



MOVING GAMIFICATION BEYOND POINTS, BADGES, AND LEADERBOARDS

Valary Oleinik
aka Valary with a Why
valarywithawhy.com

In the beginning, gamification was shiny and new and full of promise, but it quickly tarnished for some. It was sprinkled like pixie dust on poorly designed instructional materials. People thought that just adding points, badges, and leaderboards (PBLs) to their learning would be the answer to their issues of learning engagement and knowledge retention. But they missed the point (pun intended), as they focused too exclusively on the extrinsic reward aspects of gamification and implemented their PBLs in ways that were devoid of meaning to the learner and they limited their view of gamification to a very small subset of options available. In ***Moving Gamification Beyond Points, Badges, and Leaderboards***, we'll reboot gamification and take a look at a few of the countless options that can be used in conjunction with, or instead of, points, badges and leaderboards.

If you are tweeting, blogging, or otherwise social media sharing, the hashtag for this session is **#BeyondPBL** and I am **@valarywithawhy**. Feel free to also send questions or comments to that hashtag after the session or even if you can't join us for the session. Other ways to stay in touch with me are listed on the last page of this handout.





WHAT IS GAMIFICATION?

It is always helpful to start with a definition, but in this case that is a bit tricky. The word can mean somewhat different things to different people. Everyone who participates in this workshop could come up with a gamified course that looks completely different from every other gamified course and each solution could be wonderful. There is no one right answer for how to employ gamification. Of course, there are some pitfalls and mistakes that are commonly made, so we will work together to avoid those.

Now back to the original question. What is gamification? For our purposes, I'm going to stick with a classic definition from Sebastian Detering that states that gamification is

"the use of game design techniques, game thinking and game mechanics to enhance non-game contexts."

This means that we aren't going to actually make games, but rather we are going to examine a media that has focused for decades on capturing the hearts, minds, time, and attention of people. They have been stirring up the secret sauce to engaging experiences and there is certainly a lot that can be learned from them.

We are going to dig into the intersection of countless overlapping disciplines that have each contributed to and taken lessons from game design. Among these are instructional design, cognitive science, positive psychology, neuroscience, marketing, behavioral economics, creativity, persuasive design, user experience, games-based learning, aesthetics, and a host of others. When I tried to draw a Venn diagram showing the overlaps, I ended up with something that looked like a Spirograph® creation.

"You aren't going to make games. You're going to make games work for you." ~ Gabe Zichermann





The approach I am going to take you through may not be as fixated on a precise definition as some people might like, but the quote from Gabe Zichermann above embodies my general feeling. Now, some would disagree and say that adding games to a course makes it gamified, or that the whole course has to be structured as a game to qualify. Simulations or scenario-based learning may also fall into the gray area. So, if you were hoping this session would help you create a game, sadly, it will not. But what I will do is hopefully show you how we can use games (and yes, sometimes play them as part of our courses or in order to develop ideas for our courses) as a way of creating better learner experiences.

For me gamification isn't so much a product as it is a process, an attitude, a mindset, a learning philosophy. Gamification and instructional design have many common touchpoints and can align with one another well. Gamification can augment instructional design. What it cannot do is fix poor instructional design, so we will assume for purposes of this session that we have already done the work of ensuring that we are starting with good instructional designs.

Now let's head out on a gameful adventure together because all of our learners deserve the best possible learning experience.

STORY

Stories allow us to experience things outside of ourselves, but also give us a way of internalizing and contextualizing information. Our brains are wired for stories. Aside from trial and error, story is one of our oldest and wisest teachers. Stories engage us both cognitively and emotionally, which make them more memorable. Stories provide a framework for us to make sense of new information and a lens through which abstract concepts can be brought into more concrete focus. Stories capture our imagination and awaken our curiosity.

With games we encounter a unique type of story experience. Games, and by extension gamefully-constructed learning, are rare places where the learner will connect with the characters of a story to the extent that they feel responsible for the outcome since they are part of the construction and unfolding of the story. You may cry when you watch a movie but you are separated from the actions in





the film and the actions always play out in a specific, pre-determined manner. But if you are participating in a learning event presented as interactive fiction or a scenario-based activity and something bad happens to your character, you may have feelings of guilt because it happened as a result of your actions. You may also be more driven to try again, choosing different options to see if you can improve the outcome for your character and, by extension, yourself.

