

Want to Use Games in *Your* Class?

Educational, or “serious,” games allow students to enjoy themselves and have fun, while at the same time learning specific content or skills. There are a wide variety of games that can meet different pedagogical purposes. However, effective games let students interact with real concepts and ideas in a simulated setting.

Discussion At-A-Glance	
Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Have clear pedagogical objectives for the lesson.● Choose a game that best matches those objectives.● Ensure you have all the materials needed for the game.
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Introduce the rules of the game with verbal and written directions.● Allow students enough time to review the directions and ask questions.● Remember your role is of a facilitator and critical observer.
After	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Allow students to celebrate their success!● Debrief the game with the students.● Ask follow-up questions about any learning that occurred.● If necessary, provide the data you collected from your observation.

Prep

Have clear pedagogical objectives for the lesson.

- What makes educational games different than traditional games is their pedagogical purpose.
- It is helpful that students have an established foundation in the content being used for the game.

Choose a game that best matches those objectives.

- A list of games collected from Harvard faculty can be found [here](#).

Ensure you have all the materials needed for the game.

- If possible, test out the game before the class to ensure the instructions are clear and you have the correct materials.

During

Introduce the rules of the game with verbal and written directions.

- It is useful to have the instructions printed out for each student for his/her own reference.

Allow students enough time to review the directions and ask questions.

- Do not rush this process unless the goal is to have students be unclear at the beginning.
- Be careful to not answer questions that preview the learning objectives. When a student asks a tricky question, go back to the written directions.

Remember your role is of a facilitator and critical observer.

- Resist the temptation to help students.

- Listen to what students say, but also pay attention to body language, groupings, and *who* is doing the talking and who is not.
- If helpful, take subtle notes to remind you of important talking points to raise during the debrief.

After

Allow students to celebrate their success!

- Give time for students to cheer and congratulate each other for completing the game.
 - This celebration may need to be postponed if doing so distracts others who have not finished.

Debrief the game with the students.

- Ask students specific questions about what happened. Probe them to think about strategies they used, how they felt, and what they learned.
- Write down any takeaways that support your learning goals or that seem particularly interesting. Try to use direct quotes as much as possible.
- Ask follow-up questions about any learning that occurred.
 - Oftentimes, students will use universal language when describing their experience (e.g., “We all got along well,” “None of us understood.” “Everyone was on board with our plan.”).
 - It can be useful for the class and helpful for those who are not comfortable speaking up to probe further to see if those statements are actually true.

If necessary, provide the data you collected from your observation.

- If students covered the main learning objectives of the game, then congratulate them on their understanding.
- If they have missed an important point, bring it up at the end, supported by your observations of them.
- Give students time to respond to your comments.

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