



# GAME POETICS

**Department:**

English Language and Literature

**Program:**

MA

**Project type:**

Major Research Project

**Project co-researchers:**

Dr. Andrew McMurry, English Language and Literature, Faculty co-supervisor;  
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## AC ATIENZA

Atienza explored merging two major schools of thought in game studies – studying narratives vs. mechanics – by creating a new framework called “**Game Poetics**”. As someone who is both a games research and designer, Atienza wanted to bridge the gaps between the different theoretical approaches. Drawing from their English language and literature background, **Game Poetics** utilizes six unique lenses that can be used by both narrative – and mechanic – focused researchers and designers analyzing or building games. These lenses are tools to help look at the subject of analysis (in this case, of games) with a specific perspective. When using all six lenses, one should ideally gain a well-rounded understanding of the game they are analyzing or building.

**Interesting fact:** Atienza applied the framework of **Game Poetics** to the design process of their own personal games Energize and Captain’s Gambit.

**AC’s six frameworks are:**

**Superposition** – Focuses on what the player-character imagines could happen, during their playthrough of the game, driving their interactions with game elements; e.g. building a strategy before playing a game you are already familiar with or imaging how the narrative will unfold for a game you’re not familiar with.

**Output shift** – Focuses on how gameplay elements change and shift based on different environmental or narrative triggers; e.g. games that are decision-based have different dialogue prompts. Choosing one over another will lead to a different outcome, increasing game replayability.

**Deixis** – Focuses on the degree to which two gameplay elements can interact with each other, and the meaning expressed by their proximity; e.g. if a player-character cannot interact with the mountains, it probably means they are far away.

**Potentiality** – Focuses on a player-character’s potential interactions with gameplay elements which allows the player to understand a game’s tone and potential political content; e.g. only being allowed to talk to NPCs versus being allowed to harm NPCs reveals character motivation and designer intent.

**Pathbuilding** – Focuses on the experience that arises from the player’s perception of which actions (or paths) will be most beneficial to complete a game; e.g. different play styles in a game based on player choice such as a “pacifist run” where players choose to not damage enemies or “vegan runs” where a player may choose to not eat meat-based products, especially when replaying a game.

**Axis** – Focuses on game elements, how they contrast, and their value; e.g. red ball = 10 points / blue ball = 20 points.