Whether you create an actual narrative or not, consider the idea that your course is a journey that your learner will be going through much like a person reading a book. How can you give them a way to contextualize your course? Perhaps it is by applying a theme that ties the activities together. Or maybe there is a character that acts as a guide to walk them through the course. It may be useful to have others tell stories, so the learner hears the information from different voices. It may be by having learners construct stories. Ultimately, the spirit of using story is to help the learner to navigate and feel connected to the topic they are studying.

FUN

Fun is a maligned and overlooked aspect of adult learning. It seems that it is the word fun that trips us since fun is often associated with things that are not serious or things that are trivial. Fun is like the crumpled stuffed animal that has to put away once we leave childhood. But is that really the way we should approach fun?

"He who laughs most, learns best." ~ John Cleese

While there hasn't been a lot of research about fun in adult education, what we do have to date shows that fun is important and useful in many ways. We often disguise it with bigger words like engagement or we hide it amidst the emotional qualities we talk about in the affective learning domain. When we approach fun this way, we find that we are more likely to capture learners' attention, learners are more likely to try things, and learners may have a better experience, which helps prepare them for learning the next thing.





Adult learners demand relevance in their studies but they also appreciate learning that aligns with their values, motivations and attitudes. There is no rule that says that everything has to be presented in a dry and boring fashion. I hereby give you a permission slip to add some fun to your courses. Of course, this doesn't mean that just making something fun makes it a better learning experience. We are always starting with good instructional design and augmenting it with the fun.

So how do we make our course more fun? One way is to see what game designers who have studied what makes games fun have to say about it. And as we will see, some common themes will start to emerge. Themes that you might also recognize as being important to learning.

"Fun is just another word for learning." ~ Raph Koster

For game designers fun is serious business; it is a key ingredient in the secret sauce that keeps players playing, so they study it. One of the most often cited experts is Nicole Lazzaro who discovered what she calls the 4 Keys to Fun. While I encourage you to spend some time looking at her model, one of the key findings is that fun is multifaceted.

People Fun might be one of the most obvious. Whether it is playing a team sport which combines cooperating to get your team working together and competing against your opponents, or just hanging out communicating with friends, people like having fun together. Of course, that does not mean that people can't have fun on their own. People can find great pleasure in solo activities. When we get into Serious Fun, that can take several forms including those where the player is very internally focused, perhaps intensely focused on repetition or collecting items or experiences. Next there is Easy Fun which tickles our curiosity. This type of fun is about expression, fantasy, and creativity. Then there is Hard Fun which may sound to some like an oxymoron, and it can sometimes cause the player to feel frustrated, but in reality, people like to work toward goals, overcome obstacles, and strategize solutions to problems.





*"We would rather be challenged than bored."
~ Jane McGonigal*

There are many other models from the game design world that include these and other types of fun. Ultimately, the important thing to remember is that we are looking at fun because it is a gateway to curiosity. It often creates wonderful moments of surprising us in some way, whether it is because we finally figured something out, or we created something, or we won.

When we are surprised, the brain literally stops for a millisecond before it switches to focusing on finding the niche where this new information fits into the giant catalog of schema already in the brain. Surprise snaps us to attention which is important to engagement since we can't engage someone without first grabbing their attention and interest. The brain loves novelty and newness, it is built for learning, but sometimes it needs a little jolt or nudge in the right direction.

DEVELOPING A GAME PLAN

Develop a **GAME Plan** before you gamify. By determining your **Goals** and understanding your **Audience** you can select the appropriate game **Mechanics** to create the best user **Experience**.

GOALS

The first step, before even deciding whether to incorporate gamification into your solution, is to determine what problem you are trying to solve. What is your goal? Until you can answer that question, in the immortal words of the Monopoly board, "Do not pass Go" or collect anything. One of the most common mistakes is to decide to gamify before establishing goals.

