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A genre analysis of walkthroughs

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*To all the important people who have been
with me during this long, hard
and exhausting journey:
you continuously believed in me
even when I was the only one
who had lost faith in myself.
For all you did for me,
I will be forever grateful to you all.
But this time, I want to dedicate my
final effort to myself because,
despite everything,
I won again.*

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims at identifying the elements and the characteristics of the videogaming walkthrough genre, analysing and defining its main aspects, distinguishing features and general purposes. At first, a quick overview of the existing literature and studies within the specialised domain of videogaming, especially on walkthrough genre texts is given, together with a short explanation on the meaning of the word “walkthrough”. A brief description of the materials analysed and a thorough explanation about the methods of creation, selection and composition of the corpus object of the research follows. Through the analysis of the corpus, the common characteristics of the walkthrough genre are then highlighted, focusing on its general communicative purposes, its authors, and its intended audience. Special attention is then devoted, first, to the assessment of the distinctive textual structure that characterises the genre, and then, to the specialised language with which walkthrough texts are generally designed and then written, considering its lexicogrammatical constituents. In addition, insights on some contingent topics about the walkthrough genre are given: the concept of agency in walkthrough texts is discussed together with their possible considerations as real games’ narratives or as mere “cheating sheets” to complete players’ favourite videogames. The analysis carried out shows that the final purpose of walkthrough genre texts is giving clear, precise and detailed instructions on how to complete a particular game quickly and successfully without being stuck at a certain point in it, targeting an audience of mostly gaming players. Moreover, apart from their main intent of being permanent and enduring “guiding bibles” for players, walkthrough genre texts seem to serve even as a tool for higher goals: establishing as the most comprehensive player-produced investigations of digital gameplay and as a medium for the digital (and textual) preservation of gaming.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapid evolution of IT in recent years, especially the one dedicated to videogaming development, the act of playing games, especially videogames, has become increasingly frequent among young people and even adults in our current society. Videogames are one of the most influential entertainment media nowadays and they directly influence large parts of the society since both young people and adults typically play videogames daily. According to the annual global videogames report by ESA (Entertainment Software Association), in 2025 daily players were between 16 and 24 years old (14%), with the greatest part of them being between 25 and 34 years old (26%), constituting the age peak of the report. But ESA's report emphasised also how videogames were a consistent part of people's leisure time: 66% of players agreed that they consistently played just to have fun after work or school and 58% agreed that they used videogames also as means for relaxation and stress relief.

However, videogames influence indirectly our society even through the impact they have on education or on work environments as it is seen in social gamification processes where the application of game-design elements and principles – such as scoring, competition, badges and challenges – in non-game contexts helps keeping both students or employees motivated and encourage them to participate more willingly in the task at hand, turning work or school tasks into engaging experiences by leveraging natural human tendencies for achievement and rewards (see Araya *et al.*, 2019; Legaki *et al.*, 2020; Oliveira *et al.*, 2023).

Yet, the videogame world is still not a very prominent part of the scientific research process despite the establishing of a multibillion-dollar market around it that showcases the popularity and influence that games have over society (Carr *et al.*, 2006; Consalvo, 2003; Newman, 2008). One reason could be that it is hard to answer the question of how an analysis of videogames should be carried out since they consist only of bytecode mainly consumed via audiovisual means, constituting multitude of data hard to analyse due to their immaterial nature (Newman, 2008, 2012). Another reason for their being deeply unstudied texts could also be their intrinsic complexity of being interactive products. Videogames allow the manipulation of the content, form, and narrative of a game, enabling dynamic, real-time responses between what appears on the players' screen and players themselves. Therefore, a study on videogames could not comprehend only a general consideration of their structures, data and content but also the account of the bidirectional exchange of information between the game system and, most of all, the player (Newman, 2008, 2024).

Over the course of time, however, videogames have become increasingly challenging in length and complexity as technology advanced, increasing the potential for players' becoming stuck at various levels. They have added more puzzles, clues and objectives that needed to be met to complete the game, escalating game designers' fear as well that players might miss an enjoyable but not critical experience in the process such as completing all the side mission of a game or completing the retrieving of all the optional

collectibles scattered around the game's map (Newman, 2008: 95). In addition, sometimes game designers are not as successful as they could be while creating games and they end up designing levels that are too hard for the average gamer or contain flaws or bugs that prevent obvious advancement (Consalvo, 2003: 328), leaving players in distress about what to do to progress in some particularly difficult level (Fry, 2012: 1).

Precisely from this need for answers and good gaming practices, videogame walkthroughs have arisen, answering players' requests from all over the world to have all the necessary information needed to play their favourite videogames included in a text or in a video that could help in games' successful completion, preventing players from becoming stuck at a certain point during the gameplay (Consalvo, 2003: 327-328). Indeed, their particular characteristics, such as being easy to find, free to use and simple to understand, with an user-friendly interface that permits users to look exactly, above all, for the solution the player needs to finish the game, have made walkthroughs a really powerful tool not only to understand how a game should be played and completed (Burghardt, M., and Tiepmar, J., 2021: 14) but also to discover all the secrets hidden within their mechanics (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Newman, 2008).

Early research on games in general focused on their impact on children, mainly from a psychological or social-psychological perspective (Greenfield, 1984; Loftus and Loftus, 1983), examining games in light of fear of the harmful effects that videogaming could cause to parts of the population such as attention problems, lack of sleep, game addiction and game violence (DeLisi *et al.*, 2013; Dill and Dill, 1998; Doğan, 2006), as well as the fear that they could represent a new (and even worse) substitute for television, the infamous "plug-in drug" for kids (Winn, 1977: 10).

More recently, as young gamers have become adults and as games have become more sophisticated in terms of graphics, sound, plot, and marketing, the focus of research has been shifting as well. Academics have begun studying videogames in greater detail, concentrating more on their language, structure and meanings (Carr, Campbell and Ellwood, 2006; Consalvo, 2003; Despain, 2020; Ensslin, 2012; Ensslin and Balteiro, 2019; Feil, 2020; Fry, 2012; Gledhill, 2019; Krause, 2016) and on the possibility that they could serve as a mean to preserve their heritage in two main ways: a textual one, as in the case of big corpora-building of fan-based written documents that capture videogames' content (Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2021; Guttenbrunner *et al.*, 2010) and a more digital one, as in the case of all the digital instances concerning videogames that could preserve games' data over time and that include videos, recordings, reviews, fan texts etc. that can preserve gamers' performances and activities together with games' content (Lowood *et al.*, 2009; Newman, 2011; Nylund, 2015; Swalwell, 2009).

Although most of the studies on gaming in general confirmed the positive effect that walkthroughs brought to players and to the gaming world (Consalvo, 2003; Newman, 2008; Carr *et al.*, 2006), little research has been carried out to define the actual features of the Walkthrough genre (Hughes, 2018). As of now, scholarly studies of walkthroughs are actually a comparative rarity as a topic in academic game studies and where they are encountered, their range is not always made evident, restricting its focus mainly to how

these types of guides are encountered and used by readers-players rather than how they are effectively shaped and structured (Hughes, 2018).

The current study aims to fill this gap and to determine precisely which features define the Videogaming Walkthrough genre, finding out which elements and structures characterise this specific text type and which purposes it serves. In light of this, this thesis proposes a thorough analysis of the online Videogaming Walkthrough genre, carried out mostly through *genre analysis*, and motivated by the rising importance and influence of videogames in people's everyday lives and by walkthroughs' ability to explore the boundaries of humans' logic by providing fantasy worlds and situations at the edge of reality. Thus, given the plasticity and mutability of walkthroughs, their variety of functions and the range of uses to which they may be put, it is useful to spend a little time reflecting on this type of medium, setting it in its context alongside the myriad other fan-produced texts and the products of the mainstream games industries. The current study follows three main research questions: which purposes do walkthroughs exactly serve? Which are its general characteristics? And does the walkthrough genre employ a conventionalised textual structure with a definite specialised language?

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Chapter 1 provides the origin and the meaning of the word *walkthrough* within the specialised domain of videogames, differentiating it from three other types of extremely popular videogames documents: the strategy guides, the let's play and the FAQs. In addition, an overview on the theory of genre analysis is also given, concentrating specifically on its three main traditions: the English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) and the Rhetoric Genre Studies (RGS). Chapter 2 provides data's introduction and description, widely documenting the arrangement, choices and reasons behind the creation of the walkthroughs' corpus together with detailed explanations about the methodology and the frameworks employed. Chapter 3 provides and discusses the results of the study on walkthroughs' aim, audience, structure and language. Chapter 4 provides insights on walkthroughs' agency and on the possibility of these texts of not only both representing real narrative about games (Consalvo, 2003: 331) and documents for a potential preservation of gaming (Newman, 2012; Nylund, 2015), but also about their being usually misunderstood for mere cheating sheets for players (Consalvo, 2005, 2007). The thesis then concludes with some final considerations on the research's findings.

CHAPTER ONE

VIDEOGAMES: THE RISING OF A WORLDWIDE CULTURE

1.1 The word ‘*walkthrough*’ within the specialised domain of videogaming

In the first place, a general framework concerning the word *walkthrough* within the specialised domain of videogaming is given.

The word walkthrough generally refers to a great variety of different materials available through different media (textual, visual, audio etc.) and it is widely used in the specialised field of videogaming to define texts, videos etc. that are player-produced and that contain extremely precise and detailed instructions that “*walk*” the players “*through*” the game (Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2021: 14), serving as real *guiding bibles* to complete and discover games’ hidden secrets, messages, strategies and Easter eggs¹ (Consalvo, 2003; Nylund, 2015) for a wide variety of different level-skilled players.

Despite the word not being precisely used anywhere during those years, its origin goes back to the early ‘70s, precisely in 1978, when Warren Robinett included his name inside the game *Adventure* for Atari 2600² and players decided to write *guides* to share a way to uncover the secret of unlocking this feature. However, it’s only during the ‘80s that the first written prototypes (and ancestors) of modern walkthroughs were published by players for other players as printed books with hand-annotated layouts. Books such as *The Video Master’s Guide to Defender* (Broomis, 1982), *The Winners Book of Video Games* (Kubey, 1982) or *How to Beat the Video Games* (Blanchet, 1982) offered players the first premises of what walkthroughs offer today: revealing games’ secrets and hidden strategies, trying to outplay the games themselves beating them at “their own game” (Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015).

The first real appearance of the term walkthrough inside a book occurred instead a few years later, in 1988, when Shay Addams’s collection of adventure-game solutions *Quest for Clues* was published. In Addams’s book, each game’s title was introduced with a brief backstory before the real walkthrough of the game began, employing the term walkthrough in a triumphant and unambiguous manner to illustrate his games’ playthroughs. Doubtless, Addams’s books were definitely more spartan, reductive and more codelike presented, with diagrams and flows of logic, compared to contemporary walkthrough’s writing (Newman, 2016: 411).

Nowadays, the connotation of the word walkthrough is instead more ambiguous and complex than in the past, considering that it overlaps and, sometimes, interchanges with

¹ Within the specialised domain of videogaming, the term “*Easter egg*” refers to hidden, non-essential messages, images or features developers embed in games, often referencing to pop culture or to other works in the same field.

² The Atari 2600, produced by Atari and released in 1977, was one of the first videogame consoles released on the market.

the synonymity of many other terms such as *guide*, *strategy guide*, *let's play* and *FAQ* to name but a few, generally united by their common aim of “providing help for gamers” (Newman, 2016: 411).

The ambiguity of the term is even underlined by the fact that, despite being all called walkthroughs, these types of texts, videos etc. are not all identical among them. Walkthroughs may vary between one another in many aspects, despite still guiding the player through the same game: they may differ depending on their nature (textual, visual, audiovisual etc.) and on the level of detail they delve into, going from an almost “utilitarian” purpose to a real “storytelling” of the entire game (Consalvo, 2003: 329), portraying games almost as “compressed” narratives, mini-stories that are no less powerful for their simplicity (a hero on a quest to overcome adversity and save the world from evil, for example) or for their difference in form from novels or from actually real theatrical performances (Murray, 1999: 247).

They may vary even depending on the platform for which they are thought (usually, mostly for PC or gaming consoles), especially when dealing with controls or keys to move the in-game character or to interact with the surrounding environment. For example, the keys to control the movement of the in-game character while playing on computer are the keyboard's combination WASD³, whereas on console gaming the player can perform movements through the left stick of the joystick⁴.

Walkthroughs may vary also depending on the level of expertise the player has about the game and the acquired knowledge about it (Consalvo, 2003; Hale, 2013; Nylund, 2015), distinguishing between for example walkthroughs written or recorded by expert players performing *expert* walkthroughs (where both the writer and the audience have extensive knowledge about the game and its mechanics), and *blind* walkthroughs for less experienced audience, where the player experiences a game firsthand without any prior knowledge about it apart from reviews in general, more as a mean of entertainment both for them or the audience (Hale, 2013: 6).

Even the level of their completion can differentiate between walkthroughs, going from the *casual* playthrough⁵ where the player's aim is simply to entertain other players and enjoy the game and its story, to the more challenging *completionist*⁶ playthrough, where the player's aim is showing the 100% completion of the game and discovering, through the most advanced techniques of playing, each of the game's deepest secrets (Hale, 2013;

³ The combination of keyboard's keys WASD is the most common set of keys used by PC players to move in-game characters into the game's environment.

⁴ In console gaming, the player needs to use a controller (the joystick) to interact with the console. In particular, to move the in-game character around, the player can use the rounded left stick of the joystick to perform forward, backwards, left, and right movements.

⁵ A casual playthrough is the loosest format in terms of completionism and documentation of a game, where the player's style of gaming is more relaxed and informal, with the primary aim of entertaining the audience, especially through comedy (Hale, 2013: 6).

⁶ A completionist playthrough showcases the most thorough way of completing a game: using the skills and knowledge acquired in hours and hours of playing, the player completes every challenge or objective in the game: defeating enemy, collecting every item, exploring every area, completing all side missions etc. (Hale, 2013: 7).

Nylund, 2015).

Seldom, walkthroughs may vary even depending on which kind of content they may contain apart from textual/visual instructions, including *screenshots* taken directly from the gameplay or also *visual maps*⁷ of the various areas of the game, as shown in Figure 1 and 2 respectively.



Figure 1: Example of a screenshot of one of the fights the player must engage into while entering the Reapers' base in *Mass Effect: Legendary Edition*, one of the games included in the corpus.



Figure 2: Example of the visual map of USA's factions and enemies within the walkthrough of *The last of us: Part I*, one of the games included in the corpus.

⁷ In gaming walkthrough visual maps are visual representations of various areas of the game's maps where all the missions' objectives, optional collectibles and farming goods are marked with different symbols, generally provided with a key for the player to decipher them.

In addition, another fundamental distinction to be made between walkthroughs is represented by the *official* or *unofficial* nature of their writing which depends, most of the times, by the game's access point. Sometimes, videogame developers can directly license gaming companies or individuals to write *strategy guides* for their games to create "official" walkthroughs, granting them pre-release access to their games. Instead, when strategy guides are not available or were not included in pre-release bundles, walkthroughs can simply be written and created unofficially by players themselves (Consalvo, 2003; Newman, 2016).

Unfortunately, walkthroughs' true nature may be extremely difficult to discern in general due to their relying on a combination of firsthand play and insights gleaned from the wider community of players, making strict distinctions between them really difficult since they are hardly mutually exclusive in their categorisations (Hale, 2013: 8). This peculiar characteristic makes the term walkthrough an even more "*umbrella term*" (Newman, 2016: 411) for texts and publications of considerable diversity, ranging from collectible products of the commercial publishing industry created in collaboration with a game's developers to plaintext documents full of deduced techniques uploaded by players to fan sites (Newman, 2016; Rubin, 2004).

A final but fundamental remark needs to be made, however, regarding walkthroughs: despite being an extremely popular and proliferous text's type, walkthroughs are still not available for all the videogames released on the market, generally depending on a singular game's popularity and on its good audience's reception that encourages or not the creation of its relative walkthrough (Nylund, 2015: 56).

1.2 Strategy guides, let's play and FAQs

Walkthrough texts, as mentioned before, contain a series of instructions delivered with different type of media on how to play a game to reach its end successfully. However, they are not the only type of documents, in the specialised field of videogaming, that can offer such services. Before delving deeper into the analysis of the Walkthrough genre, some clarifications about the possible overlapping of the term with three other popular videogaming textual documents, the *strategy guides*, the *let's play* and the *FAQs* must be provided.

1.2.1 Strategy guides

Contrary to walkthroughs, which are usually texts written and developed by players for other players, strategy guides are texts generally written and developed by professional walkthrough authors for those players with enough money and desire to buy guides for their favourite videogames (Nylund, 2015: 56). They often contain, apart from the game's instructions, also more peripheral information about games than walkthroughs such as

concept art, interviews with creators, *cheat codes*⁸ to help players advance quickly or to add “unofficial” enjoyment to the game and more etc. (Consalvo, 2003: 328), tending to be viewed more as a collectors’ items rather than a real playthrough’s help (Fry, 2012: 2). Strategy guides are usually published as standalone books to monetize on gaming culture and they very often designate themselves as having “official” status, indicating that they were developed with collaboration from the game’s designers and development teams and with reference to design documentation (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Ashton and Newman, 2011; Nylund, 2015). Turning in-game skills and knowledge coming directly from the games’ developers into real commercial profits, they are usually sold along the games themselves at the time of their release as part of complex retail strategies, inducing players to think they need an external (and more qualified) guidance to play the game they want to buy (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 13-14).

This mechanism of making the players think they need an external guidance to play the game prompts to an idea of the game as an “impenetrably faultless system to be played against” (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 14) that compulsory needs developers and publishers’ mediation and it is in contrast with what walkthroughs foster instead: the idea of games as products that can easily be played and discovered fully directly by players themselves without the need for qualified support (Consalvo, 2003; Newman, 2011; Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015). According to Rubin (2004: 260-261), game developers even purposefully incentivise the existence of certain secrets, bonuses, treasures or other things that are unknown to the player and about which there are no intel placed inside the game to make players desperate for buying developers’ strategy guides, under the pretext of finally knowing how to discover those “mysteries”. Since no amount of deductive logic or reasoning will result in the player discovering those potential secrets if not by trying every possible combination of inputs into the game, game developers leverage on players’ thirst for knowledge to make them think that the easiest, and sometimes only way, to become someone who knows is to actually read their strategy guides.

It is to be noted, eventually, that strategy guides also incentivise only “official” playing strategies and implicitly close down the possibility of other (and often more resistant) exploratory types of play that exploit or workaround the “intended” limitations and structures of the game (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003: 320). It follows that they do not “replicate the deductive and experimental working patterns of gamers learning through experience and observation” (Newman, 2008: 97) that is generally what can be seen in walkthroughs, the products of players experiences and of their countless attempts at completing a game (Consalvo, 2003; Nylund, 2015).

1.2.2 Let’s play

If strategy guides differ primarily from walkthroughs due to their professional writing

⁸ The term “*cheat codes*” refers to in-game codes used to facilitate the development process that were accidentally (or intentionally) left in shipped games by game developers and later discovered by players who used them to unfairly “facilitate” their gameplay (Waldenmeier *et al.*, 2024: 1).

nature and their commercial purposes, let's play are definitely more similar to walkthroughs in terms of writing styles and general objectives. Their aim is close to the one of walkthroughs of offering player-to-player help completing games since they are generally written by players for other fellow players. However, they differ slightly from walkthroughs since their materials focus more on the experience of what happens on the screen and the player's reaction to it rather than on secrets, tactics and strategies to complete the game (Nylund, 2015: 57).

Let's play are also usually structured as recorded footage of visual and audio commentary of the player who narrates their performance thereby annotating their gameplay in real time (Newman, 2013: 62), becoming more a performance-focused "method by which videogame players record themselves commenting on gameplay for an online audience" (Hale, 2013: 3) and capturing the player's own anecdotal experience of playing certain games (Nylund, 2015: 57). It follows that let's play materials, contrary to walkthroughs that can have both a textual and visual nature, are generally videos rather than plain texts as they need to record a visual playthrough of what the player is doing (Hale, 2013: 4).

Compared to walkthroughs and strategy guides, let's play videos even approach and discuss videogames from a more anthropological framework (Nylund, 2015: 57): they definitely aim to something more than simply thoroughly documenting a way to complete a game, delving deeper into the players' own way of playing and experiencing videogames, documenting also their own cultures, languages and opinions on the game. They seldom comprehend also metatext elements such as commentary threads and players' and viewers mediated discussions around the game's topics, making them deeply subjective-rooted media in communal and social discussions (Hale, 2013: 13-15) that provide (implicitly incentivising a great variety of playing styles) players a clear sense of the range of potential playing which a given game might support (Newman, 2013; Nylund, 2015).

1.2.3 FAQs

The term FAQ (acronym that stands for *Frequently Asked Questions*) has already become commonplace within technical and support literature, and it is primarily designed to anticipate user difficulties and issues with a product or service. It is typically being structured as a list of apparently oft-posed questions that are supplied with answers, solutions or suggestions for action for initial troubleshooting (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 12).

Strictly referring to the videogame domain, the FAQ is a similarly problem-centric document that deal with specific issues and potential problems that gamers are likely to encounter while playing whether these be specific puzzles, techniques, fighting enemies or the vagaries of control systems. Ostensibly aiming to provide support and guidance for gamers (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 12), FAQs share with walkthroughs the same desire to pass on knowledge and share the benefits of expert players' experience through

quick troubleshooting, almost representing even better Consalvo's definition of walkthroughs as "detailed descriptions of where to go and what to do - in sequential order to get through a game successfully" (Consalvo, 2003: 328).

However, despite walkthroughs and FAQs sharing the common aim of serving simultaneously to stand as indicators of both the author's expertise and the reader's implied poverty of skill and dependence on the ability and generosity of others, FAQs result more sterile and passive, isolating only some specific moments of situational gameplay (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 12). They also fail to accomplish what walkthroughs instead provide to the player: a far more discursive and narrative step-by-step account that details a game's journey through the game world, unveiling the scope of its potentialities and capturing the player's attention through a deep and immersive style of writing that, most of the times, makes the player identify in the in-game character itself (Consalvo, 2003; Newman, 2016).

1.3 Genre analysis

Considering the purpose of this study, a brief overview on genre analysis is to be provided. According to Flowerdew (2023: 258), the term *genre* "is borrowed from French, where it has the meaning of type or kind", despite its origin going back to Aristotle times. Its first usage in English referred to the different types of macro-genres existing in literature, including even their various sub-genres (Flowerdew, 2023: 258), being merely a classifying tool to categorise texts and cultural objects (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015: 53).

However, in the field of applied linguistics, the term *genre* seems to mean something more than a tool for classifying literature. It refers to "different types of communicative events (written or spoken) associated with particular settings and communicative purposes" (Flowerdew, 2023: 258), together with being a "powerful, ideologically active and historically changing shaper of texts" (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010: 4) that can both "understand and account for the realities of the world of texts" (Bathia, 2002: 7) and also connotate the need to perceive how language relates to a culturally recognised context and its use (Hyland, 2002; Yunick, 1997).

These views attribute to the term *genre* (and, more broadly, to genre analysis) a completely different meaning comparing to the one of a simple mean of categorisation. They expand it, making it a tool not only to help organising and generating kinds of texts and social actions in a dynamic way (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010:4), but also a tool for a thorough scrutiny of words and texts as components, that, together, have particular meanings in specific contexts and settings (Flowerdew, 2023: 258).

Many theories regarding genre analysis have been achieved throughout the years, differing in the emphasis they give to either context or text whether they focus on the roles of texts in social communities, or the ways that texts are organised to reflect and construct these communities (Martín, 2003: 158).

Currently, three are the major traditions on genre analysis that are recurrently used in

linguistics (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Bhatia, 1996; Hyland, 2002; Hyon, 1996, 2017): the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) tradition, as represented by Swales (1990, 2004); the Australian tradition, or Systemic Functional Language (SFL), led by Martin (1985); and the North American new rhetoric tradition (now known as Rhetorical Genre Studies [RGS]), led by Miller (1984).

When it comes to the methodology of genre analysis, Flowerdew (2002; 2023) identifies a fundamental distinction between the traditions mentioned above: the type of approach they tend to employ to perform genre analysis, differing between a more linguistic one, on the one hand, and a more situational, or contextual, one on the other.

The linguistic approach (typical of ESP and SFL) is more interested in describing the rhetorical structure and lexico-grammar of the text, applying functional models of grammar and discourse and concentrating on the realization of the communicative purposes embodied in a genre.

The contextual approach (typical of RGS) is more interested in describing the situational context in which the text occurs, the purposes and functions of genres and the attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours of the members of the discourse communities within which genres are situated.

A more detailed overview of these three approaches will be presented in the next paragraphs.

1.3.1 Genres as forms of communicative actions – English for specific purposes (ESP)

The tradition of ESP, universal term that is used to encompass various areas of English studies such as academic English, business English, medical English etc. (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015: 57), was developed by John Swales (1990, 2004) and it was motivated by a desire to develop pedagogical materials in the context of English for academic purposes (EAP) (Flowerdew, 2023: 260), providing language learners appropriate language resources and skills in their attempt to gain access to the English language demands that they could encounter in their studies or professions (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990).

Regarding *genre* as “a class of communicative events, characterised both by their communicative purposes and by various patterns of structure, style, content and intended audience” (Swales, 1990: 58), Swales took a linguistic approach to genre analysis, applying functional models of grammar and discourse and concentrating on the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical realization of the *communicative purposes* embodied in a genre within a *communicative situation* (Bloor, 1998: 54) and within their relative *discourse community* (Flowerdew, 2023: 260), a group of individuals sharing common public goals, established mechanisms of intercommunication, a participatory mechanism of exchanging information and feedbacks and also specific lexis (Swales, 1990: 24-27).

The realisation of the communicative purposes of the genre within its relative discourse community is very often the real starting point for ESP’s genre analysis, being even a mean to provide the genre’s rationale and assisting in shaping the genre’s internal

structure, investigating its linguistic signals in semantic terms and covering the grammatical analysis of the elements within a genre (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015; Flowerdew, 2023).

One of the best-known examples of Swales' contribution to the body of discipline-specific genres' knowledge is the "create a research space" (CARS) model for the introductions to research articles (Swales, 1990), where Swales theorised that such introductions typically progress through a sequence of rhetorical moves (performed by means of a number of sub-moves or steps) as the writer creates a metaphorical space for the research that is to be presented in the main body of the article (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015; Flowerdew, 2023).

1.3.2 Genres as staged, goal-oriented social processes – Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Australian genre-based educational linguistics, also known as the *Sydney school*, has developed mainly from the theoretical work of Michael Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and it is basically concerned with the relationship between language and its functions in social settings (Martín, 2003: 158). It has been initially set out to cater the needs for language and literacy education, particularly among Australian primary and secondary schoolchildren and among adult migrant programs, but the growing number of studies investigating genres across various contexts and languages has garnered it extensive support internationally (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015).

Similar to the ESP tradition, the Sydney School sees genre as "staged, goal-oriented and purposeful social activity that people engage in as members of their culture" (Martin, 1985: 25) in which genre is regarded as the "cultural purpose" of texts, therefore being seen as a social process (Eggins, 2007: 55). This process is goal-oriented to seek an understanding of the organisation and structure of language in realising its social purpose within a particular context and culture (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015: 62).

However, contrary to Swales' tradition, the key concept of SFL is not the realisation of the communicative purposes within a precise discourse community, but the *realisation* itself. This feature assists in identifying more generalized text types' patterns compared to ESP, particularly patterns that are not specific to any precise discourse communities (Flowerdew, 2023: 260), promoting a language analysis that helps not only to describe the dynamic relationship between a language that realises both social purposes and contexts as specific linguistic interactions, but also the simultaneous realisation of language as specific social actions and meanings (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015: 62).

The primary focus of SFL's genre analysis is, consequently, to understand how social purposes are linked to text structures and how these social purposes are realised as situated social and linguistic actions within a "context of situation", labelled as "*register*" (Halliday, 1978: 31), that describes and encompasses three contextual parameters (Halliday, 1978: 33-35): the *field* (what takes place), the *tenor* (how participants relate to one another) and the *mode* (what role language is playing). These three parameters are

associated with their relative counterparts within the linguistic level which Halliday (1978: 45-46) refers to the level of *language metafunctions*: *ideational* (representation of action – corresponds to field), *interpersonal* (describes interactions between participants – corresponds to tenor) and *textual meanings* (describes the flow of information within and between texts – corresponds to mode). These parameters, analysed together with the ones within the register, account all together for the relations between context and text (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015; Flowerdew, 2023; Martin and Rose, 2008; Rose, 2012).

1.3.3 Genres as forms of social action – Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS)

The Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), also known as the North American Genre Theory, was firstly developed by Caroline Miller (1984; 1994). Differently from ESP and SFL (that take a linguist approach to genre analysis), RGS employs a situational one instead (Flowerdew, 2023: 260).

