The Seven-Step Game Implementation Model

This model is designed to assist you in customizing any game with your own material. Use the model as a guide, a reminder of the steps you must consider in the set-up, play, and debrief of your chosen game. After conducting each game, take notes on what worked well and what needed improvement; this information will guide your next use of that game.

Remember, these are your games, and they need your customizing in both content and implementation to meet the specific needs of your audience.

**STEP 1: GAME SELECTION**

The following information should be considered in selecting the game for your learners.

**Target Audience**

One of the most important considerations is your target audience. Your game must reflect their knowledge, skills, abilities, and work environments. By simulating the “total working climate” of the player, you enhance the take-home value or application of the learning into the work site.

Games can evoke powerful learning. This begins when the learner, now a player, is challenged with the information item that provokes a search for the answer. When the correct answer is aired, the learning is immediately reinforced. This learning transfer happens over and over during the game. This “moment of learning” is not only powerful but often remains long after the learning event or game has been completed.
Knowing your audience affects the following aspects of games:

**Level of Play.** You may find that higher-level learners expect more from the game experience, especially in terms of the professionalism of the set-up and play and in the quality of the overhead transparencies, graphics, and accessories. In addition, this expectation impacts on the intellectual level of the content material provided in the lecture, handout materials, and in the questions and cases prepared for the game.

**Number of Players.** When games are involved, any number can play. Although many games seem best suited for smaller numbers of players, the intrigue and challenge of play can open learning to larger audiences. The key is the attraction to the play of the game that brings learners into active contact with the content or topic.

Most games are designed for smaller groups, usually two to sixteen players. Game play in smaller groups allows for more interaction between players, players and the material, and players and the facilitator. Adaptation for larger audiences usually requires the set-up and play of multiple game sets. Thus, a game that accommodates six players could be run in ten sets for a group of sixty. The trick is to devote additional time up front to organize game materials and ensure appropriate room layout.

The facilitator exerts more or less control, depending on audience size. The energies and distractions of larger groups require more maintenance and direct control. For larger audiences, the facilitator may wish to not only introduce game play but directly control all questions, supply correct answers and elaboration, and provide continuous game services, such as scoring and awarding of prizes. Audiences larger than twenty-five usually require the aid of a co-facilitator or assistant. Or, the facilitator may delegate some of the duties of distributing materials, posting scores, or collecting game sheets to members of the group.

**Learning Outcomes**

Know what you want your audience to learn or demonstrate during and after playing the game. Reinforcement games are excellent vehicles for learners to demonstrate the following, all within the friendly but competitive game environment:

- understanding of topic material from lecture and readings
- application of concepts and principles
- problem solving and strategizing
Playing Time

Time of play is always a critical issue. Because games are part of the total learning session, most facilitators prefer games that can be set-up, conducted, and debriefed in less than fifty minutes. This requires easily understood rules of play and an organized game experience.

Game play is only one part of the total game experience, which comprises three portions: set-up, play, and debrief.

1. Set-up (25 percent). This portion establishes the game environment by setting up the room, distributing game materials, dividing learners into teams, and reviewing the rules of play.

2. Play (50 percent). This is the actual play of the game, including start and stop of game play, clarifying questions about rules or content, and closure, such as declaring winners.

3. Debrief (25 percent). This portion processes game content and player conduct. To many facilitators, this is why they conduct a game: to have meaningful experiences, both learning and behavioral, that can be translated into insights and then applications for the work site.

Most of the games in this book are designed to be played in fifty minutes or less. Of course, if any game generates a highly motivating environment, you may extend the time of play by conducting additional rounds or by adding supplemental questions or tasks. Many facilitators feel that increased involvement equates to accelerated learning impact and increased take-home value of the experience.

Game Variations

Once you have selected and played the game, you may want to change the game format to meet your classroom needs. For example, you may want to change one of the following:

- Group size: accommodate smaller or larger groups.

- Time of play: expand or contract the total time allowed for the entire game, depending on the number of rounds, questions, or material you wish to cover in the time allowed.
• Focus of the task: adjust the levels of competition and cooperation, or encourage teamwork or creativity, etc.

