

A Conversation with a *Grassroots* Author

Emily Capan and Leslie Hancock

Hello! And welcome to “A Conversation with a *Grassroots* Author.” Today, we’re talking with Leslie Hancock about her article, “From Noob to Veteran in *League of Legends*: Activity Systems and Genre Analysis in Video Games.” How do we learn to play video games? In this article, Leslie Hancock explores the process of learning how to play her favorite competitive game, *League of Legends*, using antecedent knowledge and genre analyses while participating in the game’s discourse community. After researching across a variety of genres within *League*’s activity system, Hancock learns how to improve at the game and become a fan of the game’s competitive e-sports scene.

Emily Capan: How did you come up with the idea for your article?

Leslie Hancock: The first thing that I actually did before I even imagined the idea for my article, I actually did content research to look at the previous *Grassroots* journals. I just went through the most recent couple journals that had come out and looked at the archive online at some of the articles. I was trying to figure out what people tended to write about and what kinds of topics were interesting and were getting published in the journal. I saw that a lot of the topics were things that were familiar to people, things that they were already doing or were already interested in. And that they would often take these topics, even if they were specialized things like we had recently had an article about, Thelma talking about chisme and articles about K-pop was another one that I actually used with one of my classes this semester. So even though they were topics that were maybe very specific to that person, they also turned the topic into something more relatable for other readers to look at. So, I thought that would be an interesting idea to think about something that I am already doing, something that I am already familiar with or have interest in and then how can I take that topic and turn it into something relatable using a lot of the concepts from the writing program. I knew that I wanted to talk about discourse communities and activity systems, for some reason I was just really drawn to those terms at that time that I was writing this. And so, I was trying to think of things that I was involved in and communities and activity systems that I could flush out into a whole

article. I've been playing *League of Legends* for years now, so I was like, "That's the one! This is the thing that I really care about, that I'm really passionate about." And a lot of people play video games, so I thought talking about how I learned to play a video game made sense to me as a really good topic idea that I could do and that I could talk about discourse communities and activity systems. I think that's basically the process that I went through for how I came up with that idea.

Capan: What was the rest of your writing process like? You've got your idea and now you have to actually write the article itself.

Hancock: The very first thing that I had to do was create sort of a timeline. I kind of spoke through it with my husband because he also plays the game with me. And we were trying to remember, how did we really start getting into the game and how did we start learning how to get better at the game? Because we were bad at it for a good solid year or two. So, we were trying to remember, "What happened? When did we start getting better?" I had to come up with an actual timeline of events, and I had to go back all the way to when I started playing at the end of 2013, I think it was. Unless I'm getting that wrong, it could have been the end of 2012. It all kind of blurs together because that was a million years ago now. Going back that far, that many years, it being 2020 now, it was a little tough because I was trying to remember all that. Because the game was so different at that time when we first started playing. It's almost a completely different beast at this point because there have been so many changes and so many additions and so many things added to and taken away. It's just absurd how many different changes there have been. And trying to go through and remember those changes was way too much. So I was going, "Okay. I'm not going to try and talk about every change in the game, that would be nuts." So, what can I talk about that are the things that I did that helped me improve at the game and things that I can talk about that are not so specific and specialized for understanding the game and how I improved at it, like getting really nitty-gritty with things that other people can relate to it. Part of my process, outside from making the timeline, was thinking about terms that are used in the game, you know one of the sections of my article is me giving some examples of terms, trying to loosely define them so that people who read the article can sort of feel that they are maybe more familiar with the video game or with trying to understand some of the words that I'm saying throughout the article. And how those terms have changed over time was also part of something that I had to think about for my process of writing this. One thing that really helped me with my process was using the internet archive Wayback Machine. Because again, it was like seven years ago that I got into this so trying to find things that were from that time period that

exist now is extremely difficult. A lot of those websites don't exist anymore or that content is gone now. And that was extremely important to me in my writing process for this article so that I could find examples and images and screenshots and things like that, that I could point to and say, "Here is, for example, the client interface." I had no idea what most of the buttons on that meant and I talk about that in the article. Finding screenshots of that and being able to point to these things and say, "Look, I don't get what any of these things mean." And that was part of my uptake process for learning the game. So that was actually a very important part of my writing process, reaching out to the *League* community, on the Discord community, to have people send me screenshots from forever ago that they had happened to save on their computer. So, I had some help from the community itself, I had help from the Wayback Machine, to see what kinds of access and resources I had that I could include in this. As much as the writing was important to my article, just finding images and resources and just talking to other people, that was also very much a part of my writing process.

Capan: That's so cool that they were able to help you out like that and they had those screenshots on their computers. You talked about your content research, but what about your genre research, as far as how to figure out how to write a *Grassroots* article?