Being influenced by developmental psychology and meta-cognitive science that focuses on the social purposes of genre and on society's cultural and psychological factors, RGS defines genre as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (Miller, 1984: 159), arguing that genre's definition must be based on the actions used to accomplish the genre's purposes through time rather than on the substance or on the form of its discourse (Martín, 2003; Miller, 1984). This view leads to an identification of genres as “sociological concepts mediating textual and social ways of knowing, being and interacting in particular contexts” (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015) and makes genres forms of real ‘cultural artifacts’ (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010), providing insights on how a specific culture defines and configures situations and possible ways of acting upon them.

As a matter of fact, the primary focus of RGS is understanding how genres mediate society's interactions and meanings (Bazerman, 2003: 380): it investigates genre's dynamic relationship to exigencies, situations and social motives through the study of society itself and of people's ways of constructing, interpreting and acting within particular situations (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995; Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015; Hyon, 1996; Paltridge, 1997) together with “attitudes, values and beliefs of the communities of text users” (Hyland, 2002: 114), exemplified and manifested within the construction of the genre.

Another key concept in RGS' tradition is the concept of *typification* in which “goals and tasks can be crystallised in recognisable textual forms, deployed in recognisable circumstances – or genres” (Bazerman, 1994: 18), a proceeding that provides the “symbolic means to make sense of things” which helps to “set the stage and frame possible actions” (Bazerman, 1994: 19) to identify the textual features of a genre.

However, society's study is not to be interpreted as a mean of standardising patterns at the expense of individual variation, since RGS recognises (and values) both individual and shared performances (Devitt, 2015: 49), emphasising also the dynamic quality of genres (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 4), contrary to the implicit static and prescriptive vision that SFL seems to suggest (Freedman and Medway, 1994: 9).

Since the primary concern for RGS researchers is investigating the functional and contextual aspects of genres, their methodological orientation tends to be ethnographic rather than linguistic, employing research's data that are based on participant observation, interview, and document collection rather than on a corpus of texts like in ESP or SFL's traditions (Martín, 2003; Flowerdew, 2023).

CHAPTER TWO

MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Materials analysed

The present research aims to investigate how videogames walkthroughs are thought and built, delineating their possible internal structure throughout the examination and description of their characteristics, similarities and differences to understand their final scope. In order to properly answer these questions, instead of consulting large pre-existing web-based corpora (e.g., the GWTC, 2021), it was decided to create a brand-new defined corpus of 100 online videogames walkthroughs as the primary source of evidence for the purpose of this study.

The corpus was designed as follows: 100 walkthroughs were collected through a manual consultation of the main online platforms dedicated to videogaming. Due to practical limitations such as the impossibility of manually analysing hundreds of walkthroughs without automated collection methods (e.g., programming scripts, data mining etc.), the choice was restricted to walkthroughs designed only for PC or gaming consoles⁹. Mobile gaming (i.e. playing games through smartphones or mobile gaming consoles) was also excluded from this study due to the complexity and difficulty of analysing too many gaming platforms and playing methods at the same time, possibly causing poor data quality.

The study considered 100 written, English-language walkthroughs, fanbase made by players for other players, focused on reaching the 100% completion of the game and with a declared completed status. Eventually, the walkthroughs were collected from the three following websites, already considered some of the most famous and reliable resources for online gaming walkthroughs (Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2021):

- *Neoseeker* (<https://www.neoseeker.com/>): web platform specialised in news on the videogame's world and its new releases and on walkthroughs of the most popular videogames on the market.
- *IGN.com* (<https://www.ign.com/>): web platform, one of the most famous web platforms on gaming, specialised on news on the gaming world and on walkthroughs of the most famous videogames in history.
- *GameFAQs* (<https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/>): website specifically focused on fan-made walkthroughs, written and designed by players for other players.

To guarantee comprehensive results, the corpus included videogames pertaining to different videogaming genres. The videogaming genres included were the following: action, adventure, indie, RPG, shooter.

⁹ Gaming consoles are electronic devices that output a video signal or image to display a videogame, and they can typically be played with a videogame game controller (i.e. a joystick). Nowadays, the most famous and used ones on the market are respectively Play Station and Xbox, relatively designed by Sony and Microsoft.

For further clarity, a brief description of the genres included in the corpus is given.

- Action: genre that typically includes videogames that emphasize physical challenges such as hand-eye coordination or quick players' reaction time, testing players' reflexes (e.g., *Assassins Creed*, *Metal Gear Solid*);
- Adventure: genre that typically includes videogames that, apart from emphasising physical challenges like action games, also adds the component of environment exploration and puzzles/riddles resolution (e.g., *Tomb Raider*, *The last of Us*);
- Indie: genre that typically includes videogames that were developed by individuals or by small independent teams without the financial support of big gaming companies (e.g., *Poppy Playtime*, *Stray*);
- RPG (Role Playing Games): genre that typically includes videogames where the player assumes the role of the game's protagonist, making decisions that could change or modify the game's narrative (e.g., *Mass Effect*, *Dragon Age*);
- Shooter: subgenre of the action genre, it generally includes action games that specifically requires the player to defeat enemies with weapons such as firearms, bows or knives (e.g., *Far Cry*, *Hitman*).

Moreover, to ensure up-to-date results that could properly describe the current videogames walkthroughs' style of writing, only videogames and walkthroughs published throughout the last 5 years (particularly between 2020 and 2025) were taken into account. It is important to highlight that the inclusion in the corpus of some very old videogames of which original release date goes back to the 1990s (e.g., *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill* etc.) was accounted by the fact that only their most recent remakes¹⁰ were considered for the corpus. It is to be noted that official strategy guides by professional gaming companies were not taken into consideration for the purpose of this study.

The corpus' construction encountered some unavoidable limitations. The first one was related to the quantity of materials to include into the corpus: considering the large daily mass-production of videogames materials (and especially of walkthroughs) online, it would have been extremely difficult to analyse each and every walkthrough written and published throughout the five years chosen for the study. Thus, it was decided to set the quantity limit of walkthroughs to include into the corpus to 100 to arrange a small-scale sample that could present and conduct a more efficient and precise analysis on the key features of the Walkthrough genre.

The second limitation was related to the choice of both the videogames and the videogaming genres to be taken into account into the corpus: the selection was conditioned by both which videogames (and, consequently, of which genres) were released between 2020 and 2025 and by which walkthroughs designed for which games were effectively available online at the time of the study. Decisions were more than once forced by the actual availability or not of a written walkthrough for the selected games, greatly impacting the corpus' creation and forcing several adjustments, additions or

¹⁰ Remakes are complete, ground-up rebuilds of older games using modern technology, engines and assets. These rebuilds reimagine graphics, audio, and gameplay mechanics to suit modern consoles while keeping the original's core story or theme intact.

substitutions to the list of games included in the corpus if walkthroughs weren't available at all for some game or genre.

Regarding perplexities and possible interpretations of the corpus' choices as narrow and excessively personal, it can be stated that all the walkthroughs selected were chosen taking into consideration the overall quality and comprehensiveness of each text. Extreme attention was devoted into choosing only walkthroughs that were representative to answer the specific study's research questions as adequately as possible, including only the ones that tried to depict the main essence of videogames in terms of structure, completion's level and quality in the most accurate way achievable.

2.2 Methods of analysis

This section summarizes the main steps that were involved in the analysis of the walkthrough corpus. It also explains the theoretical frameworks employed to analyse the chosen texts.

2.2.1 Theoretical framework for genre analysis

Among the many approaches to genre analysis available in the literature, Swales (1990) approach to genre analysis was chosen as the most suitable theoretical framework for the purpose of this study. Its wide adaptability to analyse texts in terms of structure, lexical and syntactic choices was considered as the most appropriate for the corpus' analysis. More, its suitability to determine a genre-specific rhetorical organisation that could investigate even the genre's discourse community (Fakhruddin and Hassan, 2015) contributed to its choice. Specifically, Swales' definition of genre (1990: 58) was employed to understand and identify the distinctive elements of the videogaming walkthrough genre, focusing on its communicative purposes, its intended author and audience, its language and the characteristics of its discourse community, together with the various constituents and lexicogrammatical features typical of the Walkthrough's genre.

2.2.2 Data sources and languages

The goal was to create a corpus of many different videogame walkthroughs, focusing especially on the English-language ones. For the current corpus, 100 unique walkthrough documents for a total of 90 games were collected.

2.2.3 Corpus construction

Due to the fact that walkthrough genre texts are usually published and shared almost only through online sources (Krause, 2016; Nylund, 2015; Newman, 2016), the only documents which yielded enough evidence for the corpus' building were specific to the

web.

Before including any walkthrough into the corpus, a manual search of the games' metadata was performed to determine the suitability or not of the games compared to the corpus' limitations. Games' metadata were gathered from RAWG (<https://rawg.io/>), one of the most famous online sources for videogames' information. It is to be noted that most of the metadata was (and still is) subjected to systematic editing since RAWG periodically revises and, if necessary, adjusts games' metadata.

Specifically for the purpose of this study, after a careful review, only the following metadata were collected and considered for the corpus' construction:

- Game's title;
- Game's genres;
- Supported platforms;
- Game's release date.

The collection of these specific games' metadata was necessary to properly construct the corpus since all the games chosen had to comply with its specific delimitations. Metadata about the games' titles needed to be collected to adequately identify walkthroughs and to understand for which game they were designed. Metadata about games' genres, supported platforms and release dates were necessary instead to figure out which games pertained to the genres considered for the corpus (action, adventure, indie, RPG, shooter), if their release happened between 2020 and 2025 (the time limit chosen) and if they were designed for the corpus' considered platforms (PC or gaming consoles).

It is to be considered that, aside from the games' titles and short descriptions, games' metadata often provided even multiple other entries per game, for example gameplay tags¹¹, developers' names, publishers' names etc. Seldom, did metadata include also multiple games' release dates. This last characteristic was to be expected because of the frequent repeated games' publications and later ports to additional game platforms that are often realized by different developer teams at different times¹².

It is to be remembered that individual copyrights protect games' walkthroughs and do not allow for the reconstruction of the full-text documents. Thus, to enable researchers to look up the original full text of some specific walkthrough for text mining, distant readings' approaches or for consulting the complete list of games' included in the corpus, the following metadata were also collected:

- Walkthrough's URL;
- Source's platform.

When the suitability of each game was confirmed and each walkthrough's availability

¹¹ Gameplay tags are metadata that “cover a wide range of topics, from platform-specific information to ludic and narrative categorization that may overlap with game genres” (Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2021: 16).

¹² Some videogames are published multiple times, as they may be the subject of patches or updates. As a mapping of such parallel releases cannot easily be achieved automatically, the original releases were kept as they were provided by the authors, considering only PC or gaming consoles' releases.

checked manually throughout both Google search and the internal search engine pertaining to each of the considered platforms for materials’ collection, each entry was reported into a spreadsheet specially arranged to write down and organise all the metadata collected for the inclusion of the texts into the corpus. The raw structure of the spreadsheet made to collect the games’ metadata is presented in Table 1.

	Genre	Platforms	Release dates	URL	Source
Game’s name					
Game’s name					

Table 1: Raw structure of the spreadsheet employed to note the metadata necessary for the inclusion of the walkthroughs into the corpus together with their source’s links and platforms.

Considering the corpus’ size set at 100 maximum different walkthroughs throughout 5 years (2020-2025), the spreadsheet was organised splitting the corpus mathematically and selecting around 17 walkthroughs per year. These 17 walkthroughs were once more split mathematically (when possible) between the three online sources (Neoseeker, IGN and GameFAQs), generally having 5/6 walkthroughs coming from each source per year. In the case of the presence of multiple walkthroughs available in more than one source platform, a choice was made on the base of both the walkthrough’s quality and level of completion and also on the base of the mathematical quantity of walkthroughs coming from each source in that particular year, privileging a mathematical balance for every year to prevent possible bias based on sources’ imbalance. The corpus list of games considered for the purpose of this study and all their collected metadata are provided in Appendix A.

2.2.4 Data analysis

All HTML walkthroughs documents were manually chosen, considering only walkthroughs pertaining to the genres mentioned in the materials section and published within the corpus’ time limits (from 2020 to 2025).

Firstly, walkthroughs’ visual appearances were observed: through a manual observation of their visual elements and characteristics, texts were divided and compared according to their sources. A general visual structure for each of the sources chosen for the corpus’ analysis was then inferred both for the walkthroughs’ homepages and for the consequent tabs accessible through their index.

Secondly, data about walkthroughs’ schematic organisation were gathered, following Swales (1990) guidelines about text rhetoric organisation, to infer the genre’s general internal structure. Texts were manually observed and compared to infer a general structure and examined and then subdivided into several different sections according to their specific communicative function. Data about walkthroughs’ sections were manually annotated in a spreadsheet: each game’s name was written down, together with all the sections identified across the texts’ corpus. Then, data were cross-checked to mark the

sections included in each walkthrough and compared to understand which sections occurred the most throughout the corpus, inferring a general trend's structure for the genre. The raw structure of the spreadsheet employed for the structure's analysis is presented in Table 2.

	Section 1 (name)	Section 2 (name)	Section 3 (name)	Section 4 (name)	Section 5 (name)	Section 6 (name)	Section 7 (name)	Section 8 (name)
Game's name								
Game's name								

Table 2: Raw structure of the spreadsheet employed to cross-check sections' presence across the walkthrough's corpus.

Secondly, data about walkthroughs' text content were gathered and observed to examine the language employed throughout the corpus, analysing its characteristics and its usage. Walkthroughs' content was not altered or normalised¹³ in any way to preserve and maintain the characteristic (e.g., idioms, spelling mistakes, sentence order, informal register, usage of technical gaming terms etc.) of their original narrative: no stop words, acronyms or abbreviations were removed and no lemmatization or stemming was performed. Sentence collocations were left unchanged too to support a thorough analysis of walkthroughs' structure, components and, above all, of the genuine informal language employed by the authors. As for potential paratextual¹⁴ elements (e.g., introductions, general information on the game, etc.), all of those were kept and only HTML-related structural elements (e.g., navigation headers etc.) were removed. Sentences were manually analysed to gather data about wording, phraseology, lexical choices and verbs' structures. In addition, to understand if the relationship between the authors and the audience constituted an example of asymmetric relationship between experts and novices (Chang, 2011; Consalvo, 2003), the way in which authors addressed the readers within the texts was analysed too.

Since all the walkthroughs considered in the corpus were mainly plaintext files, it is to be remembered that the visual representation of the games analysed was preserved only partially through some games' screenshots or visual maps already included in the texts. Audio representation (e.g., retention of dialogues, characters' voices or speech's inflections, background noises etc.) was instead not retained.

¹³ Text normalisation is the process with which informal writing is transformed into a standardised and canonical form, and it generally involves correcting spelling errors, expanding abbreviations, correcting punctuation etc. within a text (Aliero *et al.*, 2023: 44-45). In this case, the walkthroughs included in the corpus were not subjected to this process, leaving the texts as they were originally written by their authors.

¹⁴ The term "*paratextual*" refers to materials or data in general that can help shape the reader's experience and understanding of a text (Genette, 1997: 5).

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three research questions were formulated, at the beginning of this dissertation, to examine the videogaming walkthrough's genre: the first concerning the purposes walkthroughs serve; the second investigating the general characteristics of the Walkthrough's genre; the third examining its conventionalised textual structure and the specific type of specialised language it employs. The results of the analysis carried out throughout the corpus are presented and discussed in this chapter.

3.1 Aim of the walkthrough genre

3.1.1 Walkthroughs as instructional texts

According to Burghardt and Tiepmar (2021: 44), the general communicative purpose of the Walkthrough genre is giving precise, detailed and clear *instructions* on how the player needs to play and move around the game's map to progress through the whole game successfully. A rhetoric-communicative analysis of the corpus confirms this perspective on walkthroughs, as illustrated in Examples (1) and (2), only two of the many available throughout the corpus.

- (1) You can use this guide to find everything in the game, which means all equipment (rings, weapons), spells, and hidden items. We'll also have detailed strategies for getting through every level and taking down all the bosses in the game. [*Horizon: Zero Dawn* (remastered) walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (2) If you've come to this guide, chances are you need help to complete a specific task or find a certain item. There are additional sections outside of the main walkthrough that will help with more specific tasks. The goal here is to help you complete whatever you need to complete. [*Ghost of Tsushima* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

The evidence provided in Examples (1) and (2) testify how walkthroughs explicitly state their aim of wanting to help players in reaching all the missions' objectives and a thorough completion of the game. In addition, their claim of helping players in the collection of equipment, hidden items and all that is needed to complete the game supports the idea of their mainly serving as *guides* (Feil, 2020; Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015), tutorials of which principal function is to drive the players onward, preventing their inability to progress further at a certain point/level into the game (Consalvo, 2003: 327-328).

Still, it is to be noticed that, while providing the best way to successfully complete a game, walkthrough texts also promote an idea of ending a game that is to be intended in a broader sense compared to a simple accomplishment of the game's main plot line. All the corpus' walkthroughs indicate also the author's intent and attention towards the

central goal of ensuring a completion that goes beyond the mere conclusion of a game's storyline and that points towards a different kind of completion that is not centred on the progression towards the "end" of the narrative. The completion that authors want to achieve within walkthroughs rather involves the exploration of the game space in all its complexities (including even engaging and completing all the side quests¹⁵) and the maximisation of the collection of objects, skills or techniques (Hockey, 2004: 268) together with the completion of the primary narrative sequence, as shown in Examples (3) and (4) respectively.

- (3) In this guide, we will go over how to complete every stage, defeat every boss and enemy, find all of the items/power ups, and how to unlock every achievement! This game can be incredibly challenging so make sure to use everything at your disposal and learn how to deal with every encounter in the walkthrough below. [*Blasphemous 2* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (4) This comprehensive guide aims to cover 100% of the *Gotham Knights* experience by providing walkthrough of the main story campaign. It will also cover all side quests, collectibles (Batarangs, Street Art, Historia Strigidae Pages, Landmarks etc.), open world activities, provide strategies for boss encounters and some of the trickier combat situations. [*Gotham Knights* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

This distinctive attention towards a more extensive idea of "completion" denotes walkthroughs authors' intentions of describing a game in all its facets to grant players the possibility of discovering multitude of other pleasures to be derived from digressing from the primary narrative. The experiencing of the "interplay between the simultaneously felt desires to progress to 'the end' and to prolong the pleasurable engagement and engaging in detours" (Kinder, 1991: 177) drives in fact players, as it can be inferred from Examples (3) and (4), towards the need for a game's completion that goes beyond the main plot line. At the same time, authors guide players also towards the discovering of the myriads of side quests often implied but left "undeclared" by the game itself, condition that could leave players oblivious and unable to enjoy the game they are seeking help for to the fullest without a guide that could disclose and guide them towards that hidden content (Newman, 2008: 95).

3.1.2 Walkthroughs as means of "deep diving" into videogames

An attentive study of the corpus' texts highlights another general genre's goal: while delivering solutions and aiding the stuck gamer while playing, walkthroughs' aim of "diving" deeper into videogames is also evident, developing the players' interest in apprehending the full extent of what games have to offer. All the corpus' texts document

¹⁵ The term "*side quest*" is frequently used in gaming jargon to indicate all the games' missions that are beyond the main storyline and that do not hinder the completion of the game if left behind. Their execution is completely optional and at the discretion of the player.

the meticulous authors' attention in describing and researching every branch of the game's narrative tree¹⁶, specific locations, games' choices, trophies' achievements or every combination of weapons, ability points¹⁷ etc. that will make the player reach a really high percentage of the game's completion, up to an actual 100%¹⁸ completion of the whole game (Newman, 2016: 413), as shown in Examples (5) and (6) respectively.

- (5) This comprehensive guide will cover all aspects of the game including a complete walkthrough for each of the game's campaign missions, secondary missions (Heleus Assignments, Relationship and Ally mission and Additional Tasks), a guide to help find and clear all of the Remnant Vaults, tips and much, much more. The walkthrough will also provide you with any context specific achievements/trophies as well as useful items so you can collect 100% of everything in the game. [*Mass Effect Andromeda: deluxe edition* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (6) This guide covers the whole *Little Nightmares II* experience by providing a step-by-step walkthrough of the whole game, as well as the location of all Glitching Remains and Hats for 100% completion. In addition, this walkthrough aims to provide any useful information regarding Trophies & Achievements, with a guide on how to achieve each. [*Little Nightmares II* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Examples (5) and (6) clearly demonstrates how walkthroughs are not products of idle or casual engagement with a game, but the result of a systematic attempt to interrogate and document the extent of the whole game's potential. They constitute a comprehensive record of a thorough investigative play that seeks a complete mastery of the game and the acquisition of the most complete knowledge of its systems and operations that can reveal also the complex set of chain reactions, contingencies and interdependencies in the game's model (Ashton and Newman, 2011: 6). As evidence, in several of the corpus' walkthroughs, the need for completion is showcased by an ever-increasing version or revision number of the documents, proudly and prominently displayed in their relative walkthrough's page, confirming the almost never-ending process of perpetual upgrade that this type of texts undergoes (even when the periods between updates become lengthy). This desire for completion leads walkthroughs' authors to an almost endless exploration of every available space within the game or to the transcription of every branch in a dialogue tree even if these hold the key to no intrinsic reward in terms of high

¹⁶ In the specialised field of videogaming, the term "*narrative tree*" defines a programmed choice-driven structure of a game. Widely used in RPG games, it is constituted by *nodes* (specific plot points, dialogue choices etc.) and by *branches* (how the story dynamically alters depending on the user's choices, leading to different consequences/endings).

¹⁷ Ability points are numerical values that are usually very common in RPG. The player can employ these points in generical ability trees to define a character's both mental and physical capabilities. Usually very important for the character's development, they can generally influence even the character's success in fights, explorations and social interactions.

¹⁸ In gaming jargon, a "100% completion" of a game is reached when the player has completed all the missions' objectives (both main and secondary) and has collected all the objects, materials, optional collectibles, weapons etc. available inside the game.

score, trophy or game’s ranking (Ashton and Newman, 2011: 4), serving as proof of their long-lasting commitment to achieve and complete everything the game offers in terms of storyline and secondary objectives (Ashton and Newman, 2011: 5). Figure 3 shows an example of the increasing versions’ history of *Lords of the Fallen*’s walkthrough, one of the games included in the corpus.

Change Log	
Version 2.01	• Added a note about Moon’s Judgement at the beginning • Added instructions for finding Enhanced Cursed Effigy in Bramis Castle • Added instructions for finding the Saintry Quintessence in Bramis Castle that I forgot - thanks all for the heads up! :)
Version 2.0	I was inspired to revisit this guide after seeing the trailer for LotF 2, and I got carried away - this is a SIGNIFICANT update to my original guide • Critical path is largely the same, with a few alterations • Directions are significantly expanded, especially in the later chapters • Guide was split into more chapters and organized into story arcs • Formatting changes throughout to bring it in line with my other guides • Did another pass to include a few items I had missed • Now includes all post-launch DLC item set quests at the end I’m thinking about adding an appendix to talk about builds, so that might show up in a future release.
Version 1.02	• The original version of this guide contained only missables and items along the critical path. Many asked for a more complete guide, and I’ve finally gotten around to it. This is a greatly expanded version that covers all significant item drops/pick-ups. • Incorporated the Bucketlord sidequest into the guide at appropriate spots. • Improved directions across the board. • Formatting adjusted to better support GameFAQs dark modes. • Slight fixes based on changes the devs have made (including one spot where they just changed the layout). • This should be good for Lords of the Fallen version 1.7.19 • Planning to add an appendix in the next update to cover the new armor quests, but they can all be done post-game so no worries.

Figure 3: Example of a part of the increasing versions’ history of *Lords of the Fallen*, one of the games included in the corpus, published on GameFAQs’ website.

It is to be underlined that all the walkthroughs chosen for the scope of this study were marked as having reached “Final” or “completed” status, despite most part of the walkthroughs available online could remain in a dormant state of “perpetual update” without any major upgrade or update schedule for years (Ashton and Newman, 2011: 4). The need for perpetual updates or revised versions showcase the countless dedication to perfectionism of walkthroughs’ authors and the iconic cornerstone of walkthrough production of reaching, in the end, a game’s outmost completion (Ashton and Newman, 2011; Nylund, 2015; Newman, 2016), as shown in Figure 4.

Introduction
What is this game? Nier Replicant Ver.1.22474487139... is a remake or upgraded version of the original Nier title specifically the japanese version of the game released only in japan, so things not in the english version have been brought over to the west for the first time. A notable difference between this and Nier Gestalt (western version) is the protagonist being a young man as opposed to an middle aged man. Instead of a daughter he has a younger sister though they are the same character. This game is a prequel to Nier Automata and this remake has had its gameplay redone in areas to be similar to Automata. There is a new ending and other such changes as well. (Will update this part if needed later.) Guide Progress: Guide is Complete.

Figure 4: Example of the introductory tab of *Nier Replicant (EU Edition)* published on GameFAQs’ website, where its author clearly marks their walkthrough as “completed”.

3.1.3 Walkthroughs as means for gaining status in the gaming community

Taking into consideration walkthrough's genre main aims analysed as of now, it could seem that the Walkthrough genre could arise from only a genuine altruistic desire felt by expert players to help less experienced fellow "comrades" or to simply assess the true extent of what videogames have to offer (Chang, 2011; Consalvo, 2003; Fry, 2012; Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015).

Still, this is not the only point why players spend hours of their free time to write walkthroughs. One more reason for walkthroughs' writing can be inferred from the corpus' examination: the walkthroughs' authors need for recognition and status from the gaming community (Ashton and Newman, 2011; Burn, 2006; Fry, 2012). Although walkthroughs' authors, as noted above, indeed write their walkthroughs to help other players and to show them all the hidden secrets behind a game's playthrough, Fry (2012: 10) suggests that, very often, walkthroughs are written also just to fulfil players' requests for them, implicitly satisfying players' desire for a complete knowledge of the game. The corpus' study confirms Fry's perspective: while satisfying players' thirst for knowledge, walkthroughs' authors definitely want to improve their relations with their audience to "obtain recognition" (Consalvo, 2009: 179) from them and establishing *ethos* (authority, credibility) for their efforts in that particular game (Fry, 2012: 10). In Figure 5, evidence of Fry's perspective is provided: the caption is taken from the corpus, precisely from the comments section under *Rise of the Ronin*'s walkthrough on Neoseeker's website and it shows how *vinheim*, the walkthrough's author, answers to players' comments to establish a positive relationship with them and receives recognition of his status as an expert walkthroughs' writer.

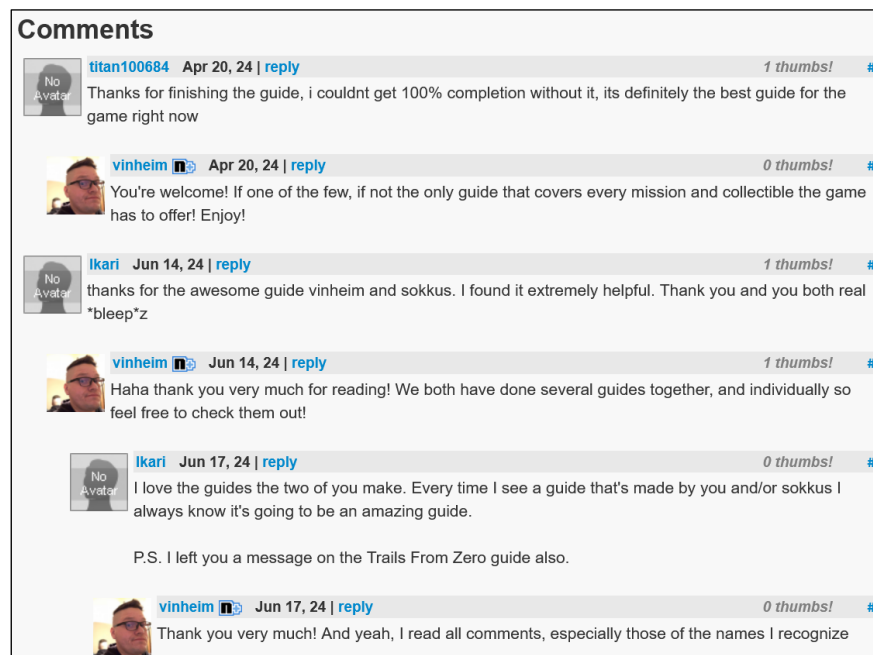


Figure 5: Example of how the walkthrough writer *vinheim* tries to establish a relation with his audience by answering to players' comments.

The more walkthroughs are considered “useful” and so, as a consequence, highly rated¹⁹ by players as time passes (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Fry, 2012; Simons and Newman, 2003), the more walkthroughs’ authors can be effectively considered “experts” (Consalvo, 2003: 273) and receive deference and recognition for their expertise by the gaming community (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 78) that has a chance to learn directly from them (Newman, 2008: 110), as Figure 5 demonstrates.

It follows that performing well in a game and creating useful walkthroughs, also frequently referred to by the gaming community, forms a crucial role in shaping the extent to which a walkthrough creator can establish a reputation and gain a social standing (Ashton and Newman, 2011; Burn, 2006). By assessing their expertise and, implicitly, their “superiority” compared to “regular” players through seeking the “high score” imperative of efficient and well-received performances by the gaming community, walkthroughs’ authors encode in the virtual pages of their online walkthroughs their need for high-end playing. Their high-end playing is the ploy with which walkthroughs’ authors can pursue a public indicator of both recognition of their own gaming mastery (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Newman, 2008) and the accomplishment of their status gaining through gaming community’s praises and approval since a highly rated walkthrough can be a real “status marker” for a player (Consalvo, 2003: 273), as shown in Figure 6.