Once you have identified the goal, remember that gamification is *an* answer, not *the* answer. Think about the purpose of the learning and the behaviors you are trying to change. Think about the culture of your institution or organization. Is there buy-in? If not, perhaps gamification is not appropriate or needs to be relabeled as





an engagement initiative or motivation support. What metrics are important? How will you know if it worked? How will the learners know that they are on the right track? Are you trying to help learners overcome the forgetting curve by keeping the content in front of them on a regular basis or are you trying to build more community in your courses? Ask yourself lots of questions and make sure you are clear on what you are trying to accomplish as your overall goal. These questions are often larger than, or apart from, the goals of the course, i.e., the learning objectives.

Learning objectives are key to your course development and they too need to be examined and clarified before we attempt to overlay or integrate any gamification. One area of overlap between the learning objective and gamification is often feedback. To keep the learners moving toward the course objectives it is vital that they get timely and relevant feedback. You may decide to use gameful elements as a way of providing feedback to the learners. There are gamification methods and mechanics that can help the learner to visualize their pathway and progression to the achievement of goals.

As Jane McGonigal points out in *Reality Is Broken*: "Satisfying work [and I would add learning] always starts with two things: a clear goal and actionable next steps toward achieving that goal." Research in Thomas Malone's study into "What Makes Things Fun to Learn?" supports this pathway of milestones to achievement approach. He found that having short term goals was superior to having no goals or long-term goals "in sustaining performance and interest in the task."

This notion of short term goals brings us to another important consideration in our instructional design. In recent years the term micro-learning has become more prevalent. One advantage of micro-learning is that it provides the learner with what they need, when they need it. This satisfies the learner's requirement that the content be relevant, and that feedback be timely. Video games do this sort of scaffolded tutorial structure extremely well, getting the learner quickly into the game with just enough resources to accomplish the first small goals. Then additional short levels of play introduce additional content and options. By having small, early successes the player is more likely to continue playing. They start to build the confidence and competence needed to tackle more complexity later.





Too often in learning we dump everything on the learner at once and expect them to wade through it. Not only does this overwhelm the learner cognitively but it makes the content less accessible. Long-term goals are ephemeral and very difficult for the mind to grasp but short-term goals are much more concrete. By presenting the content in a manner that clearly shows the pathway of completing a series of smaller goals, learners will be more likely to stay the course. They will also be able to see how the various concepts work together.

AUDIENCE

Once you have established the goals of your project, the next step is to think about who your audience is and what motivates them. What is meaningful to them? What keeps them moving forward in pursuit of their goals and what might hinder them from following through on their intentions? There are many concepts from game design and psychology that can help to inform your gamification choices, but, for now, we will focus on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, and self-determination theory.

INTRINSIC VERSUS EXTRINSIC

In our quest to engage our audience we need to figure out what motivates them and what types of rewards to put into place. Extrinsic motivation uses external rewards (or punishments) to encourage a change in a person's behavior. Cash, prizes, and grades are familiar examples of this category. Intrinsic motivation comes from within the person and derives from learners' interest in doing something for its own sake. Feelings of accomplishment, self-expression, status, altruism, or increased social capital would be some of the intrinsic rewards that gamification could provide.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are not mutually exclusive. People do things for a variety of reasons that may draw from both ends of the motivation spectrum. A learner may be extrinsically motivated by receiving a bonus for completing a course or moving into a new job but that does not preclude intrinsic motivations such as feeling good about their accomplishments or simply a thirst for knowledge. As Bob Nelson explained, the difference between extrinsic and





intrinsic is that the former lights a fire underneath someone and the latter sparks a flame within them.

In general, however, extrinsic reward systems are more short-sighted and may actually serve as demotivators, crowding out creative solutions that fall outside of the reward structure. There are some exceptions to the rule. Extrinsic rewards can infuse enough "caffeine" into the system to get participants over the initial inertia and jump start their participation, especially in situations in which there was no intrinsic motivation to begin with. However, as with caffeinated beverages, the effects of the extrinsics are not long lasting and should generally not be used when intrinsic rewards are available. One key advantage of extrinsic motivators is that they can impart a sense of urgency and push a person to take action whereas intrinsic motivators don't usually have a sense of timeframes and deadlines. Another way that extrinsic rewards can be used, without negatively impacting intrinsic motivation, is to offer them unexpectedly. A surprise gift can bring about a burst of appreciation and add a little extra spark to a learner's efforts.

