UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER
School of Performing Arts

course syllabus for

MUSI 4343: Topics in Music (3 credit hours)
Spring 2026 – Topic: Video Game Music
TuTh 9:30–10:50 a.m. – FAC 1222 (Choir Room)

Professor: Dr. Kyle Gullings
Office: FAC 1215
Email (preferred contact method): kgullings@uttyler.edu
Office Phone: 903.565.5653

Office Hours: (contact me to set an appointment, or…)
Mondays 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Tuesdays 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Thursdays 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Fridays 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Course Description: MUSI 4343 covers selected topics in music theory and analysis. May be repeated three times for credit when content changes. For Spring 2026, students in the course will share, discover, analyze, compose, and celebrate music for video games. Students will explore the creative, aesthetic, practical, technological, and career-oriented aspects of writing video game music. This course serves as a fun and informative introduction to appreciating and writing in the genre, although it will not fully prepare you for a professional career in the field due to practical limitations of available technology / time / instructor industry experience.

Pre-Requisites: MUSI 2312 (Music Theory IV) and MUSI 2117 (Aural Skills IV). Students not possessing the pre-requisites will be administratively removed from the class unless otherwise approved by the department.

Course Learning Objectives: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:
1. **Describe** the main **genres of video games** and the **types of music** they generally feature
2. **Describe** the difference between **linear and interactive music** for video games
3. **Summarize** the basic **technical and entrepreneurial skills** required for a career writing video game music
4. **Evaluate** how well their own **personality assets** have prepared them for a career in video game composition
5. **Create** a compelling **personal origin story**, including a description of their own **formative experiences** with video game music, and an **evaluation** of how well their **personality assets** have prepared them for a career in video game composition
6. **Analyze** the music for a given video game, including describing its game and music genre(s), instrumentation, linear versus interactive aspects, technical requirements, and contributions to storytelling and player immersion
7. **Create** short original excerpts of both linear and interactive music for video games

Required Texts and Resources:
Required Textbook: Phillips, Winifred. A Composer's Guide to Game Music. The MIT Press, 2017.
ISBN-13: 9780262534499. Possible sources:
- https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262534499/a-composers-guide-to-game-music/
- https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/a-composers-guide-to-game-music-winifred-phillips/1117299892
- https://www.amazon.com/Composers-Guide-Game-Music-Press/dp/0262534495/
- https://www.bkstr.com/uttylerstore/shop/textbooks-and-course-materials (UT Tyler Bookstore)

Grading:

Grade Weighting		
	Daily Assignments and Quizzes	15%
	Analysis Project 1: Retro Game	10%
	Analysis Project 2: Select Your Character (Student Choice)	10%
	Composition Project 1: Themes and Genres	15%
	Composition Project 2: Interactive Music	15%
	Origin Story & Personal Inventory	15%
	Participation / In-class Discussions	20%

- Optional Project 1 – Written Review of a Live Concert of Video Game Music
- Optional Project 2 – Essay on Video Game Music
   Each Optional Project may replace one Analysis or Composition Project grade.

Grading Scale	90–100%	A
	80–89%	B
	70–79%	C
	60–69%	D
	Below 60%	F

Methods for Assessing Outcomes: Students will be evaluated through participation in regular in-class discussions, short daily assignments and/or quizzes, prepared class presentations about existing video game music, creative and technical composition projects related to video games, and a personal inventory of personality assets and how they have grown over the semester. Optionally, students may complete a written review of a live video game music concert, and/or write an essay on video game music:

- Topic 1: "Is Video Game Music Art?" (Respond to Roger Ebert)
- Topic 2: "The Current State and Trajectory of Video Game Music Scholarship" (Read Whalen article).

Methods of Instruction: A variety of instructional methods will be used, including readings, in-class lectures, group discussions, and sample class presentations.

** Due Dates and Excused Absences Policy: All assignments are due on the days indicated, at the start of class. At the instructor's discretion, reduced credit *may* be given for homework, projects, or other work that is late or missing due to *unexcused* absences, with the following penalties applied:

Later the same day, up to 6 days late = 10% off
7–13 days late = 20% off
14+ days late = no credit / not accepted

At the instructor's discretion, absences may be considered *excused* only for legitimate, *documented* reasons (serious illness, family emergency, etc.). Even in cases of *excused absences*, any outstanding assignments are due at the following class period. In all cases, it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of absences as soon as possible, and to *document* that absence if an *excused absence* is being requested.

** Attendance Policy: Full attendance and participation are expected in this course. Arrival after class has begun will be considered a tardy, which will count as one-third of an unexcused absence.

For absences in this course, the following penalties may be applied:

6–8.9 unexcused absences = maximum grade of B
9+ unexcused absences = maximum grade of C
(This penalty is not part of the Participation grade, which reflects engaged activity in class.)