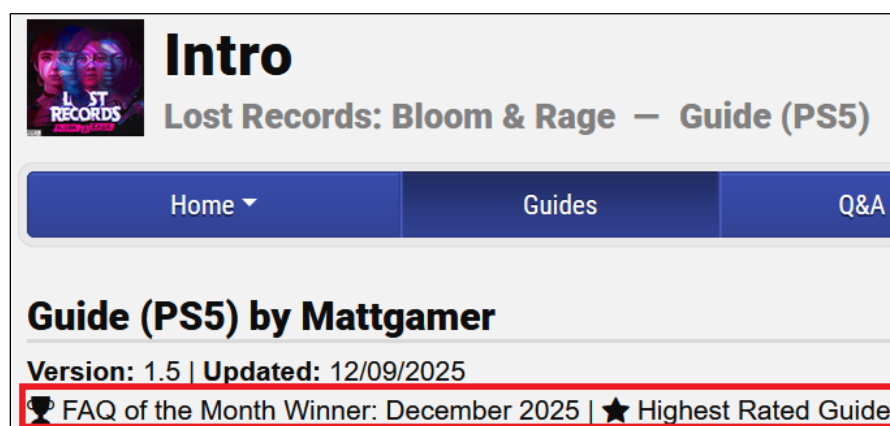


Figure 6: Example of how, on GameFAQs’ website, the walkthrough’s author of *Lost Records: Bloom & Rage*, one of the games included in the corpus, receives recognition through commemorative sentences and awarding symbols.

The great importance of community’s rating is clearly depicted also in the examples provided in Figures 7 and 8 respectively: in Figure 7 a visual reminder to rate their own walkthrough is provided by the authors themselves in every walkthrough’s homepage. In Figure 8, the reminder is put instead under the shape of a floating banner at the top of every walkthrough’s tabs.

¹⁹ Usually, online websites where walkthroughs are published have a rating system where readers can rate walkthroughs on the base of how much they have found them useful, practical or well written. Generally speaking, the highest rated walkthroughs have a star or a “highest rating” label near the title to let players identify particularly worthy walkthroughs recognised by the community.

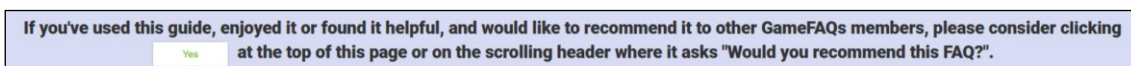


Figure 7: Example of a walkthrough’s author directly asking the audience to rate their walkthrough on GameFAQs’ website.

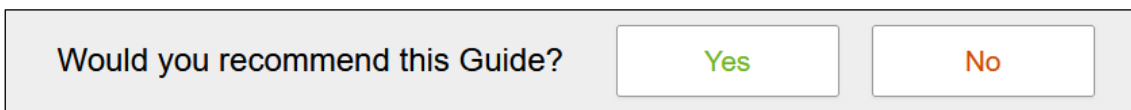


Figure 8: Example of the floating reminder to rate walkthroughs at the top of each walkthrough’s webpage on GameFAQs’ website.

Considering the significance and relevance of gaining community’s recognition, it comes as no surprise that authors even scrupulously try to protect their works (Fry, 2012: 12) through long lists of reposting requirements (e.g., obtaining the writer’s permission for reposting, not changing anything in the walkthrough or prohibiting the use of the walkthrough in books, magazines, and guides etc.). Very frequently, walkthroughs’ authors even reach the extreme point of downright prohibiting any reproduction of their works, setting copyright’s rules for the usage of their walkthroughs as for personal use only, as shown in Figure 9.

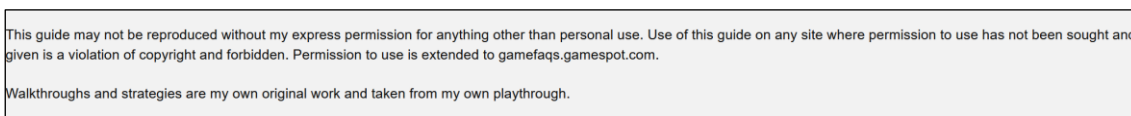


Figure 9: Example of how *Christopher Williams*, the author of the walkthrough of *Baldur’s Gate III*, one of the games included in the corpus, sets strict copyrights rules for the usage of his own walkthrough on GameFAQs’ website.

By acknowledging the difficulty of writing walkthroughs and setting forth use requirements to ensure they get credit for their work, player-writers increase their credibility and protect the status they have gained for having completed the game and for having taken the time to write the walkthrough, ensuring not to have their efforts stolen or plagiarised (Fry, 2012: 12) and publicly condemning and punishing every transgressions that could happen (Newman, 2008: 116).

3.1.4 Walkthroughs as texts for *glitch-hunting*

Less common but not least, the corpus’ communicative analysis denotes even the aim of the genre of documenting a certain level of *glitch hunting*²⁰ players encounter and research while writing walkthroughs, desire motivated by the will to create also the most

²⁰ The word “*glitch*” refers to unexpected software errors or flaws within videogames that result in unintended behaviours, graphical anomalies (graphics drawing incorrectly or audio breaking up) or narrative inconsistencies (continuity errors either within titles or across series). These anomalies range from minor visual setbacks to game-breaking issues hindering progress (e.g., inability to progress due to looping sequences etc.) (Simons and Newman, 2003: 11).

comprehensive account of hidden potentialities or limits within a game (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 20-24). According to Newman (2008: 15), the practice of glitch hunting often makes players discover funny games' malfunctions or strange environments' behaviours, with the ultimate goal of uncovering and mastering not only what the game appears to offer in terms of gameplay, but also to celebrate and publicise those errors that even developers were unaware of. Example (7) confirms Newman's point of view, underlining how, by chance, the author of *Ghost of Yotei's* walkthrough – one of the games included in the corpus – documents and publicises a malfunction unknown to the developers in the ambient lightning of the game while writing their own walkthrough.

- (7) Since the latest update I've been having an issue where the horse that I picked when you get your first one, and I picked the black horse, and around a couple hours of playtime after the latest patch, I started seeing my horses colour go from black to brown when the lighting and weather changes and sometimes my horses colour will be just full on brown like a totally different horse. [*Ghost of Yotei* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

As Example (7) demonstrates, walkthrough texts are the embodiment of the tortuous and rigorous journey (carried on with a great amount of effort) players decide to embark on while trying to unravel and break the game's code, perfectly aligning also with Ashton and Newman's (2010: para. 20-24) findings. The presence of glitches within a game testifies also how a game can be refigured as a living, dynamic, malleable entity that reveals more and more secrets and anomalies as it is continually probed, investigated and played in many new and different ways (Newman, 2008: 116).

It is to be noticed, nevertheless, that technical issues such as glitches never systematically appear in the same way since they depend on random factors impossible to predict. They generally manifest in a totally different manner depending on each single playthrough (Maldon, 2025; Simons and Newman, 2003), despite concerning the same game's frame or sequence. Example (8) illustrates how, in the comments section of *Ghost of Yotei's* walkthrough, a player documented and witnessed the same issue the walkthrough's authors encountered with the ambient lightning but experienced differently.

- (8) I hadn't really thought about it but I just assumed that it was ambient lighting that did it. But when it happens to me the horse went from brown to a bluish black. [*Ghost of Yotei* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Whereas glitch hunting is far from being a way to criticize game developers or undermine the value of a game just because of random malfunctioning reasons (Newman, 2008: 120), it definitely constitutes a mean to expose and exploit technical issues that slip through companies' quality control systems and that, *in extremis*, may crash the game outright. Glitches, however, allow access also to new, perhaps unpredictable, techniques

and capabilities: they could grant players access to unknown sequences, abilities or bonuses generally out of order during normal playthroughs, or they could even offer players the possibility of discovering certain games' unexpected failures, as Examples (7) and (8) demonstrate. In these particular situations, walkthroughs are the proof of players clearly operating outside the "official strategies" generally suggested by commercial guides, promoting instead a deliberate and less constricted journey with the goal to uncover obscure items, interpret playful engagements with glitches and create new forms of emergent gameplays that go beyond normal playthroughs (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Newman, 2008).

3.2 Audience of the walkthrough genre

According to Consalvo (2003: 334-335) and Nylund (2015: 56), the audience of the Walkthrough genre is represented by people who share an interest in gaming or videogaming and want to achieve a full completion of a particular game or, above all, by people who desire to learn how to go through a particular level/map of a game because they are unable to progress further. A communicative analysis of the corpus confirms this perspective on walkthrough's genre audience, as illustrated in Example (9).

- (9) IGN's *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines 2* walkthrough guides you through every main story quest with tips and tricks along the way. You can expect to see steps for completing every quest objective, tips for picking the right difficulty, info on every clan, and more. We're here to help you get through Bloodlines 2 while having a good overall experience. [*Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines 2* walkthrough, IGN]

Example (9) gives evidence to Consalvo and Nylund's statements, underlining how walkthroughs can help players whether they simply desire to complete every quest or objective available or being guided to basically "get through" the game because they are potentially stuck in their own playthrough.

But in Example (9) also the addressing of the author towards the readers is relevant to help defining the kind of audience walkthroughs address. By using the word "guiding" or the expression "we're here to help you", it can be inferred that walkthroughs' authors consider their readers as novice players who need guidance and advice from more expert players during their playthrough. This characteristic confirms Ligman's (2009: 3) view of walkthrough texts' audience as a metaphor for other fellow players of the game, whose level of expertise is always generally lower compared to the one of the author/writer. Chang (2011), Consalvo (2003) and Fry (2012) also agree with this perspective on walkthrough texts' audience.

The evidence provided in Example (9) and Consalvo's (2003: 328) suggestion that walkthroughs' authors generally need to play a game multiple times to find and record all the information needed to complete their walkthroughs prompts to the idea that walkthroughs' authors are, eventually, more experienced and skilled players compared to

their audience. The expert status of walkthroughs' authors can be inferred also from Example (10) where the authors refer to themselves as "veteran" players of the game and from Example (11) where the author, to reiterate their being an expert in that game, clearly states their level of expertise by mentioning the total hours of playing performed.

- (10) In this guide you can expect to find every helpful item and insight into the monsters and bosses that will block Hinako's way as we undoubtedly delve into the mystery of the fog and face our demons. And of course horror veterans Sokkus and Bkstunt will both be here to help you out as well! [*Silent Hill F* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (11) My views on certain artifacts and weapons will obviously differ from others, but I do know how to play this game (at least I'd like to think I do). I've put in roughly 90 hrs. into *Returnal*, I have the platinum, and I consider myself somewhat decent at this game. The only reason I'm saying this is because I just want the reader to know this guide is being written by someone with at least some competency on the subject they're writing about. [*Returnal* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

Moreover, while observing how walkthroughs' instructions are given throughout the corpus, it can be stated that the Walkthrough genre is not suitable for readers who are not at least literate in the practice of gaming since the greatest part of the walkthroughs' instructions analysed are not always expressed in an exhaustive manner. Instead, just like all specialized texts, authors actually assume a certain recipient's prior knowledge and a minimum degree of technical skills already mastered to understand their strategies to finish the game or to discover hidden trophies or objectives (Consalvo, 2003; Chang, 2011; Newman, 2016), as shown in Examples (12) and (13) respectively.

- (12) This section assumes that you have already played *Alan Wake*. [*Alan Wake II* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (13) The paddleboard in question is found near the dome in the center camp. Look for a red board lying on the rocks and foliage. Lavender can be found a very short way up ahead on your left (look for the green herb next to the rocks). Grab an extra one for good measure, use it for XP, and repeat until you can't anymore (but have one in your inventory). [*The Chant* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

It is to be underlined, though, that "expertise" in the videogaming field can be definitely diverse compared to the great variety of the videogaming's genres available on the market: an expert in one genre of gameplay, for example action games, or in one particular game, for example *Tomb Raider*, may not be versed in other genres or games and vice versa (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 65). Corpus' results confirm Ashton and Newman's perspective: to give but an example, the three most recurrent walkthroughs' authors on Neoseeker's website *vinheim*, *bkstunt* and *sokkus* always appear as the authors of action/adventure games' walkthroughs but they never appear between the authors of indie or simulation genre ones. In this sense, the expert in one field or game may need to

come to an expert in another field or game for advice, possibly reversing the status of expert and novice (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 65).

According to Giddings (2006: 22), walkthrough texts document a writer/player's skills and efforts in exploring and solving every aspect of the game. Nevertheless, the range with which this exploration of the game is carried out may vary. Despite being generally thought and designed for less experienced players compared to the author, walkthroughs can definitely range from their main aim to guide novices in their first attempts at playing, as illustrated in Example (14), to guiding even more expert players looking for more difficult and challenging material, as illustrated in Example (15). In Example (14) the way in which walkthroughs' authors give novices advice and tips to progress through the game (14) is outlined. In Example (15) the way in which walkthroughs' authors share their knowledge to assist players in search of more challenging objectives to achieve is illustrated instead.

- (14) If you're struggling to find specific things in braindances, don't forget - look at the bars at the top. When there's hashed areas/dashes across the bars at the top which indicate that there's something to scan in that moment, so use this to guide you. [*Cyberpunk 2077* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (15) [To unlock the *Tears of a Blue Demon* trophy²¹], at the end of the prologue mission - *Infiltrating the Black Ship*, you will encounter the Blue Demon who will promptly beat you first time around. After unlocking the Testament of the Soul, retry this mission for a re-match. Once you have reached the end of the game, you should be around level 50 and have some pretty decent gear so taking him on at this stage will be significantly easier. Once you have beaten him, the Trophy will unlock. [*Rise of the Ronin* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Being documents explicitly thought for public consumption and viewing, it is hardly surprising that walkthroughs' audience is also frequently directly involved in the process of updating the "labours of love" (Simons and Newman, 2003: 9) for their editors. Walkthroughs' authors plenty replete their texts with genuine requests for contributions, greatly encouraging a "public participation" to their works: from critics or corrections to the identifications of overlooked narrative branches or accessible locations, walkthrough texts are definitely a form of collaborative exercises and intelligence (Newman, 2008: 116) that actively involve readers in contributing to the author's work (Simons and Newman, 2003: 9), as shown in Examples (16) and (17) respectively.

- (16) Please leave a comment or contact the authors of this guide (Krystal109) if you find that there's an error, something is missing, or anything that could be added to improve this guide. [*Little Nightmares II* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

²¹ The term "*trophies*" refers to the possibility in videogames of getting achievements outside of the main campaign of the game. These achievements are usually awarded to the player after the completion of special or optional challenges, the mastering of particular tasks or after extensive explorations of some hidden areas of the game.

- (17) Please edit the guide or contact me (Sokkus) on Neoseeker if there is anything missing, you have an alternate strategy or any advice that you would like to give.
[*Mass Effect: Andromeda – deluxe edition* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Given the extensive work required to produce walkthroughs that can fulfil both inexperienced and expert players' needs, it is also not surprising that, at times, these types of texts end up developed by more than one authors, creating a product that is once more a form of collaborative exercises, this time, to form alliances between renowned walkthroughs' writers (Simons and Newman, 2003: 9), as shown in Examples (18) and (19) respectively.

- (18) *Demon Souls* is known for being a rather hard title. [...] Thankfully, you have Bkstunt and Vinheim on your side! Together we'll scour every bit of Boletaria and find every advantage we can to overcome the Demon scourge. [*Demon Souls* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (19) Join us as we set out in this adventure with Master Chief into Zeta Halo. What awaits us? Is Cortana still alive? Let's find out, together!
Yours, ~ vinheim & sokkus [*Halo Infinite* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

According to Simons and Newman (2003), whether the cooperation is between author and readers or between walkthroughs' authors, the walkthrough's credits sections dutifully namecheck contributors and meticulously note the exact nature of their input. Corpus' results confirm this perspective as illustrated in Figures 9 and 10 respectively. In Figure 9, the author namechecks one contributor for the general suggestions received about their walkthrough albeit without going into too many details. In Figure 10, a diverse and more thorough listing of the contributors is depicted instead: the author meticulously namechecks which kind of contribution they received and from whom, valuing even apparently minute morsels of information.

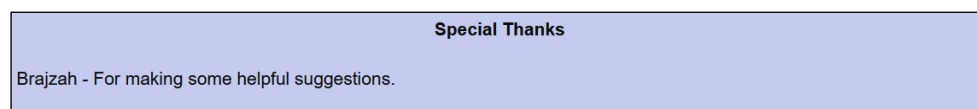


Figure 9: Example of the credits section of *Returnal*'s walkthrough, one of the games included in the corpus, where the author clearly namechecks a player for their contributions on GameFAQs' website.

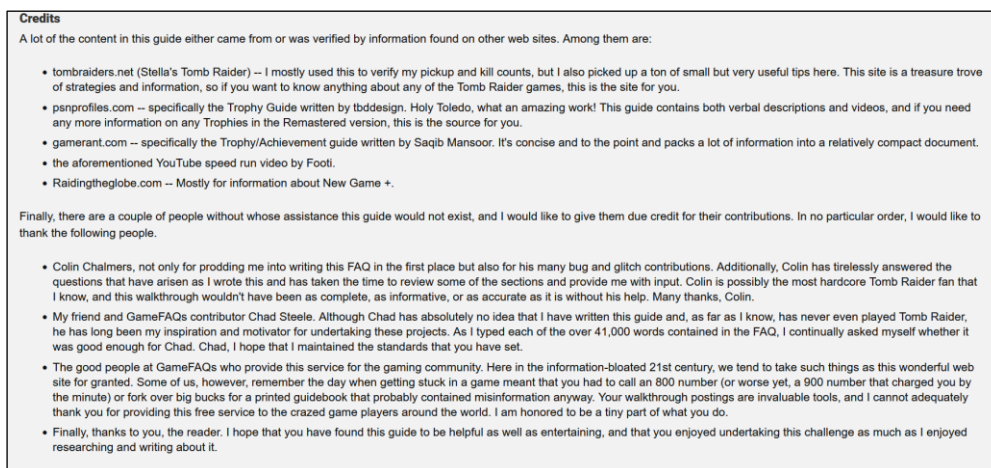


Figure 10: Example of the credits section of *Tomb Raider I-III remastered*'s walkthrough, one of the games included in the corpus, where the author clearly namechecks both walkthroughs' authors and players for their contributions on GameFAQs' website.

3.3 General appearances of a walkthrough text

From the visual evaluation of the texts considered in the corpus, the general visual appearance of the Walkthrough genre presents one notable feature: even if all the corpus' documents come from different websites, with many different authors and with very different texts' lengths depending on the game's features, the genre retains a very minimalist visual appearance, reducing each webpage's representational system to its barest and most stark, aligning with Newman's (2016: 412) perspective. The genre present in fact a minimal homepage setup to contextualise each walkthrough and a series of written instructions that constitute the heart of the texts in their various following tabs (accessible through the homepage's index). A general overview of what readers are presented after clicking a Walkthrough genre's link is provided.

Right after clicking on each relative walkthrough's link, readers are presented with the introductory homepage concerning the game chosen with the following visual structure:

- The game's title on top or on the left of the home page;
- The game's poster or, alternatively, the game's introductory video in the centre of the home page;
- An interactive index on the right/left (or under the poster);
- A brief introduction on the walkthrough (generally written by its authors) under the poster (or above) with basic information about the walkthrough, its content, its main characteristics and the specific type of playthrough performed.

An example of the general appearances of a walkthrough's home page is shown in Figures 11, 12 and 13, respectively coming from Neoseeker, IGN and GameFAQs', the three online sources chosen for the corpus' building.



Figure 11: Example of the general appearances of a walkthrough's homepage on Neoseeker's website, particularly the one of *Halo Infinite*, one of the games included in the corpus.

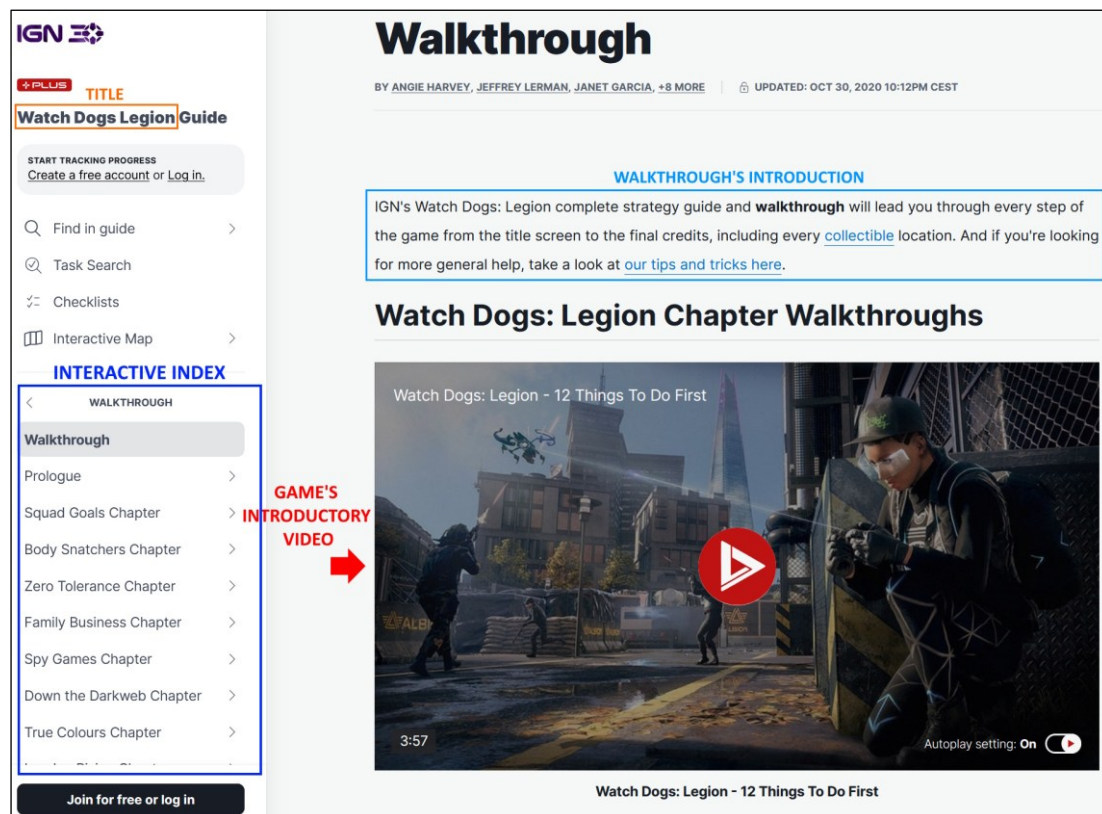


Figure 12: Example of the general appearances of a walkthrough's homepage on IGN's website, particularly the one of *Watch Dogs: Legion*, one of the games included in the corpus.

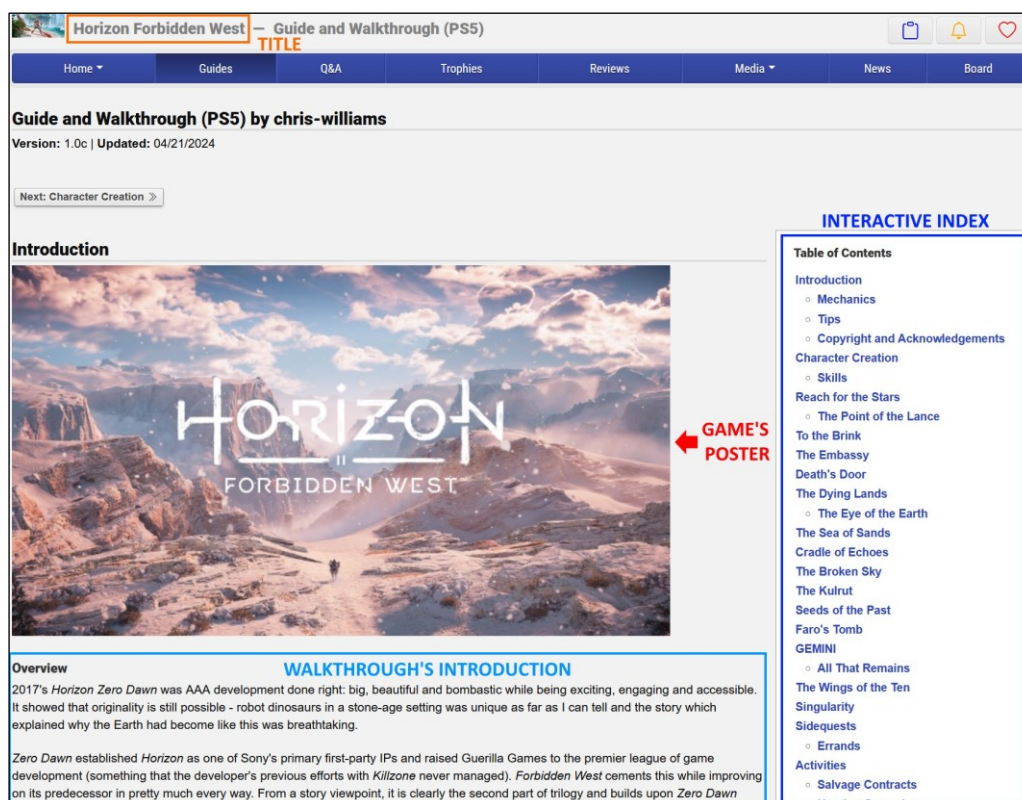


Figure 13: Example of the general appearances of a walkthrough's homepage on GameFAQs' website, particularly the one of *Horizon: Forbidden West*, one of the games included in the corpus.

Secondly, leaving the home page by clicking on each of the interactive entries of the index, the reader gains access to all the other various tabs of the walkthroughs, invariably including explications and discussions of the backstory of the game, explanations of the available controls, reference lists of each enemy the player might encounter with their stats (including strengths, weaknesses, attack patterns etc.) or reference lists of items, weapons, strategic commentary etc. (Simons and Newman, 2003: 9). Apart from the more discursive sections about the games' background or tactics, each walkthrough's interactive index redirects also to the many different other sections named after each games' areas and that contain the effective instructions necessary to play the selected game. Particularly, the existence of a general index in each webpages makes it easier for the player-reader to navigate throughout the document in case only some specific parts of the playthrough are needed to follow, identifying in an easier manner the progression through the game (Nylund, 2015; Simon and Newman, 2003). Each walkthrough genre's tab is similarly designed to the homepage, and it is structured as follows:

- The game's title on the very top of the webpage (or on the left);
- The section's title under the game's title;
- An ordered list of instructions or information necessary to complete the relative chapter/area of the game or to understand the game's requirements under the section's title. Seldomly (if present), instructions are also

accompanied by screenshots, annotated maps or illustrations to increase their clarity through visual aids.

An example of a walkthrough's tab structure (accessible through clicking on a walkthrough's interactive index) is shown in Figures 14, 15 and 16, respectively coming from Neoseeker, IGN and GameFAQs, the three online sources chosen for the corpus' building.

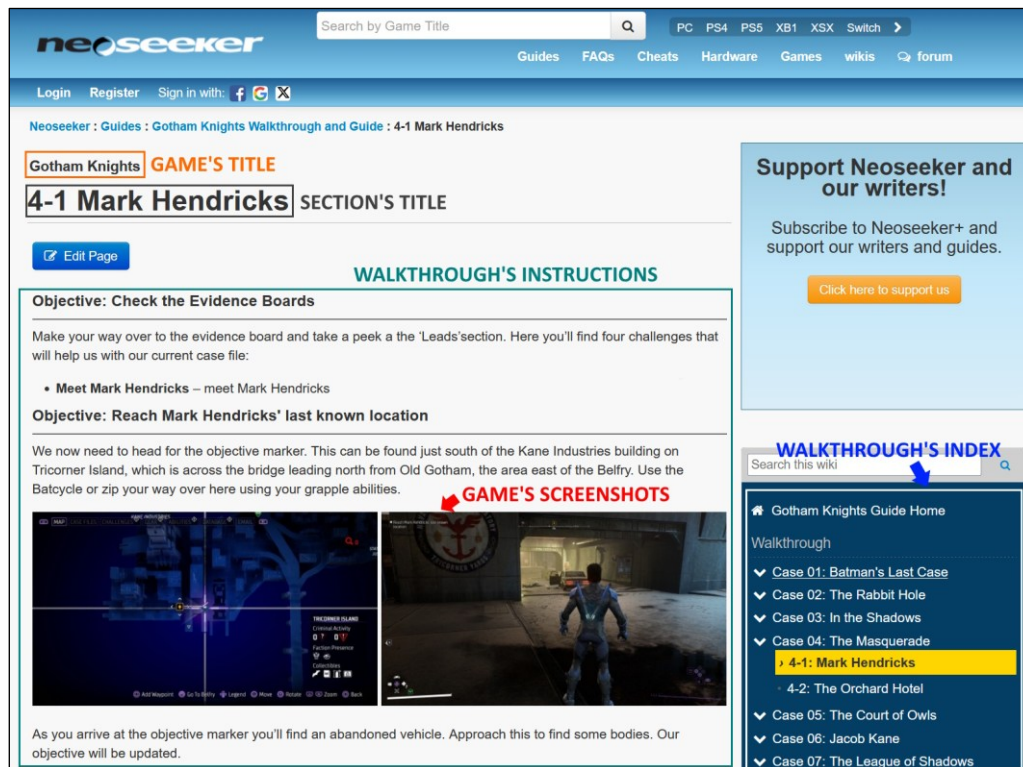


Figure 14: Example of one of the many walkthrough's tabs of *Gotham Knights*, one of the games included in the corpus, on Neoseeker's website.