• Scoring procedure: revise rewards and penalties as necessary.

In each of the games provided in this book, suggestions are listed for ways to adjust these four elements. Every trainer will have his or her own ideas for variations, but the ideas listed offer a starting point for modifying a game to suit a particular situation.

**STEP 2: GAME CONTENT: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Desired Outcomes**

Review your learning outcomes. What do you want the participants to learn from the game? These games are best suited for the review of information by recounting specific data and the identification of required items.

"Loading," or placing your content into the game, is a threefold process:

1. Select suitable information items for the game.

2. Translate these items into game-sized pieces or information nuggets by using short questions, mini case studies, or situations (for example, "demonstrate two low-cost, positive ways to deal with customers at the point of sale.")

3. Incorporate questions into the game format.

The following loading techniques were the most helpful in selecting and translating material into the game format. They can be used individually, or in a mix, to develop your game.

**Technique #1. Final Exam.** Develop a fifty-item post-class test to translate the most important concepts and facts into the game format. Go through the items and create an order for the game by prioritizing the items, creating a conceptual flow to the order of the questions, or using a random sequence.

**Technique #2. Triage.** Highlight important items and facts from your lesson material. Sort the material into "keep" and "drop" categories. Repeat the process until you have fifty items.

**Technique #3. Story Board.** Place significant items from your lesson material on 3” x 5” index cards. Categorize the cards by theme or concept. Then create a logical
flow to the items for game use. The material from the cards can be edited into questions for the game.

**Technique #4. Zoom In/Zoom Out.** Remove yourself or “zoom out” from your material to gain a holistic overview. Then zoom in on specific incidents or questions that illustrate your learning points. Generate a tapestry of learning items that reinforce and assess participants' understanding of learning concepts.

**Technique #5. Interview the SME.** Interview a subject-matter expert (SME). Ask your expert about the most important learning aspects of the topic, what participants should know when they leave the class, underlying themes, and so on. Construct a pattern of questions that underscore the desired learning outcome.

**Writing Questions**

 Appropriately written questions add to both the learning and fun of the game. Old tests are helpful, as well as the test banks that accompany classroom texts. Asking participants to develop questions adds to the question bank, provides fresh perspectives of the material, and even assists the learner in gaining a better understanding of the topic.

Following are some question-writing tips:

1. Write questions in a conversational format. Because game questions are usually read aloud, this helps the flow of the game.

2. Write closed-ended questions—questions requiring only one response. This ensures that the requested information and its rationale are covered in the question-and-answer format.

3. Focus each question on one fact. This keeps the information precise and brief. If needed, use several questions to ensure that the learning concept is covered adequately.

4. Be brief. Use simple wording for both questions and answers. Questions should contain thirty-five words or less and require only a brief statement as an answer. Brevity keeps the content portion from being a drawn-out question-and-answer process.

5. Develop a review-to-preview question mix. Write three review questions for every preview question. This will create a good question mix and pique interest in new topics. Even if the question material is new to the audience, it can be considered part of the randomness of play.
6. Mix the difficulty. Players become discouraged if they miss more than half of the questions, so try for an answer rate of 50 percent by creating a question difficulty mix of 1:3:1 (that is, one challenging question, three moderate questions, and one easy question). Start with the easy and moderate questions to help learners get into the game. This allows new players to feel comfortable with both the game play and the content before they are challenged by more demanding questions.

7. Include the rationale or elaboration with the answers. This is a "moment of learning" when players are open to additional learning.

8. Number each question. This helps your question count and gives you a way to quickly identify questions that may require adjustment or updating.

Following are some proven question formats:

Direct question. This question requires players to identify a person, place, or thing. Be sure to include enough information to allow players to provide the proper answer.

Q: What one behavior has more impact on customer service than any other factor?

A. Cooperative behavior. Customers are more satisfied if they sense you are trying to help them.

Fill-in-the-blank. This requires the player to identify the information required by the blank space. Be careful to specify what is expected in the blank space.

Q: Five hundred studies document that _________ behavior had more impact on customer service than any other factor.