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

While there are numerous models and theories about motivation that can provide insights, one of the theories that has great importance to our discussion of gamification in the learning space comes from Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. Self-Determination Theory posits, among other things, that people have three innate psychological needs that must be met to be motivated and in turn productive and happy—autonomy, mastery, and connectedness. These needs are often mentioned in learner-centric models, showing once again how gamification and learning have a significant amount of common language.

Autonomy refers to a person's need to have control over aspects of their learning. This could take the form of providing a range of activities for the learner to choose from or even just offering various ways of completing an assignment. Does every assignment need to be of the read, reflect, and respond in writing form? Could the learner present their display of mastery of the material through other means? That brings us to mastery, which refers to a person's need to progress and feel





competent. Again, this maps well with gamification which is focused on a progressive journey and not a destination of winning, as in many games. Often mastery can be tied to intrinsic rewards such as providing learners access to additional materials or giving them status markers or positions such as team leader. Finally, connectedness refers to the social needs of individuals. Learning is a social experience and while it can be done with no or low-tech options, gamification can leverage technology to provide excellent collaborative environments.

CREATING PERSONAS

Just as it is harder to visualize long-term goals because the distant future is abstract, visualizing who you are designing a particular course for can be rather abstract. This is where personas come in. Personas can help you to be more learner-focused as you are designing since you will be taking into consideration how the design of your course would be interacted with and experienced by an actual learner, albeit an imaginary one.

Instead of designing for a list of demographics and needs analysis specifications that give you only a vague image of a learner taking a particular course, personas let you assign a character that represents a portion of the learner base. It does not represent a particular learner, nor is it an attempt to create stereotypes of categories of learner. Rather it is a way of putting a face to a generalized amalgamation of learners that have a number of similar characteristics. You are generally going to want to create 3 to 5 personas to get started. That means that if each persona represents about 20% of your learners, your collection of personas will take into account a majority of your learners. While you may want to create personas for smaller, but prevalent, learner populations, a good benchmark might be a character that represents at least 10% of your learners.

You can use the questions on the Create a Persona worksheet below to start to develop a persona. Over time you will create a whole backstory for your character and they will start to seem like an actual learner.



CREATE A PERSONA WORKSHEET



Try out creating a persona. Some things to consider include:

- Name (you may also want to find an image)
- Age, where they live, languages spoken, hobbies, interests
- Education level; full- or part-time employee/student
- Major they are pursuing or what job role do they have
- Prior knowledge/experience with the subject matter
- Reason for taking the course
- Comfort level with the requisite technologies
- How they consume information outside of formal learning
- How self-directed they are as learners
- What they would identify as their needs as a student
- Responsibilities: job; family; community
- Motivations, desires, and goals
- Learning obstacles
- Special skills or abilities





MECHANICS

This is the phase where you will find ways to make the goals actionable, design activities that will move the learner from where they are to where you need them to be, and use game mechanics to overlay the experience and provide feedback to the learner. The success of a gamified solution is not how much they played or enjoyed the gamification but whether the behaviors have been changed to meet the goals.

Progression and learning are not possible without adequate feedback, which is a strong suit of gamification, and one of the main reasons it can be successful. Game designers have perfected the delivery of timely, frequent and relevant feedback and the need for better and faster feedback has never been greater. Those who grew up with the Internet and a constant stream of feedback from video games prefer daily feedback, rather than the delayed feedback common to previous generations. However, older generations, when they have a taste of the frequent feedback, quickly adjust and embrace the concept as well.

While there are countless elements that can be borrowed from game design, there are several that appear in most gamification systems in some form—points, badges, and leaderboards (PBLs). Unfortunately, their misuse has led to a lot of negative commentary about gamification in the learning space. Points, badges, and leaderboards are tools; you can't simply sprinkle them atop learning like fairy dust and expect miracles to occur any more than you can add pretty pictures to PowerPoint slides and guarantee a great presentation.

