “What do X, Y, and Z words mean?” “How did you learn to write A,B, or C?” “How do you communicate with other people (on your team, in your gaming group, at your business, etc.)?”
6. Analyze your field notes, collected materials, and interview using John Swales’ six characteristics of a discourse community.
7. Write the Discourse Community Ethnography.

### More about Step 6

After you’ve collected your data, you will want to analyze your data. Some questions you should consider include

1. What are the shared goals of the community? Why does this group exist? What does it do?
2. What mechanisms [or genres] do members use to communicate with each other (meetings, phone calls, email, text messages, newsletters, reports, evaluation forms, etc.)?
3. What are the purposes of each of these mechanisms of communication (i.e. to improve performance, make money, share research, etc.)?
4. Which of the above mechanisms of communication can be considered genres (textual responses to recurring situations that all group members recognize and understand)?
5. What kinds of specialized language (lexis) do group members use in their conversation and in their genres (name some examples—ESL, on the fly, 86, etc.)? What communicative function does this lexis serve (i.e. why say “86” instead of “we are out of this”)?
6. Who are the “old-timers” with expertise? Who are the newcomers with less expertise? How do newcomers learn the appropriate language, genres, and knowledge of the group?

These questions are just to get you started. Organize your essay around key points in your argument, rather than an examination of these questions from start to finish.

In order to conduct detailed analysis of your discourse community—and will help you produce a clear, focused essay—you must draw on specific examples from your field notes, collected materials, and interview. In addition to making reference to Swales, you should also include **at least 4 other pieces of secondary research** to support your thesis about this discourse community. This also means using in-text citations and a Works Cited (MLA).

### More about Step 7

After you’ve completed your thorough and thoughtful analysis of your fields notes, collected materials, and interviewed, it’s time to write about your findings in the essay itself. Although there are many ways to approach writing the essay, I ask that you follow this basic structure:

- **Introduction** (1-2 pages): Provide key information about your discourse community, for example, who they are, what they do, etc. You want to give enough context about your discourse community so that your audience feels prepared to read your analysis, but not so much information that your analysis becomes repetitive. You should also explain why you chose this discourse community and what you hoped to gain from studying it. You will also want to provide a thesis in this section. A thesis should answer three questions in one or two sentences: **WHAT** your argument is, **HOW** you will be making this argument, and **WHY** this argument is important (or, as I call it, the **SO WHAT** question).
- **Research Methods** (1 page): Before you discuss your findings, you need to briefly explain how you gathered them. Tell your audience where and when you conducted your observation(s), who and when you interviewed a member, and what materials you collected for analysis.
- **Body** (6-7 pages): The body of your essay is where you will discuss and explain your analysis.
- **Conclusion** (1 page): In your conclusion, reflect on your findings and analysis. What did you learn about how your discourse community communicates verbally and in written form? What did you learn about the genres your discourse community rely on most for communication? How does this knowledge help you better understand what it’s like to be a member of this discourse community?

\*Note: Using headings/subheadings might be helpful for various sections/subsections.

### Submission

The proposal/abstract is due on Canvas no later than Tuesday, April 14, by 11:59 p.m. and should be approximately 1 - 2 double-spaced pages. Use MLA format.

The gaming discourse community essay is due on Canvas no later than Saturday, May 9, by 11:59 p.m. and should be approximately 8 - 10 double-spaced pages. Use MLA format.

**Successful Crafting and Battle**

I will evaluate the essay using the PSU Writing Rubric available on Canvas

**Result of Successful Battle**

You successfully prevent Cthulhu from awaking and destroying reality as we know it.