

Is That Your Final Answer? Making Training Effective with Games

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Would you like to transform your ponderous or boring training course into a learning event that participants look forward to attending? "

Is That Your Final Answer? shows you how to make training effective with games that involve your learners, add value to the training course, and help them remember and use the training content.

INTRODUCTION

When used appropriately, games can make a complex, boring, or tedious topic interesting and fun. However, inappropriate use of games can trivialize your training event, or cause self-paced or online participants to skip over important learning points.

The purpose of this paper is to:

- ❖ Describe when games add value
- ❖ Describe how to select the right game for your content
- ❖ Describe the pros and cons of using games
- ❖ Provide resources for classroom and online games

WHEN DO GAMES ADD VALUE?

Classroom time is limited. One of your goals as an instructional designer, developer, or instructor is to achieve the greatest possible impact on the learners during available teaching/learning time. If the learning event is online, this goal is transmuted to entice each learner to complete all of the learning modules without simply paging through.

Games are of greatest value when they:

- ❖ **Are fun and interesting.** Select games that are like popular television game shows or reflect favorite pastimes of the region or culture.
- ❖ **Relate to specific learning points.** The game should be directly related to the content, and should support learning objectives. An abstract connection will leave the online learner wondering why time was wasted, and the classroom learner demanding that the instructor explain why the time was wasted. Select a game

that makes the connection between game and content apparent, and which will allow learners to make the connections themselves.

- ❖ **Have rules and a goal.** Games need to be structured to allow learners to focus on the content or strategy of the game. An ineffective game is one that attracts attention to itself—learners spend the entire allotted time asking for clarification about rules and how the game is played. An effective game should be a transparent tool the learners use to learn, rather than trip over.
- ❖ **Are introduced with a frame of reference.** For example, *this game will help you review the key points of internetworking components, or this game parallels the process of team-building.*
- ❖ **Make learning easier** by disguising repetitive or mundane instructional techniques. For example, a game patterned after the television program *Jeopardy*, where an answer is given and the learner must provide the question, is a good way to reinforce facts and assess level of knowledge on a variety of topics. Timed games, where the participants, either individually or in teams, have to be the first to accomplish a goal (put together a puzzle, brainstorm the most solutions) can reinforce a process, provide practice following a protocol, or illustrate how typical errors can delay or derail an outcome.
- ❖ **Are debriefed.** The time allotted for the game should include time to talk about what they learned, what they would do differently next time, and how the game relates to the content, process, tasks, or whatever it was designed to demonstrate, reinforce, or teach.

Games that are not related to a learning point can be used to make a transition from one unrelated content topic to another, provide a vehicle for introductions, or promote interactivity among class members. If games that are not related to learning objectives last for more than a few minutes, they are diverting expensive and limited learning time from the course goal.

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT GAMES FOR YOUR CONTENT

There are several questions you need to answer before adding a game to your training content:

- ❖ What learning point(s) can the game teach, demonstrate, or reinforce?
- ❖ Will the time you invest in the game be proportionate to the value of the learning points that the game teaches, demonstrates, or reinforces?
- ❖ Will the time and money that must be spent developing or customizing the game be worth the learning outcome you expect from the game?
- ❖ What assumptions about the learner does the game make? Are those assumptions reasonable? For example, does everyone understand the goal of and rules for playing *Jeopardy*?
- ❖ Is the game appropriate in the region or culture in which it will be presented?

PROS AND CONS OF USING GAMES

PROS	CONS
Fun way to learn	Fun can overshadow the purpose. Be sure to introduce the purpose and debrief the game.
Competitive	Can backfire if competition between incompatible groups is escalated, losing the learning point. Mix types of group members, for example, by shoe color, or no more than half with the same job title. Grouping might be important to retain in team-building games. Group learners to maximize learning points and desired outcomes of the game, and minimize distractions not related to learning points.

Time passes quickly	Structure the time in the design, monitor the design in the implementation.
Interactive	The instructor must be an objective observer. If the instructor participates in the process rather than facilitating it, for example, by taking sides or helping one group more than another, that action can alter the class perception of the instructor (as having become biased or unfair), which remains after the game.

SUMMARY

Games provide an enjoyable vehicle for learning and should be considered as an instructional method. If games are selected and used with a focus on the learning they can enhance, your training courses will be events that people talk about and want to attend.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Online resources for games are readily available and the applications in your virtual classroom are endless if you can insert snippets of code in Java, JavaScript, Perl, or CSS.

- ❖ Cut-N-Paste JavaScript Home (<http://www.infohiway.com/javascript/indexf.htm>) has several games that apply well as drill exercises, such as:
 - Crossword puzzle (<http://www.infohiway.com/javascript/cross/index.htm>)
 - Hangman (<http://www.infohiway.com/javascript/hngmn.htm>)
- ❖ You can find test scripts for matching, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, and true or false exercises. Try PerlArchive (<http://www.perlarchive.com/guide>), and select Tests and Quizzes on the pull-down menu.
- ❖ Find Hangman, Jumbled words, Matching/Flashcards/Concentration, Quizzes

and other games www.quia.com . Online learning portal, and private directories are supported. Click *Create Games* on the home page to begin (requires registration).

- ❖ The Discovery Channel organization offers this offers puzzles <http://www.puzzlemaker.com/>
- ❖ A demo version of *Cross Craze*, a *Scrabble*-like game is available from www.cnet.com—The registered version is only \$19.95. Also on CNet are *Word Search Factory 2.0* (freeware) and a demo version of *BingoMaker 2.3*.
- ❖ A PowerPoint version of *Who wants to be a Millionaire?*, produced by Jeffrey White, can be downloaded from his web site (<http://www.geocities.com/jteacher/tech/index.html>). You can contact Jeffrey at (jteacher@yahoo.com)
- ❖ A template for *Jeopardy*, close in appearance to the TV show's style, can be downloaded from the *Tech Writer's Guide* web site www.lepublishing.com . This version originated at the Educational Technology Training Center (ETTC) at Columbus State University in Georgia.
- ❖ For print books about games, search www.amazon.com. The keyword phrase *training games* returns 203 books with structured games on a variety of topics.

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