Whatever elements you use they have to bring value and meaning to the learner. If the game elements and rewards become the focus, then learning is probably not happening. Always keep in mind that the game mechanics are supporting players to the learning event. They help draw in the learner, to keep the learner engaged, and to help the learner receive feedback and see their progress, but they are not the stars of the show.





POINTS

It is hard to image not using points. We need to have ways to measure progress, provide feedback, gather information about participation, and a host of other metrics. But points, by themselves, have no meaning. I can give you 1000 points but whether that is a large number or small, meaningful or not, depends on the context. Do they tell me how close I am to completion? Do they tell me how I am doing? What value do they provide to the learner? The learner may not even need to see the points. Maybe they are just used to track information in the background. Or maybe they keep track of when the learner sees that they have advanced to a new level. Since goals should be measurable and trackable, points are a natural element, but they have to be more than just a number.

BADGES

A badge is a symbolic representation of an achievement that can serve any number of purposes. Badges can provide a micro-credential; aid in branding and add some personality to the learning program; provide progress indicators and mileposts for learners; help build communities of shared experiences; and let peers offer recognition to one another, to name a few uses. Don't discount the value that learners place on badges. Their effectiveness depends on the organizational culture and the population of learners. I have witnessed many adults get very excited about both physical and virtual badges. Badges are generally part of a collection. People are wired to want complete sets of things, so seeing the slots where future accomplishments will be filled in has a very motivating effect.

Progress bars can be viewed as a type of badge, albeit a dynamic one, that shows progression whereas the previously mentioned badges show completion. Some systems have shown greatly improved participation by simply adding a progress bar. Having constant feedback about where a person stands in a process can be highly motivating. Research has even found that displaying a person's progress may change their perception of the difficulty and duration of a task which can impact their decision as to whether to continue working at it or abandon the task.





LEADERBOARDS

Of the three, a poorly constructed leaderboard has the potential to do the most damage. People may lose interest in points or badges, but a leaderboard can make people actively disengaged if it focuses solely on competition of individuals, particularly if it has been in use for a long period of time. There are few things more demotivating to a new “player” than to see the seemingly insurmountable totals of the people at the top of the leaderboard. Some options for better leaderboards, depending upon the context, can focus on team competitions, can reset periodically to even the playing field, can display participants’ positions only relative to others around them in the list, or focus on things other than just points, such as most improved. Don’t settle for the simple and obvious choices.

To get you started exploring elements beyond points, badges and leaderboards, check out 40+ Gameful Ideas to Mix and Match.

EXPERIENCE

The final piece of the GAME plan is to examine what the overall experience will be. Sometimes gamification will satisfy a targeted need with a clear start and end. Other times the journey will be ongoing and there will be a need to ensure ways are built into the system that help the learner continue to be engaged. Gamified solutions provide feedback both to learners and those administering the program and that feedback should be heeded to help evolve the system. No matter how well conceived a gamified solution is, it will become stale over time if it remains static.

Every step along the way, ask yourself what the learner’s experience is going to be like. Are you focusing more on what the learner should know than what they should do? The more a learner interacts with the content, their fellow learners and you as the instructor, the better the learning outcome. Is there enough variety in terms of the ways they are receiving the information and the ways that they can use it to demonstrate their mastery?

Yes, before we go we have to talk about the scary F-word – failure. How will that be handled? Are the learners given a safe space to take risks to really stretch their





abilities or does the course reward playing it safe? When people play games they start with an expectation that, while the game might be difficult at times, it is winnable. Do your students have that feeling about the course? Are quizzes used solely for evaluation and grading or can you create an understanding with learners that sometimes there are low-stake quizzes to help them check in with their own progress? Can there be some breathing spaces between extremely challenging and easier assignments?

And what about you? What if the first gamified solution you try doesn't work just right? Will you try again? We learn a lot more from our failures than our successes. Gamification is an iterative process, not a one-and-done system. Take into consideration your experiences as well. Adding gamified elements isn't meant to cause you more work or to simply add another layer of complexity to the course for you or the learners. At its best, gamification will open up a whole new realm of rewarding experiences for you and your learners.