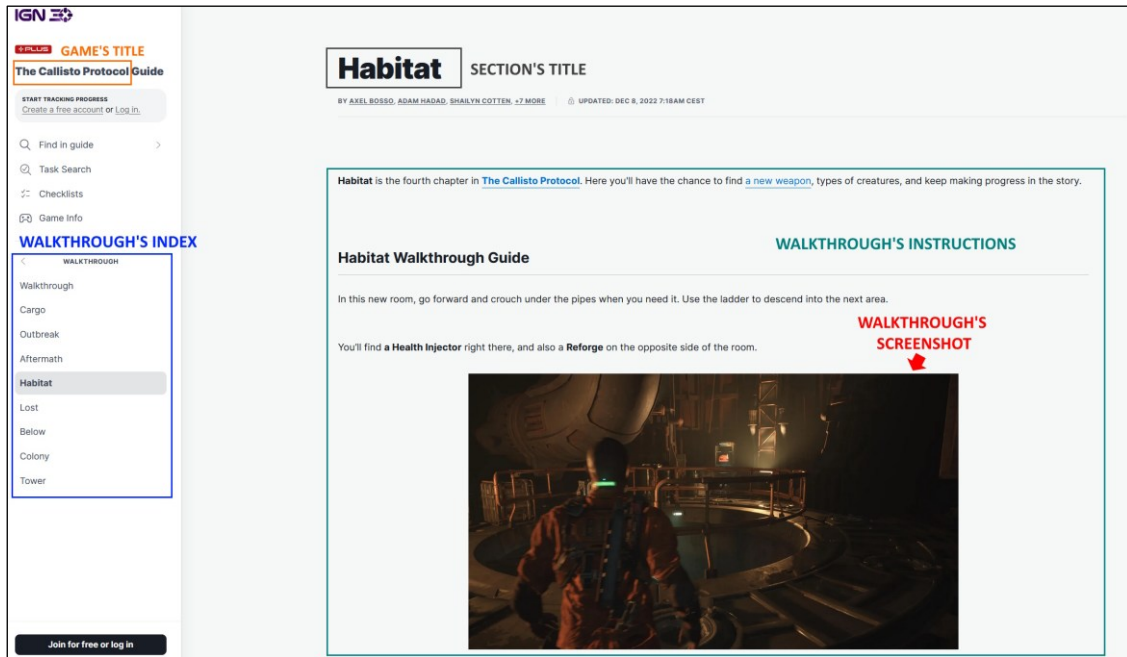


Figure 15: Example of one of the many walkthrough's tabs of *The Callisto Protocol*, one of the games included in the corpus, on IGN's website.



Figure 16: Visual example of one of the many walkthrough's tabs of *Metal Gear Solid Delta: Snake Eater*, one of the games included in the corpus, from GameFAQs' website.

3.4 Content of a walkthrough text

Considering the texts analysed, it can be argued that the walkthrough genre's content is generally made of *instructions* on how to reach the game's true ending in the quickest

way possible (Consalvo, 2003; Feil, 2020; Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015), codifying walkthroughs as focused technique-packaged texts, delivered as what Burn (2006: 91) has termed “technical, dispassionate texts” that “relay the procedural demands of the game system” (2006: 90). This characteristic suggests a view of walkthroughs as forms of *instructional* texts (Fry, 2012: 5), basically exemplifying both Farka’s (2005: 42) definition of them as “written and spoken discourses that guides people in performance of a task” and of Lannon’s one (2000: 2) as texts that “address the user’s desire for information”, as shown in Examples (20) and (21) respectively.

- (20) You start the chapter with the slaver in front of you. Your objective is to follow him. [...] Follow the slaver until the end of the path and you will arrive at a barricade with white chalk on it. When you see anything with white chalk on it, you'll know it's something that you can interact with. [...] Go left and enter the hut to reach the other side of the village. [*Senua’s saga: Hellblade II* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (21) To learn more about how to escape the island and unlock all three endings, see our Ending Explained guide, where we break down everything you need to know. [*Helldivers 2* walkthrough, IGN]

Both Farka’s and Lannon’s definitions of instructional texts perfectly point out the walkthroughs’ general goal observed throughout the corpus: guiding players through the task of completing the game through following basic inputs, addressing players’ desire to get information about how to progress into it. According to Fry (2012: 4), precisely the written-based nature of the corpus’ texts strengthens the presence of only these basic inputs into the documents, discarding the audiovisual dimension of gameplay and reducing the games they talk about to their “most fundamental constituents” (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 10). The corpus’ results confirm Fry’s perspective as shown in Examples (22) and (23), where walkthroughs’ instructions provide players-readers with only the extremely necessary written information they need, stripping away any extraneous or confusing other inputs.

- (22) Cross the wooden path up the shrine till you reach the top, when up here follow the right path till you reach a blue block, pull and push to a broken ladder further in (use the drag marks on the ground as a hint). [...] Then keep going till you arrive at 2 more sets of ladders going down. Go down both and you will reach the door and save point. [*NieR Replicant* (EU edition) walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (23) When you gain control, start following Hugo down the slope. [...] When you reach King Hugo's castle, you will have to hide from Lucas the Perfidious. Head into the ruins and crouch (○ button) while Lucas counts to ten. Try to be aware of Lucas's whereabouts and stay crouched while you sneak through the ruins. [*A Plague Tale: Requiem* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

In addition, a more contained part of the texts’ instructions (generally coming from GameFAQs’ website) broadens the idea of walkthroughs as merely instructional texts that

contain only useful information for players by also giving evidence to a certain tendency of some texts to mimic actually computer language (Newman, 2008: 103) while progressing through the gameplay's instructions. Sentences within the corpus almost emulate real computer proceedings, configuring walkthroughs as virtual design documents in which emotional response is suppressed and subsumed by a machine-like sequence of commands. These commands resemble more computer printouts, recreating the behaviour of a program in itself, or perhaps more accurately, of a more complex decompiled account of the game program that is essentially a *reverse engineering* process (Newman, 2008: 103), as shown in Examples (24) and (25) respectively.

(24) Now to complete the objectives:

1. You can find the snack on the desk.
 2. The video tape box near the cat and tape is in the another VHS box by the closet.
 3. Go to the closet to get dressed.
 4. Finally you can grab your bag by the desk.
- [*Lost Records: Bloom & Rage* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

(25) You start the first act with a flashback and a sparring match with your dad.

Break his guard four times, block four times then have a real match.

After the scene, follow your dad to go see your auntie.

Head towards the marker to meetup with her and she'll tell you someone is stealing from her garden.

Head north until you reach the tower then climb it until you reach the viewpoint.

[*Assassin's Creed Shadows* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

3.5 Structure of a walkthrough text

From a general overview of the organisation of the instructions contained in the corpus' texts and following Swales (1990; 2004) guidelines on the analysis of texts' schematic structure, it can be stated that the instructions contained in the documents under analysis are usually organised in a conventionalised structure that can be furtherly subdivided into several different sections or units.

Each walkthrough's section is labelled according to the exact discourse task it performs inside the text, constituting a specific *functional*²² unit that serves a definite communicative function to express to the reader. All the functional units identified in the texts under analysis together with their respective communicative functions are presented in Table 3.

²² In this case, the term "*functional*" is employed in the text to refer to linguistic units that "both perform discourse tasks and reflect aspects of the communicative situation and production circumstances" (Biber, 1995: 137).

Functional Units	Communicative function
Author	Indicating the author/authors of the walkthrough
Author's notices	Providing author's notices about the walkthrough
Comment Section	Providing space for players' comments on the walkthrough
Contact Section	Providing players with the possibility of contacting the author
Copyright	Providing copyright information
Credits	Indicating the list of people who contributed to the walkthrough
Date of Update	Informing players about the last update of the walkthrough
Donation Section	Offering the possibility of donating real money to the author/website
Feedback Section	Offering the possibility of giving feedback to the walkthrough
Game's plot/story Section	Providing background information on the game and its plot/story
Index	Providing all the sections and instructions of the walkthrough
Introduction	Introducing the purpose of the walkthrough and its aim/characteristics
Logo	Identifying the provider of the walkthrough
Platform	Identifying for which platform the walkthrough is intended
Title	Labelling for which game the walkthrough is intended

Table 3: Functional units identified throughout the walkthroughs' corpus and their corresponding communicative function.

For further clarity, some visual examples of some of the walkthroughs' conventionalised structures occurring in the corpus are provided in Figures 17, 18 and 19, respectively coming from Neoseeker, IGN and GameFAQs, the three online sources chosen for the corpus' building. All the functional units identified in each example are marked with a distinct colour for a better comprehension.

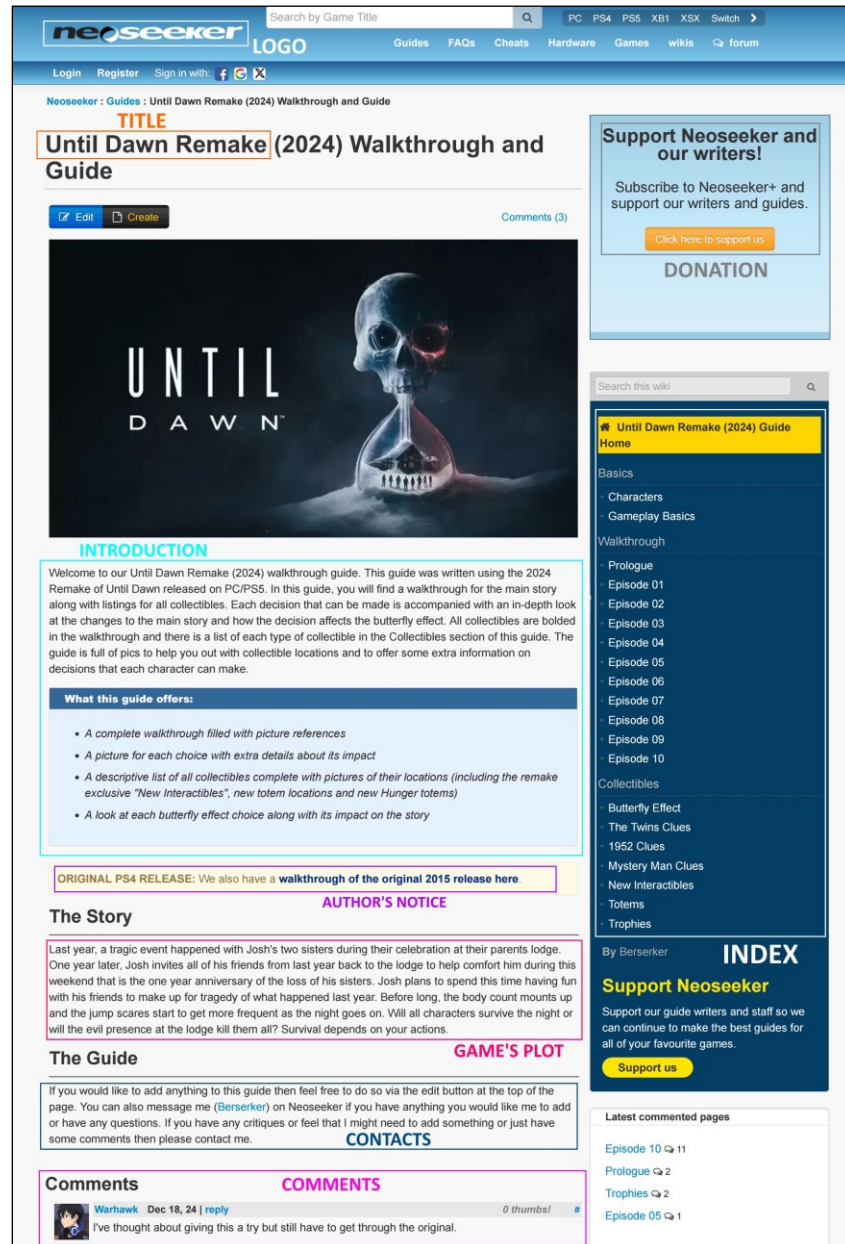


Figure 17: Example of the conventionalised structure of Neoseeker's walkthrough of *Until Dawn (Remake)*, one of the games included in the corpus.

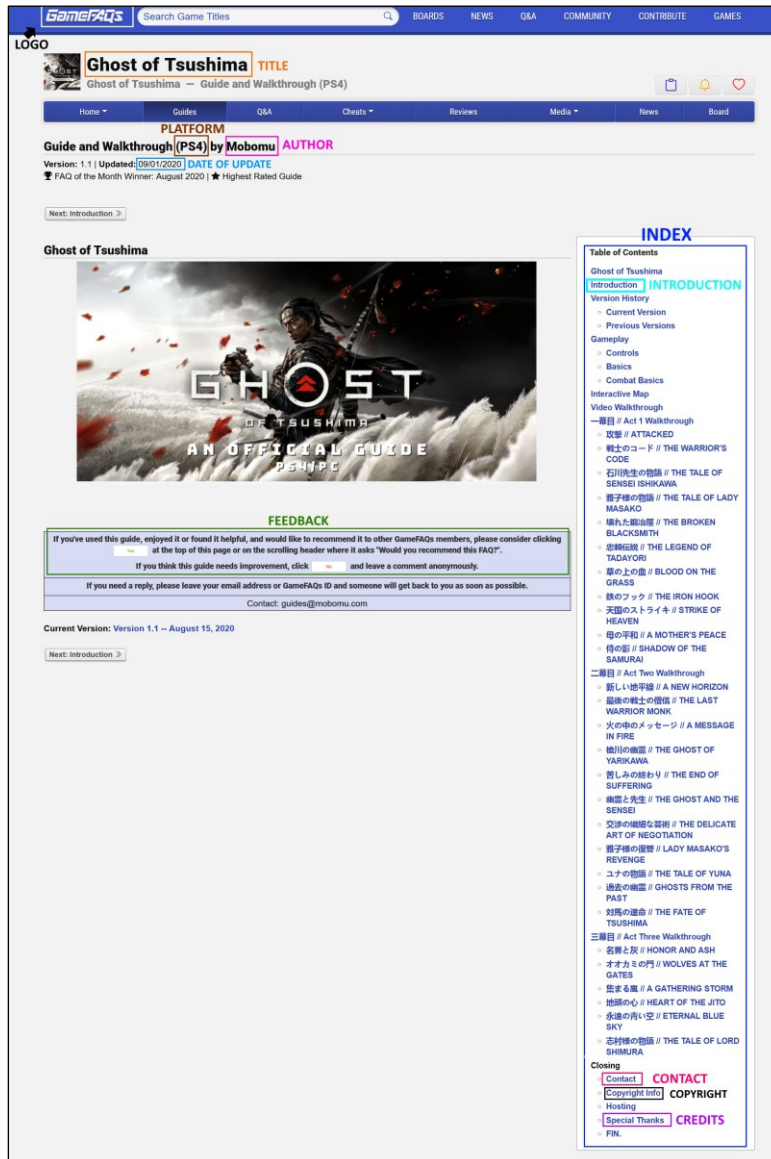


Figure 19: Example of the conventionalised structure of GameFAQs' walkthrough of *Ghost of Tsushima*, one of the games included in the corpus.

All the functional units listed in Table 3 are realised throughout the corpus with a floating frequency as shown in Table 4. A more complete summary of the frequency of functional units related to each corpus' walkthrough is provided in Appendix B.

Functional Units	Realisation frequency
Author	100
Author's notices	22
Comment Section	37
Contact Section	11
Copyright	17
Credits	13
Date of Update	100
Donation Section	39
Feedback Section	43
Game's plot/story Section	17
Index	100
Introduction	100
Logo	100
Platform	100
Title	100

Table 4: Realisation frequency of all the functional units identified throughout the corpus.

Taking into account the data collected in Table 4, it is to be noticed that some of the identified functional units (author, date of update, index, introduction, logo, platform, title) appear with the highest frequency possible, being realised in every text analysed. Others (e.g., feedback section, contact section, copyright etc.) are featured instead in only some of the documents considered, varying depending both on the volatile will of the author and on the different necessities pertaining to each game (Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015), as Figures 17, 18 and 19 demonstrate.

In addition, it is to be observed that there is a feature that clearly differentiate between all the functional units identified throughout the corpus: their being necessary. Considering the main purpose of walkthrough texts of serving as guides for players, it is to be noticed that, between all the functional units that appear throughout the walkthroughs analysed, some of the ones always occurring are the ones that are extremely necessary for the audience to contextualise the walkthrough and to understand how to play the game. Instead, the ones with a more variable appearing frequency are the functional units that are not exactly necessary to serve the main purpose of walkthroughs of showing to the readers how to effectively play the given game, only adding some extra information to the text or to the game in general.

Following Swales (1990; 2004) guidelines, this raw distinction of functional units between “necessary” and “not necessary” can be formally expressed into their subdivision into two main branches: *obligatory* functional units and *optional* functional units. Obligatory functional units are the ones that writers are obliged to include into their walkthroughs to make them useful and understandable and that cannot be absent. Optional functional units are instead the ones that can or cannot be included in a walkthrough without hindering its overall efficacy and that are at the complete discretion of the writer.

It is to be remembered that the occurrence of a functional unit throughout all the walkthroughs considered cannot be a sufficient condition for its classification into the obligatory functional units since not all the ones occurred in every walkthrough are essential to its correct realisation (e.g., the date of update functional unit occurs in every

walkthrough but it is not essential for the fulfilment of a walkthrough text's purpose). In Table 5, the subdivision of all the functional units identified in the corpus in obligatory and optional functional units is presented.

Functional Units	
Obligatory	Optional
Index	Author
Introduction	Author's notices
Platform	Comment Section
Title	Contact Section
	Copyright
	Credits
	Date of Update
	Donation Section
	Feedback section
	Game's plot/story section
	Logo

Table 5: Subdivision of all the functional units identified in the corpus in obligatory and optional functional units.

As Table 5 illustrates, of the 15 functional units realised throughout the corpus, only 4 of them are identified as obligatory. As previously mentioned in this section, their labelling as obligatory relates to the fact that it is essential for the reader to know the information they communicate. The *Introduction* functional unit provides fundamental intel for the reader as it offers a contextualisation of the walkthrough, generally telling the reader for example which kind of playthrough it is performed within the text, its level of completion (e.g., 100% completion, only main story line completion etc.) or its effective status (e.g., completed, in progress etc.). All these data are crucial for the readers since they permit players to understand if the walkthrough they are consulting it is of the type they are effectively seeking. Considering instead the *Title* and *Platform* functional units, they provide another kind of core information for the player: the Title functional unit expresses to the player for which videogame in particular the walkthrough is designed, preventing the player from potentially using the wrong walkthrough for their playthrough. Conversely, the Platform functional unit indicates the specific platform for which the walkthrough is supposed to be employed, avoiding platforms' misunderstanding especially if the game can be run by multiple devices or gaming consoles. In the next paragraph, a separate analysis regarding the Index functional unit is provided.

3.5.1 The Index section

Between the four obligatory functional units identified in Table 5, the *Index* unit is the most fundamental one that can be found in a walkthrough as it contains the direct references to all its available sections. It generally consists of an interactive list of all the walkthrough's sections (from the introductory section to the credits section, commonly the last one) that provides readers a general overview of what the walkthrough includes,

ensuring a smooth and quick browsing of the entire text in case players need to locate only specific parts of the playthrough (Nylund, 2015; Simon and Newman, 2003).

From a general survey of the corpus, it can be stated that the index functional unit is generally organised into an interactive table of contents, of which main entries are named after each section’s communicative function within the walkthrough as already showed in Table 3. Typically placed on the right or on the left of both the game’s homepage and of all its other tabs to always provide means for the reader-player to navigate throughout the walkthrough, the index unit represents an interactive redirect to any desired part of the text that players can navigate just by clicking on each of the interactive sections’ hyperlinks. In Figures 20, 21 and 22 examples of the visual structure of a walkthrough’s index respectively of Neoseeker, IGN and GameFAQs’ websites, the three online sources chosen for the corpus’ building, are provided.

Chernobylite Guide Home

Walkthrough

- First Steps
- Day 2

Olivier Quests

- Old Documents
- An Old Friend
- Weapon Transport
- Chain Reaction
- Some Excuses

Tarakan and Sashko Quests

- A Memento from the Past
- Meeting with Tarakan
- The Crumb Trail
- The Final Exam
- Hardware for Real Men
- Checkpoint Assault
- A Few Things From An Old Hideout

Mikhail Quests

- Hacking into NAR Servers
- Mikhail in Trouble
- Hermit
- Big Fish

Olga Quests

- Traitor
- A Voice in the Woods
- On the Other Side of the Barricades
- The Truth About NAR's Experiments
- Black Stalker

Kozlov Quests

- Kozlov Kidnapping
- Hard Truth

The Heist

- How to Complete The Heist With No Deaths

By Jaska

Figure 20: Example of the structure of the index functional unit of Neoseeker’s walkthrough of *Chernobylite*, one of the games included in the corpus.

IGN

Metro Exodus Guide

<

WALKTHROUGH

Walkthrough

Introduction

Moscow

>

Winter

The Volga

>

Spring

Yamantau

The Caspian

>

Summer

The Taiga

>

Autumn

Dead City

>

Finale

Figure 21: Example of the structure of the index functional unit of IGN’s walkthrough of *Metro Exodus: Enhanced Edition*, one of the games included in the corpus.

Table of Contents
Introduction
◦ Tips
◦ Copyright and Acknowledgements
Chapter 1 - Under a New Sun
Chapter 2 - Newcomers
Chapter 3 - A Burden of Blood
Chapter 4 - Protector's Duty
Chapter 5 - In Our Wake
Chapter 6 - Leaving All Behind
Chapter 7 - Felons
Chapter 8 - A Sea of Promises
Chapter 9 - Tales and Revelations
Chapter 10 - Bloodline
Chapter 11 - The Cradle of Centuries
Chapter 12 - The Life We Deserve
Chapter 13 - Nothing Left
Chapter 14 - Healing Our Wounds
Chapter 15 - Dying Light
Chapter 16 - King Hugo
Chapter 17 - Legacy of the de Rune Family
Skills
◦ Prudence
◦ Aggressive
◦ Opportunism
Crafting
◦ Sling
◦ Crossbow
◦ Alchemy
◦ Gear
◦ Instruments
◦ Projectiles
Collectibles
◦ Hugo's Collection
◦ Souvenirs
Trophies

Figure 22: Example of the structure of the index functional unit of GameFAQ's walkthrough of *A Plague Tale: Requiem*, one of the games included in the corpus.

In addition, the index unit is not only a reference point for the reader, but it contains also all the entries specifically dedicated to the walkthrough's instructions necessary to complete the game. Consequently, the index represents the whole core of a walkthrough's text without which a walkthrough could not serve its main purpose since the player would not be able to find and consult the game's prompts, making it impossible for the reader-player to understand how to proceed within the game.

Each index's entry specifically pertaining to the game's instructions is hierarchically structured, presenting at first the sections named after the main areas the player can encounter through the game or after the name of the main missions players need to complete. These main sections are almost always furtherly subdivided into several other subsections whose number and names depend on the game subdivision of missions, objectives or areas into different phases to face. In Figures 23, 24 and 25, the index units' parts of Figures 20, 21 and 22 specifically dedicated to the game's instructions are marked: main missions' sections are marked in red. Where available, main missions' subsections are marked in blue.

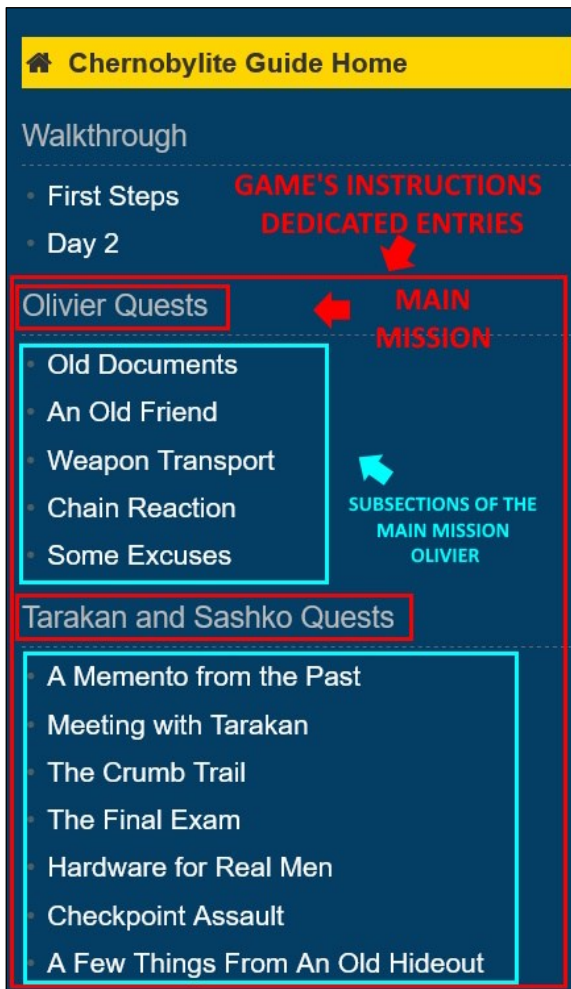


Figure 23: Example of the index functional unit of Neoseeker's walkthrough of *Chernobylite* with main missions and main missions' subsections marked.

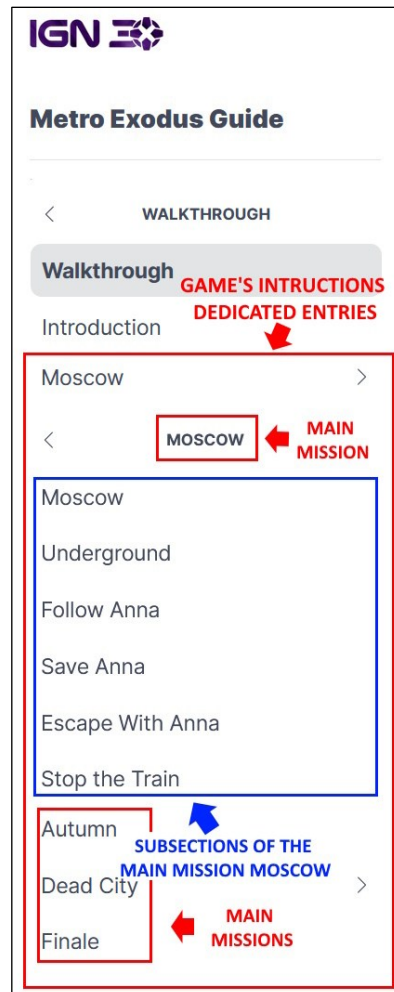


Figure 24: Example of the index functional unit of IGN's walkthrough of *Metro Exodus: Enhanced Edition* with main missions and main missions' subsections marked.

Table of Contents
Introduction
◦ Tips
◦ Copyright and Acknowledgements
Chapter 1 - Under a New Sun
Chapter 2 - Newcomers
Chapter 3 - A Burden of Blood
Chapter 4 - Protector's Duty
Chapter 5 - In Our Wake
Chapter 6 - Leaving All Behind
Chapter 7 - Felons
Chapter 8 - A Sea of Promises
Chapter 9 - Tales and Revelations
Chapter 10 - Bloodline
Chapter 11 - The Cradle of Centuries
Chapter 12 - The Life We Deserve
Chapter 13 - Nothing Left
Chapter 14 - Healing Our Wounds
Chapter 15 - Dying Light
Chapter 16 - King Hugo
Chapter 17 - Legacy of the de Rune
Family
Skills
◦ Prudence
◦ Aggressive
◦ Opportunism
Crafting
◦ Sling
◦ Crossbow
◦ Alchemy
◦ Gear
◦ Instruments
◦ Projectiles
Collectibles
◦ Hugo's Collection
◦ Souvenirs
Trophies

**GAME'S INSTRUCTIONS
DEDICATED ENTRIES**

Figure 25: Example of the index functional unit of IGN's walkthrough of *A Plague Tale: Requiem* with main missions marked.

Very often, apart from the entries concerning the standard playthrough of the game, the index unit may contain also entries about the completion of game's specific contents such as guidelines about games' optional collectibles, trophies or challenges, specific guidance about romantic relationships²³ between characters or playthroughs concerning game's optional content like DLC²⁴, as shown in Figures 26 and 27 respectively.

²³ Sometimes, videogames provide players the possibility of pursuing romantic relationships with other characters of the game's universe by following specific behaviour's patterns to gain their trusts or loyalty. This feature is typical of RPG where, through giving the right answers to characters' dedicated interactions, the protagonist can deepen their connection with them.

