

»It's Dangerous to go alone! Take this [method].«

Methods for analysing digital games, illustrated on the ›The Legend of Zelda‹ series

[[german version](#)]

›The Legend of Zelda‹ is such a well-established subject of study within Game Culture Studies that, as early as 2020, *Zelda Studies* was proposed as a sub-field of Digital Game Culture Studies (Cirilla 2020, 2). The term refers to two aspects that also characterise the volume planned here: on the one hand, games from the ›The Legend of Zelda‹ series are to be the subject of study; on the other hand, the question of how and by what methods digital games and gaming cultures are researched is itself at the center of attention.

As game studies and game culture studies are, by their very nature, often inter-, trans- and even anti-disciplinary in orientation, this volume aims to move beyond the classic three-way division of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods approaches typically found in methodological texts. Similarly, no absolute distinction will be made between in-game, reception and development analysis. The volume aims to encourage researchers from various disciplines to apply their subject-specific methods to ›The Legend of Zelda‹, even—or perhaps especially—if these methods do not fit neatly into the traditional categories.

The ›The Legend of Zelda‹ series is particularly well-suited to such an introductory methodology volume because it...

- ... has helped shape a significant period in the history of digital games, from 1986 to the present day. This opens up opportunities to examine, for example, aspects of past or current game design, or the impact of different hardware on the production and reception of games (cf. e.g. the reception of ›Skyward Sword‹).
- ... is one of the most influential and successful series (Brandes/Gödl 2025), meaning that much of what relates to the critique, evaluation and reception of digital games can be observed paradigmatically through it.
- ... covers a variety of game mechanics and formats. 2D or top-down adventures are just as much a constant feature of the series as linear titles (from ›Ocarina of Time‹ to ›Twilight Princess HD‹) or, more recently, sandbox 3D titles (›Breath of the Wild‹/›Tears of the Kingdom‹)

This diversity is also evident in previous research on ›The Legend of Zelda‹. For example, alongside anthologies on philosophy (Cuddy 2008) and psychology (Bean 2019), the series has also inspired works on game mechanics (Smilie 2020; Bosboom et al. 2023), music (Bradford 2020; Rone 2020) and ludo-narration (Matuszkiewicz 2019). Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the rather rudimentary plot, the series appears open to a variety of approaches, such as postcolonial perspectives (Hemmann 2021; Hutchinson 2021) or contributions on gender (Nicolas 2023; Pugh 2018; Stang 2019). At the same time, the popularity of certain titles is also reflected in the research literature. ›Breath of the Wild‹, ›Majora's Mask‹ and ›Ocarina of Time‹ are much more frequently the subject of academic work, whereas older or lesser-known titles such as ›Oracle of Seasons‹ or ›A Link Between Worlds‹ are, at best, mentioned in the context of other titles (for example, in the volumes by Cirilla/Rone 2020; Cuddy 2008).

The aim of the planned volume is to bring together, in the form of a methodological introduction, the variety of approaches that can be applied to ›The Legend of Zelda‹ as a case study of digital games and gaming cultures. The planned volume is therefore intended to illustrate methods from various disciplines as applied to the ›The Legend of Zelda‹ series and – where this has not yet been done – to demonstrate the suitability of

the respective methods for the study of digital games. The individual contributions are required to first provide an introductory explanation of the chosen method before subsequently applying it.

Both data collection and analysis methods are welcome. The volume is open not only to a wide range of methods, but also to disciplinary cultures and discourses. The following breakdown is therefore intended merely to illustrate and clarify that the volume does not follow any fixed or loose dichotomy or trichotomy, but rather allows for and encourages different focuses and categorisations. Some methods can theoretically be classified into several categories; what is important for submissions is that it is clear which focus is placed on the method and how it is understood. The following methods, for example, but not exclusively, are conceivable for the volume:

