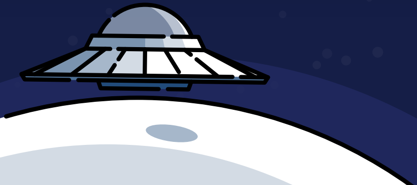
10 ELEARNING GAME TIPS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS

Here are 10 simple gamification strategies that instructional designers can incorporate into their learning content to engage and motivate learners.



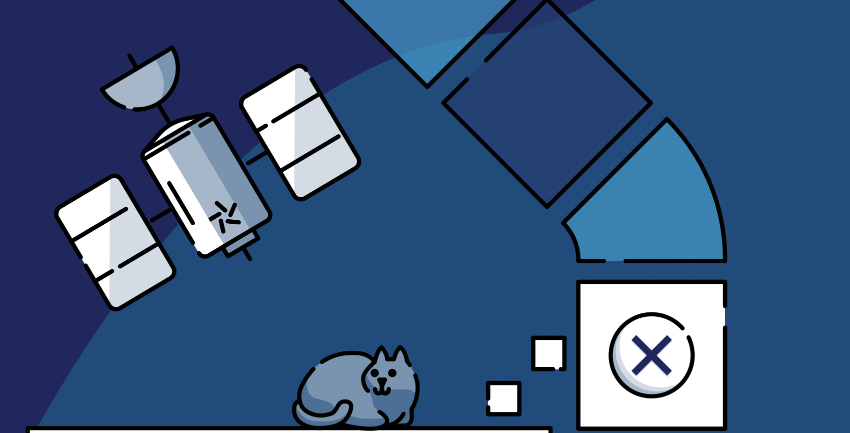
Please help me
find my lost cat,
Paw Paw 🐾
START

1. TELL A STORY

Stories are an essential part of game design. They provide relevant context for players to interact with your content. Start by defining the world, the characters, the conflict, the objectives, and what success looks like. Let players know that they are controlling the action of the story rather than merely reading through a storybook. Let them know it's acceptable to be wrong by simply correcting them as they go along, thereby promoting strong decision making. Stories draw players in and keep their attention and drive greater engagement.

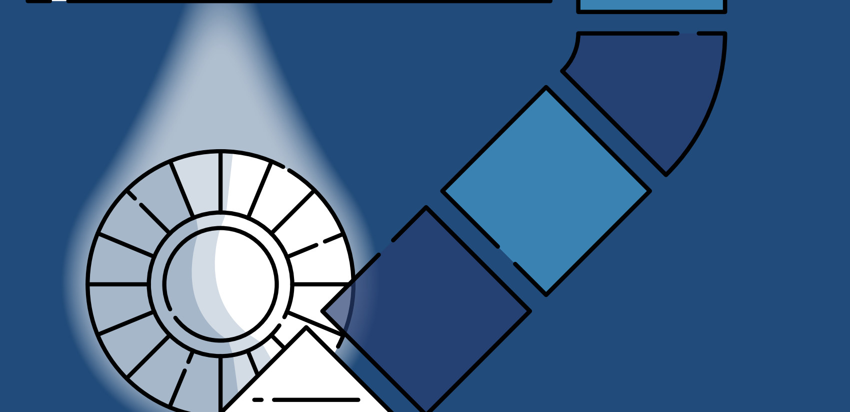
2. CREATE CONSEQUENCES

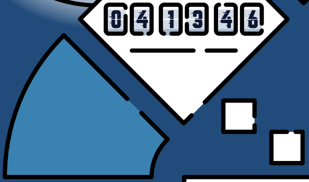
Games allow people to level up, get better equipment, more points, and so on as they do things well. Conversely, if a player fails to block a punch, their life force goes down. These immediate rewards and punishments create engagement and investment in the task. You can recreate this feeling in a learning exercise by giving points for what a learner does well, and taking points away for mistakes. Learners pay more attention when they know that they have to earn that point back to reach the 10 points they need to move on.



3. Let Them Fail

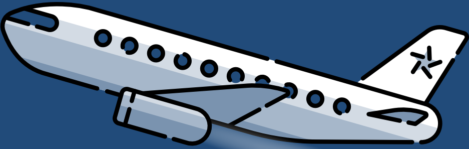
It's okay to let your learner fail. Ever played Angry Birds? It almost feels like the game is designed to be challenging enough that learners have to fail in order to learn enough to pass each level. Every bird, every try, is about learning how NOT to complete the puzzle until finally, you learn how it does work. Similarly, it's okay to design games or activities that allow for the learner to fail a few times in order to succeed. It increases their emotional investment and commitment.