Additionally, avoidable distractions such as cell phone use/texting, eating food, outside work, and unnecessarily leaving the room during class time may results in a tardy or absence for the day, at the instructor's discretion. Multiple occurrences will result in the student being asked to leave the class session.

** Communication: Students are required to regularly check their Patriot e-mail account and the class Canvas page.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in This Course: For this course, students are allowed to use artificial intelligence (AI) to brainstorm or improve on composition strategies, creative concepts, and lists of related repertoire for listening. All such uses of AI in this course must be disclosed at the time of submission. Unless you get prior permission from your instructor, you may **not** use AI in any other ways to assist with any portion of the Analysis Projects, Personal Inventory, Daily Assignments, etc., or to generate audio or music notation for any purpose.

** Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated (cheating, copying homework, plagiarism, disallowed AI use, etc.). All suspected violations will be reported to the campus Student Conduct and Intervention Office.

Other: For additional **University Policies and Information** and **Student Resources**, please follow the links below, or view thosee sections on our course Canvas site under the Syllabus Module.

- University Policy
- Student Resources

Topics in Music Theory – Video Game Music – Spring 2026

Course Calendar

(subject to change)

Week	Date	Topic or Event
1	1/13	First Class Day / Syllabus / Course Introduction
		Intro. to All Projects
		Select / Assign Games for Analysis Project 1: Retro Game
		Introduce Optional Project 1 (Concert Dates) & 2 (Essay Topics)
		Your "Origin Stories" –Game Experiences, Current Systems & Games – Goals & Perspectives
	1/15	Reading: Phillips Ch. 1 Why Write Video Game Music / Assets (also on Canvas)
		Homework: Personality Assets of a Game Composer (see Excel template on Canvas)
		Discussion: Maximize one strength, and shore up two weaknesses. Make a plan, and document it.
2	1/19	**NO CLASSES:** *MLK Jr. Day*
	1/20	Introduce Analysis Project 1: Retro Game
		Reading: Phillips Ch. 2 Creative Skillset (also on Canvas)
		Homework: Select Your Gamer Type (see Ch. 2 reading)
	1/22	Reading: Collins "From Bits to Hits" (2005) (short)
		Reading: Collins "Video Games Killed" (2007) (very short)
		Reminder of Optional Project 1 and Upcoming Live Concerts of Video Game Music
3	1/26	**Census Date** (last day to withdraw from courses without penalty)
	1/27	Instructor Sample: Analysis Project 1: Retro Game
		Reading: Choose one… Collins "Flat Twos" (2006) (short), or Collins "In the Loop" (2007)
	1/29	Reading: Phillips Ch. 3 Immersion / Play Experience (also on Canvas)
		Gaming: NES, Atari (emulation?). Play Experience of TMNT, Dragon Warrior I/IV, etc.
4	2/3	**Due:** Analysis Project 1: Retro Game
		Introduce Analysis Project 2: Level with Emily Reese
	2/5	Introduce Composition Project 1: Themes and Genres
		Reading: Phillips Ch. 4 Themes
		Homework: Bring in 3 Excellent Video Game Themes to Share
		Gaming: Switch. Use of Themes in Stardew Valley, Splatoon 3, Skyrim, Animal Crossing
5	2/10	Instructor Sample: Analysis Project 2: Choose Your Character (Student Choice / Level with Emily Reese)
		Reading: Phillips Ch. 5 Genres
	2/12	Homework: Rank the Video Game Genres Best to Worst
6	2/17	**Due:** Analysis Project 2: Choose Your Character (Student Choice / Level with Emily Reese)
	2/19	Reading: Phillips Ch. 6 Roles and Functions of Music
		Gaming: Switch. Roles and Functions of Music in Breath of the Wild
7	2/24	Reading: Phillips Ch. 7 Prep and Workflow
		Reminder of Optional Projects 1 & 2
	2/26	**NO CLASS:** Instructor at a UT System OER Meeting in Austin, see Canvas for alternate plans
8	3/3	Reading: Phillips Ch. 8 Development Team (short)
		Reading: Phillips Ch. 9 Music Needs of the Game (short)
	3/5	**Due:** Composition Project 1: Themes and Genres
		Gaming: SNES / SEGA / N64 (emulation?). Story of the GoldenEye 007 development team.

