

Learning games

It is in the midst of play that we are most in possession of our full powers.

An unobstructed sense of play releases all sorts of positive endorphins in our bodies, exercises our wholeness, and gives us the sense of being fully alive. For many people the highest expression of life and of the creative intelligence within them is achieved in play. Learning games that create a playful atmosphere and release people's full and unbridled intelligence have a contribution to make.

Learning games, wisely used, can:

- take the inhibiting "seriousness" out of the air
- de-stress the learning environment
- get people totally involved
- improve the learning process

Accelerated Learning does not always require games, and games of themselves do not always accelerate learning, but games used with discretion can add variety, zest, and interest to some learning programs.

Caveat

Like all learning techniques, games are not ends in themselves but only means towards the ends of enhanced learning. Sometimes a game can be interesting, clever, fun, and very engaging, but produces no substantial learning or long-term value. In that case it's just a big waste of time and should be scrapped.

The simple rule is this...

If games result in enhanced learning and improved job performance, use them. If they don't, don't.

Games that add value

In order for a learning game to be effective and add real value to the learning process it should:

1. Be related directly to the workplace. The best games are ones that provide knowledge, reinforce attitudes, and initiate action essential for success on the job.
2. Teach people how to think, access information, react, understand, grow, and create real-world value for themselves and their organization on a continuing basis.
3. Be as enjoyable and engaging as possible without striking people as being silly or superficial. (Games that appear shallow and childish can turn people off.)
4. Allow for collaboration among learners. (Any competition in a game should be between teams and not individuals.)

5. Be challenging, but not to the point of frustration and disconnect.
6. Permit ample time for reflection, feedback, dialog, and integration.

And remember this: don't overdo it! Too much of any one thing (games included) can destroy learning effectiveness.

What the right game can do

The right game for the right audience at the right time can make learning fun and interesting, can provide a helpful review that strengthens the learning, and can even act as a kind of a test and measure of learning.

When to use games

Games can be used throughout a facilitation event in any of the four phases of learning. For example...

Preparation	<p>Team-based or group-based games can be used at the start of a facilitation event to measure existing knowledge, arouse curiosity, and build interest. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • team-based quiz games • scavenger hunts • problem-solving games
Presentation	<p>Team-based learning games can be used as encounter devices where teams can access the learning materials in the process of answering questions. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quiz show games • question baseball • 20 questions
Practice	<p>Games can be used to practice the new knowledge or skill and reinforce the initial learning. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quiz show games • board games • card games • unjumble the components • Pictionary • Concentration • Jeopardy • Family Feud
Performance	<p>Partnered, team-based or individual games can be used to test knowledge or to apply a newly learned skill. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • question/answer games • problem-solving games • information-accessing games • model-building games

Some suggested games

There are many books of learning games on the market. Check the bibliography for a list of some of them. Meanwhile, here are a few ideas for games to start you thinking.

Matching games

Construct games that test people's ability to match terms with definitions, features with benefits, conditions with responses, questions with answers, etc. This can take many forms and can be individual, partnered, or team-based. You can use a table-top, a wall, a magnetic whiteboard or the floor to display the matches. Game points could be based on speed, accuracy, or both.

Stick the label on the component

Give partners or small teams labels containing the names of components of a system. Have them stick the labels on the various components of a system they are studying. Game points could be based on speed, accuracy, or both.

"Name that..." Games

Construct an appropriate preview or review game for the subject you're teaching such as: "Name That Symbol," "Name That Error Message," "Name That Malfunction," "Name That Product," "Name That Communication Technique," or whatever.

Dice games

Prepare a deck of question cards. Partners or teams take turns picking cards. If a partner or team can answer a question correctly in the allotted amount time they get to roll the dice, receiving points equal to the role.

Race games

Similar to Dice Games above with each participant's or team's play piece advancing on a model of a racetrack according to the roll of the dice.

Spinner games

Create a spinner board with numbers, colours, or category names around the perimeter. Prepare a deck of cards for each number; colour, or category on the spinner board. Partners or teams take turns spinning, answering a question from the deck corresponding to where the needle stopped. A correct answer in the allotted time wins a point.

Sports-related games

For an appropriate audience you can create a game organized around a sports theme: baseball, football, basketball, hockey, soccer, or whatever.

Board games

Create a board game on a tabletop, on a magnetic wallboard, or on the floor (bigger than life). You can model it after Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit, Parcheesi, or other popular game boards. Or create a design of your own. Put together a deck of question cards that test people's knowledge or event cards that reflect real-world situations that people will be faced with. The game can be individual-, partner-, or team-based, whatever is most appropriate.

TV game shows

Games based on TV game shows have been popular. Games such as Jeopardy, Family Feud, Concentration, Beat the Clock, and others, can easily be adapted to any content.

20 Questions

Give each partnership or team the same list of 20 questions. The first partnership or team to answer all the questions correctly wins.

Reconstruction

Construct an entire system, process, or procedure out of poster board components on a table top, mag board, or on the floor. Jumble the components up. Then have partners or teams put the components back into the correct configuration while explaining out loud what they're doing and why. The group that accomplishes this the fastest wins.

Have learners create games

As a learning exercise, ask a team of learners to create a game that will help people review and retain course content. Then play the game with the group.

Special note on quiz questions

Questions in a question/answer game need not always require quick short answers, but can pose problems to solve that may take more time. Other questions may be "open book" and exercise people's information-accessing skills, timing how long it takes them to find the answers in the documentation.

Meier, D. (2000) The accelerated learning handbook, McGraw Hill: Martinsburg, Pp 147-156

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