²⁴ The term "DLC", short for *Downloadable Content*, refers to the possibility of widening a videogame's experience by downloading online digital contents for the base game. Contents can include bonus chapters, stories and maps or simply cosmetic contents like characters' skins, clothes or bonus weapons.

Mea Culpa DLC Walkthrough
• Mea Culpa DLC Walkthrough
• Choir of Thorns
• Icebound Mausoleum
• Choir of Thorns Revisited 1
• Streets of Wakes
• Mother of Mothers
• Beneath Her Sacred Grounds
• Labyrinth of Tides
• Sacred Entombments
• Santa Vigilia
• Sunken Cathedral
• Labyrinth of Tides Revisited
• Beneath Her Sacred Grounds Revisited
• Elevated Temples
• Grilles and Ruin
• Icebound Mausoleum Revisited
• Choir of Thorns Revisited 2
• Mini-Bosses
Mea Culpa DLC Bosses
• Sor Cautiva del Silencio
• Brother Asterion
• Brother Asterion Second Encounter

Figure 26: Example of the index's sections dedicated to the DLC *Mea Culpa* of the game *Blasphemous II*, one of the games included in the corpus.

Romance Options
Side Quests - General
Side Quests - Judy
◦ Both Sides, Now
◦ Ex-Factor
◦ Talkin' 'Bout A Revolution
◦ Pisces
◦ Pyramid Song
Side Quests - Panam
◦ Riders On The Storm
◦ With A Little Help From My Friends
◦ Queen Of The Highway
Side Quests - River
◦ I Fought The Law
◦ The Hunt
◦ Following The River
Side Quests - Rogue
◦ Chippin' In
◦ Blistering Love
Side Quests - Kerry
◦ Holdin' On
◦ Second Conflict
◦ A Like Supreme
◦ Rebel! Rebel!
◦ I Don't Wanna Hear It
◦ Off The Leash
◦ Boat Drinks

Figure 27: Example of the index's sections dedicated to the side missions and the possible romantic relationships of the game *Cyberpunk 2077*, one of the games included in the corpus.

3.6 Language of a walkthrough text

3.6.1 General considerations

It can be noted that, in the walkthroughs examined, some interesting peculiarities can be found about the language the genre employs. According to Ensslin (2012: 6), gaming language can be generally branched into two major aspects, one about how game developers convey meaning to their audience, and another one about how players communicate and negotiate meanings between themselves. However, Feil (2020: 43) suggests that, specifically in the Walkthrough genre, this subdivision sees a further and more specified categorisation, branching walkthroughs' language into a *mixture* of two main languages rather than only two mere aspects. The first language is the one derived directly from the game itself, from its mechanics, plot and characters, without obfuscation or shyness to laying out pure game terms and control schemes. The other is derived

instead from the gaming *jargon*²⁵ players actually use while writing or discussing walkthroughs since walkthroughs are usually created and written by actual players of the game for other fellow players of the same game (Krause, 2016: 28). Feil's opinion is also supported by Burghardt and Tiepmar, (2021: 14), that agree with her theory. The analysis of the corpus' language confirms Feil's and Burghardt and Tiepmar's perspective seeing that both these languages are realised throughout the texts under analysis. Evidence of the language derived directly by the game itself is provided in Example (26) with the specific labelling of *Horizon: Forbidden West*'s enemies. Evidence of gaming jargon is provided instead in Example (27) where gaming jargon terms such as "stealth" or "ammo" are realised within *The Last of Us (remake)*'s instructions.

- (26) When you get to the other side, you will emerge in the ruins of a base. There are two *Apex Leaplashers* and a *Snapmaw* that you need to take out before you can explore freely. Grab loot from the area and then go through an opening in the cliff face where you will find a vault sealed by three locks. [*Horizon: Forbidden West* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (27) When going for stealth²⁶ you'll want to stay low and quiet by crouching and be aware of your enemy's location at all time by using Listen Mode. [...] If you're going for the silent approach, performing grabs and executions will save ammo²⁷ and silently take down enemies that you encounter. [*The Last of Us (remake)* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

Especially the fact that walkthrough are generally designed and written by players themselves characterises walkthroughs as, for the most, *fan-based* texts (Ensslin, 2012; Gledhill, 2019), not subjected to any language correction nor official revisions (Consalvo, 2003: 331), constituting forms of vernacular cultural practices (Grimes, 2015: 382-383) that often retain a flow of the text which is almost close to natural language (Krause, 2016: 28). It is to be noted that this last trait is more frequent in the walkthroughs collected from Neoseeker or GameFAQs websites rather than from IGN's one, as it can be compared in Examples (28) and (29).

- (28) If you spare him here, he will make another appearance a little later in this story arc and you will need to fight him again, so dispatching him is your best bet here! [...] All three of these quests are part of the main story and can be done in any

²⁵ Gaming jargon includes many words and idioms, which often need to be intended in a broad sense. To give but a few examples of some extremely frequently used words in gaming jargon, the word "*checkpoint*" indicates a place where you can save your in-game progress whereas the word "*skills*" indicates the in-game character's special abilities (if present).

²⁶ The gaming jargon "*going stealth*" refers to the adoption of a playing style that generally avoids fighting directly and privileges instead a quiet approach, killing enemies only if necessary and only with the usage of edged weapons or by strangling them.

²⁷ The gaming jargon "*ammo*" is the short for the technical English word "*ammunition*" that refers to weapons' cartridges or projectiles.

order. As *Let Them Eat Ashes* quest is nearby, let us start with that one... or not, the choice is yours! [*Assassin Creed Valhalla* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

- (29) Once the Breachers and Cutthroats have been dealt with, you will need to deal with the outpost in front of you. There will be many enemies inside, so use any area of effect skills to take them down. When it's empty, move up to the outside of the building, making sure to take down any enemies in your line of sight before moving forward. [*Outriders* walkthrough, IGN]

3.6.2 Instructions' content

Corpus' content generically consists of the instructions the player needs to proceed into the game successfully, indicating which moves/interactions the in-game character should perform in the surrounding environment to reach the different in-game objectives, as shown in Examples (30) and (31).

- (30) *Walk up the stairs* and follow the same path. *Interact* with the sign below the large totem up ahead. [Until Dawn (remake) walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (31) After crossing the wooden bridge while attempting to stop Sergio from escaping, *head into the building* on the right. Inside on a metal table is the Cigarette Card: Sergio Morello card. *Continue forward* and take out the enemies before you. Don't go too far *without looking at your map*. [*Mafia: Definitive Edition* walkthrough, IGN]

Instructions, at times, are complemented also with *compass directions* to provide a concrete way for the player to orient the in-game view, as shown in Examples (32) and (33).

- (32) Next back track to before the big tree and then look *west* and *up*, you will see some greenish yellow fruits up there, shoot one down with your gun, this is a Russian False Mango (Fruit B). [*Metal Gear Solid Delta: Snake Eater* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (33) The water purifier is located on the *northern side* of Westport on the water's edge. [*The Outer Worlds 2* walkthrough, IGN]

Instructions retain also a discrete level of technicity²⁸ (Gledhill, 2019: 62) due to the specific types of information they contain about the various game related material. Example (34) illustrates information about missions or challenges to complete, Example (35) about collectibles or resources to pick and Example (36) about places to reach or depart from.

²⁸ In this case, the term “*technicity*” is intended as “the extent to which these texts engage with the specificities of the fictional game world, or the mechanics of the game” (Gledhill, 2019: 62).

- (34) To complete *Let's Build A Skyscraper* [mission], you must build all Criminal Ventures on the Empire Table and complete all Main Missions. As a reward, you unlock the ability to place the Saints Tower as your final Criminal Venture on the Empire Table. [*Saints Row (2022)* walkthrough, IGN]
- (35) Drop into the pit and score a *small Medi Pack*. [Then] climb back out of the pit and jump/grab the crevice to the north. Shimmy right until you can pull up into the opening. Head into the cave for *Secret #2 -- shotgun shells*. [*Tomb Raider I-II-III* remastered walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (36) Head to *Tsuruga Sea Port* where the marker is. Fight your way inside and recover the bag from inside a building on the northwest side of the area. [*Assassins Creed Shadows* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

At times, even aids about the controls needed to move the character into the gaming environment and about the correct sequences/rhythm of keys/buttons the player's fingers need to press (Giddings, 2006: 23) are included within the instructions, as illustrated in Example (37). Suggestions about the possible employment of the in-game character skills to facilitate the gameplay can also be included, as shown in Example (38). Figure 28 shows instead an example of visual aid provided to the player to learn the game's controls.

- (37) Pick up the nearby brick with  and hold it, then press  to throw the brick at the wooden wall. [*MADiSON* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (38) Concentrate initially on increasing your health bar and the damage inflicted by your *Launch* ability. After this, spend points on improving your Shield ability and increasing your energy bar. Spending points in Seize is lower priority and improving your melee attack is lowest priority of all. [*Control: Ultimate Edition* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

PS	XBOX/ PC	FUNCTION
		Jump
		Holster Equipped Item
		Toggle Flashlight
		Toggle Text Overlay / Toggle Gun
		Run
		Throw / Ready Equipped Item
		Crouch
		Analog Lean
		Interact / Use Equipped Item
		Toggle Gas Mask
		Open Menu
		Inventory

Figure 28: Example of a visual recap of the controls needed to play *Amnesia: The Bunker*, one of the games included in the corpus, on Neoseeker's website.

Directions about the way the gameplay should be handled are provided too, as shown in Example (39). Very frequently, also warning about the shocks or surprises that might be forthcoming are given, as shown in Example (40), together with precise advice about what to do to get the best outcome possible in the game, as shown in Example (41).

- (39) That being said, *don't take your vehicle either*. You won't be able to pass it through the gate and will end up leaving it behind. So go ahead and leave the ship and simply go south up the valley and in between the mountains. It's an extremely linear path with literally nothing in the way. [*Death Stranding 2: on the beach* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

- (40) Head that way, but *be wary for zombies*. The area surrounding the cave seems to be experiencing high psi radiation, so you may also have to deal with hallucinations. If that happens, use Psi-Block drugs if you have any to spare. [*STALKER 2: Heart of Chornobyl* walkthrough, IGN]

- (41) Before you go into this fight, you'll want to check your skills and your engine stats. An engine that has good maneuverability is going to help you significantly in this fight, as you'll dodge the powerful beams that the Starborn use on their ships. [*Starfield* walkthrough, IGN]

Particularly the usage of this sort of *cautionary* tone (Carr *et al.*, 2006; Newman, 2016) within the texts analysed generally confirms a view of walkthroughs as “regulated” texts (Burn, 2006: 90) that tend to impose and force restrictions on the players, confining them to certain paths or styles of play (generally, proper to more experienced players) only for the sake of succeeding in the mission’s objectives in the best way possible (Newman, 2016: 412).

3.6.3 Verbs’ structures

A general overview of the corpus indicates that neither impersonal nor passive structures are used to give instructions throughout the texts, favouring instead a widespread usage of the *imperative mood*, particularly of the imperative singular (Burn, 2006; Krause, 2016; Newman, 2016), as shown in Examples (42) and (43). This feature confirms the idea of walkthroughs texts of being mainly instructional texts that “order the gamer to follow the instructions” (Newman, 2008: 102) aligning with both Fry (2012) and Newman’s (2016) perspectives. Consequently, walkthroughs’ instructions order players to perform the actions specified within the text, directing the player/reader through their adventure without opportunity for variation (Gledhill, 2019: 65) and exemplifying concretely yet again Lannon’s definition of instructional texts as documents that should “use direct address, active voice and imperative mood” (2000: 463-71).

- (42) *Check up* on everyone in camp, then *head for* the red tree trunk among the ruins to take the fight to them. [*Assassins Creed Mirage* walkthrough, IGN]

- (43) After defeating the Faceless One, *head to the right* past the boss room. [...] *Jump* and break it to open the door. *Proceed* through to enter the next area, Ravine of the High Stones. [*Blasphemous II* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Imperative commands are also often supported by instances of marked appraisal and evaluation (e.g., numerous asides, comments, judgments, and other markers of authorial stance) denoting corpus' walkthroughs tendency of favouring a writing style that is typically close to the one of oral interactions, agreeing with Gledhill's (2019: 64) findings, as shown in Examples (44) and (45). The usage of imperatives also confirms the expert status retained by walkthroughs' authors while writing, enabling them to give orders or suggest certain paths instead of others to their readers due to their wider gaming experience and underlining their role of guides who can praise or comment performances within the game (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 79).

- (44) I'd also like to point out a bit of trivia since we have a moment. Up high on the wall near the back room (not the recording booth) is a banner for Firewalk. This was the band featured in *Life is Strange: Before the Storm*, also developed by Deck Nine, same as this game. *Just a cool little callback.* [*Life is strange: True Colours* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (45) This is an equipment item that lets you GLIDE through the air. You can sprout your wings by jumping twice and holding the jump button. Try it out to go from this chest to the upper ground in the distance. Well, even if you mess this up, just try double jumping and getting a feel for this piece of gear. *You're going to really love it* when it comes to the game's platforming. [*Borderlands 4* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Furthermore, the usage of imperatives, particularly of the *imperative singular*, is justified also by the will to share a definite sense of familiarity between author and audience, considering that walkthroughs are generally written by more experienced members of the gaming community for other fellow members of the same community (Krause, 2016: 28). This characteristic, apart from strengthening a repeated direct reference to the audience, supports also the author in the employment of an extremely *informal tone* to enhance even more the closeness and the sense of "camaraderie" towards the addressees, as illustrated in Examples (46) and (47), since walkthroughs are generally written - and thought - by a player (the author) for other fellow players (the addressees) (Chang, 2011; Fry, 2012).

- (46) Well... You know we're going to be attacked, right? It's pretty much a rule when you see a big elevator like this. Go ahead and head to the objective here, and on the way down we'll be attacked by three slashers. It's pretty easy to back into a corner and use the Ripper to keep them all at bay. [*Dead Space* (remastered) walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (47) After putting in your birthday and watching the initial scenes, we'll gain control of Sam with little Lou. Man he's so big now! Right away you're told about the red

and blue gauges. Red is your blood levels aka your health while the blue one is your stamina. [*Death Stranding 2: On the beach* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Also, interaction markers accompany imperatives too and contribute to the highly informal style of the walkthroughs analysed. This category includes oral discourse markers and typographic and other features below the level of the word (e.g., speech marks, exclamation marks, contractions, etc.) that strengthen even more the oral, colloquial and highly subjective style authors decide to maintain while writing, aligning with Gledhill's (2019: 64) findings, as shown in Examples (48), (49) and (50).

- (48) First things first: welcome home. This cozy little loft is where Alex will be staying. Like the previous scene, you're not let off the leash just yet to explore. *Patience!* That'll come in the next scene. [...]
Whew.
Well, while Alex (and you, presumably) recover from that, it's time to explore. Got a few big things here to check out! [*Life is strange: True Colours* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (49) We, *um...* we have our work cut out for us it seems. [*Dragon Age: The Veilguard* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (50) You know, I wasn't expecting to head underground to fight fungal infections. Skeletons? *Sure.* Some type of bug? *Definitely.* But fungal zombies *were not in my cards.* [*Dragon's Dogma II* walkthrough, IGN]

It is to be argued that the usage of the imperative mood and, in particular, the casual, almost conversational and extremely familiar format employed in the corpus' writing can definitely place walkthroughs in a distinct instructional texts' subgenre compared to the basic one of other instructional texts such as strategy guides or FAQs. According to Fry (2012: 5), strategy guides and FAQs simply list general information to the readers in a formal format and in the indicative mood, listing even details not strictly pertaining to the videogame's playthrough, whereas walkthroughs categorize and index instead information that is only strictly intrinsic to the gameplay experience. The corpus' results confirm Fry's perspective, as shown in Examples (51) and (52), where only instructions strictly pertaining to the prosecution of the gameplay are given to the reader.

- (51) Upon starting this level, head on forwards towards the chain link fence in the distance. Climb atop the skip bin closest to the fence and then jump over the fence and onto the awning on the building behind it. Drop down to the floor. Continue along the main path here until you reach a large pool of water. [*Stray* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (52) Trigger the east rail so it connects to the circle. Trigger the north rail so it connects to the circle and trigger the west rail so it connects to the outside. Back out of the mechanism and then return to our little buddy in the cart. Push it around until you lock it into another contraption. [*Prince of Persia: The Lost Crown* walkthrough, IGN]

Apart from imperatives, several other types of verbs' constructions are also assessed throughout the corpus. Indicatives are generally employed to give the player information about the gameplay or explanation about the plot, moving the narrative along (Fry, 2012: 15), as shown in Examples (53) and (54) respectively.

- (53) The Rebreather is a piece of equipment in *Sons of the Forest* that is used to help you swim underwater for longer. It's essential for recovering additional tools and weapons in the game and is located in a dark cave that's found along the northern coastline. [*Sons of the Forest* walkthrough, IGN]
- (54) The following day after Tanta Sila's raid, Frey is determined to seek revenge on her. But before she can do that, she's alerted by a Cipal citizen that Robian has wandered off the city. Worried about her ticket out of this world, you'll need to locate Robian and help him. [*Forspoken* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

A deontic modality (Gledhill, 2019: 65) with modals' constructions is employed instead to provide the following information: predictions about some possible options to choose, as shown in Example (55), advice about efficient gaming strategies, as shown in Example (56), or suggestions about the usage of a character's ability to facilitate the game's progression, as shown in Example (57).

- (55) From Dallas' RIG, you can get back to the store area either the way you came or *you can use* the door in the room to go through a small hallway that also leads back to the store (there's a little scene if you go through the small hallway, just FYI). *You may find* a Lurker around the store area. [*Dead Space* (remake) walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (56) Towards the end of the fight, the boss²⁹ can use a multi-hit combo³⁰ in which she uses both Fox Arms to attack repeatedly and ends on a spinning attack with both Fox Arms held out. *You can perform a counter* on the attack immediately before the final spin. [*Silent Hill F* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (57) *You should be able* to instantly deplete its health at around 15% health using Killer Blow. [*Rise of the Ronin* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

3.6.4 Syntax

The texts in the corpus show an extensive use of complex subordination in their instructions, characteristic which walkthroughs share with other technical genres such as procedural manuals (see Couterut, 2016), confirming their pertaining to technical and instructional genres in accordance with Gledhill's (2019: 63) perspective. In Examples

²⁹ The term *boss* generally refers to the strongest enemies the player has to face throughout the gameplay. They generally appear at the end of games' areas or chapters, and they are particularly difficult to take down, especially the first time around or if the player is quite inexperienced.

³⁰ A *combo* is a gaming's jargon specific term to identify a definite series of hits the player can perform that, if chained in a certain way, can deal a massive amount of damage against an enemy.

(58) and (59), corpus' paragraphs have been edited according to the conventions of Systemic Functional Grammar to better indicate the subordination, using the following notation: embedded clauses are signalled by square brackets [...] and bound/subordinate clauses by slash symbols: // A = main clause // B = bound clause etc.).

- (58) (A) [[Dealing with the enemies here]] can be frustrating // because you'll have to explore several alcoves and crevasses // to clear them all //. (B) What's more // (as you've already encountered) //, the Geth will jam your radar, // making it unusable // (C) (you can mitigate this // by applying your best Combat Scanner to a gun // and then equipping said gun) //. [*Mass Effect: Legendary Edition* walkthrough, IGN]
- (59) (A) After a few seconds, the voice of the mysterious entity // (B) [[who brought us here]] // will bellow from the cell block speakers, // (C) telling us // (D) that he plans to test our reaction to fear //. [*Poppy Playtime* walkthrough, IGN]

In addition, instructions are also linked logically by a time sequence which is not always explicitly encoded in the texts, following mainly the train of the events of the unfolding plot, as shown in Examples (60) and (61).

- (60) Now go to the opposite corner of the rooftop to find another set of stairs. Go up to the top of it and cross to the opposite corner to find the spherical drone next to a broken part of the short wall. Whip out your camera and aim it at the Drone to scan it. You'll need to shoot down some fresh drones in order to get a connection to Imogen Royce's phone. [*Hitman 3* walkthrough, IGN]
- (61) Return to the APC and check the dead end area to the south. Defeat the Arillery Walker and look by the tank for Deimos Orders - Liberate. [...] Head west and through the tunnel below the train tracks and defeat the Negator with the Haze on the far side. You will see a pharmacy ahead. Check the bus stop on the right for Note - Cryptic Clue. Follow the street west and past the pharmacy to find the town hall building. Defeat the Hollow Walker with the Haze outside (this is a Timeloop Guardian). Grab the item out front for Signal Flare x4. [*Hell is Us* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

3.6.5 Lexical choices

The terminology occurring in the texts under analysis reveals a clear trend towards a certain technicity within walkthroughs, realised throughout very specific lexical choices and constituting a real repository of what Gledhill labels as “*terminological networks*” (2019: 62). The texts examined contain, primarily, wide ranges of technical uses of general language items such as “hack”, “lockpick” or “drones”, as illustrated in Examples (62) and (63), as well as specialised collocations such as “fast track” or “grav jump”, as shown in Examples (64) and (65).

- (62) You need *Hack* level 1 to use the terminal, and that'll also let you open the locked safe next to the desk. That safe can also be lockpicked if you have *Lockpick* level 1. [*The Outer Worlds 2* walkthrough, IGN]³¹
- (63) Two new obelisks will be picked up and moved towards the meat tree. With both activated, we'll need to get back to the meat tree, although it'll be slightly harder this time. Hovering in the air are a bunch of drone-like organisms spraying white steam. We'll call these foes "*Drones*". [*Scorn* walkthrough, IGN]³²
- (64) There is currently an issue where you can *fast track*³³ your stance unlocks by observing and then killing the same leader and it will count as two. I don't think this is intended, but it's how it works right now. [*Ghost of Tsushima* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (65) *Grav jump*³⁴ across to the next building where we can zip around the interior using grav panels. When you reach one that is blocked by biomass, look up and to the right of it. [*Chronos – The New dawn* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Even abbreviations are frequently used, as shown in Examples (66) and (67), containing the abbreviations “AoE” and “GRE”. Abbreviations are often mentioned without comments nor definitions, assuming that users have a general base knowledge on gaming such as not to need extensive explanations about common procedures (e.g., loading, saving, materials crafting etc.). The recurrence of unexplained abbreviations within the texts analysed validates and confirms Chang (2011) and Consalvo's (2003) idea that walkthroughs are technical texts specifically thought for people who are already literate in the practice of gaming.

- (66) Once you're through to the other side, defeat the small group of Wretches that will attack. These Wretches will introduce a new attack that sees them rolling toward you, then performing an *AoE*³⁵ explosion. [*God of War: Ragnarok* walkthrough, IGN]
- (67) The *GRE*³⁶ base you need to go to is just outside to the west of the Garrison area. [*Dying Light 2* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

³¹ In this case, the general words “hack” and “lockpick” refer to the protagonist's specific skills “Hack” and “Lockpick”, gaining technical sense.

³² In this case, the general word “drones” is used to refer to a specific type of enemy inside the game, gaining technical sense.

³³ In gaming jargon, the term “*fast track*” indicates accelerated routes, cheats or game's mechanics that permit the player to skip standard progression in favour of a quicker one, generally obtained by bypassing “canonical” levelling up stances.

³⁴ The term “*grav jump*” refers to a specific movement mechanic that allows the player to leap between designated anti-gravity or magnetic platforms across the large environmental gaps of the game.

³⁵ The abbreviations AoE in the current example stands for the term “*Atlas of Eruption*”, a particular type of attack that Kratos, the protagonist of the series, can perform through the wielding of his magical sword, the *Blade of Chaos*.

³⁶ The abbreviations GRE in the current example stands for the “*Global Relief Effort*” group, the organisation responsible for supplies' management for the city, one of the last humans' settlements in the world of *Dying Light*.

In addition, many terms involving novel forms of amalgamation such as *nominal-verbal conversion*³⁷ (Gledhill, 2019: 64) are observed, as shown in Examples (68) and (69).

- (68) The beginning of Scorn will open with a cinematic *cutscene*, showing a nameless man stumbling through a vast desert before falling into a labyrinthian cave system below the sands. When he comes to, it's time to begin our adventure. [*Scorn* walkthrough, IGN]
- (69) Once you've got the door open, *loot* the room on the other side. [*Atomic Heart* walkthrough, IGN]

Considering the corpus' general repertoire, it is to be noticed that, really often, corpus' analysis highlights also a noticeable occurrence of *lexical expansion* of walkthroughs' lexical choices performed through the frequent introduction of rich sets of quasi-synonyms (Gledhill, 2019: 64). For example, euphemisms or attenuating expressions related to combat instructions such as "deal with" or "fight your way through" are evidently employed in the texts analysed, as shown in Examples (70) and (71), instead of the verb "to kill". Likewise, slang or colloquial language terms such as "kill" or "take out" occur within the texts to express meanings more directly with more force in relation to death's references, as shown in Examples (72) and (73).

- (70) This newer enemy can resist more hits and won't be grabbed with your new ability. You have to learn its attack tempos and deal damage as quickly as possible. After *dealing with it*, break the glass on the furniture on your left, because it's likely it will have loot. [*The Callisto Protocol* walkthrough, IGN]
- (71) Once the shieldbearer is down, around a dozen enemies will swarm the graveyard, with some being dropped off in vehicles. *Fight your way through* them and after they are defeated you'll want to approach the front doors to the chapel and press Δ to head inside. [*Marvel's Spider Man 2* walkthrough, IGN]
- (72) Use the Raven to identify the correct soldier - he will be on foot and by himself at the centre of the moving search area. *Kill him* and then interact with his body to confirm the kill. [*Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (73) Reach the pole to the left and, when the soldiers arrive, *take out* the one on the left - Elena will get the other one. Swing across to rejoin her at the top of the elevator. [*Uncharted: Legacy of thieves* walkthrough, IGN]

Despite involving a great number of technical terms and expanding their repertoire in many lexical category, the corpus' analysis observes also a configuration of walkthroughs as documents where lexical expansion coexists with *lexical reduction*: walkthrough texts

³⁷ Nominal-verbal conversion is a linguistic process where a word shifts its part of speech – turning a noun into a verb (or vice versa) – without changing its form. In these specific cases, the word *cutscene* turns the verbal action "to cut a scene" into a single noun (cutscene) whereas the noun *loot* turns instead into a verb (to loot).

definitely expand their lexical choices as shown in Examples (70), (71), (72) and (73) but, at the same time, they also make high use of highly informal and nonspecific terms, especially vague nouns³⁸ (Gledhill, 2019: 64), such as “someone” or “things”, as shown in Examples (74), (75) and (76).

- (74) You can tell when *someone* has a side quest for you when they have speech bubble over their heads. [*Nier: Replicant* (EU edition) walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (75) Enter the door you uncovered and we'll get the Log: Ghosts on the Monitor (12/22) right away as Daniels tries to contact us. She's seeing *things* too (just like us). [*Dead Space* remastered walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (76) Speak to Dammon again. He has a number of worthwhile items to buy and he can make *stuff* from some of the *things* that you've picked up. [*Baldur's Gate III* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

3.6.6 Audience's reference

An overall analysis of the texts examined reveals a constant and recurring reference to the audience: while providing instructions, the reader is often addressed directly through the usage of the personal pronoun *you*, as shown in Example (77). In addition, the reader is also addressed through the mention of the in-game character name (in this case, Jill), as shown in Example (78), or, more rarely, through the combination of the personal pronouns *you* and *we*, as shown in Example (79). Especially this last way of referring to the audience creates a definite shift from the second person singular to a more inclusive address that situates the gamer as the member of a wider community of players who share the same challenges and desires for knowledge as the authors (Newman, 2008: 115).

- (77) *You* will automatically find yourself in the backstreets of Toyko, looking for where *you're* going to be living as well as your new guardian. [...] *You'll* find a delivery man outside of the house *you're* supposed to check out. Also take this opportunity to listen to what other people are saying to learn more. Sometimes *you'll* have to actively listen while other times *you'll* just hear people talking as *you* pass them. [*Persona 5 Royal* walkthrough, IGN]
- (78) When you head into Bar Jack, Brad will get bitten by one of the zombies trying to follow you inside. He will tell *Jill* to get herself to safety while he makes a heroic last stand. Make your way through the alley where *Jill* will automatically grab the pistol from the dead cop. After *Jill* has checked how many rounds she has left, a zombie will come around the corner. [*Resident Evil 3 (remake)* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (79) Whilst on this island, *we* can also climb the rocky platforms above. On the uppermost platform *you* can find some rocks that we can Force Lift to find a

³⁸ In linguistic terms, vague nouns are nouns that fail to convey precise meanings, not pointing to any specific quantity, concept or tangible objects or people (Ismail *et al.*, 2022: 1).

