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Games and Fun in the Classroom

Deborah Ginsberg

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Why use games and other tools for fun in the classroom?

- Provide feedback to both students and faculty – use games to discover what students find confusing and to determine which methods work best to explain difficult concepts.
- Games engage students and allow the entire class to actively participate.
- Games motivate students and provide an incentive to participate and a way to stretch limits in the classroom.
- Games can provide a less-threatening environment to explore ideas and concepts – games and fun allow students to relax while tackling difficult subjects.
- Games provide more choices in the classroom – faculty can use these tools when they want to change their approach.

Short Videos

Use short videos to introduce a topic, to emphasize important points, and for storytelling in the classroom.

Xtranormal – a popular website for creating online cartoons. Type the dialog and the characters speak in computerized voices. This is helpful for creating short, humorous videos.

Other animation sites – A list of several animation sites on the web <http://bit.ly/bqkrfE>

Note about the cost of these sites: Most sites offer free accounts, but many use a “points” system for making multiple videos. Users can buy these points in packages or earn points from the site’s advertisers by buying a special offer or taking a survey. Some, like Xtranormal, offer points to educators. For 5000 extra Xtranormal points, contact their tech support at <http://xtranormal.zendesk.com/requests/new> and select “Request to become an Xtranormal Educator” from the drop-down list.

Classroom Games

PowerPoint Games

PowerPoint can be used for more than just slides. By using links and a few other advanced features, faculty can create their own games for the classroom. Don’t worry if you don’t have time to create your own templates – there are plenty of examples already available.

Jeopardy - <http://powerpointgames.wikispaces.com/PowerPoint+Game+Templates>

Many educators have created PowerPoint templates for Jeopardy. This handout lists just one example. Jeopardy is great for reviewing basic concepts or for preparing for a final exam.

Set up a game: Open the Jeopardy PowerPoint template and save it with a new name. Add topics on the main screen. Replace each “Question” slide with a Jeopardy answer (e.g. “A legal citation guide created by law review

students from Harvard and other schools”) and each “Answer” slide with a Jeopardy question (e.g. “What is the Bluebook?”).

How to play: Start the slideshow and follow the on-screen instructions. Click a dollar amount to see the Jeopardy answer. Click the “?” button on the Jeopardy answer slide to see the Jeopardy question. Click the home button to return to the main screen. The dollar amounts will disappear as they are clicked. To refresh the game, close PowerPoint and then reopen it.

Other PowerPoint game templates

There are more games on the page with the Jeopardy template mentioned above. See also <http://facstaff.uww.edu/jonesd/games/>.

Game Show Presenter (<http://www.almorale.com/gsd.html>)

Create a multiple choice game using a stand-alone desktop application. Game Show Presenter offers more features than basic PowerPoint templates.

Cost: \$79 for the presentation version, \$149 for the PLUS version. The presentation version offers only multiple choice questions; the PLUS version includes a Jeopardy-type game along with other advanced options.

Adding games to course websites

StudyStack (<http://www.studystack.com>)

Use this free tool to upload definitions or other study materials to create flashcards, a crossword puzzle, and other study tools. Note that each side of a flashcard is limited to 255 characters.

Resources

Skinner, Colleen Martinez, and Pipins II, Charles, “Bringing Fun Back into the Classroom: How to Compete with Facebook and Win – CALI conference presentation with many ideas for fun tools for the classroom,” <http://conference.cali.org/2011/sessions/bringing-fun-back-classroom-how-compete-facebook-and-win>

Schneider, Andrea Kupfer and Goodrich, Kathleen, “The Classroom Can Be All Fun & Games” (October 8, 2009). Marquette Law School Legal Studies Paper No. 09-36. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1485532>

The Game Group, “Ten of the Very Best Reasons for Using Classroom Games (and for Justifying Their Use in Your Organization),” <http://www.thegamegroup.com/article1.htm>

Mika, Karen, “Games in the Law School Classroom: Enhancing the Learning Experience,” Perspectives, Fall 2009 <http://west.thomson.com/pdf/perspec/2009-fall/2009-fall-1.pdf>

Dennis, Johanna K. P., “Assessing Student Learning Through Powerpoint 'Games'” (February 11, 2009). Second Draft, Vol. 23, Spring 2009; Vermont Law School Research Paper No. 10-14. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1408593>