CONCLUSION

Gamification is no more the answer than any other technology, media, or method. Just as video and mobile are increasingly important areas of focus in the learning space, they are among the answers, not the sole answer. Ultimately, whether you decide to use gamification or not, it is about providing the best learning experience for the learner that you can. Gamification can amplify a well-constructed learning event but it cannot transform poor design into gold. Well-designed gamification, like good instructional design has the learner's needs at its core.

Our learners deserve the best learning experience we can provide. I'd love to hear the ideas you came up with. Let's stay in touch!



ABOUT ME



Little did I know when I was growing up, being frustrated because no one (except me and my parents) seemed to be able to spell my name correctly, that my name carried within it the my secret identity. After more than two decades working in the learning and development space, it dawned on me that my name wasn't Valary with a Y at the end, it was really Valary with a Why and what I was great at was inspiring curiosity. That curiosity has led me to exploring the emerging trends in learning rather than sticking with the more traditional (also known as boring) boring approaches.

I knew that learners deserved better. My more cutting-edge, disruptive and engaging approach has led to colleagues and course participants saying things like:

"You have a quirky unique personal style that is fresh, intoxicating and encourages people to Stop, Look and Listen because you definitely have something to say!" ~ Cathleen

"Your passion is refreshing and downright contagious." ~ Cathy

I have had the great fortune of working with people across a host of industries and at every level of their career. That diversity of experiences has giving me the ability to meet each and every learner where they currently are in their journey. Ingrid, a former student, said she appreciated that I could "speak to a group but spot the one who needs extra help."

I have been a sought-after speaker at learning events from coast to coast and have contributed to a number of articles and publications on learning, creativity, and gamification and am the creator of the GAME Plan framework for gamification in learning.

Drop by and say hi and let's talk about how I can help you!

Visit: <http://www.valarywithawhy.com>

Email: valary@valarywithawhy.com

Subscribe: <http://eepurl.com/bLNGqr>

Like me: <https://www.facebook.com/valarywithawhy/>



40+ GAMEFUL IDEAS TO MIX AND MATCH

Why 40? Why not? There happen to be 40 spaces on a Monopoly board. And forty is the only integer in English that is spelled with letters in alphabetical order.

But what is really important isn't the number, it's what you can come up with when you get creative. There are tons more ideas that you can add to the list. Try mixing and matching the following gameful ideas in different ways that best suit your needs and those of your learners.

1. Access or Unlocking Content

One of the most overlooked rewards is access to something extra. This could be bonus content, early access passes, an invitation to a special event, behind the scenes content, or membership into a community. Of course the reward has to be related to the course and perceived to be of value to the learner. It also has to be something special that can only be received via the gameful experience for it to be of great value.

2. Achievement

Achievements are completed tasks or challenges and are usually represented by some virtual or physical item such as a badge or level. These can feed the desire for mastery by providing indicators of success and a means of learners showing their accomplishments and status.

3. Autonomy

How can you let the learners make meaningful choices? Does the learner have any control over the path they take through the learning? Do they have options to choose from in terms of assignments? Are there different formats of the content available? Autonomy is one of the three elements of the self-determination theory of intrinsic motivation.

4. Badges

A badge is a symbolic representation of an achievement that can serve any number of purposes. Badges can provide a micro-credential; aid in branding and add some personality to the learning program; provide progress indicators and mileposts for learners; help build communities of shared experiences; and let peers offer recognition to one another, to name a few uses.



5. Challenges

Challenges give learners discrete tasks that need to be completed successfully. They can vary in difficulty to help keep the learner moving by giving them easier moments between more difficult ones. This gives the learner a chance to reflect and settle into competency with the early skills between bouts of more struggling moments to reach new levels of mastery. A series of challenges are often grouped together to create a mission or quest.

6. Collaboration

How are you letting players help one another and work together? This ties in with many motivation drivers. Those doing the helping may be strongly motivated by the social interactions, or the status of being considered an expert, or the idea that they are being altruistic. Teamwork is a valued and necessary skill in both the learning environment and the workplace.

