

Design a Game - Student Handout

Session is 1 hr 45 mins total

Summary:

Students will be formed into teams where the objective is to *invent* a new game. The number of potential games is a function of the number of participants, i.e. the number of teams.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will learn about game design.
- Several games will be designed and play-tested in the course of the session.

Course Outline:

Intro

- What are the properties of game play? They include chance, skill, rewards, turns, and a beginning and an end.
- What happens if a rule is broken? Is there a penalty?
- OK, you get the idea. To be a game minimally there has to be some rules, and some consequences, positive or negative.

Game Setup

- *Teams* - Audience will be split into teams of approximately 5 per team.
- *Sprints* - blocks of time where a team works together to create something. Today sprints are limited to 5 minutes each.
- *Themes* - a word or phrase that describes your *objective* during a series of sprints.

Constraints:

- Today we are going to limit ourselves to games that use existing models where the props are simple and portable; e.g. cards, dice, tokens.
- While complex games using models such as a first-person shooter or managing competing armies may be possible with the method we use today, they are beyond what we can do in the time allotted today.
- There are explanations of the techniques used on the last page.

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Now let's design a Game - in about an hour:

Remember, sprints are 5 minutes.

0. Theme: "Purpose" (one extended 10 minute sprint)

- Define a *purpose* for your game - e.g. "I'd like to invent a game that explores...".
- List candidates. Discuss each candidate.
- Use dot voting or simple head counting to select one that everyone can agree to continue working on.
- The end result of this sprint is to have your high-level "goal" for *why* you're designing a game.
- During this sprint, you can "vote with your feet". If you discover that another group is focusing on something more to your interests, then ask to join them.

1. Theme: "Model" (15-20 minutes)

- Use 3 or more time-boxed *brainstorming* sprints to explore existing models (e.g. monopoly, blackjack, roulette, etc.) for how they might be tweaked/extended to suit your stated purpose. Keep this to no more than 5 minutes for each sprint. Each sprint should result in one model and a list of tweaks to make the game reflect the stated goal of the game.
- The desired result for this release is to have 3+ models the team thinks might be tweaked to suit your purposes. This is only an initial take. A choice can be abandoned in a subsequent sprint and a different model selected instead.

2. Theme: "Play Test" (15-20 minutes)

- Use 3 or more time-boxed *play-test* sprints. Try out each game (minimum one game per sprint) and see how well the tweaks perform. Does the game have an element of chance? How about strategy, choice, or decision making? Is it fun? How does it explore the designated topic, i.e. meet the original goal?
- Does it just need some more tweaks, or is the model a total loss that the team agrees needs to change. If so, that's a lesson learned: go to the *next* model on the next play-test sprint.

3. Theme: "Final Choice" (5 minutes) "Decide at the last responsible moment."

- In just *one sprint*, choose which model + set of tweaks worked best. Use dot voting or head count but *make a decision*. If you think you have a tie, review the playability of both candidates and how well each explores the original goal. If the original goal *changed* during the course of designing the game, then choose whichever game best explores/reflects the *new* goal.

Q & A (and a mystery)

We'll use process to explore what we just did; what worked, what could have worked better, how we feel about what we ended up with.

At this stage, you'll also be asked to solve a mystery. The mystery is revealed in a hand-out at the conclusion of the class.

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Techniques:

Brainstorming in it's simplest form has three steps:

- collect ideas - no negatives or analysis during this step, only *capture* the ideas, in writing.
- analysis - explore, explain, and compare the ideas.
- filter - sift through the ideas to choose the *one* you will continue to work on.

Hat Guide Note: the form we use today will not use all the hats.

- Blue Hat - layout objectives for the session. Write the output on the whiteboard.
- White Hat - *facts*, objective input ONLY.
- Yellow Hat - Only the *good* stuff, all positive.
- Black Hat - What could have worked better, the *negatives*.
- Red Hat - *Emotions*, gut reactions, strong feelings.

Dot Voting each participant gets a small number of sticky dots with which to vote.

- Each participant places one or more dots next to the items (written on a board) they are voting for.
- You can "spend" your dots all on one item or spread them around, its up to you.
- The item with the most dots is what gets selected.