4. ADD A COUNTDOWN

Use a timer to spice up a challenge. Then, the game or activity becomes not just about the learner doing the task, but learning to do it well enough that they can do it under pressure and in a certain amount of time. Sometimes, this will require doing it over and over again until they can do it in that challenging amount of time.



5. SHOW PROGRESS

Let the learner have a visual reward for their progress. This can be as simple as letting the learner add color to a picture for everything they do right or building a picture where pieces of it appear for every correct answer. You can also do more interesting things, like let them break something. Remember how fun it was to crash that bird into the wood structure and see it topple in Angry Birds? Knocking something down can be fun, and all of it can be controlled with variables and image states and fun sounds—simple!

6. PLAY TO YOUR AUDIENCE

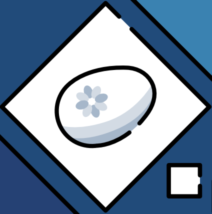
You can create interest in your course by finding ways to help the learner learn more about themselves, and then connecting it to the content. Start with a self-quiz or challenge that sets up a question for them to answer about themselves. The show Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader was interesting because it made you wonder—am I? Use this dynamic and design interactions that let the learner either learn something about what kind of person they are (make sure it's positive) or have a little fun with how much—or little—they know about a topic.

7. HAVE FUN

Some elements of games exist only for entertainment. They're not part of the challenge and they don't earn points, but they're fun. Sometimes, people like to do things just to see what happens, or to see a funny result. What if you made a course where every time you rolled over the narrator's face, his eyebrow would raise and a funny sound effect happened? Or hovering over a box made a kitten pop out? There's no point to it, but it makes learners enjoy the experience more, and they became more willing to engage. Try setting up an activity or challenge where the learner is rewarded with some entertainment for learning a key concept.

8. Create Some Mystery

One thing gamers love is to solve larger problems or wars through smaller puzzles or battles. Every time they accomplish something small, they get one more piece of the bigger picture. Try creating an interesting larger mystery that the learner can start to solve through small achievements. Reward them with small hints or pictures of a bigger puzzle they can solve at the end. This "mystery" can be meaningful or simply entertaining.



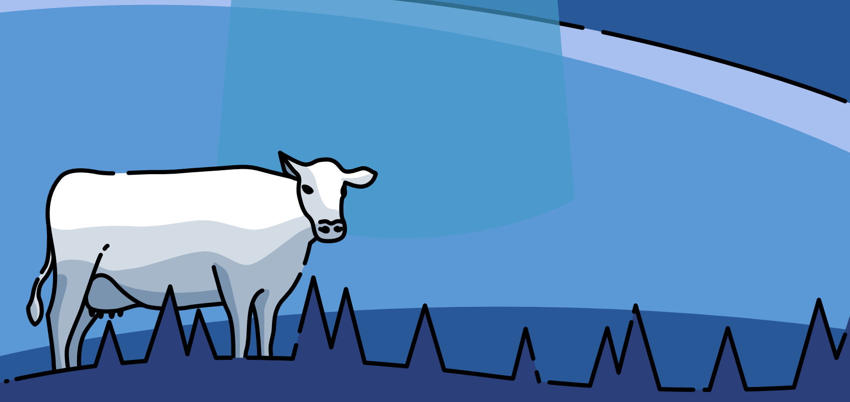
9. INCLUDE EASTER EGGS

Easter eggs are secret, hidden elements within a website or course that have to be found through exploration or achievement. Once activated, they launch special content, videos, codes, etc. Include Easter eggs tied to performance. Perhaps every time the learner scores a perfect 5/5 on a game or quiz, they earn an Easter egg. The key is to make those Easter eggs desirable. Maybe the Easter egg displays a redemption code for a free item from the office cafeteria. Or maybe each Easter egg contains the clue to a riddle that, once solved, is redeemable for company swag.

10. Set Up Boss Battles

The big achievement for any gamer is beating the big boss at the end of a level. You can use this concept at the end of a section or a course. For example, have the boss be a dragon. For every question missed, the learner gets hit with a fireball from the dragon. If they got hit with three fireballs, they fail the challenge and have to retake the entire course, which really motivates them to beat this boss.

We found Paw Paw!
Thanks for helping!
FINISH



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