Week	Date	Topic or Event
9	3/9–13	**NO CLASS:** *Spring Break*
10	3/17	Introduce Composition Project 2: Interactive Music
		Reading: Phillips Ch. 10 Linear Music in Games (pp.157–172, End before "Technical Issues with Loop Construction")
	3/19	**NO CLASS:** College Music Society South Central Conference, see Canvas for alternate plans
11	3/24	Reading: Phillips Ch. 10 Linear Music in Games (pp. 172–184, Start at "Technical Issues with Loop Construction")
	3/26	Reading: Phillips Ch. 11 Interactive: Rendered
12	3/30	**Withdrawal Deadline** (last day to withdraw from courses without a grade of "W")
	3/31	Reminder of Optional Projects 1 & 2
		Reading: Phillips Ch. 12 Interactive: Music Data (short)
		Reading: Collins "An Introduction to Procedural …" (2009)
	4/2	Introduce Personal Inventory
		Reading: Collins "An Introduction to the Participatory…" (2007) (long)
13	4/7	Reading: Phillips Ch. 13 Technical Skillset
	4/9	Homework: Inventory Your Technical Skillset and Resources
		Gaming: Wii? / Other? Linear vs. Interactive Rendered vs. Interactive Music Data in Games (?).
14	4/14	**Due:** Composition Project 2: Interactive Music
		Reading: Phillips Ch. 14 Business
	4/16	Homework: Inventory Your Entrepreneurial Abilities and Experience
		Gaming: Mobile. Mobile Gaming as Big Business. See revenue charts!
15	4/21	Reading: Phillips Conclusion
	4/23	**Due:** Personal Inventory
		Reminder of Optional Projects 1 & 2
16	4/28 (Tu)	**Due:** Optional Project 1 – Written Review of a Live Concert of Video Game Music
		Due: Optional Project 2 – Essay
		• Topic A: Is Video Game Music "Art"?
		○ Reading: Ebert
		• Topic B: The Current State of Video Game Music Scholarship
		○ Reading: Whalen (long)
		(No Final Exam or Final Project)

Bibliography

Collins, Karen. "Flat Twos and the Musical Aesthetic of the Atari VCS." *Popular Musicology Online* 1 (2006). http://www.popular-musicology-online.com/issues/01/collins-01.html.

Collins, Karen. "From Bits to Hits: Video Games Music Changes its Tune." *Film International* 3, no. 1 (2005): 4–19. https://doi.org/10.1386/fiin.3.1.4.

Collins, Karen. "In the Loop: Creativity and Constraint in 8-bit Video Game Audio." *Twentieth Century Music* 4, no. 2 (2007): 209–27. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478572208000510.

Collins, Karen. "An Introduction to Procedural Music in Video Games." *Contemporary Music Review* 28, no. 1 (2009): 5–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460802663983.

Collins, Karen. "An Introduction to the Participatory and Non-Linear Aspects of Video Games Audio." In *Essays on Sound and Vision*, edited by Stan Hawkins and John Richardson. Helsinki University Press, 2007.

Collins, Karen. "Video Games Killed the Cinema Star: It's Time for a Change in Studies of Music and the Moving Image." *Music Sound and the Moving Image* 1, no. 1 (2007): 15–19. https://doi.org/10.1353/msm.0.0009.

Ebert, Roger. "Video Games Can Never Be Art." December 14, 2012. Accessed January 7, 2026. https://www.rogerebert.com/roger-ebert/video-games-can-never-be-art.
See Optional Project 2: Essay

Phillips, Winifred. *A Composer's Guide to Game Music*. The MIT Press, 2017; ISBN-13: 978-0-262-53449-9.
Required class textbook

Reese, Emily. "Level with Emily Reese." Accessed January 7, 2026. https://www.levelwithemily.com/.

Reese, Emily. "Topics." Accessed January 7, 2026. https://www.levelwithemily.com/topics/.
See Analysis Project 2: Choose Your Character (Student Choice)

Society for the Study of Sound and Music in Games. "Bibliography." Accessed January 7, 2026. https://www.sssmg.org/wp/bibliography/.
For reference only

Whalen, Zach. "Play Along - An Approach to Videogame Music." *Game Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004). https://www.gamestudies.org/0401/whalen/.
See Optional Project 2: Essay

Live Concerts of Video Game Music in Our Region
See Optional Project 1: Written Review of a Live Concert of Video Game Music

- **Video Games Live**
  - o Sunday   January 25, 2026   5:00PM
    - ▪ College Station, TX: Rudder Theatre – Texas A&M (Brazos Valley Symphony Orchestra)
    - ▪ Reasonable student tickets available
- **PlayStation: The Concert**
  - o Wednesday   January 28, 2026   7:30PM
    - ▪ Sugar Land, TX: Smart Financial Centre at Sugar Land
- **Stardew Valley: Symphony of Seasons**
  - o Tuesday   February 3, 2026   8PM (Doors open 7PM)
    - ▪ San Antonio, TX: Majestic Theatre
  - o Wednesday   February 4, 2026   8PM (Doors open 7PM)
    - ▪ Tulsa, OK: Tulsa Theater
  - o Thursday   February 5, 2026   8PM (Doors open 7PM)
    - ▪ Oklahoma City, OK: The Criterion