- In-game analysis
 - Spatial analysis
 - Ludonarrative analysis
 - Music analysis
- Player analysis
 - Forum analysis
 - Participant observation
- Developer analysis
 - Interviews
- Qualitative methods
 - Discourse analysis
 - Interpretation (e.g. hermeneutics)
 - Sequence-analytical image hermeneutics
- Quantitative methods
 - Standardised surveys
- Mixed methods
 - Grounded theory
 - Qualitative content analysis
- Disciplinary methods
 - Didactic approaches
 - Methods of the digital humanities
 - Big data analysis
 - Text mining
 - Network analysis
 - Methods relating to human-computer interaction
 - Eye-tracking analysis

If you are interested, please send an abstract of no more than 280 words by 20 July 2026 to kontakt@phillipbrandes.de, carolin.puckhaber@uni-muenster.de, and anja.goedl@student.uibk.ac.at. The final papers should not exceed 40,000 characters (including spaces). Please use a standard file format (.doc, .docx, .odt). Abstract and paper can be written in English or German.

We expect to provide feedback by 3 August 2026.

The deadline for submitting the full papers is 15 February 2027.

Publication of the papers is planned for late 2027/early 2028.

Bibliography:

- Bean, A. M. (2019). *The psychology of Zelda: Linking Our World to the Legend of Zelda Series*. BenBella Books.
- Bosboom, J., Brunner, J., Coulombe, M., Demaine, E. D., Hendrickson, D. H., Lynch, J., & Najt, E. (2022). *The Legend of Zelda: The Complexity of Mechanics (Version 1)*. arXiv. <https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2203.17167>
- Bradford, W. J. (2020). Exploring the Narrative Implications of Emerging Topics in The Legend of Zelda. *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, 1(4), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsmg.2020.1.4.1>
- Brandes, P., & Gödl, A. (2025). Raum als Merkmal der Kanonizität digitaler Spiele: Musteranalysen zu The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time und The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. In Y. Lyapova & T. Unterhuber (Eds), *Game Studies* (1st edn, Vol. 10, pp. 261–280). transcript. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839400593-015>
- Cirilla, A. G. (2020). Introduction: Zelda, Mythopoeia, and the Importance of Developing an ‘Inside’ Perspective on Videogames. In A. G. Cirilla & V. E. Rone (Eds), *Mythopoeic Narrative in The Legend of Zelda* (pp. 1–13). Routledge.
- Cirilla, A. G., & Rone, V. E. (Eds). (2020). *Mythopoeic Narrative in The Legend of Zelda*. Routledge.
- Cuddy, L. (Ed.). (2009). *The Legend of Zelda and Philosophy. I link therefore I am*. Open Court.
- Hemann, K. (2021). I Coveted That Wind: Ganondorf, Buddhism, and Hyrule’s Apocalyptic Cycle. *Games and Culture*, 16(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019865847>
- Hutchinson, R. (2021). Observant Play: Colonial Ideology in The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. *Game Studies. the International Journal of Computer Game Research*, 21(3). http://gamestudies.org/2104/articles/dom_ford
- Matuszkiewicz, K. (2019). *Zwischen Interaktion und Narration: Die Heldenreise in digitalen Spielen als Handlungs- und Erzählstruktur*. vwh Verlag Werner Hülsbusch, Fachverlag für Medientechnik und -wirtschaft.
- Nicolas, J. M. A. (2025). *The Legend of the One Role You Rarely Play A Gender Analysis of The Legend of Zelda*. SSRN. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5734924>
- Pugh, T. (2018). The Queer Narrativity of the Hero’s Journey in Nintendo’s The Legend of Zelda Video Games. *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 48(2), 225–251. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.2018.0009>
- Rone, V. E. (2020). Twilight and Faërie: The Music of Twilight Princess as Tolkienesque Nostalgia. In A. G. Cirilla & V. E. Rone (Eds), *Mythopoeic Narrative in The Legend of Zelda* (pp. 81–100). Routledge.
- Smilie, E. (2020). Curiositas and Critical Glitches: Speedrunning The Legend of Zelda. In A. G. Cirilla & V. E. Rone (Eds), *Mythopoeic Narrative in The Legend of Zelda* (pp. 48–62). Routledge.
- Stang, S. M. (2019). (Re-)balancing the triforce: Gender representation and androgynous masculinity in the Legend of Zelda series. *Human Technology*, 15(3), 367–389.