7. Collection

It is human nature to like to collect things and to be motivated to complete collections. When we see empty spots in a collection, we want to fill them and as we approach completion our motivation is even higher.

8. Competition

Competition allows people to compare and prove themselves against others. It can be useful in some instances but you need to be careful to ensure that competition isn't demotivating. It can be used with teams to encourage collaboration among team members. Competition is also a strong motivator for individuals to compete against their own personal bests.

9. Connectedness

Connectedness acknowledges our desire to be connected to other people. Learning is a social activity and providing ways for learners to work together and collaborate can fuel learners' intrinsic motivation. Connectedness is the third element of the self-determination theory, with Autonomy and Mastery.

10. Creativity

Is there the opportunity for learners to express their creativity? Letting people have some creative freedom and explore the boundaries of what is possible can be very motivating. Not everyone will want to do this but, for those who do, it can provide hours of engagement.



11. Discovery or Exploration

People love to make discoveries. Everything doesn't need to be spelled out for learners. Leave them some things to discover on their own. Find ways to encourage learners to explore.

12. Easter Eggs

OK, we're not talking about the ones that the Easter bunny hides, but that is where the name comes from. We are talking about little hidden things in your course that learners get to find. They could be a renamed message on a button or a link to additional content or some bonus points. Like decorating Easter eggs, the possibilities are endless. Let your creativity run wild.

13. Epic Meaning

We all want to feel that we matter and that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. How can you help the learners find epic meaning in completing their goals and the goals of the institution?

14. Failure

Without failure there can be no learning. In fact, games that cause players to fail are often rated as better than those that are too easy to win. People like appropriate challenges for their abilities. How can you make it safe for learners to stretch their limits and take some risks in a safe environment?

15. Feedback

Without feedback we can never know where we are or how we are doing with our learning. Games are masterful at supplying tons of immediate and meaningful feedback, keeping the player posted at all times about progress, next actions, and accomplishments. Is the feedback in your learning helping the learner advance on their journey or just throwing up an occasional roadside billboard?

16. Fun

There is a wide array of things that people find fun. Fun doesn't mean trivial, it can be challenging, surprising, and yes, sometimes even a little silly. When we find something fun we are more engaged, so where's the fun in your learning program?



17. Hints and Nudges

Everyone needs a little help now and then. Can you provide hints or nudges if learners get stuck? Remember that if someone feels overwhelmed by the task they are more likely to discontinue trying. It is OK – and necessary – to let the learners struggle, but don't let them drown.

18. Leaderboard

Players are ranked and compared to one another based on some scoring or measurement. While it can be helpful for people to see where they stand in relation to others it needs to be used with caution. It can be demotivating if there is no way to reach the top but you can set up leaderboards that reset periodically and/or display participants' positions only relative to others around them in the list.

19. Levels

Levels are used in conjunction with experience points or some other scoring method to designate a position along a scale of achievements. Achieving a new level marks a milestone, an increased level of experience and expertise. Generally players advance faster in lower levels and it becomes increasingly difficult and requires more points or progression in order to move between higher levels.

20. Loss Avoidance

In general you will not want to take away points or punish learners but there can be instances where you want to spur them to action by motivating them through loss avoidance. None of us like to lose stuff, except maybe weight. Think of loyalty programs that reset your points after a period of time if you have not used any points. You could send a message saying something like: "To maintain your current level, be sure to log into the system at least once every [x number of] days."

21. Lottery or Chance

In the same way that surprise or mystery are very enticing to the brain because of the element of the unknown, including a lottery or other game of chance can be appropriate sometimes to add a little fun, as long as it is perceived as fair.



22. Mastery

We are all striving to progress. We want to get better. Mastery is one of the three ingredients of motivation in the self-determination theory. How can you help the learner not only gain mastery but chart his/her course along the way?

23. Mystery or Curiosity

Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? We want to know. The mystery keeps us engaged because we want to know what happens next. What sort of cliff-hangers can you create in your learning? How can you withhold some information to peak the learner's curiosity?

24. Ownership or Possession

People value things they own or have control of. If the ownership is as the result of an accomplishment then learners can be motivated by pride in what they did. What can the learner have in the environment that is uniquely theirs or that they helped to build (like the attachment people have to their IKEA furniture because they put it together)?