Datadisc. Return to the Meditation Point - Viscid Bog. Just past this there is a zipline. There is a second zipline set up below this. *We* want to ride the first zipline and then drop to the second as you pass over it. [*Star Wars Jedi: Survivor* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Specifically, the direct reference to the player-reader through the mention of the in-game character name is a ploy with which the author keeps the player even more committed and focused on the task at hand. This way, the walkthrough's author favours both the understanding of what the in-game character should do and, above all, the identification's slippage of the player towards the in-game character (Consalvo, 2003: 331), positioning the game-readers and their characters as one and the same (Burn, 2006; Newman, 2016). It follows that, through this technique, the player is drawn into the game's story, being directly inserted into the game's adventure so as to favouring, like in cinema or novels, the players' identification with the main character and making it more likely that readers-players will see themselves as involved in the game (Consalvo, 2003: 331), as shown in in Examples (80) and (81) respectively.

- (80) Fellow students (including Ganke and Hailey) enter and *Peter* bursts through the door, introducing himself as their new teacher. Miles notices sand drifting past the window, and excuses himself to the "bathroom" before quickly rushing back and demanding he needs Peter's help. *Peter* reluctantly joins him on the roof of the school to see Sandman causing chaos across the bay. [...] Controlling *Peter*, begin swinging through the streets with R2 in the direction of the yellow quest marker. [*Marvel's Spiderman: Miles Morales* walkthrough, GameFAQs]
- (81) Any items that *Ashley* had will drop to the right of the cage. Go into the room to the right of the cage, then open the large doors in front. [...] If you want to pick up more treasure and complete the Merciless Knight Request, retrace *Ashley*'s steps to explore the areas she went through in Chapter 9. Otherwise, go through the brown doors and head forward. [*Resident Evil 4* (remake) walkthrough, Neoseeker]

CHAPTER FOUR

BEYOND WALKTHROUGHS: AGENCY, NARRATIVE, CHEATING AND GAME PRESERVATION

Beyond their practical function as guides for players who are in need of help with their favourite videogames, walkthroughs can undoubtedly shape also the way players engage with videogames. Walkthroughs not only implicitly influence the player's agency within a game but can also contribute to the construction of a real narrative experience while playing, often blurring the boundaries between legitimate assistance and cheating. At the same time, walkthroughs can even be configured as valuable tools for the preservation of games' data, content and gameplay choices, constituting a textual preservation of both gaming culture and player knowledge that might otherwise be lost in the case of data corruption. The exploration of these broader dimensions that provision walkthroughs not merely as aids to gameplay but as significant cultural and interpretative artifacts is presented and discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Agency in walkthrough texts

Walkthrough texts, as previously mentioned throughout this dissertation, indicate the outmost of games' imperatives: the player *must* find a way, a key to progress into the game, *must* master the combination of buttons or keys to propel the avatar over the chasm to prevent being stuck and, without help, possibly abandoning the game (Consalvo, 2003; Giddings, 2006; Newman, 2016). But to propel the in-game character forward, a great quantity of efforts and thoughts needs to be put into play by players themselves and that is where *agency* acts.

The concept of agency is generally defined as having “the capacity to act as a cause” (Parsler, 2010: 135) in the cause-and-effect process that drives a narrative arc, implying that an agent has the ability to make choices and that these choices have an effect on a narrative arc. Related to the videogaming world, the concept of agency applies to videogames' feature of directly empowering players (Parsler, 2010: 142) in many different ways. Firstly, by giving players freedom to “move as they will and make totally free behavioural choices” inside the game (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler, 2007: 1). Secondly, through developers providing players a game's system that supports their choices, whichever they are (Wardrip-Fruin *et al.*, 2009: 1), supplying them an environment where “the feeling of empowerment [...] comes from being able to take actions” in a world whose effects relate to their own intentions (Mateas and Stern, 2006: 647). Especially this last interpretation underlines one of the most important characteristics of videogames: providing players a wide range of agency through the meaningful choices they are required to make, seeing how their results and effects can directly influence and change the videogame's narrative (Mateas and Stern, 2006;

Murray, 2016).

From this perspective, it is to be argued that two levels of agency can be identified in videogames: a first level of agency, that directly comes from games' developers themselves, that is granted to the in-game character compared to the game's narrative. And a second level of agency pertaining to the player, who influences directly both the in-game character's own agency and the narrative (Cole, 2018: 2), configuring videogames as forms of virtual environments through which players navigate while selecting alternatives (and, implicitly, applying forms of agencies) that have been already anticipated by game designers (Kline *et al.*, 2003: 19).

Although this assertion usefully points to videogames as a carefully built virtual environment within which players operate with varying degrees of agency, it limits players' decisive potential only to the available alternatives anticipated by game designers, constituting an understatement of the exploratory, investigative nature of gameplay in general that is, on the contrary, always open to diverse playing (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 17). The idea of considering videogames as virtual worlds where agency is merely limited by game designers' choices downgrades the nature of walkthroughs too as texts where players' agency is once again limited by developers' decisions. Conversely, walkthroughs envision not only forms of different playing styles, experiences (and implicitly, of different players' agencies) and of "unanticipated" emergent gameplay, but they also promote and eloquently demonstrates, instead, how players can differently interrogate various available selections (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Consalvo, 2003; Ermi and Mäyrä, 2005; Newman, 2008). In Example (82) all the potential answers and consequent actions the player can choose from (and their results) are provided in an extract taken from *Wasteland 3*'s walkthrough, one of the game included in the corpus, testifying how walkthrough texts always provide different ways of interrogating games' choices or decisions, promoting diverse forms of playing styles.

- (82) As you enter you'll start some conversations with a couple of characters. There are several ways for you reply, and several of them affect your reputation with them. For the first answer:

"[Kiss Ass 4] Check": Reputation +1 with the Gippers.

"Let's take care of business first.": No change.

"We don't care about your justice.": Reputation -1 with the Gippers. [*Wasteland 3* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Especially this quality of walkthroughs of always promoting diverse gameplay strategies and operations demonstrates how these texts can definitely challenge the notion that there is only one "correct" way to play a game (Consalvo, 2007: 3). They formally depict instead forms of digital recordings of different playing styles and agencies that provide resources from which players might draw from in the development and honing of their own approach to the game (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 50) to reach their desired outcome. Under such conditions, walkthroughs perfectly represent written

examples of texts where the player (who does not possess the time, energy nor resources necessary to master every aspect of their favourite videogame and so goes in search of walkthroughs) employs what Bandura (2001) theorised as “*proxy agency*”. Proxy agency is a socially mediated form of agency in which the individual makes use of the mediating effects of others with the necessary resources or expertise in order to secure a desired outcome (Schott, 2006: 135). Applied to walkthroughs, proxy agency works as follows: players secure the outcomes they desire (proceeding into the game or solving an issue they could not solve on their own without the walkthrough’s help) by enlisting those who have access to resources or expertise (the walkthrough’s writers) to act at their behest.

Retracing the successful strategies employed by the walkthrough’s writer (who has successfully completed the game) can seem a simple mean to reach the desired outcome by a player in need of assistance. But retracing strategies and actions performed by others can also lead to the idea that walkthrough texts could also be interpreted, less positively, as forms of *ancillary* texts³⁹ archiving of existing gameplay (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 62) that can be configured as “prefigurative demonstrations [that] have a strongly performative aspect in the creation of new artefactual experiences” (Barker, 2004: 9). Serving as prefigurative demonstrations of the whole gameplay experience, walkthroughs texts can indeed, in this way, shape in advance the conditions under which players can see and then play the videogames they are seeking help for, “constitut[ing] more or less [a] patterned discursive preparations” (Barker, 2004: 9) for the act of playing (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 62) where players-writers “order the gamer to follow the instructions” (Newman, 2008: 102). This condition of walkthroughs of serving as prefigurative plays mines the individual agency walkthrough’s readers could have (and that extends beyond in-game choices) not only to both understand and interpret the game, but also to make their own personal choices in favour of the path suggested by the walkthrough’s writer (Ashton and Newman, para. 18) who orders players to follow their instructions. In this sense, walkthrough texts can represent a real foreknowledge pattern that can model players’ expectations and decisions to the point of outclassing players’ agency in favour of the walkthrough’s author personal one (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Barker, 2004), as shown in example (83), only one of the many available throughout the corpus.

- (83) Talk to Hardee Knox on your right (the man about to be burned alive). Save him and he'll thank you and give you tips on the fight ahead. Enter the lodge. [...] Find Riley Woodson in the back room. [...] Ignore the locked door/wall in the Lobby for now and head up the left hall. Take a left and speak to Ash over the intercom, who isn't bluffing when he says he'll kill all the hostages if you come in. Don't go in. We'll go rescue the hostages first THEN go in. If you do anyway,

³⁹ Ancillary texts are secondary or auxiliary texts that usually accompany or support primary works (Barker, 2004; Most, 2021). In this case, walkthroughs are considered “ancillary” texts with respect to the videogames they refer to (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 62).

he'll give you Patriarch's Home Key, and provide some advice on Vic (i.e. he's good with bombs and guns).

Taking into consideration Example (83) always taken from *Wasteland 3*, it can be noted how multiple examples of the writer's own agency (that can even influence the game's storyline) outclassing the player's own one can be found in the instructions provided to track down Victory Buchanan⁴⁰. The author orders the player to perform a series of actions that reflect many possible choices the players could make if they were not following the author's own instructions: the author orders to talk to Hardee Knox and save him, to find Riley Wilson, not to open the locked door etc., justifying their orders in the name of the best strategy to quickly find Victory. Nevertheless, by doing so, the author exerts a strict control over the players' choices, stripping them off the freedom to autonomously decide what to do to play the game (in this case, of what to do to find Victory Buchanan), undermining their agency and substituting it with their own one. The player could reasonably decide not to talk to Hardee Knox in favour of doing some further explorations of their surroundings or to open the locked door due to the curiosity of discovering what lies behind it. But the writer, by telling them that the best strategy is instead the one suggested in their walkthrough, overtakes the player's agency due to their wider (and more reliable) experience in playing the game without leaving players any choice but to follow (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Barker, 2004).

Thus, walkthroughs' understanding of agency goes definitely "beyond": firstly, beyond game developers influencing their own in-game characters through the extent of the agency they arrange for them to have. Secondly, beyond players influencing the in-game character's agency through their own choices. In walkthrough texts, it is indeed necessary to add another deeper, more subtle level of agency, where the walkthrough's writer can potentially influence the readers' agency by unintentionally forcing certain choices at the expense of players' own freedom of playing (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 18). By doing this, walkthroughs' writers forget the fact that their instructions should only act as a lens through which recognising the game's threats and dangers, albeit abated and guarded against by means of the walkthrough (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 65 and 81) and not as absolute commands that could limit the player's agency. This condition showcases the scaffolding potential of walkthroughs of being a possible mixed blessing player-produced product: on one hand, an encouraging blueprint of new, emergent and diverse playing styles, but on the other hand, a prefigurative demonstration of playing that can undermine players' agency, having a direct, material and traceable influence on the gameplay of others that can possibly persuade, regulate and control players' choices (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Smith and Sanchez, 2015).

⁴⁰ Victory Buchanan is one of the many recruitable characters in *Wasteland 3*. He is the eldest son of the Patriarch of Colorado, disowned from his own father due to his violent behaviour and mental instability. The player can both recruit him or not, the latter resulting in Victory becoming an enemy.

4.2 Walkthroughs as narratives

According to Consalvo (2003: 331), walkthroughs can be seen as “an aid to creating a story line to a game”, being configured as forms of dramatized narratives, almost always with a definite subjective author’s style, where one player-writer provides opinions and instructions on the best way to complete the game (Fry, 2012: 13). Indeed, while guiding players throughout the game, walkthroughs’ authors “tell” the game’s story to their readers and the more they captivate the players, the more they insert them into their own “narrative”. This narrative concerns both the game’s plotline and the narration of the author’s own playthrough, positing a beginning, middle, and ending to it and delineating a basic framework for the game that constitutes a basic descriptive narrative⁴¹ (Consalvo, 2003: 331), also underscored by the comments of gamers themselves who often remark on the relative merits of the game’s story lines.

But the concept of narrative does not imply only the content involved in a story and its realisation within a definite, coherent structure (the plot) that maintains a coherent plot all along its unfolding (Crawford, 2013: 51), but also how that that content is communicated and described in the narrative discourse (Chatman, 1978; Carr, 2006). The same set of story events could be plotted (and also communicated) in many ways, giving rise to many different narratives, each of which would accentuate, exclude or emphasize different things (Carr, 2006: 35). Likewise, narratives involves also, apart from the content of the narration and the way in which it is unfold and described, one more fundamental aspect: the text’s perspective, in other words, whose voice tells us about the characters and their actions and, above all, whose voice relates the information (Genette, 1980: 186).

In addition, videogames’ narrative is almost always conditioned and subverted by players’ interaction within the game, being both afforded and limited by what the game system (hardware, software, interfaces, etc.) and the players themselves make possible (Mejeur, 2020: para. 2), ensuring a sense of individuality to the game’s storyline through one of the defining features of videogames, their *interactivity* (Consalvo, 2003; Mejeur, 2020; Newman, 2011). By accommodating (intentionally or otherwise) a wide variety of playing styles and by allowing players to make different decisions in order to keep the game interesting (Atkins and Krzywinska, 2007: 5), interactivity inevitably alters the game’s events and, in the end, creates an “apparent incompatibility” with the plot (Crawford: 2013, 51) caused by the flowing emergence of possibilities that it offers and that often opposes the limitations of narrative’s structures (Mejeur, 2020: para. 3).

According to Carr (2006: 37), it can be argued that walkthroughs are texts generally processed by an author (the player-writer) that, by giving instructions on how to perform actions within the game, implicitly tells their readers both the game’s story as designed by game developers and, at the same time, the specific story developed by their own playthrough through their own perspective. The corpus’ results confirm Carr’s

⁴¹ In this case, the term “*narrative*” is intended following Lawrence Stone’s definition of narrative as “the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with subplots” as quoted by Alex Callinicos (1995: 45).

perspective since the texts under analysis rehash the performed author's individual choices and impressions within the game while they were the ones playing (Consalvo, 2003: 331), as shown in Example (84), where the author, while giving instructions to the player, implicitly overlaps the narration of the game's plotline with the one derived by their own playthrough.

- (84) When you see a Huggy emerge from a pipe, hit it with the pack and it'll retreat. Much like Musical Memory, things will start out slowly and grow increasingly harder as the game goes on. You'll need *to be quick* and stay on top of things until the timer runs out and the game's over. *This can be tricky*, as it requires you to efficiently manage the Huggy onslaught and, in truth, be a bit lucky. If you aren't already, *wearing headphones can be your savior here*, as it'll allow you to pinpoint the direction of new Huggys entering the area and take them out quickly. While it can be hard to use sound to track them while they're entering the arena, when they're about to attack, they'll growl. When you hear them growling, quickly turn and push them back into their holes. Remember to prioritize any growling Huggy Wuggys before you focus on clearing the ones coming out of the pipes. [*Poppy Playtime* walkthrough, IGN]

In Example (84), the walkthrough's narrative of the videogame *Poppy Playtime* clearly contains evidence of its author's perspective and perception of the game "embedded" between its lines. While warning the player about the speed of one of the many deadly games Mommy⁴² is presenting to the in-game protagonist, the author makes the player believe that players should be quick while performing the actions needed to proceed into the game, enforcing their own perception about the game's speed on the player. By doing this, the author implicitly implies, on one hand, that the player is not quick enough on a standard basis (even if the author cannot know this piece of information), and on the other hand, that the game is effectively requiring a quicker speed of actions compared to the standard one it always uses, forcing again a subjective perspective and account of the game's events onto the player (Carr, 2006: 37). The same pattern can be observed a few lines after, when the author strongly advises the player to wear headphones to pinpoint in an easier way the enemies' location. In this manner, the author is supposing that the player could have difficulties in pinpointing the enemies' locations too without headphones, making the player believe that, without them, they could not be able to progress through that particular challenge. Through these amicable but extremely personal "advices", the author is effectively *forcing* their subjective game's perception onto the player through a personal interpretation of the game's reality (in this case, as too quick and needing a certain commitment to keep up the pace together with an almost compulsory use of headphones to progress through the game). In this way, the author offers to the player a game's narrative that is not the one that can factually describe and create "a story line to

⁴² Mommy, short for *Mommy Long Legs*, is one of the main antagonists in the game *Poppy Playtime*. Depicted as a tall, pink creature with long, flexible and extendable limbs, she acts as the ringleader of the Game Station, the underground hub where the human experiments of the Playtime Co. toy factory are secretly kept, blackmailing the player into agreeing to her deadly mini games.

a game” as Consalvo (2003: 331) suggested, but that depicts instead only a biased and altered game’s narrative, influenced by the author’s impressions and shaped according to their own perceived game’s narrative (Carr, 2006: 43).

Furthermore, by giving a series of peremptory commands using imperatives (e.g., *hit, remember, turn, push back*, etc.) to guide the player (tendency widely already described in this dissertation concerning walkthroughs’ instructions in subsection 3.6.3) and by using indicatives to provide a series of suggestions about how to face the game (e.g., *it will allow you to pinpoint the location, you will need to be quick*, etc.), the author fails to compel to narrative’s general descriptive function “not to give an order, express a wish, state a condition, etc., but simply to tell a story, and therefore to “report” facts (real or fictive)” (Genette, 1980: 161), evidently forcing the player to “replay” certain actions instead of simply describing what happens into the game’s story line.

A different situation can be noted when walkthroughs, instead of giving the player the exact instructions needed to proceed into the game by manipulating the game components (e.g., going in one specific direction, interacting with the environment, etc.), describe instead events that elude manipulation by the player and that will happen whichever choices the player will make. These events are plotted (arranged in time and space) and then related to the player in cutscenes, in the testimony of NPCs⁴³, or in character biographies or storylines (Carr, 2006: 44). This characteristic can be observed, among the various examples available throughout the corpus, in a passage taken from *Persona 5* walkthrough, in Example (85).

- (85) Today you will get the chance to go out for lunch with Futaba and Sojiro. It's a lovely sushi restaurant, though a bit pricey. After that, Futaba will ask you to come to Akihabara. Unfortunately, she'll head over there on her own rather than meet up with you and she'll have a panic attack. As it turns out, severe social anxiety can't be cured with just a few days with friends and a trip to the beach. Help her out and you'll unlock the Hermit Confidant through her. Take her home and you'll rank up with the Fool Confidant as well. [*Persona 5 Royal* walkthrough, IGN]

In this passage, the player learns about what happens on August 31st through a description of the events unfolding during that particular day and that mainly follow Futaba’s⁴⁴ storyline. This narrative material establishes the developing of the character’s issues with her panic attacks related to her social anxiety and how the main protagonist helps her dealing with them when they meet shortly after the insurging of one of them. The extract

⁴³ The term NPCs is an abbreviation commonly found in gaming jargon that stands for *Non playable characters*. It refers to all the available characters within a videogame who cannot be controlled by the player but only by the pre-set scripts of the game’s programming.

⁴⁴ Futaba Sakura is one of the main key characters in *Persona 5* videogame. She is one of Ren Amamiya’s (the main protagonist of the game) closest friends and she is a brilliant tactician for Ren’s team. Unfortunately, she suffered from severe trauma and psychological manipulation in her childhood, condition that made her extremely introvert and reserved and that led her to have panic attacks in social contexts.

simply describes which events happen into the game (the ones that happen on August 31st) and that will happen at the same time and in the same way in any playthrough, perfectly compelling, this time, to the idea of a narrative that basically describes and reports always happening facts (Genette, 1980: 161) without adding any author's personal interpretations nor suggestions to the narrative (Carr, 2006: 44) that could change the reader's perspective about it. Players might not finish the game, or they might skip as much of the storytelling as possible. One player might read all the text that the game offers and check all the characters' biographies. Another player might ignore the storytelling and be happy playing and replaying each single day, unconcerned about resolution. One player's trail through the game's days may vary considerably from another's. One player's character might favour one character's friendship or love instead of the other. Yet, the events happening will always depict Futaba having a panic attack on August 31st and the protagonist having to deal with it, despite the few days with friends and the trip to the beach the two shared a few days prior.

All things considered, it can be stated that, while it is still possible to distinguish between gameplay and narrative, walkthrough texts can be configured as documents where these two aspects are interwoven. On one side, walkthroughs definitely contains strings of instructions and pieces of advice or suggestions that reflect a long chain of chance, player action, setting and narrative content, all worked together and filtered through the author's eyes that cannot be considered narrative since they depict a game's reality that is influenced by the writer's perspective and choices. Each time the game is loaded, the characters are in a particular location, facing a set of circumstances, and subject to conditions that reflect a complex combination of accumulated gameplay, plot and the author's choice (Carr, 2006; Fry, 2012). On the other hand, walkthroughs can constitute instead as narrative while describing and reporting always true game's reality, simply stating game-related facts about the game's characters, plot, biographies and mechanics that will not change whichever walkthrough may be taken into consideration (Carr, 2006: 44).

4.3 Limitations of the walkthrough genre

Despite their immense versatility and retrievability, it is to be noted that walkthroughs possess two remarkable weaknesses: for instance, they are not broadly suited for all the available videogame's genres on the market. Walkthroughs can be hardly applicable in fact to videogames that do not have a specific ending goal (e.g., *Minecraft*⁴⁵) or with too complex and open gaming experiences (e.g., *Grand Theft Auto*⁴⁶) since they may result in a really limited and narrowed explanation of the game compared to the richness of the

⁴⁵ *Minecraft* is an adventure, first person videogame where players can discover and build different kind of worlds made of blocks.

⁴⁶ *Grand Theft Auto* is one of the most famous action/adventure videogames on organised crime. The story follows the path of an outlaw and of his rising through the ranks of organised crime through robbery, murder and thefts.

actual gameplay itself (Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2021: 14). Secondly (and more importantly), as already stated in subsection 1.1 of this dissertation, walkthroughs are not available for all the videogames released on the market as of now, generally depending on a singular game's popularity that encourages or not the creation of its relative walkthrough. This condition produces an evident bias towards the whole Walkthrough genre's capability of covering all the videogames published since the rising of computer games, possibly taking the genre's roots in the mere audience's likes or dislikes (Nylund, 2015: 56).

In addition, walkthrough texts usually face another major limit: their being very often compared to nothing more than cheating materials to end a game (Consalvo, 2007; Hemlen and Blumberg, 2015; Parker, 2007; Simons and Newman, 2003).

4.3.1 Walkthroughs as cheating materials

Walkthrough texts definitely configure as an aid for players who need guidance to proceed into the game throughout their playthroughs (Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2012; Consalvo, 2003; Krause, 2016; Newman, 2008, 2011), offering insights into almost everything the game can offer without leaving anything to chance. According to Juul (2001: 242), walkthroughs now permeate gaming culture and landscape to the point that they play a central role for many gamers all around the world, becoming an integral part of the gaming experience since every player knows that, if necessary, they can find a walkthrough that can help them any time they want. It follows that walkthroughs' existence has become "simply an option available in all games" (Juul, 2001: 242) nowadays, leading to the common idea that, whichever issue may arise during players' gameplay, there will always be a potential solution under the shape of a walkthrough, literally undermining the possibility of having to deal with being stuck in a specific point into a game or having to solve a puzzle without any external help.

However, despite not interfering with the game's program or code and still requiring solutions performed on usual terms with the game, walkthroughs are very often considered as forms of *cheating* firstly, by gamers themselves, and, secondly, even by game developers (Newman, 2008: 120). Leaving aside players who, unfortunately, resort to walkthroughs only because they are too indolent to really engage in what they are playing, only wanting a "magic trick" that can make them proceed into their playthroughs and who represent the really small minority of players that just "sit[s] at the end of a one way tunnel of content" (Consalvo, 2005: 8) – that is, in this case, the tunnel of walkthroughs' instructions – it seems curious that walkthrough texts could be considered so problematic and, most of all, a form of cheating when players are the first ones who seek help through them when their skills are not enough to "beat the game" (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Consalvo, 2003; Newman, 2008; Schott, 2006).

According to Bowyer (1982: 47), cheating can be considered as "the advantageous distortion of perceived reality [where] the advantage falls to the cheater because the cheated person misperceives what is assumed to be the real world", implying that a cheater is taking advantage of a person or a situation (or both) in a distorted perceived

reality that, put all together, constitute a form of *deception* that can involve a hidden “true” reality or a reality showed in a way that can deceive others (Consalvo, 2007: 5). Specifically, the desire to cheat arises “out of the nature of power” (Bowyer, 1982: 3), implying that when one is faced with a more powerful opponent and desires to win, cheating can become a viable option to help even the score (Consalvo, 2007: 5). This perspective configures cheating as an already widely common part of our society or culture since the desire to win starts to develop really early during childhood when children learn how to cheat when playing cards or peak-a-boo because they want to win the game (Bowyer, 1982: 428).

Bowyer’s idea of cheating can then be definitely linked to the practice of gaming and, implicitly, to the one of using walkthroughs too. When players decide to resort to look for walkthroughs, they are facing a definitely more powerful opponent (an enemy, a boss or a specific game’s challenge) compared to what their skills can make them overcome and, to even the score (so, to help them proceed into the game or to help them with the puzzle they cannot seem to solve on their own etc.), players decide to “get help” from more experienced “colleagues” to easily overcome the obstacle. Considering Bowyer’s definition, it follows that players who use walkthroughs could be effectively configured as people who cheat to win the game.

However, when a game is played, the player enters a space that is not anymore within the boundaries of reality, creating instead a new space, a playground, a “magic circle” with its own absolute rules (Huizinga, 1950: 11) where even the deception theorised by Bowyer needs to be redefined and reconsidered since the game’s reality is not the real world’s one. The games’ world constitutes a parallel reality where rules are different from the real world and, above all, where they are absolute: if rules are breached, the game ends (Huizinga, 1950: 11). Therefore, in the game’s world, cheating does not concern an act of deception towards something or someone but rather following or not the game’s rules since rules are the ones that keep the game distinct from other games as well as other parts of life, being the “swing vote” for cheating (Consalvo, 2007: 7). Rules, then, are a central component of games, and their significance for cheating (or its various expressions) cannot be understated. Players have the options of following the rules, overtly refusing to abide by them, or secretly not abiding to them (although appearing to do so) and thus cheating (Consalvo, 2007: 7). Consequently, the effective “cheater” within the alternate reality of playing is not the one who takes advantage of something or someone to gain power and to win against a more powerful opponent nor the one who trespasses or ignores the game’s rules (the “spoil-sport” in Huizinga’s words). The real cheater in playing’s reality is the one who “pretends to be playing the game and, on the face of it, still acknowledges the magic circle” (Huizinga, 1950: 11), in other words, the one who pretends to abide by the rules but covertly breaks them to win.

Following Huizinga’s idea of cheating, walkthroughs texts could be considered cheating if they covertly broke the rules of the videogames they were thought for while still pretending not to be. But, at this stage, two obvious questions arise: which videogames’ rules could they exactly be breaking? And where could these rules even be

found? The immediate answer could consider videogames' physical copies and their attached booklets where there is usually information about the game, the platform's system requirements necessary to play it and various other explanations about the game's objectives and characters with some guidelines about how to proceed into the game (Consalvo, 2007: 84). Unfortunately, apart from the fact that booklets do not provide that much information about the gameplay and that they are very rarely read by players in between playing, booklets are not even that widespread since digital stores do not sell them anymore together with the games' copies and their bonus content (Consalvo, 2007: 85). It follows that videogames do not have a "written" set of rules under the shape of physical (or digital) instruction manuals, but rather a set of rules hidden in their codes (Consalvo, 2007: 85). Games' codes are, in turn, run by games' engines that contain and structures all the rules to which characters (and, implicitly, even players) must abide to (e.g., going through certain doors, killing certain enemies or not, engaging in certain activities etc.), embodying by themselves the rules players must confront (Consalvo, 2007: 85). In this way, the game code poses as the rule, the "law" of the parallel world of the game (Lessig, 1999: 60), a law that has prior been established by the game developers in the real world and that could be possibly open to questions or alterations by the players. Hence, if videogames' rules are constituted by their codes, walkthroughs should be considered as "cheating" if they "broke" the code, the rules of the videogame, while pretending not to do it. In this sense, walkthrough texts could definitely provide a kind of help that could go even beyond breaking the rules of their programming codes. But their perceiving as unfair materials could also depend on players own personal interpretation and conception of cheating, encompassing also players' own gaming ethics or morality (Consalvo, 2007; Hamlen and Blumberg, 2015; Waldenmeier *et al.*, 2024). In the following paragraphs, the most common ways of perceived cheating applied to walkthroughs are discussed.

4.3.2 Cheating as using "cheat codes"

Hamlen and Blumberg (2015: 86) argue that one of the most common ways to break videogames' codes is using *cheat codes*, alphanumerical codes that "may be directly typed in using a keyboard or enacted via button combinations or movement repetitions in the game" (Hamlen and Blumberg, 2015: 86) and that can work directly on the code's structure. They are generally used during games' developing stage to add a temporary advantage or mechanic as a means of facilitating game testing (Parker, 2007; Waldenmeier *et al.*, 2024) and often left in the game due to their removal causing fastidious bugs⁴⁷ (Hamlen and Blumberg, 2015: 86). Despite their existence and knowledge should remain within developers' testing teams, at times, players discover

⁴⁷ Bugs are defects, "imperfections that cause systems to improperly deliver the service they are intended for, resulting in what is called a failure" (Frattoni *et al.*, 2016: 551) that commonly characterise software programmes. In this case, since videogames are considered software programmes, bugs could occur throughout players' playthroughs.

these sequences of numbers or letters and acquire visible bonuses or facilitations during their playthroughs (Consalvo, 2007; Hamlen and Blumberg, 2015; Kuecklich, 2004; Waldenmeier et al., 2024). Following this definition of cheat codes and taking into consideration Huizinga’s definition of cheating in games as pretending to abide by the game’s rules while privily breaking them, using cheat codes can definitely configure as a form of cheating since cheat codes break the code (so the rules) while the player, obtaining clear advantages and facilitations by using them, pretends to play fairly by exploiting codes meant to be used only for testing (Consalvo, 2007; Hamlen and Blumberg, 2015). Thus, walkthrough texts could be considered as forms of cheating if they contained cheat codes within their instructions that could break games’ codes (so the games’ rules).