A: Cooperative

Multiple choice. This format presents the appropriate answer along with two distracting answers. This format can make difficult items easier by presenting a choice to the player. Questions for game play should aim at three choices. Avoid questions with four or more choices; they can be confusing and slow down play.

Q: Five hundred studies document that this one behavior had more impact on customer service than any other factor:

a. cooperative behavior

b. product knowledge

c. company loyalty
A: (a) cooperative behavior. Customers are more satisfied if they sense you are trying to help them. They expect you to know your product and be loyal to your company. What they are looking for is someone who pays attention to their needs.

True-false. This is the easiest question to prepare and answer, and it offers players a 50/50 chance to answer correctly. This question format can help players to ease into competition. Limit these questions to fewer than one in four to keep the game from becoming a “flip of the coin” match.

Q: Five hundred studies document that cooperative behavior had more impact on customer service than any other factor. True or False?

A: True.

Partial listing. This requires the multiple identification of items from a list. Ask for some, but not all, of the items. This “partial” format underscores the precedence without frustrating players in their attempts to recall the entire listing. The total list should be read when the answer is given.

Q: Name four of the seven behaviors that have a positive impact on customer service.

A: Accept any four of the following: cooperative behavior, product knowledge, sincerity, listening and/or asking questions, flexibility, patience, letting the customer know that you care.

Lecture Material

Develop appropriate lecture materials to elaborate your questions or provide between-round and end-game commentary. This includes carefully prepared supplemental materials.

Games often enhance learner interest. Prepare a handout that is more than just “take-home” information from the presentation, containing ideas, applications, readings, resource lists, bibliography, etc., that underscore the entire learning experience. The handout may range from a thoughtful expansion of the question material to an in-depth reference manual. Handouts are traditionally distributed during class, but consider disseminating them prior to class to encourage pre-class study. Game play will reward those learners who took the time to go through the material.

Multimedia can add to the total learning experience. Consider other media, such as video dramatizations/case studies found in films (popular and training), audio
dialogue or recordings, in-class demonstrations and models (laboratory samples), or computer simulations. (In all cases, remember to respect copyright laws.)

● **STEP 3: GAME ACCESSORIES**

Game accessories are materials that help create an appropriate game learning environment. You may want to invest in additional game accessories and props. Here is a starter list of equipment, materials, and props, with hints on how they may be used during the game:

**Audiovisual Equipment**

- **Flip chart:** Used to reinforce lecture, display game objective and rules of play, keep score, or list key elements of discussion.

  Using the flip chart to “bullet” or “headline” record the key elements of discussion has four major benefits. First, flip charting keeps key issues right in front of the group and helps them stay focused. Second, flip charts let the group cross-reference learning between different situations and helps prevent backtracking and needless repetition of the same issues and ideas. Third, a shared “record” reinforces the notion that learning is a group activity. This can reduce the tendency of some players to face off against one another in defense of their interpretations of events. Fourth, ideas recorded on the flip chart can be used to create new situations.

  Guidelines for being a recorder or scribe: Be neutral (capture everyone’s points and do not edit). Use key words only; do not try to record comments verbatim. Invite corrections and ask for validation that you have captured the discussion points accurately. Write fast and legibly, using letters at least 1½” or 4 centimeters high.

- **Overhead projector:** Used to reinforce lecture, display game board, game objectives, and rules of play, keep score, and list comments and reactions. This is especially helpful for large groups.

- **Audiotape player:** Used to play background music to create a learning environment and to introduce audio information from speeches or sound tracks.

**Game Materials and Accessories**

- **Felt-tipped markers:** Used by both facilitator and learners for a variety of tasks from filling out name cards to listing responses on a flip chart.
- Masking tape: Used to place charts on walls, mend paper items, secure electrical wires, and so on.

- Game sheets: Used as playing surfaces, score sheets, or to present questions during game play.

**Special Props**

- Timer: Used to time rounds, question periods, debriefing or entire game period. A simple stopwatch or desk timer will work well.

