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## 5 Tips For Making Your Class As Addictive As A Game

By [Douglas Kiang](#) on January 28, 2014

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Game designers have mastered certain tricks that make games so addictive that people can't stop playing them. Here are the top five secrets that game designers know, and some tips on how you can use these same game dynamics to make learning in your classroom as addictive as gaming.

### The Appointment Dynamic: Be Here At This Time, Get a Prize

Make it an event! Games such as [FarmVille](#) and [Animal Crossing](#) have events going on all the time, even if players are not logged in. Crops need to be tended, and special gifts await those who login on their birthday.

Your students all need to show up at the same time for your class, but does the learning in your class stop when students leave the room? Classrooms that have an online presence, and that provide ways for students to work together at an appointed time online, use the appointment dynamic to allow learning to continue beyond the limits of the school schedule. In my "flipped"

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classroom, for example, I make an event out of watching the lecture videos that I have posted by creating a “viewing party” on certain evenings. Students can all view the lecture at the same time, and I use [TodaysMeet](#) to have a synchronous chat during the lecture. Even though viewing parties are optional, I find that many more students will watch the videos if I make it an event.

## The Failure Dynamic: Fail Early, Fail Often

In certain games, such as [Angry Birds](#), players must actually fail many times in order to succeed. Some levels simply aren’t solvable until you have spent a few games just locating all of the obstacles. In this way, failing many times allows players to get a little farther each time they try. This promotes an iterative approach, and takes the sting out of the big red “Game Over” screen.

Try to provide ways for kids in your classes to “fail” frequently, in many small ways, rather than in one big high-stakes test or exam. One way to do this is to use online tools such as [Socrative](#) to check students’ understanding during a unit, even during every class. Give kids lots of ways to give and receive feedback. In some instances, you might ask kids to report their scores privately by name, and at other times, ask them for their anonymous feedback as a group by voting on whether or not they are ready to move on to the next segment. You might also design projects that encourage students to rapidly prototype and then promote constructive feedback at every stage of the design process. Don’t wait until a project is done to show your work!

## The Flexibility Dynamic: Provide Multiple Paths to Success

Early video games only provided one way to win. You had to meet a predetermined series of objectives in a certain order: run up the ramp to find the key, that unlocks the door, which opens a window, and so forth. If you got stuck at any point, you couldn’t finish the game. Later games such as [Mario 64](#) and [Grand Theft Auto](#) provided a “sandbox” environment full of quests to complete and places to explore, all in whatever order the gamer chose. It was possible to finish the game in your own unique way, taking a personalized path to get to the end.

Find ways to build this same kind of flexibility into your own curriculum. In school, some courses follow a set syllabus and reward students based on their progression through a linear set of objectives. This is as limiting as an old school computer game, offering only one path to success and rewarding only one kind of learner. Try to build in multiple paths to be successful in your course. Consider offering a “main quest” or storyline that leads students through the primary content, but offer abundant “mini-quests” that allow students to investigate certain paths further.

Here’s another way to look at it. Universities, and some high schools, allow kids to choose electives as they progress through school. Graduates haven’t all taken exactly the same courses, but they have still mastered enough of the skills to earn a degree. Consider using an “elective credit system” in your course in which students need a certain number of credits to graduate. Which units would be the required credits? What kinds of elective opportunities would you be able to offer? Make students fulfill all of the “graduation requirements”, but also require them to “declare a major” by choosing some path of interest that supplements what they are learning. This is the true meaning of “extra credit”!

## The Progression Dynamic: Scaffold and Recognize Progress

Game designers know that gamers are most likely to be lost in the first few minutes of a game. If they aren’t “hooked” right away, there is a good chance they will leave and never come back. That’s why every modern game has a tutorial level that scaffolds the progress of the gamer by setting up a series of simple levels — each one designed to teach one new skill, and each one building on previous levels. This allows gamers to build new skills within the context of game levels, and if they successfully make it through, the game designer knows they have mastered that level.

Consider building self-paced learning into your class by scaffolding each student’s progress

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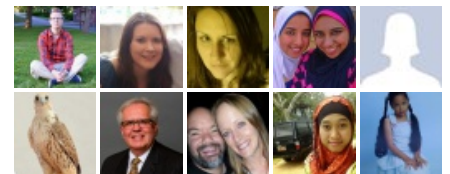
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through the early levels of your course. Remember the “hot and cold” hide-and-seek game many of us played as kids? “You’re getting colder... colder... now you’re getting warmer, warmer, hot, red-hot... you got it!” Try to offer positive feedback for accomplishing simple tasks that get progressively more challenging. Mozilla’s [badges.org](#) and [ClassDojo](#) offer badging and recognition tools to provide incentives and positive reinforcement.

## The Construction Dynamic: Build Something That Matters

Badges and achievements alone don’t make school feel meaningful if students don’t feel engaged in creating something that has purpose. Some of the most successful games of all time, such as [Civilization](#) and [Minecraft](#), allow open-ended building opportunities in which gamers set their own goals, and freely express their creativity in the process of building something difficult and worthwhile

Find ways to engage students in your own classroom by reaching out to the community at large, or by challenging your students to create an initiative that they care about. Build a functioning classroom economy with kid-designed currency, goods, and services. Organize a fun run in the community that benefits local shelters. Have kids design and maintain a recreational Minecraft server run by the community. The [Challenge-Based Learning framework](#) is an ideal way to frame and assess challenges that your students take on.

Kids don’t need to be playing actual games in your class to benefit from game dynamics, and you don’t need to be a hardcore gamer to learn how to create curriculum as stimulating and engaging as games. Much of what we know about good instructional design is modeled in the very games that most of our students are playing every day. Game designers engage players in learning more and more about how to be successful in the game world. Our students expect it from the games they play. Let’s build it into the classroom, too!

**To learn more about how you can use gaming styles in your classroom, come join me for the [EdTechTeacher Summer Workshop Series](#). I will be leading [Gamify Your Classroom: Teaching with Games and Simulations](#), July 24-25 in Cambridge, MA!**

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