From an attentive analysis of the corpus, it can be argued that walkthrough texts do not contain any cheat codes within them that could “skip” some parts of the game or give hidden advantages during playing, but simply instructions that can help the player proceed through the normal progress of the game (Newman, 2008: 120). Figure 29 gives evidence of the absence of cheat codes within walkthroughs’ instructions: the caption is taken from *Silent Hill 2* (remake)’s walkthrough on GameFAQs’ website, precisely from the section where the player is presented with the riddle of the jukebox in Neely’s Bar’s area. Albeit supplying to the player the correct sequence of actions needed to solve the riddle and listen to the various recordings cut into the jukebox vinyls, walkthroughs’ instructions do not contain any cheat codes that can “break” the game’s code nor offer facilitations. Instruction contains only useful hints that can prevent the player from being stuck at the riddle resolution and that can help them proceeding throughout the game, not configuring, at least concerning breaking the code (and so, implicitly, the rules), as cheating.

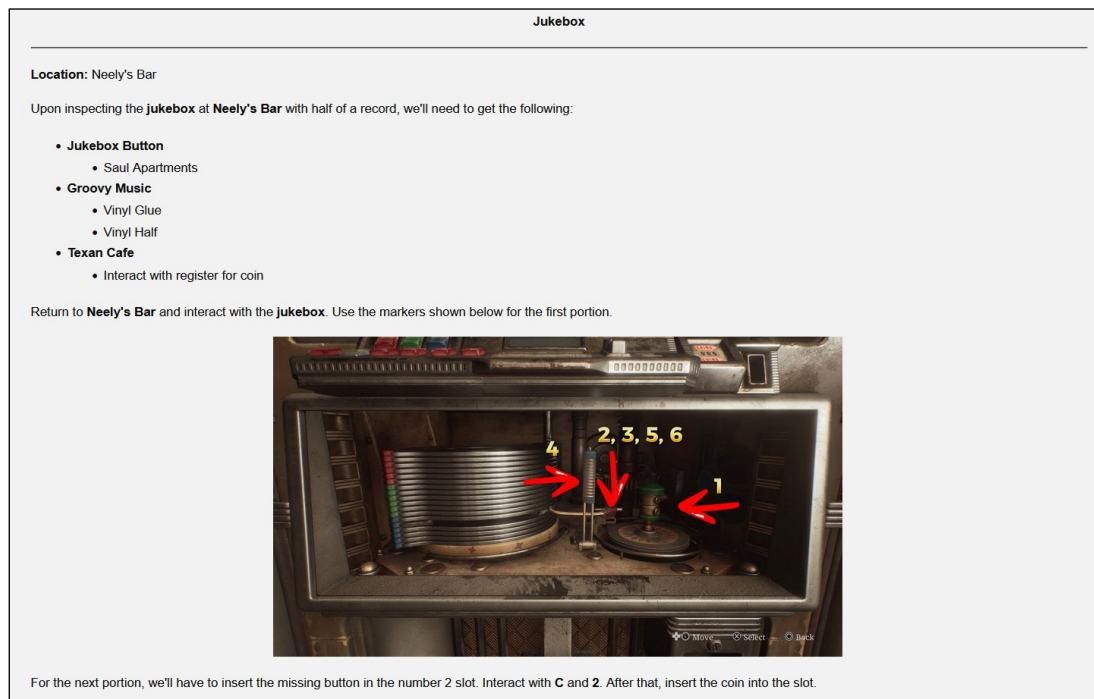


Figure 29: Example of the disclosure of the correct sequence of actions needed to solve the riddle of the jukebox in *Silent Hill 2* (remake)’s walkthrough without resorting to cheat codes.

4.3.3 Cheating as having unfair knowledge

According to Consalvo (2007: 87), another common perceived way of cheating in videogames concerns the amount of knowledge players can have about the game before they begin playing it and that can be labelled as “unfair” if obtained through external sources rather than from playing the game. “Unfair” knowledge in the videogames’ field can come from different sources and in a great variety of different manners. One of the most basic ways to acquire information on a game (and, implicitly, of possibly gaining “unfair” one) is provided by the numerous trailers, demos⁴⁸, developers’ interviews or any other discussions or rumours that generally surrounds a game before its release on the market and that can actually “spoiler” a lot about the content of that game, constituting a full-fledged paratext around it (Consalvo, 2007: 87). Another widespread way of gaining an alleged unfair knowledge about videogames occurs when players try to ask a friend, a relative or a spouse for suggestions when they are stuck and unable to proceed into the game (Consalvo, 2007: 88), seeking help from other players rather than make it on their own. Considering this last assertion and considering walkthrough texts’ main aim of helping players in need of assistance (Consalvo, 2003; Krause, 2016; Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015), walkthroughs could then be considered as “cheating” since they provide alleged “unfair” knowledge about a game under the shape of solutions to issues that players could not address on their own (Consalvo, 2007; Hamlen and Blumberg, 2015), as it can be observed in Figure 30, where the solution to the riddle of the music player in the Beneviento’s house in *Resident Evil: Village*’s walkthrough on GameFAQs’ website is given.

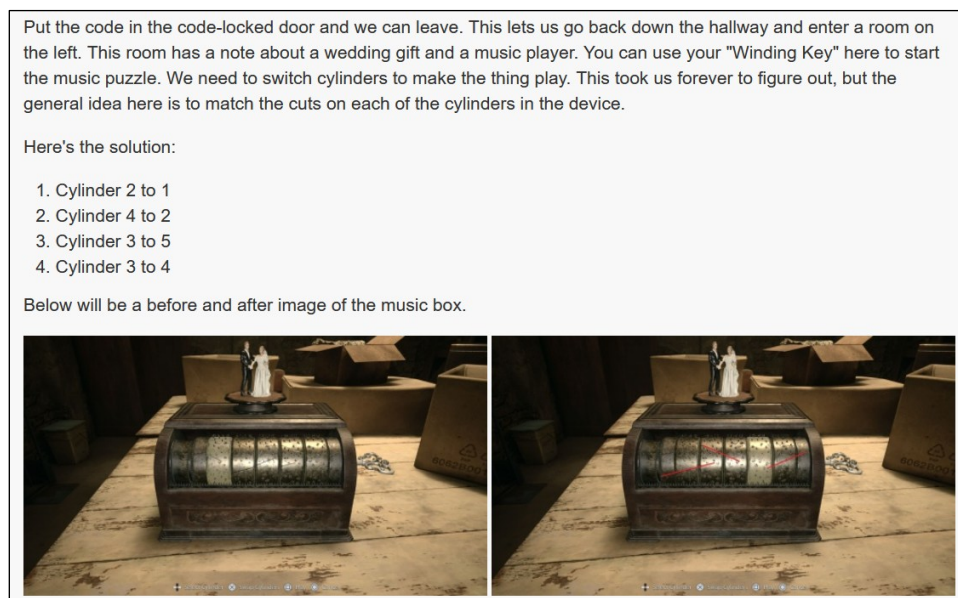


Figure 30: Example of the disclosure of possible “unfair” knowledge in the walkthrough of *Resident Evil: Village* through the revelation of the correct cylinders’ sequences needed to unlock the music player.

⁴⁸ The term “demo”, short for “demonstration”, refers to restricted playable versions of a game that are usually distributed before its official release.

Figure 30 demonstrates that walkthroughs' instructions definitely contain a certain amount of gaming knowledge that can provide players (who do not possess such knowledge) with information about specific game content they were not aware of at the time they were reading. This specific knowledge can facilitate them throughout their gameplay, constituting an actual example of knowledge that can be labelled as "unfair" due to its coming from an external source and then perceived as a mean for cheating.

Nevertheless, walkthroughs perceived usage as "fair" or "unfair" materials depends mostly on the player's own personal evaluation, interpretation and ethical judgement of which kind of knowledge, materials or behaviours can be considered "fair" or "unfair" to actually finish a game (Consalvo, 2007; Hemlen and Blumberg, 2015; Simons and Newman, 2003). Still, as Simons and Newman (2003: 9) argue, it is not always easy to draw a firm line between the fairness or unfairness of walkthroughs' practices. Their fairness relies especially on their usages' honesty and that depends again on a player's own personal interpretation of cheating or not boundaries. On one hand, it comes as no surprise that walkthroughs might be treated as little more than "unfair" cheat sheets for indolent players (Ashton and Newman, 2010: para. 7) if a player considers walkthroughs solely as useful tools for achieving full games' completion, conquering difficult puzzles or trouble spots or for simply trying to "trick" the game and proceed through it more quickly. But even purist players who consider whichever external suggestions that does not come from solo playing as "cheating" may consider walkthroughs as nothing more than cheat-sheets (Consalvo, 2007: 88).

On the other hand, walkthroughs can instead be deemed as "acceptable" in specific situations that involve players making ethical decisions about how far pushing the boundaries of a possible cheating's accusation. Keeping in mind Huizinga's definition of a game as a magic circle with its own rules (1950: 11), videogames, as games, have their own rules embodied in their codes (Lessig, 1990: 66) that players could effectively break, establishing, in this way, a form of cheating. However, a form of cheating can be posed even if players decide to bend or reinterpret the rules to their advantage, making ethical judgements about gameplay that extend beyond the coded rules of the game and laying the ground for "softer rules" that can be negotiated (Consalvo, 2007: 87). Those rules can be broken more easily than the game code or "hard rules," but to many players they are still important in understanding the boundaries of acceptable gameplay and how far one can push those boundaries before an accusation of cheating is made (Consalvo, 2007: 87). This is the case, for example, of players who have already repeatedly tried to perform the actions needed to proceed into the game (e.g., several attempts at solving a puzzle, at killing a particularly difficult boss or at completing a complex mission etc.). They end up not achieving the desired result necessary to continue the playthrough and so they decide to "bend" the videogames' rules by seeking external help (under the shape of walkthroughs) to prevent a possible abandoning of the game out of sheer frustration and real inability to progress further (Consalvo, 2007; Simons and Newman, 2003). The same can be said for players who have already beaten or completed a game and who want to play again to explore new areas or try new things: their knowledge about the game is

already pre-existing since they have already completed the game, thus their seeking external guidance does not pose as them wanting “unfair” knowledge before playing the game (Consalvo, 2007: 89). By way of conclusion, the debate about whether walkthroughs can be configured as a means for cheating is still in question: if they can be considered as mere cheat-sheets for indolent players or as acceptable ways of seeking help by the gaming community, it all depends on the player’s personal interpretation of what can be configured as cheating and on their personal evaluation of which behaviours, materials or practices can be considered right or wrong or “fair” or “unfair” to play a game.

4.4 Hidden potential of the walkthrough genre

Despite some evident limitations, the Walkthroughs genre can actually have an immense *hidden potential* apart from being a useful quick-fix solution for players (Krause, 2016: 28). The following paragraphs discuss the hidden potentialities of walkthroughs observed throughout the corpus.

4.4.1 Walkthroughs as player-produced investigations of digital gameplay

The corpus’ analysis underlines a common characteristic between all the walkthroughs taken into examination: apart from the already widely discussed aim of being player-produced texts that guide other fellow players throughout the successful completion of a game (Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2021; Consalvo, 2003; Newman, 2016; Nylund, 2015), walkthroughs’ deep analysis and recordings of games’ content also configure them as texts that can give testimony to something more than being guides for players. Their deeper diving into games’ mechanics, sequences and tactics make them also one of the most-comprehensive player-produced *investigations* of digital gameplay that presently exist (Newman, 2011: 111). Consequently, walkthrough texts can reveal much about how a game was made, how its creators envisioned it being played, as well as how it is actually played and performed by constituencies of players (Newman, 2016: 415), serving as a tool to capture and communicate sequences of gameplay as understood by their players in a better way than the playable games themselves (Newman, 2011: 111).

As a matter of fact, walkthrough texts are indeed the products of the prolonged and sustained engagement that authors put into playing in order to understand the requirements for an outmost completion and “digital dissection” (Ashton and Newman, 2011: 5) of their favourite videogames. Authors’ commitment into playing often leads them trying to find all the easter eggs, trophies or achievements that are earned only after many hours of gameplay (Ashton and Newman, 2011: 5). But authors’ exploration of gameplay often pushes them also towards the achievement of all the possible endings of a game, as illustrated in Figure 31 taken from the game *No, I’m not a Human*, where the author clearly states that the walkthrough will guide the player throughout all the possible game’s endings.

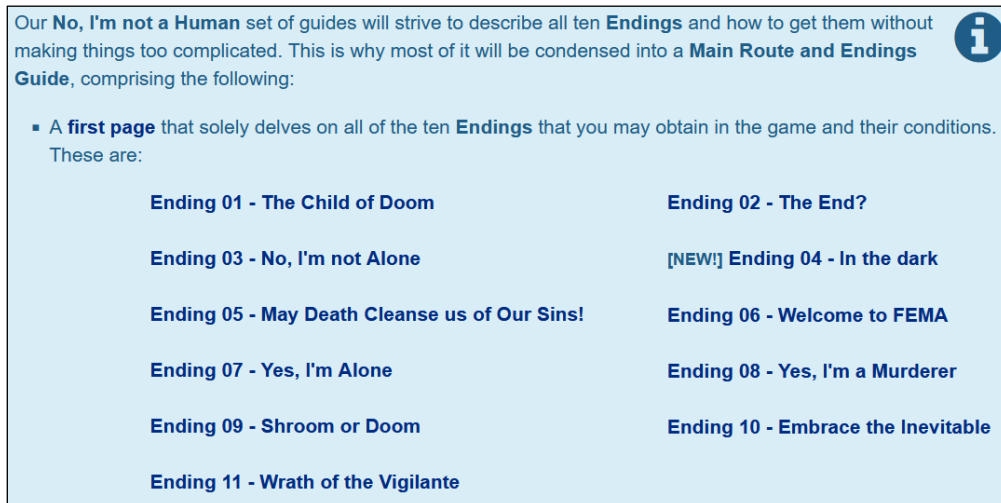


Figure 31: Example of how the walkthrough of the game *No, I'm not a Human* published on Neoseeker's website presents its purpose of guiding players throughout all its possible endings.

The corpus' analysis highlights also how walkthroughs texts can further “investigate”, apart from the many potentialities, also the many inconsistencies and weaknesses digital games have. Very often, walkthroughs document also videogames' technical limits, glitches and bugs (Newman, 2011: 120), as shown in Example (86), where a bug concerning the game freezing and its possible solution are being discussed in the comments section of the walkthrough of *Metal Gear Solid Delta: Snake Eater*.

(86) Q: Why does my game keep freezing during the jungle escape sequence?

It's the part where you escort Eva and you are being followed by enemies. I wait for them and tranq them and after a few seconds the game freezes and i have to exit the game, but each time i try it again it freezes?????

A: This is a bug or major error. For whatever reason it only triggers when you try to tranq them not sure why. Your best bet is to instead use flash grenades at the beginning bring Eva up the hill on the right path and then cross the bridge (throw another flash grenade if needed). Blow up the bridge with TNT if you have it other wise keep making it down hill and stopping enemies with stun grenades until you reach the goal with Eva. The 2nd area of the escape does not have this bug btw, you can tranq freely. [*Metal Gear Solid Delta: Snake Eater* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

The design of much gameplay exemplified in Figure 31 and in Example (86) clearly showcases a combination of repeated playthroughs performed by the players to achieve both all the possible game's endings in *No, I'm not a Human* and the possible resolutions for the freezing bug in *Metal Gear Solid Delta: Snake Eater*. Figure 31 displays the restless investigation on what the game can offer in terms of achievements and challenges, rewarding players for their passion and continuous efforts to “inspect” the game with the acquisition of the skills and prowess necessary to, in this case, achieving all the endings the game included. These accomplishments are usually fuelled by players' own desire to

better their performances to “perfect” their high score table, stimulating their wish for a comprehensive knowledge of the game so vast it can grant them all the tools necessary to eventually write a successful walkthrough for other fellow players (Ashton and Newman, 2011; Newman, 2016). Example (86) showcases instead how the “investigative” nature of walkthrough texts can even go beyond challenges and trophies to achieve or secrets to reveal, indicating, in between playing, also the less pleasant implications of uncovering code glitches or programming errors (Newman, 2008: 15). These malfunctions pose as only some of the many inconsistencies that still surrounds digital entertainment given that videogames are digital products that are still very often subjected to the occurring of technical failures (Newman, 2011: 120).

4.4.2 Walkthroughs as means for digital and textual game preservation

Videogames are digital products, the result of a series of data “imprinted” in a code that is then initiated through a game engine to produce audiovisual content suitable to be reproduced on a great variety of different platforms such as computers, gaming consoles, mobile phones etc. (Consalvo, 2007; Newman, 2012). Videogames’ digital nature, however, comes with a series of implications: the first is that videogames are made of *bits* – the most basic units of information in digital communication (Evens, 2015: 2) – immaterial content that can easily deteriorate, corrupt and then be lost forever since there is no physical medium to replace it (Newman, 2012; Nylund, 2015). And even physical media such as magnetic tapes and hard drives where videogames’ data are stored can be susceptible to corruption⁴⁹, decay or malfunctions as well as the data themselves (Lowood *et al.*, 2009: 141). The second implication is that videogames, due to their being digital products, require a certain specific equipment to be “run” by players in their homes: for example, to play a game on their computer, apart from having the digital copy of the game, players need to have a working internet connection to download the game content, a perfectly working computer to run it, a working screen to see the gameplay, a working set of speakers to hear its dialogues etc. (Newman, 2012: 5). The same goes for players who want to play on gaming consoles or mobile phones: they need to have all the equipment necessary to run and play their favourite videogames (Newman, 2012: 5). The third (and most relevant) implication is that the act of playing could require even more equipment and tools if players decided to play videogames that were released many years ago. The necessary equipment to play them could almost duplicate to ensure the effective reproducibility of older codes and data on newer consoles or platforms. And if the reproducibility of older data could not be guaranteed anymore due to physical incompatibilities between newer platforms and older reproduction media, the equipment necessary to reproduce videogames could even triplicate since a player must resort to

⁴⁹ Both digital data and physical media such as hard drives, magnetic tapes, floppy disks etc. can be especially susceptible to the process of media decay, better known as *bit rot*, “the gradual and natural decay of digital information and storage media over time, causing information to become unreadable” (Lowood *et al.*, 2009: 141).

other functional solutions to effectively play the game such as, for example, emulation⁵⁰ (Nylund, 2015: 55). While technology advances, shelves inside videogames' shops are quickly emptying to leave space to videogames thought for brand new platforms, condemning iconic games designed for older gaming consoles or computers such as *Super Mario*⁵¹, *Donkey Kong*, *Doom*⁵² etc. to an inescapable disappearance since technology development is going incontestably forward. Gaming industry is trying to stand the pace by designing increasingly advanced reproduction media and platforms but its innovations, as time goes by, will inevitably replace older technologies, risking to completely wipe out hundreds and hundreds of old videogames data worldwide (Lowood *et al.*, 2009; Newman, 2012).

Yet, videogames are not only composed of digital information that may be corrupted or lost. They are also complex media that, together with digital information, store even more complicated data that concern what players do while playing: their activities, their choices and their active involvement in the game's storyline (Nylund, 2015: 55). In addition, videogames store also data that can give evidence to the development and rise of the gaming industry, to the evolution of games' art and design and, above all, to information that can even testify games' impact on contemporary culture and entertainment through their documenting of players' choices and behaviours that could be lost forever too because of the process of bit rot (Lowood *et al.*, 2009: 150). This last assertion leads to the idea that preserving digital data pertaining to the gaming field in general is becoming of the outmost importance in a world where the technological progress risks to completely wipe out years and years of culture and data related to gaming. Videogames are proofs not only of the growth of the gaming industry and of its increasingly multifaceted art and design, but also of the increasing influence that gaming is having on modern culture and society and that needs to be preserved over time (Lowood *et al.*, 2009; Nylund, 2015).

The clear impact that videogames have on both technology and society is the reason why scholars have been actively researching for a way to properly preserve them. As of now, research has been focusing on preserving videogames' fundamental characteristic of *playability*⁵³, one of their key features (Consalvo *et al.*, 2013: 1) and since long been

⁵⁰ The term “*emulation*” refers to the process where a piece of hardware or software “allows a user to execute game software on a platform for which the software was not originally intended” (Conley *et al.*, 2003: 261). Emulation leaves data in their original form and, through the emulator, interprets data through the original software supposed to display them but on a newer platform (Guttenbrunner *et al.*, 2010: 77) This is the case, for example, of computers being able to function exactly like old gaming consoles such as Play Station 1 or Xbox 360 through the emulator.

⁵¹ *Super Mario* is one of the most famous videogames released by the Japanese videogames company Nintendo. It tells the story of Mario, a plumber who, together with his family and friends, explores magical worlds, practices sports and, in the meanwhile, tries to rescue Princess Peach from Bowser, the villain of the franchise. Mario's first appearance in the videogames' market happened in 1981 when he was featured in Nintendo's arcade game *Donkey Kong*.

⁵² *Doom*, released in 1993 from iSoftware, is one of the most famous first-person shooter games ever released on the videogame market.

⁵³ In this case, the term “*playability*” is intended following *Dictionary.com* definition of playability as “the quality or state of being playable” as quoted by James Paavilainen (2020: 56).

considered a crucial technique in the game studies researcher's methodological toolkit (see Aarseth, 2003). To preserve videogames' playability over time and following also the guidelines provided by the UNESCO for the preservation of digital heritage (see Webb, 2005), several other strategies have already been applied to videogames to try achieving their preservation apart from the already mentioned one of emulation.

According to Guttenbrunner *et al.*, (2010: 76), the most common preserving strategies employed as of now in the videogaming field are the *Museum Approach*, the *Backwards Compatibility* and the *Migration*. The Museum Approach focuses on the preservation of videogames through screenshots or non-digital video recordings, leveraging the documentation of gaming content to preserve immaterial data but failing, regrettably, to preserve the dynamic look and feel of videogames' interactive content (Guttenbrunner *et al.*, 2010: 76). Backwards Compatibility, instead, relies on the ability of newer gaming platforms to interpret older versions of data, allowing games from previous generations of systems to be played on subsequent ones. In some cases, mechanisms are implemented to improve the image quality of older games, thereby altering their original content. Unlike emulation, platforms can interpret older data either with or without additional hardware or software supplied by the manufacturer. Nevertheless, when a manufacturer leaves the market, games are no longer supported and, if they become defective, the data are ultimately lost (Guttenbrunner *et al.*, 2010: 76). As for Migration, as the name suggests, it consists of transferring digital data to a new format whenever a new technology is developed, converting older data into a different universal standard and reprogramming them for newer systems. Although this strategy can be effective, it appears not to be applied to all types of games, mainly being viable with relatively simple game structures, such as text adventures and games with a linear flow (Guttenbrunner *et al.*, 2010: 77).

All the strategies mentioned above have been suggested and applied to preserve videogames' digital data and content under the impression that, if a game and its "feel" could be successfully recreated throughout technical means, its preservation could be achieved without too many issues, definitely forgetting that videogames are constituted for the most part by the actions, choices and performances of a *player* without whom "there is no game" (Newman, 2024: 1). As a matter of fact, videogames offer reasonable evidence that a game can be played in more than one way (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Newman, 2024) and that no experience can be like that of another player. Thousands of strategies, choices, techniques or bugs could in fact differ between playthroughs, underlining the central significance of the role of the player and of the preservation of their performances too in addition to the preservation of games' content and data (Newman, 2024: 2). This is why preserving complex products like videogames presents even more difficulties than preserving digital data in general: not only their gaming technology needs to be preserved, but also their gameplay components (Nylund, 2015: 56). Videogames represent, first and foremost, a performance, an activity under the shape of a playthrough and precisely for this reason their preservation's methods should employ a sufficient approach that must consider, together with the preservation of game data,

technology and content, also means for the preservation of their performed activities and gameplay (Nylund, 2015: 56).

According to Nylund (2015: 56), one of the possible approach to preserve both gaming content and gameplay is to look into the many textual genres that are born from playing games such as commentaries, reviews or any “other secondary texts that help to structure a primary text (the game) and give meaning to it” (Nylund, 2015: 56), configuring forms of written paratext that could help shaping both games’ contexts and meaning. Taking into consideration Nylund’s suggestion and considering the many textual types concerning videogames available at present, walkthroughs pertain to the many textual genres born from playing performances. Walkthroughs can be definitely configured as a suitable textual genre for purposes of game preservation (Newman, 2011; 2012) through the exploitation of their paratext (Nylund, 2015: 59) that both “stores” the instructions needed to complete a game and that can definitely also *preserve* a wide amount of various other context information about gaming such as, for example, general information about the game itself (e.g., plot, creators, characters etc.). The corpus’ study confirms walkthroughs retaining of games’ context information as it can be seen both in Example (87) and in Figure 32.

- (87) Clair Obscur: Expedition 33 is an RPG developed by Sandfall Interactive a french developer with the goal of creating a high fidelity RPG that is often neglected by AAA studios and developers. [...] The game takes place in a dark fantasy Belle Epoque setting. The protagonist embark on an expedition to defeat a god like being who paints a number on a monolith and wipes out all people of that age as a result. Many past expeditions have failed and the number has continued to count down. The next number is 33. [*Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* walkthrough, GameFAQs]



Figure 32: Example of the preservation of context information about game’s characters biographies in *Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy*’s walkthrough on GameFAQs’ website.

From a general overview of the corpus, the texts analysed retain (and, implicitly, preserve) also information about the countless ways in which players have decided to play their favourite videogames, validating the idea that walkthroughs can preserve digital content (games' data) through meticulous and detailed texts about how to play the game (games' content) by describing the author's choices and performances while playing (players' actions), perfectly adhering to Newman's (2024: 2) idea regarding a meaningful preservation of digital videogames, as shown in Example (88).

- (88) After the incredibly pretentious intro sequence, go through the body scanners to your right. Once through, look on top of the X-Ray machine for a collectible, Prohibited Items Reminder. [...] There is nothing interesting through the door on the left so head upstairs. At the top, go through the door on the left. Examine the green folder on the desk and Jesse will have a few words to say. Turn around and look on top of the filing cabinet for Bureau Expenditures. [...] Leave this office and turn left. [*Control – Ultimate Edition* walkthrough, GameFAQs]

Likewise, apart from retaining information suitable to preserve both gaming content and players' performances, corpus' walkthroughs give evidence even to the preservation of the particular language with which walkthroughs are written and that is a product of both the time of their writing and of each walkthrough's author own personal writing style, indirectly preserving, if present, also all the colourful or poetic shades that could reflect the sensibility and the personal points of view of the author (Nylund, 2015: 60), as shown in Examples (89) and (90).

- (89) Are you a fan of "Mr. X"? Yes? Well, you'll probably like this guy then. He's basically an enhanced Slasher enemy who will re-generate limbs after he's lost enough to "die". You're best best is to chop his limbs off, hit him with stasis, and run... [*Dead Space* (remastered) walkthrough, Neoseeker]
- (90) Far from being an orderly - albeit dystopic and oppressive - manifestation of the Timekeeper's ideals, Dominion is... well, frankly a chaotic dump quickly falling into rubble. [*Borderlands 4* walkthrough, Neoseeker]

Examples (87), (88) and Figure 32 show the restless dedication players-writers devote to analyse videogames "to the bones" in their walkthroughs, including in their texts not only various degree of context information about the concerned game, but also information about the many ways in which the gameplay can be faced and performed. In this sense, walkthrough texts can indeed serve as a real form of textual preservation of both the digital data contained and imprinted in games' codes and of the performances enacted by players that will last even if the games themselves are lost (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Nylund, 2015). The same applies for the language employed in walkthroughs: as Examples (89) and (90) demonstrate, walkthroughs retain the personal writing styles of their authors, preserving both their personal ways of speaking and expressions, slangs or idioms that could derive from authors' cultural heritage, upbringing or personality's traits (Nylund, 2015: 60).

The lingering engagement observed throughout the corpus in relation to ensuring the availability of walkthroughs even for less recent videogames (e.g., for the ones released in 2020) gives also evidence to another preserving potential these texts can guarantee. They can assure a continued circulation (and, implicitly, preservation) of videogames even beyond their “best before” (Ashton and Newman, 2011; Newman, 2008), safeguarding the existence of data related to older videogames. Older games’ testimonies can in fact still be found online mainly thanks to the presence of their walkthroughs (Ashton and Newman, 2010; Newman, 2012; 2024; Nylund, 2015) still stored in the many *repository archives* dedicated to gaming like the NVA or the GWTC etc. (see Newman, 2009; Pinchbeck *et al.*, 2009; Burghardt and Tiepmar, 2021) that helped preserving traces of their digital data in spite of the time passed since their release.