- Noisemaker: Used to alert teams to start, stop, return from break, and so on. A whistle or chimes are playful ways to keep time.

- Name cards: Used to allow players to network and teams to create their own identities, promoting esprit de corps.

- Dice: Used as motivator in many games, especially board games. A roll of the dice is random and adds to the game environment.

  *Note:* Have several extra dice available. If a player complains about the performance of a specific die, simply swap that die for one from your supply. This addresses the complaint and models your interest in fair play.

- In-box: Used as a nice way to simulate the work environment when delivering assignments, game sheets, and special instructions.

- Prizes: Used to stimulate the game environment. Current data suggests that awarding prizes is inversely proportional to audience enthusiasm—the greater the natural energy of the audience, the lesser the need for using prizes for motivation. However, once prizes are mentioned, you must proceed with their award. Otherwise, this will be viewed as withholding of a promised benefit.

- Question cards: Used to ask or disperse specific information during game play. Although the use of question cards is usually associated with board games, they can also be used in facilitator-controlled games where a question is directed at the whole class or team. You may find it helpful to sequentially number all question cards for purposes of easy retrieval and updating.

- Raffle tickets: Used for drawing prizes. Tickets can be found at most stationery or office supply stores. Have players sign one portion and drop it into a container. Conduct a random draw at prize time. Some facilitators require winners to be present at the time of the drawing to help bring participants back from break. This policy can be introduced to the audience before each draw by
establishing a “contract.” This is done by asking the audience members if they approve the strategy that only participants in attendance can receive a prize. Thus, when a winner is drawn, but not present, the facilitator can draw again until an attending winner is found. Obtaining confirmation of this policy neutralizes complaints from participants not present at the time of the drawing.

- Glass bowl or container: Used to hold coupons for the drawing for prizes. Participants who match drawn ticket stubs win the prize.
- Chips: Used with board games to show rewards or status of play. Chips can also be used to cover spaces on bingo or tic-tac-toe game boards.
- Pawns: Used to denote a player’s position on game board. Pawns can consist of almost any object, ranging from coins to paper clips. Pawns can also be customized to match the topic. For a pharmaceutical game board, the designer created “pill bottle” pawns using clear plastic coin tubes filled with colored candies.

**STEP 4: PRE-GAME SET UP: THE GOLDEN TIME**

This time is critical, for readying the classroom and yourself. Take this time to walk through your game as you set up your game environment. Take on the perspective of your learner as you enter the room. Is the room visually attractive; does it reflect the game experience?

Conduct a room inspection, checking wall outlets, lighting, ventilation, and so on. Set up your tables, chairs, and name cards. Place posters, banners, work sheets, or wall charts containing quotations or art work. Later, post rules of play and other materials.

The instructor’s table is your resource area. Take time to organize it with the game sheets and accessories for easy access during game play.

Lay out additional handouts and reference materials, as required. Lay out score sheets for distribution before and during the games. Lay out accessories, such as whistle, timer, overhead transparencies, prizes, and markers, as required.

Take this time to ensure that the equipment is appropriate and prepared. This includes:

- Flip chart easel(s). Make sure they are stable, in repair, and have sufficient paper. Post any pre-prepared flip chart pages. Check for markers and masking tape.
• Overhead projector. Make sure it is operable, focused, has an electric cord sufficiently long and secured to floor, is placed in a workable stand, and has an extra bulb.

• Video/audiotape player. Make sure they are operable, have appropriate power source (either battery or electric cord/outlet), and that tapes are readied and cued.

• Tables. Take this time to place four to six chairs in clusters around tables to establish a decision-making atmosphere. Make sure tables and chairs are cleared, clean, and in proper repair.

● **STEP 5: GAME PRELIMINARIES**

These are the in-class procedures prior to actual game play that help create the structure and environment of the game. They include such steps as:

• Dividing the group into teams (as required).

• Seating each team at its own table.

• Having team members fill out name cards.

• Having teams select team names, as needed.

• Distributing game materials.

• Distributing score sheets, question or problem sheets, flip chart paper, and other game accessories and props, as necessary.

• Displaying game information and player instructions on overhead transparencies or a flip chart.