25. Perks and Swag

While our main focus should always be to promote intrinsic motivation, there are times where rewards in the form of gift cards, physical items and such can be very motivating in the short term, particularly to overcome inertia of performing a task that does not engender a great deal of intrinsic motivation. Used extensively, however, these types of rewards can be extremely demotivating.

26. Points

Perhaps the most common game mechanic used in gamified systems is points. Since goals should be measurable and trackable, points are a natural element. Points are gained for performing specific tasks and are generally not drawn back. Points in and of themselves are not useful, and may not even be visible to the learner, but can help create value for the learner when context and meaning are attached to them, such as when they are tied to levels or progress bars.



27. Power or Exposure

Are there ways you can provide some additional power to learners who have achieved certain levels or completed certain challenges. In communities, perhaps you can give moderator capabilities or include some symbol to indicate a frequent participant, for instance. Perhaps a learner can become a team leader, at least for a specified period of time.

28. Praise

Positive reinforcement is often overlooked as a motivator. When someone receives a positive reaction they are more motivated to do that action and even bigger actions in the future. It could even lead to an epic win. And when praise is given early in a learning event, the learner will perceive the activity as easier and shorten in duration.

29. Progress

If you want people to be engaged, it is vital that they know where they are and how they are doing. Motivation quickly wanes without feedback about our progress. Progress bars are simple yet powerful visuals. If you make no other changes to your design, making progress visible will help you and your learners rack up more wins.

30. Quests or Missions

Sometimes we all like to pretend we are secret agents, right? No? Just me, huh? Well creating missions is a great way to tie together multiple tasks and provide the learner with challenges to figure out content. Another word for missions might be quests. Often missions or quests are linked to themes and narratives to create a player journey.

31. Recognition

Contrary to popular belief and practice, recognition is a much more sought after reward than gifts or money. Once a dollar amount is attached to something it takes on a less personal meaning and loses some value. Recognition empowers the learner on a personal level and shows an appreciation for both the person and their accomplishment.



32. Scarcity and Impatience

In real life we often have to struggle with a scarcity of resources or have to wait for a specific time or other event to happen before we can do something. These types of challenges can also be put into place in learning environments. Holding back certain activities until designated times or having learners find creative solutions to problems where their options are limited can spur action.

33. Self-expression

Similar to the ideas of ownership and creativity, some people will be motivated by being able to express themselves. For some it may be something like the ability to choose or customize an avatar and for others the desire to be heard on the discussion boards.

34. Sharing

Some people will be highly motivated by sharing resources, virtual currency, or knowledge. Think about people who create entries for Wikipedia or other sites where there is no reward other than the feeling that they are helping.

35. Status

People like having indicators that they have achieved a certain level of status, especially if that is made public. People also like to know where they stand at any point. There is both the external version of status as compared to others and the internal check of a learner's current position.

36. Story or Theme

Story is a powerful way to tap into people's emotions and help get them engaged and help them to learn the content. It is also valuable to let people share their own stories of their learning journey. Even if there is not a formal narrative, creating a theme can provide a context in which learners can immerse themselves in the content.

37. Surprise

The brain delights in newness and surprise and it aids memory and increases excitement. How can you add some surprise? It can take many forms. An unexpected reward. A hidden object. Even imagery that is novel and unexpected.



38. Time

There can be added challenge when a time component is added to a task. This can be either a time limit or a designated time when something occurs. This can be effective by tapping into people's fear of missing out (FOMO). When something is offered for a limited time, people are more likely to act.

39. Virtual Currency

In addition to or in conjunction with awarding points you may want to create some virtual items that can be bartered, traded, or gifted by players. Unlike points that get awarded to a learner and stay with the learner, virtual currencies can give learners some additional control and choices about how they interact with the program and each other and help build a sense of community.

40. Voting

Think about ways you can let the participants let you and other participants know what they are finding most interesting and valuable. Can you provide them with a way to like, heart, give a thumbs up, or rate items?

41. ?????????

As you continue your gamification journey be on the lookout for other elements you can incorporate into your learning and add to this list.

