GAT 110 Paper Guidelines

In previous semesters, many of the same issues occurred in many of the papers I've graded, so I've summarized some of the top issues that I've seen.

General

1. **Check your word counts in each section.**
2. The key to an analysis paper is the magic word question, "WHY?" For every sentence in your paper, look to see if there is a reason someone could ask this question and decide whether you need to preemptively answer it for them.
3. You do not need any text describing the historical background of the game genre or a particular game in the Game/Experience Analysis. The assignment is to analyze the mechanics of the games, so no preamble or historical context is needed—just jump into the analysis of each game.
4. If you are trying to describe something and you are having a hard time articulating it, maybe you shouldn't—perhaps an illustrative example would be more informative? Think about what game rules do and consider using some of those techniques.
5. Don't use diagrams/images for "color" – only use them if that is a more efficient way of elucidating your point. Try to describe in text if possible.

Game Analysis

1. Best strategy is to write one paragraph of analysis per game, and then one paragraph comparing and contrasting all three games.
2. Do not bury the goal of the game mid-way down the paragraph, or omit it entirely.
3. Games are inherently based on math – as a designer analyzing a game, you should be digging beyond the rules to the math that makes the game work. How many turns will the game take? What's the average move length in a game with movement and, thereby, the average length of the game? What percentage of time do certain results happen? Are the odds of randomizers linearly distributed or on a bell curve? Why are there randomizers rather than a fixed amount?
4. Be sure to analyze each of the components of the game and the significance of the component.
    - **Randomizer Component**: If there are randomizer elements, describe the nature of each of these components.
        - How many are used (e.g. 2d6 dice, 4d2 throwing sticks, 52 cards, etc.) in each mechanism?
        - What is the purpose (e.g. movement) of each mechanism?
        - What are the possible results (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) and the probabilities of each use of a given randomizer element? If there are special meanings attached to certain results (like the Sorry! Card), then describe these in detail and give the probability of this occurring on a given use of the randomizer element.
        - What is the average expected result of the randomizer element?

    - Does the randomizer element reset during play (e.g. if using a draw deck, is it reshuffled during play)? If so, how often does it reset in an average game.
- **Board Topology: If there is a board topology (and there often is), describe the nature of this component.**
    - What are the dimensions and shape of the board (e.g. a 3x10 grid that is played as a linear, Z-shaped track that encompasses every square on the board)? How many spaces are there on the board (e.g. length of a track) and what is the expected number of turns to navigate the board? Simply stating "8x8 square board" is not sufficient as that could describe a single track around the outer edge of the board or indicate that all 64 spaces are playable in some way. Note that the board topology may be virtual (e.g., a tableau in a solitaire game or a player's play area for a rummy-like game).
    - Are there any notable elements of the board (e.g. certain spaces have a game effect or special significance like the Slides in Sorry!)? If so, enumerate each one of them, where it is located on the board, and what the exact effects are. What are the implications to the design of that board element being in that location with exactly that effect? A good way to approach this is to engage in "reverse design." In reverse design, we assume that many design decisions were made to lead to the extant design, so we try to ascertain what those decisions were and what problem(s) they were trying to solve.
- **Player Tokens**: If there are player tokens, describe the nature of these components.
    - How many types of tokens does each player have? Is each token type dedicated to a player or are they sometimes/always shared? Under what conditions or with what mechanic can each be used and/or activated? (Hint: both player pawns and power ups are examples of player tokens.)
    - What is the design purpose of each token type?
    - How many tokens of each type? If there are win conditions associated with a token type, how many of that type of token are required to fulfill the win condition?
    - Does a player have a choice of tokens (e.g. Mario characters in Mario Kart) before the game starts and, if so, what are the implications of that choice?

5. State how many players a game supports (e.g., 2-4 players).
6. Identify both the core mechanic and the supporting mechanics. Most games have more than one, even if it is a dexterity mechanic for an action computer game. Blocking and player token exchange are examples of mechanics that are enacted in some way—describe what they are and how they are used!
7. **Avoid unsubstantiated judgmental adjectives (either positive or negative) unless you explicitly state how you drew that conclusion.** Be sure to clearly articulate WHO is affected by the judgment without disparaging whether that person is right or wrong; e.g., "Players who find the wide-range of possible results from the randomizer element exciting due to the ability to come from behind unexpectedly will enjoy this game, but players who prefer a more predictable outcome from a given board position may find this game frustrating."

Dynamics Analysis

1. It is not sufficient to describe individual user's experience (even your own). Analyze deeper to WHY that experience is occurring and for what kinds of players (e.g., don't say it is frustrating, say what can be seen as frustrating by what kind of players).
2. What is the pacing of the game play? Describe the interest curve engagement of the players.
3. Why, why, why? What causes a player to experience a given emotion during the game? What mechanic specifically are they reacting to (positively or negatively) and what is going on there that triggered that reaction?

Modification

1. Clearly identify what you are trying to accomplish and why. A good place to start is "this aspect of this game has these suboptimal results, so I want to try to fix/improve/remove that element of the game" and then let your modification flow from that.
2. Write with the same clarity and coherence as you would find in a set of game rules.

Testing Report

1. Be careful about drawing conclusions from limited playtests.
2. Average playtesting time should be around 2-4 hours, depending on the game. You need to get above this to get extra points for lots of playtesting on the rubric. There is no hard and fast rule, so I use my judgment based on how long it takes me to play the game for how many sessions are "average".
3. I generally look for an average of at least 60% new people per game session (divide number of unique players by number of games and by the average number of seats in the game).

Further Modification

1. This section isn't about justifying whether your modification was good or bad, but actually describing A) further changes necessary to make your Modification meet the goal you identified, or B) new (and hopefully better) ways of meeting your Modification goal if you totally met your goal with your first Modification.