Following is an example of using the game "tic-tac-two":

Introduce the game to the participants. The introduction, along with an interesting classroom layout, should motivate your learners to play. Audiences reflect and take on the enthusiasm displayed by the facilitator into game play.

"Good morning, I want to briefly go over the game tic-tac-two. The game objective is to cover three spaces in a row horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. The game is played in rounds. Each round consists of a team selecting a space on the game sheet, and being asked a question. If team answers correctly, it covers selected space, then play alternates to other team. There is one
exception: If a team selects the center space, it is asked two questions. Both
questions must be answered correctly to cover the space. If team answers
incorrectly, its turn is completed, and play immediately alternates to other
team. The game is played until one team gets three spaces in a row. Note that
if neither team covers three spaces, both teams count number of correct
answers. The team with the most correct answers is the winner.”

• **STEP 6: GAME PLAY**

The game begins and the facilitator reads first question. If only one game is being
played, answering teams responds to facilitator. If more than one game is being
played, the answering team responds to its opponent.

After the team’s answer, the facilitator may want to elaborate on reasons why the
selected response is the most appropriate. As with all training situations, expect
periodic resistance, defensiveness, or conflict while managing the game. Remember
that while the question may have designated right and wrong answers, there may
be other circumstances or answers not considered when the question was written.
In this case, the objective is not to simply impose any one opinion or approach, but
to get the learners to sort out the assumptions and details and encourage them to
think about the information or situation created by the question.

Playing teams take appropriate action, covering the space if correct or ending the
turn if incorrect.

The game is played the same for all rounds. The first team covering three spaces in
a row is declared the winner. (*Note:* If a team covers three in a row before the facili-
tator completes his or her agenda of questions, simply congratulate the winners
and invite them to return to play with the rest of the class. This acknowledges their
win but continues play, as required.)

• **STEP 7: CLOSURE/DEBRIEFING**

Successful games usually motivate players to reach for the game objective, to
“win.” If the game objective is reached, then it should be acknowledged and
rewarded, as appropriate. Then, in the after-glow of the game, attention can be re-
focused on the topic plus any problems of game play, such as the rules, time peri-
ods, and quality of questions or team play. In the event of very competitive play,
remind players that the goal was not just to win or get the right answers, but to
demonstrate a working understanding of the topic. Thus, all competitive feelings,
if any, should stay in the room. Players, now participants, should want to transfer positive learning experiences from this game back to the workplace.

Debriefing is the process of helping people reflect on their experiences to develop meaningful learning. It usually takes place immediately after the game experience. Guided debriefing involves the facilitator initiating and moderating the discussion. The debriefing period can include venting, where learners let off steam; shared insights; generalizations about relationship of game and content to real life; transfer, discussion of application of generalizations to the workplace; and speculations related to the game experience. Most instructors have their own method of debriefing, but may wish to follow a debriefing process of What? So What? and Now What?


- So What? What learning happened? What critical incidents in the game, decision process, or learning lead to insights? What did you learn from the readings or lecture that might have helped? What one major idea or concept did you learn? What are things that this relates to or reminds you of?

- Now What? What applications can be made to real-life, workplace? How does this relate to real life? If the same thing happened again, what would you do? From your experiences here, what behaviors would you show at the next meeting or work situation? What if these case studies actually happened at work? What if different folks from your organization were present?

Teaching by game has the unique challenge of matching the personality of the game—its ability to bring dimensions of playfulness and energy—to the demands of the topic and audience. This means that no matter how many times you play the same game, even with the same material, audience reactions differ. Each audience has its own learning thresholds and perceptions of what is new and important. So, as you act as guide and facilitator, you get to experience the joy of discovery along with each audience.

To serve you, each game offers sample play along with recommended tips on customizing for your audience. This should help you select and adapt material for the critical first rounds of play. Then, as you feel more comfortable with the game, you can customize game play by varying the topics and rules.

Finally, these games can be used as either “stand-alone” activities—to introduce, teach, review, or test learning—or sequenced with other games or activities to create a mix of learning.