Hancock: That was also me just coming up with an idea, and I had kind of mentioned this earlier, I did look at a lot of *Grassroots* articles in the most recent journal, and I also looked back a little bit through the previous journals from the past three or four years or so. I noticed that when I looked at the very first couple of journals that are in the archive on the ISU Writing website, they actually used different formatting. The vocabulary words that we were trying to emphasize would be underlined and the most recent ones are bolded. So, as I was writing my article, I deferred to what the most recent conventions were. I would bold my terms, I had interesting section headers because I saw that a lot of the current ones do that. It was interesting comparing how it has changed over time and then looking more closely at the most recent journals to see what the conventions are that are being used now. I saw that there was an abstract, so I kind of tucked away in the back of my mind that once I'm done, I've got to get my abstract written. I saw that there were things like an author's picture and an author's biography, and then the works cited list. That was maybe one of the trickiest parts for me when looking at the genre conventions of *Grassroots* articles because I was using so many images in my article so that I could show examples of the things that I was talking about. So, trying to figure out how to cite those, and should they be listed as images and figures. A lot of that was me deferring to how other *Grassroots* articles already do those things, so they were my examples for creating the

works cited list and the kind of author's bio and whatnot that you see in my article. A lot of the genre research that I did for the article specifically and the writing process of that was looking at what they already do in the most recent *Grassroots* journals.

Capan: I think that's a good point. You're looking at the trajectory of the genre conventions of the journal. Once you wrote your *Grassroots* article, you submitted it, what was that review process like? How did you take the feedback and revise your work to resubmit?

Hancock: My first round of reviews was having, I think, two editors that looked at my article, and they both gave me excellent feedback. One of the comments that I really appreciated in the review process was that there was some confusion around some of the game specific terms that I was using. Not even *League of Legends* specific terms, but things that were more gaming-related terms that I hadn't considered would not be accessible to everyone. Because for me, they are just so old hat. Everybody that is in any kind of gaming circle would know the terms. I was a little taken aback when, for example, hit points was something that I had put in my article. And I was like, "Oh, you're right! This is probably something that I should say that this is 'health'" It's the health of a character and hit points is how we measure that. There were little comments here and there that the editors pointed out, where I needed to expand on what these things meant to make them more accessible for readers who may not already be familiar with those terms. That was really helpful for me because I'm so deep into this community and knowing these terms that it was hard for me writing the article to completely step back from all of that and say, "Okay, what might a reader who doesn't know these terms need to know?" That was some of the most constructive feedback I had. I also really liked the feedback from the first round of review about adding certain terms. I don't believe that I talked much about genre analysis and content research in the first draft. Which are now things that have been added. I think that it was really helpful to think about what writing program terms I could use in the article that I had not considered. Because as I said earlier, I was really focused on writing about discourse communities and activity systems, so it kind of almost didn't occur to me, some of the uptake, and antecedent knowledge, and things that I was tapping into, or like genre research, genre analysis, that I was doing and I was writing about in the article, but I wasn't thinking about it in that way. It was super helpful to have another set of eyes to say, "Hey, this is actually something that you're doing, you should consider including that." As the review process has continued, it's been interesting to see formatting changes, and those have been super useful in the last round of reviews that I've gone through. And just further suggestions about, "Let's really work out these

terms for someone that doesn't know." I believe that I'm in my second round of reviews now and it's been super helpful getting the feedback from them.

Capan: I think that you make a good point that sometimes when you are so deep in a discourse community that it's hard to know what other people might not even recognize as something that is unfamiliar. Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't made space for in these questions or is there any advice that you would like to give to someone that is going to write their own *Grassroots* article?

Hancock: If I gave advice for somebody writing a *Grassroots* article, I think that the thing that I would say is most helpful, especially when coming up with an idea, is to try to write about things that you are already familiar with or already interested in. Because we are already always participating in activity systems and working with genres or producing genres or considering our writing processes all the time. We're always doing that; we're always interacting with different genres and performing genre analysis and content research. If we just take a moment to pause in our day and think, what are all the things that we are already doing? What are all the things that, even hobbies or for classes or just around me, in the environment around me, what are the things that I'm interacting with or seeing? What are the things that I care about, that I'm passionate about, the things that I want to do with my future? What are some possible genres or texts that I might work with as part of my career? Could I investigate that? Thinking about what is familiar to you is a very helpful way to start pondering what you might be interested in doing for a *Grassroots* article topic. The writing program terms are just things that will flow naturally alongside and in your article. It's going to happen. I think that if I gave any advice, it would be to think about what you already know and that's a good place to start.

Capan: Well, thank you so much Leslie for your time today!



Emily Capan is a PhD student at Illinois State University studying rhetoric and composition. Her research interests include multimodality, writing program administration and pedagogy, and writing assessment. She loves all things fantastical, including *Lord of the Rings*, *Dungeons and Dragons*, comics, and witchcraft. You can usually find her walking her dog, Clover, while listening to dance music or Machine Gun Kelly.



Leslie Hancock is an instructor and English Studies Master's student at Illinois State University. Her research interests focus on sociocultural pedagogies in the teaching of writing for nontraditional students in alternative learning environments. When she's not working, you can find her playing video or board games, watching KDramas, posting to her recipe blog, or trying to catch a Sizzlipede to complete her Pokédex . . . someday . . .