Undoubtedly, expectations on the Walkthrough genre towards gaming preservation are high and ever more demanding, pointing towards the soaring goal of retaining, preserving and safeguarding, through walkthroughs, an overall impression of the way in which games develop meanings, representing a mean for a general transmission of some sort of “*gaming culture*” throughout the years (Nylund, 2015: 60). But if walkthroughs will really achieve the milestone of promoting and spreading a positive and constructive gaming culture in modern society is still all up to debate.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation aimed to investigate the videogaming walkthrough genre to identify its formal characteristic, particularly its general structure, specialised language and its addressed audience, with the ultimate goal of understanding its main scope. To answer the research's questions accordingly, a corpus of online walkthroughs was arranged especially for the purpose of this research, including 100 online walkthroughs coming from three different online sources (Neoseeker, GameFAQs and IGN), concerning videogames published in a time frame of 5 years (from 2020 to 2025), with a 100% game's completion level and pertaining to the following game genres: action, adventure, indie, RPG, shooter.

The thesis' findings have shown that the main general aim of the walkthrough genre is giving detailed and precise instructions on how the player needs to play a game to reach its final completion quickly and successfully, preventing the player from becoming stuck at a certain point/level into the game. The results suggest also that walkthroughs constitute an example of an extremely technical type of instructional text addressed to people who share an interest and are already literate in the practice of gaming, who want to achieve a full completion of a particular game or, above all, who want help going through a particular level/map in it, unable to progress further.

Nonetheless, the study also highlighted three additional goals of the walkthrough genre: firstly, delving deeper into the world of videogames, almost "dissecting" them piece by piece to satisfy players' need to discover games' deepest secrets and to understand the full potential of what they could offer if pushed to their extreme limits. Secondly, being a mean for players-writers to gain a real status (the one of experts) inside the gaming community, obtaining recognition for their works through websites' high ratings and fellow players' approval. Thirdly (and less commonly), expressing the need for players' unusual desire to uncover malfunctions or code errors inside videogames to discover unknown sequences, bugs, glitches, rewards or abilities within them that were hidden behind developers' programming.

Accordingly, to ensure the correct performing of the walkthrough genre's main aim of guiding the player towards the successful completion of a game, evidence has been found that texts effectively present, first of all, an overall very minimalist appearance. This minimalist appearance includes, primarily, a minimal online homepage's setup to contextualise each walkthrough that contains the game's title, poster, interactive index and a brief introduction on the walkthrough. Secondly, walkthroughs present also various following other tabs (accessible through the webpage's index) that constitute the heart of the texts and within which an ordered-structured list of written instructions needed by players to complete the game is provided. A careful examination of both walkthroughs' homepages and tabs has also confirmed the existence of a specific internal configuration within the documents under analysis. Walkthrough texts are generally organised in a conventionalised structure subdivided into several different functional units labelled according to each communicative function to express to the reader, furtherly split into a

set of obligatory functional units, necessary to ensure the successful completion of the chosen game, and a set of optional functional units, not explicitly necessary and at the complete discretion of the writer. Particularly, between the obligatory functional units, the index section has resulted as the most important functional unit within the texts. It contains all the instructions necessary to proceed into the game under the shape of an interactive hyperlink mass-redirection to every part of the walkthrough and it ensures a smooth and quick browsing of the entire document in case players need to locate only specific parts of the playthrough.

The thesis' results have also emphasised the usage of a specific technical language within walkthroughs, confirming their pertaining to the field of specialised texts. Games' instructions mainly contain action verbs that indicate which specific actions/interactions the in-game character needs to perform, not necessarily clarifying their exact time sequence and very often using specific gaming jargon or technical use of general language items or specialised collocations with references to games' specific information, supplying players with only the extremely necessary information they need to complete the game. Prompts are mainly provided in the imperative mood, especially in the imperative singular, with a direct reference to the audience through the main usage of the personal pronoun "you" to help the player identify with the in-game character. The usage of the personal pronoun "you" facilitates an identification slippage towards the in-game character that involves even more the player into the game's plotline and that strengthens a sense of "camaraderie" between writers and readers by employing a highly casual and informal style of writing. Clauses also maintain a regulative and cautionary tone that precisely indicates how the gameplay should be managed by players, suggesting (but implicitly ordering) readers to follow the given instructions. Most of the times, this regulative tone of walkthroughs' writing limits the player's agency by shaping their gameplay as a simple replication of the performed actions of the author in favour of the best way to complete the game.

However, regardless of the predominant instructional nature of the walkthrough genre where the game's reality is narrated through the author's own "lens" that irrevocably influences the game's reality throughout their own perceptions, the analysis has indicated that walkthroughs can be configured even so as texts where the instructional nature coexists with a more narrative one that instead describes and reports a game's reality that never changes, simply stating game-related facts about the game's characters, plot, biographies or mechanics and that can be configured as "an aid to create a storyline to a game" (Consalvo, 2003: 331).

The thesis results have also highlighted the evident limitations of the walkthrough genre. Walkthrough texts are regrettably not suited for all the titles available on the market, not being apparently applicable to videogames that don't have a specific and precise ending goal and to the ones with an especially complex and articulated gaming experience. In addition, walkthroughs' general availability online depends strictly on a game's popularity itself, possibly taking the genre's roots in the mere audience's likes or dislikes rather than on the effective quality and refinement of the game's experience. But

the most fundamental limit the genre presents is the one concerning the perceived fairness or unfairness usage of its content: walkthroughs texts are very often viewed as “unfair knowledge” by a great part of the gaming community that still considers making use of them as blatant cheating. Players perceive walkthroughs’ content as an intentional act of “breaking the rules” of the game they are playing by seeking an external guidance that can help them proceeding through the game instead of making it on their own. Despite walkthrough genre’s aim, as demonstrated by this dissertation, is not the one of offering a mean for cheating in videogames (as cheat codes, instead, truly offer by “breaking” games’ code), the idea of cheating still relies on a player’s own personal interpretation of what could be fair or unfair within the gameplay and on how much the player could stretch their own boundaries in order to win or finish the game.

The study has shown, in any case, that walkthrough texts can definitely go further than only helping fellow players all around the world completing their favourite videogames. Walkthrough texts actually offer invaluable insights into the pleasures of investigating videogames and, most crucially, on the investigations of their replaying, testifying players’ countless and restless attempts at achieving the outmost completion of their favourite videogames. In addition, walkthrough texts also encourage increasingly diverse and creative gameplay styles to the point of representing the most comprehensive investigations of digital gameplay presently existing both in positive terms of achievements unlocked and in terms of weaknesses such as malfunctions or bugs owed to videogames’ digital nature.

Taken as a complex digital corpus of widespread online texts born from the collective act of playing, walkthroughs texts can also aim at ensuring a powerful, innovative and durable source of real written preservation of videogames that neither the games by themselves nor any formal academy’s scholarships or professional games criticism could hope to achieve, including information about games’ data, their content and also footage of the performed actions and decisions made by players over time. Moreover, they can even be considered as a written form of textual preservation of the language employed by players to write their walkthroughs, retaining intel about players’ slangs, idioms or ways of speaking that may derive from their own culture, upbringing or personality’s traits. But walkthroughs retain even more priceless information: they preserve traces of the development of the gaming industry in general, of the evolution of videogames’ art and design and even of their influence on both culture and society throughout the years.

It will be fundamental to keep researching walkthrough texts as a whole corpus of information for further studies to understand to which point their true potential can arrive, trying to end the general misconception for which they still remain broadly unstudied texts: their being mislabelled as mere mediocre “paraphernalia of cheating or glitch hunting” (Newman, 2016: 416) for inexperienced or cheater players.

Statement concerning the usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools

I, the undersigned DE FAVERI FRANCESCA, matriculation number 857587, enrolled at Ca' Foscari's Master's Degree course in LANGUAGE SCIENCES, author of the dissertation A GENRE ANALYSIS OF WALKTHROUGHS, supervisor COCCETTA FRANCESCA, aware of the penalties provided for by Article 76 of the Consolidated Act, D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n. 445, and of the forfeiture of benefits provided for by Article 75 of the same Consolidated Act in the event of false or mendacious declarations, under one's own personal responsibility pursuant to Articles 46 and 47 of the D.P.R. 28/12/2000 n. 445,

STATES

of NOT having used generative AI technologies to support various aspects of my research and thesis writing.

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APPENDIX A

The Walkthroughs' Corpus

WALKTHROUGHS' CORPUS SUMMARY TABLE								
	GAME'S NAME	GENRE	PLATFORMS			RELEASE DATE	URL	SOURCE
			PC	PS	XBOX			
2020	AMNESIA: REBIRTH	Indie, Adventure, Action	X	X	X	20/10/2020	https://www.ign.com/wikis/amnesia-rebirth/Walkthrough	IGN
	ASSASSIN'S CREED: VALHALLA	Adventure, Action, RPG	X	X	X	10/11/2020	https://www.neoseeker.com/assassins-creed-valhalla/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	CONTROL: ULTIMATE EDITION	Shooter, Adventure, Action	X	X	X	27/08/2020	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps4/241157-control/faqs/78194/introduction	GAMEFAQ
	CRYSIS (REMASTERED)	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X	X	X	18/09/2020	https://www.ign.com/wikis/crysis/Walkthrough	IGN
	CYBERPUNK 2077	shooter, action, RPG	X	X	X	10/12/2020	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/pc/672376-cyberpunk-2077/faqs/79161/introduction	GAMEFAQ
	DEMON'S SOULS (REMASTERED)	Action, RPG		X		12/11/2020	https://www.neoseeker.com/demons-souls-2020/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	GHOST OF TSUSHIMA	Adventure, Action, RPG	X	X		17/07/2020	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps4/226261-ghost-of-tsushima/faqs/78506	GAMEFAQ
	GHOSTRUNNER	Action	X	X	X	27/10/2020	https://www.ign.com/wikis/ghostrunner/Walkthrough	IGN
	HALF LIFE: ALYX	Shooter, Adventure, Action	X			23/03/2020	https://www.ign.com/wikis/half-life-alyx/walkthrough	IGN
	MAFIA: DEFINITIVE EDITION	Adventure, Action	X	X	X	25/09/2020	https://www.ign.com/wikis/mafia/Walkthrough	IGN
	MASS EFFECT ANDROMEDA: DELUXE EDITION	Action, RPG	X			11/06/2020	https://www.neoseeker.com/mass-effect-andromeda/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	PERSONA 5 ROYAL	Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	31/03/2020	https://www.ign.com/wikis/persona-5/walkthrough	IGN

	RESIDENT EVIL 3 (REMAKE)	Adventure, Action	X	X	X	02/04/2020	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps4/278662-resident-evil-3/faqs/78887/walkthrough-assisted-standard	GAMEFAQ
	MARVEL'S SPIDER MAN: MILES MORALES	Action	X	X		12/11/2020	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/292799-marvels-spider-man-miles-morales/faqs/78748	GAMEFAQ
	THE LAST OF US: PART II	Shooter, Adventure, Action		X		19/06/2020	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps4/202466-the-last-of-us-part-ii/faqs/78416	GAMEFAQ
	WASTELAND 3	Strategy, RPG	X	X	X	28/08/2020	https://www.neoseeker.com/wasteland-3/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	WATCH DOGS: LEGION	Shooter, Adventure, Action	X	X	X	29/10/2020	https://www.ign.com/wikis/watch-dogs-legion/Walkthrough	IGN
2021	CHERNOBYLITE	Adventure, Action, RPG, Simulation, Indie	X	X	X	28/07/2021	https://www.neoseeker.com/chernobylite/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	DOKI DOKI LITERATURE CLUB PLUS	Adventure, Casual, Indie	X	X	X	30/06/2021	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/switch/323217-doki-doki-literature-club-plus/faqs/79367/story-guide	GAMEFAQ
	FAR CRY 6	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X	X	X	07/10/2021	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/pc/295452-far-cry-6/faqs/79816	GAMEFAQ
	FINAL FANTASY XIV	Massively Multiplayer, RPG	X	X		25/05/2021	https://www.neoseeker.com/final-fantasy-xiv-a-realm-reborn/faqs/1345791-final-fantasy-xiv.html	NEOSEEKER
	HALO INFINITE	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X		X	08/12/2021	https://www.neoseeker.com/halo-infinite/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	HITMAN 3	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X	X	X	20/01/2021	https://www.ign.com/wikis/hitman-3/Walkthrough#Hitman_3_Walkthrough	IGN
	LIFE IS STRANGE: TRUE COLOURS	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	10/09/2021	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/xbox-series-x/315994-life-is-strange-true-colors/faqs/80009/introduction	GAMEFAQ
	LITTLE NIGHTMARES II	Action, Adventure, Platformer	X	X	X	10/02/2021	https://www.neoseeker.com/little-nightmares-ii/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER

	MARVEL'S GUARDIAN OF THE GALAXY	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X	X	X	26/10/2021	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/323452-marvels-guardians-of-the-galaxy/faqs/79678/intro-read-before-using	GAMEFAQ
	MASS EFFECT: LEGENDARY EDITION	Action, Shooter, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	30/04/2021	https://www.ign.com/wikis/mass-effect-legendary-edition/Full_Walkthrough_Roadmap	IGN
	METRO EXODUS: ENHANCED EDITION	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X			06/05/2021	https://www.ign.com/wikis/metro-exodus/Walkthrough	IGN
	NIER REPLICANT (EU EDITION)	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	23/04/2021	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps4/286768-nier-replicant-ver122474487139/faqs/79235/introduction	GAMEFAQ
	NIOH 2: COMPLETE EDITION	Action, RPG	X	X		05/02/2021	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps4/305939-nioh-2-the-complete-edition/faqs/78230	GAMEFAQ
	OUTRIDERS	Shooter, Adventure, Action, RPG	X	X	X	01/04/2021	https://www.ign.com/wikis/outriders/Walkthrough	IGN
	POPPY PLAYTIME	Indie, Adventure, Action	X			12/10/2021	https://www.ign.com/wikis/poppy-playtime	IGN
	RESIDENT EVIL: VILLAGE	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	07/05/2021	https://www.neoseeker.com/resident-evil-village/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	RETURNAL	Shooter, Action	X	X		30/04/2021	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/292804-returnal/faqs/79310	GAMEFAQ
2022	A PLAGUE TALE: REQUIEM	Adventure, Action	X	X	X	17/10/2022	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/323487-a-plague-tale-requiem/faqs/82248/introduction	GAMEFAQ
	DYING LIGHT 2: STAY HUMAN	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	04/02/2022	https://www.neoseeker.com/dying-light-2/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	ELDEN RING	Action, RPG	X	X	X	25/02/2022	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/323053-elden-ring/faqs/79824	GAMEFAQ
	GOD OF WAR: RAGNAROK	Action	X	X		09/11/2022	https://www.ign.com/wikis/god-of-war-ragnarok/Walkthrough	IGN
	GOTHAM KNIGHTS	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	21/10/2022	https://www.neoseeker.com/gotham-knights/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	18/02/2022	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/292822-horizon-forbidden-west/faqs/80118/introduction	GAMEFAQ

	LIFE IS STRANGE: BEFORE THE STORM (REMASTERED)	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	01/02/2022	https://www.ign.com/wikis/life-is-strange-before-the-storm/walkthrough	IGN
	MADISON	Action, Adventure, Simulation, Indie	X	X	X	08/07/2022	https://www.neoseeker.com/madison/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	SAINTS ROW (2022)	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	23/08/2022	https://www.ign.com/wikis/saints-row-2022/Walkthrough	IGN
	SCORN	Action, Adventure, Indie	X		X	14/10/2022	https://www.ign.com/wikis/scorn/Walkthrough	IGN
	SNIPER ELITE 5	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X	X	X	25/05/2022	https://www.neoseeker.com/sniper-elite-5/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	STRAY	Adventure, Action, Puzzle, Indie, Platformer	X	X	X	19/07/2022	https://www.neoseeker.com/stray/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	THE CALLISTO PROTOCOL	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	01/12/2022	https://www.ign.com/wikis/the-callisto-protocol/Walkthrough	IGN
	THE LAST OF US: PART I (REMAKE)	Action, Shooter, Adventure	X	X		02/09/2022	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/370167-the-last-of-us-part-i/faqs/67221	GAMEFAQ
	THE CHANT	Adventure, Action	X	X	X	02/11/2022	https://www.neoseeker.com/the-chant-2022/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	THYMESIA	Action	X	X	X	18/08/2022	https://www.neoseeker.com/thymesia/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	UNCHARTED: LEGACY OF THIEVES COLLECTION	Action, Adventure	X	X		28/01/2022	https://www.ign.com/wikis/uncharted-legacy-of-thieves-collection/Uncharted:_Legacy_of_Thieves_Walkthrough	IGN
2023	ALAN WAKE II	Action	X	X	X	27/10/2023	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/344537-alan-wake-ii/faqs/81253	GAMEFAQ
	AMNESIA: THE BUNKER	Action, Adventure, Indie	X	X	X	06/06/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/amnesia-the-bunker/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	ASSASSIN'S CREED: MIRAGE	Adventure	X	X	X	05/10/2023	https://www.ign.com/wikis/assassins-creed-mirage/Walkthrough	IGN
	ATOMIC HEART	Shooter, Adventure, Action	X	X	X	21/02/2023	https://www.ign.com/wikis/atomic-heart/Walkthrough	IGN
	BALDUR'S GATE III	Adventure, RPG, Strategy	X	X	X	03/08/2023	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/397566-baldurs-gate-3/faqs/81142/introduction	GAMEFAQ

	BLASPHEMOUS II	Action, Adventure, Indie, Platformer	X	X	X	23/08/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/blasphemous-2/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	DEAD SPACE (REMASTERED)	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	27/01/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/dead-space-2023/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	FINAL FANTASY XVI	Action, RPG	X	X	X	22/06/2023	https://www.ign.com/wikis/final-fantasy-16/Walkthrough	IGN
	FORSPOKEN	Action, Adventure	X	X		24/01/2023	https://www.ign.com/wikis/forspoken/Walkthrough	IGN
	HOGWARTS LEGACY	Action, RPG	X	X	X	10/02/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/hogwarts-legacy/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	LIES OF P	Action, RPG	X	X	X	19/09/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/lies-of-p/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	LORDS OF THE FALLEN	Action, RPG	X	X	X	13/10/2023	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/240331-lords-of-the-fallen/faqs/80926	GAMEFAQ
	MARVEL'S SPIDER MAN 2	Action, Adventure	X	X		20/10/2023	https://www.ign.com/wikis/marvels-spider-man-2/Walkthrough	IGN
	RESIDENT EVIL 4 (REMAKE)	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	24/03/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/resident-evil-4-2023/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	SCARS ABOVE	Adventure, Action	X	X	X	27/02/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/scars-above/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	STAR WARS JEDI: SURVIVOR	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	27/04/2023	https://www.neoseeker.com/star-wars-jedi-survivor/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	STARFIELD	Adventure, RPG	X		X	06/09/2023	https://www.ign.com/wikis/starfield/Walkthrough	IGN
2024	DRAGON AGE: THE VEILGUARD	Action, Adventure, RPG, Strategy	X	X	X	31/10/2024	https://www.neoseeker.com/dragon-age-the-veilguard/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	DRAGON'S DOGMA 2	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	21/03/2024	https://www.neoseeker.com/dragons-dogma-2/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	HELLDIVERS 2	Action	X	X	X	08/02/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/helldivers-2	IGN
	HORIZON ZERO DAWN (REMASTERED)	Action, Shooter, Adventure, RPG	X	X		31/10/2024	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/pc/487428-horizon-zero-dawn-remastered/faqs/78524	GAMEFAQ
	PATH OF EXILE 2	Action, Adventure, RPG, Massively Multiplayer	X			06/12/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/path-of-exile-2/Walkthrough	IGN

	PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE LOST CROWN	Action, Adventure, Platformer	X	X	X	18/01/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/prince-of-persia-the-lost-crown/Walkthrough	IGN
	RISE OF THE RONIN	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X		22/03/2024	https://www.neoseeker.com/rise-of-the-ronin/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	SENUA'S SAGA: HELLBLADE II	Action	X		X	21/05/2024	https://www.neoseeker.com/senuas-saga-hellblade-ii/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	SILENT HILL 2 (REMAKE)	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	08/10/2024	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/383909-silent-hill-2/faqs/81517/foreword	GAMEFAQ
	SONS OF THE FOREST	Action, Adventure, Simulation, Indie	X			22/02/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/sons-of-the-forest/Walkthrough	IGN
	STALKER 2: HEART OF CHORNOBYL	Action, Shooter, Adventure, RPG	X		X	20/11/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/stalker-2/Walkthrough	IGN
	STAR WARS OUTLAWS	Adventure, Action	X	X	X	30/08/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/star-wars-outlaws/Walkthrough	IGN
	THE CASTING OF FRANK STONE	Adventure	X	X	X	03/09/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/the-casting-of-frank-stone/Walkthrough	IGN
	THE OUTLAST TRIALS	Action, Adventure, Indie	X	X	X	05/03/2024	https://www.ign.com/wikis/the-outlast-trials	IGN
	TOMB RAIDER: I-II-III (REMASTERED)	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	13/02/2024	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/426415-tomb-raider-i-iii-remastered-starring-lara-croft/faqs/49379	GAMEFAQ
	UNTIL DAWN (REMAKE)	Action, Adventure	X	X		04/10/2024	https://www.neoseeker.com/until-dawn-remake-2024/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
2025	ASSASSIN'S CREED: SHADOWS	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	20/03/2025	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/380042-assassins-creed-shadows/faqs/81869/act-i	GAMEFAQ
	BORDERLANDS 4	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	12/09/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/borderlands-4/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	CLAIR OBSCUR: EXPEDITION 33	RPG	X	X	X	24/03/2025	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/469495-clair-obscur-expedition-33/faqs/81883/introduction	GAMEFAQ
	CRONOS: THE NEW DAWN	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	05/09/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/cronos-the-new-dawn/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
	DEATH STRANDING 2: ON THE BEACH	Action, Adventure	X	X		26/06/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/death-stranding-2-on-the-beach/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER

GHOST OF YOTEI	Action, RPG		X		02/10/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/ghost-of-yotei/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
HELL IS US	Adventure, Action	X	X	X	04/09/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/hell-is-us/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE II	Action, Adventure, RPG	X	X	X	03/02/2025	www.ign.com/wikis/kingdom-come-deliverance-2/Walkthrough	IGN
LOST RECORDS: BLOOM & RAGE	Indie, Adventure	X	X	X	18/02/2025	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/486817-lost-records-bloom-and-rage/faqs/82273/intro	GAMEFAQ
METAL GEAR SOLID DELTA: SNAKE EATER	Action	X	X	X	28/08/2025	https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps5/407572-metal-gear-solid-delta-snake-eater/faqs/82115	GAMEFAQ
MONSTER HUNTER WILDS	Adventure, Action, RPG	X	X	X	27/02/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/monster-hunter-wilds/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
NO, I'M NOT A HUMAN	Simulation, Indie	X			15/09/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/no-im-not-a-human/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
SILENT HILL F	Action, Adventure	X	X	X	24/09/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/silent-hill-f/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
THE OUTER WORLDS 2	Action, Shooter, Adventure, RPG	X		X	29/10/2025	https://www.ign.com/wikis/the-outer-worlds-2/Walkthrough	IGN
SOUTH OF MIDNIGHT	Adventure, Action	X		X	08/04/2025	https://www.neoseeker.com/south-of-midnight/walkthrough	NEOSEEKER
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES 2	Action, RPG	X	X	X	21/10/2025	https://www.ign.com/wikis/vampire-the-masquerade-bloodlines-2/Walkthrough	IGN

APPENDIX B

Walkthroughs' corpus functional units' frequency

	FUNCTIONAL UNITS														
GAME'S NAME	AUTHOR	AUTHOR'S NOTICES	COMMENT SECTION	CONTACT SECTION	CREDITS	COPYRIGHT	DATE OF UPDATE	DONATION SECTION	FEEDBACK SECTION	GAME'S STORY/PLOT SECTION	INDEX	INTRODUCTION	LOGO	PLATFORM	TITLE
AMNESIA: REBIRTH	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
ASSASSIN'S CREED: VALHALLA	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
CONTROL: ULTIMATE EDITION	X					X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
CRYSIS (REMASTERED)	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
CYBERPUNK 2077	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
DEMON'S SOULS (REMASTERED)	X	X	X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
GHOST OF TSUSHIMA	X			X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
GHOSTRUNNER	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
HALF LIFE: ALYX	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
MAFIA: DEFINITIVE EDITION	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
MASS EFFECT ANDROMEDA: DELUXE EDITION	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
PERSONA 5 ROYAL	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
RESIDENT EVIL 3 (REMAKE)	X	X		X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X

MARVEL'S SPIDER MAN: MILES MORALES	X				X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
THE LAST OF US: PART II	X				X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
WASTELAND 3	X	X					X				X	X	X	X	X
WATCH DOGS: LEGION	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
CHERNOBYLITE	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
DOKI DOKI LITERATURE CLUB PLUS	X						X				X	X	X	X	X
FAR CRY 6	X						X			X	X	X	X	X	X
FINAL FANTASY XIV	X	X	X			X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
HALO INFINITE	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
HITMAN 3	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
LIFE IS STRANGE: TRUE COLOURS	X						X				X	X	X	X	X
LITTLE NIGHTMARES II	X		X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
MARVEL'S GUARDIAN OF THE GALAXY	X	X		X			X				X	X	X	X	X
MASS EFFECT: LEGENDARY EDITION	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
METRO EXODUS: ENHANCED EDITION	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
NIER REPLICANT (EU EDITION)	X						X				X	X	X	X	X
NIOH 2: COMPLETE EDITION	X	X			X		X				X	X	X	X	X

OUTRIDERS	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
POPPY PLAYTIME	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
RESIDENT EVIL: VILLAGE	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
RETURNAL	X			X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
A PLAGUE TALE: REQUIEM	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
DYING LIGHT 2: STAY HUMAN	X		X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
ELDEN RING	X			X		X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
GOD OF WAR: RAGNAROK	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
GOTHAM KNIGHTS	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
THE CHANT	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
HORIZON FORBIDDEN WEST	X					X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
LIFE IS STRANGE: BEFORE THE STORM (REMASTERED)	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
MADISON	X		X				X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
SAINTS ROW (2022)	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
SCORN	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
SNIPER ELITE 5	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
STRAY	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
THE CALLISTO PROTOCOL	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
THE LAST OF US: PART I (REMAKE)	X					X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
THYMESIA	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X

UNCHARTED: LEGACY OF THIEVES COLLECTION	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
ALAN WAKE II	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
AMNESIA: THE BUNKER	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
ASSASSIN'S CREED: MIRAGE	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
ATOMIC HEART	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
BALDUR'S GATE III	X				X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
BLASPHEMOUS II	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
DEAD SPACE (REMASTERED)	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
FINAL FANTASY XVI	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
FORSPOKEN	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
HOGWARTS LEGACY	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
LIES OF P	X		X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
LORDS OF THE FALLEN	X			X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
MARVEL'S SPIDER MAN 2	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
RESIDENT EVIL 4 (REMAKE)	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
SCARS ABOVE	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
STAR WARS JEDI: SURVIVOR	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
STARFIELD	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
DRAGON AGE: THE VEILGUARD	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
DRAGON'S DOGMA 2	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X

HELLDIVERS 2	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
HORIZON ZERO DAWN (REMASTERED)	X			X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
PATH OF EXILE 2	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE LOST CROWN	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
RISE OF THE RONIN	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
SENUA'S SAGA: HELLBLADE II	X		X				X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
SILENT HILL 2 (REMAKE)	X			X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
SONS OF THE FOREST	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
STALKER 2: HEART OF CHORNOBYL	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
STAR WARS OUTLAWS	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
THE CASTING OF FRANK STONE	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
THE OUTLAST TRIALS	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
TOMB RAIDER: I-II-III (REMASTERED)	X			X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
UNTIL DAWN (REMAKE)	X	X	X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
ASSASSIN'S CREED: SHADOWS	X				X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
BORDERLANDS 4	X		X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
CLAIR OBSCUR: EXPEDITION 33	X				X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
CRONOS: THE NEW DAWN	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X

DEATH STRANDING 2: ON THE BEACH	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
GHOST OF YOTEI	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
HELL IS US	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE II	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
LOST RECORDS: BLOOM & RAGE	X						X			X	X	X	X	X	X
METAL GEAR SOLID DELTA: SNAKE EATER	X				X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X
MONSTER HUNTER WILDS	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
NO, I'M NOT A HUMAN	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
SILENT HILL F	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
THE OUTER WORLDS 2	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
SOUTH OF MIDNIGHT	X		X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES 2	X						X		X		X	X	X	X	X
TOTAL	100	22	37	11	13	17	100	39	43	17	100	100	100	100	100