

GET
INTO
THE

GAME



Photo courtesy of EA Games



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“Do what you love.”

“Better late than never.”

“Get your foot in the door.”

These idioms appear to repeat ad infinitum from the moment we receive our first high school grade-point average through the rest of our academic careers. Although they seem like throwaway bits of motivation, the trick is to try them before discarding. For me, that meant writing video game reviews.

Since the 1980s, the video game phenomenon has permeated daily life, creating its own cultural colossus worthy of scrutiny. Both gaming and the Internet have evolved over the last 30 years, and both offer excellent journalism opportunities.

In this weak economic climate, it's hard to stay positive let alone find a break. As my college career wound to a close, I decided to apply for a volunteer writing position at a few Web sites out of pure interest in writing about games and their creation. The result has been one of the most valuable assets I'll take away from college.

Writing video game reviews is also ripe for high school journalists to use in their newspapers,

VIDEO GAMING POPULARITY GROWS, GENERATING INTEREST IN REVIEWS

newsmagazines and Web sites. In this approach, the review can be written as a regular column, in a blog or as a contributed, occasional review.

Another approach for high school journalists to publish video game reviews is under the safety of a larger entity, such as gaming Web sites. This offers you a chance to develop your own skill with the help of others. This is the route I chose.

Writing and editing video game reviews is a much more time-consuming task than you'd expect, so volunteering while you are financially secure and have time to devote to your craft is crucial. Each new game console and genre will offer new challenges, requiring you to change your tactics from one review to the next. Editing will also eat up much of your time, but is easily the most beneficial part of the process.

Motivate yourself to research and write a quality review or editorial, something that exemplifies your particular style, skill, and love of gaming. If you're already an autodidact, read like a thief; check out Web sites, other publications, etc. Understanding the climate in which you'll be writing is as important as producing quality work. It might even allow you to explore a way of reviewing what others have overlooked.

Locating a Web site that will accommodate your skill set shouldn't be too hard, but find one worthy of your time. The sooner (and the more) you have your name and works published, the easier job-hunting will be later. If the site you are looking to volunteer for is worth its virtual weight in salt, it will have an application process. You can expect to provide a cover letter and a writing sample. Thorough editing, quality writing and honesty will certainly secure you a position, but ensure you are fulfilling all of these tenants by letting others read your work.

Once you've been “hired,” your most important task is to maintain your standards while pushing your creativity and abilities to their limits. Of course, meeting deadlines and interacting with the community are excellent ways to flourish, but the nature of a volunteer position tends to be lenient. Most editors or directors understand, and will encourage that your “real life” commitments - such as school or work - come first. That said, turning out a review quickly after obtaining a game will be a reality (sometimes meaning within days) and can be very stressful. As long as you are realistic with your time, you shouldn't have trouble.

Difficulty doesn't go unrewarded. If you're lucky, your site will have established relationships with game publishers, which will yield review titles shipped to your door. This doesn't always pan out though; you will almost certainly review some truly awful games initially. After a few months of solid work, your options will undoubtedly expand to triple-A titles like Mario, Halo or Uncharted. Many sites still lack relationships with publishers, in which case you will be asked to take the freelancer's approach - buy or rent your own review titles. Either way, never forget: You're getting published somewhere that's not your own blog.

The Internet, which began with a dilution of the notion of journalism, is becoming more welcoming. That is, journalism and its credibility are gaining value in contrast to the banality that has developed among some bloggers and others.

Writing for free has become the novice journalist's foot in the door. And the video game industry certainly isn't crumbling anytime soon.

Read Gegner's reviews:

<http://www.totalgamingnetwork.com/main/showthread.php?204021-The-Conduit-Review>
<http://www.totalgamingnetwork.com/main/showthread.php?204255-Fallout-3-Point-Lookout>