



He's a
Wolf!

Social Deception Games in the Composition Classroom

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WHAT are social deception games?

Social deception games (also called social deduction) are games played in groups in which players are either trying to uncover information, conceal information, or both. In the classic game of Werewolf (sometimes known as Mafia), an informed minority—the wolves—are trying to slowly pick off the uninformed majority—innocent townsfolk—before they are discovered. Games proceed in two phases; in the first, the day, all players talk and try to decide who the most likely wolves are. At the end of the phase, they choose one to eliminate. During the night phase, wolves eliminate a member of the town. The game continues until the wolves are discovered or until the wolves equal remaining townsfolk.

WHY play them in the composition class?

Social deception games rely on three things: argument, audience awareness, and evidence. In order to discover the wolves, town players must make strong arguments and observe how other players react. Those reactions become evidence they must use to make new arguments. Not all arguments will convince all players, so participants must adapt and adjust. Social deception games offer a low-stakes, fun opportunity for students to both practice rhetorical appeals and to observe how others build their own arguments. Logos, pathos, ethos, kairos—a game of Werewolf has it all!

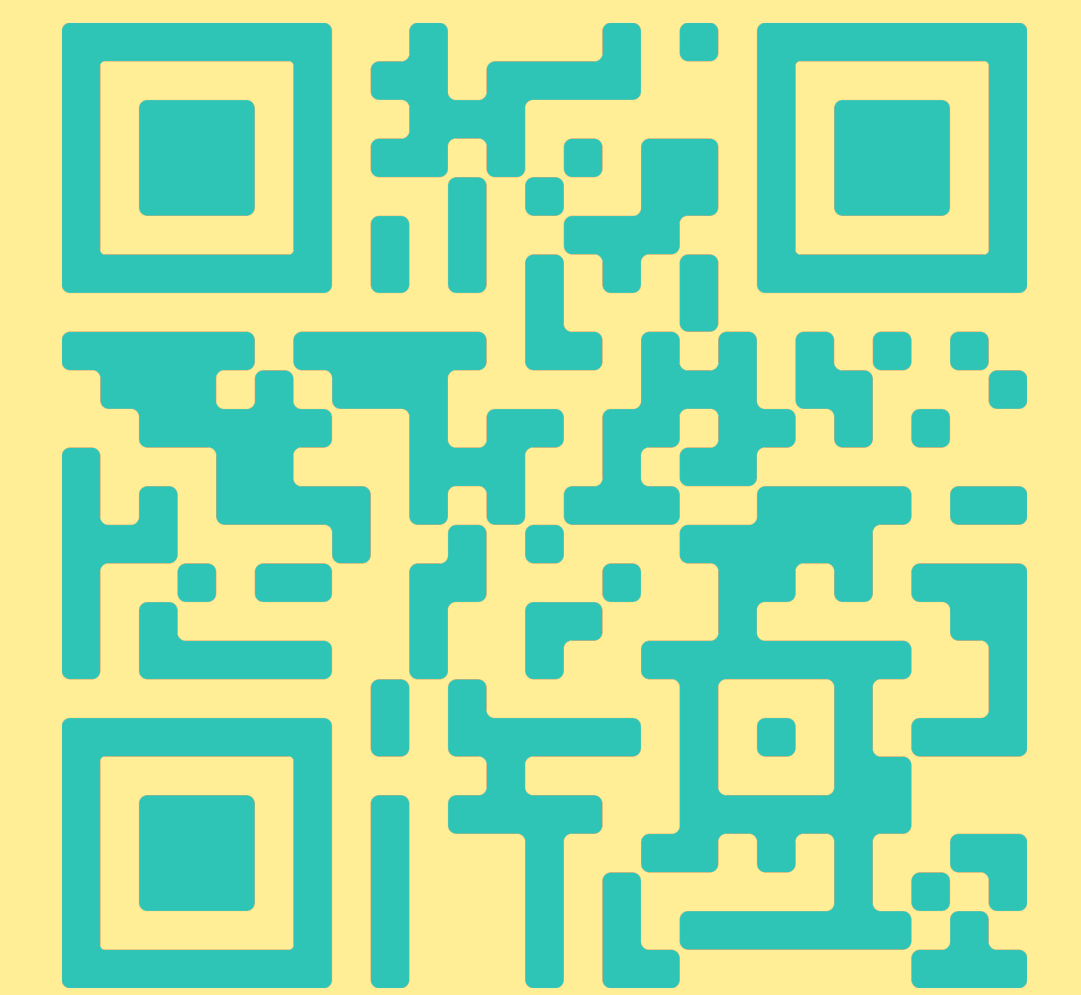
HOW should I run a game?

Running a standard game of Werewolf is actually very easy (scan the QR code for access to guides), but for the classroom, there are a few things you should do a little differently:

- Divide students into groups of players and observers. Ask observers to take notes about the types of appeals and evidence used. You can switch groups or save the observers for students who may not want to play.
- Be careful with language. Social deception games can get heated, and sometimes employ troubling terms. Talk with students before playing.

Social deception games offer a fun, low-stakes opportunity for students to practice creating and recognizing various rhetorical appeals, and they can help reinforce lessons on audience awareness.

Want to try Werewolf in *your* class? Scan the QR code for printable role cards and tips for running games.



Tilton (2019) used social deception games to foster small-group communication skills in a case study. Many of the skills studied are similar to those fostered with this activity in the composition class.

Tilton, drawing on Malloy (2015), promotes the use of interactive games that build on classroom skills, but aren't just games for the sake of games. Wiseman & Lewis (2019) reported that players were likely to utilize game discussions in strategic ways to build arguments likely to win over fellow players.

Wolf image, top: J. Vriens; werewolf silhouette: Viergacht

Tilton, S. (2019). Winning through deception: A pedagogical case study on using social deception games to teach small group communication theory. *SAGE Open*. 10.1177/2158244019834370.

Wisman, S. and Kevin Lewis. (2019). What data do players rely on in social deduction games? *CHI Play '19 Extended Abstracts*. October 2019, pp 781-787. 10.1145/3341215.3356272

