



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Hey! There is Fun Learning

The worldwide Internet population is predicted to increase to 827 million users by 2004. There is bound to be a corresponding increase in the number of e-mail users. Here lies a learning opportunity - e-mail, bulletin boards and chat are low cost, low technology tools that can be used to promote collaborative interactive online learning.

More than 1000 corporate learning practitioners are reportedly using e-mail games as learning tools. Designed to cover a wide range of learning topics, web-based games are the latest learning arsenal. They offer a challenging way to effectively process problems that require application, analysis and synthesis.

Why E-games?

Attracting learners to an online learning environment is similar to offering them a sample product in the supermarket. They may taste or even buy it, but this doesn't indicate that they will buy the product in future. Most learners that have been exposed to online learning are motivated to enroll in e-learning programs. But are they going to stay, contribute and return to online learning?

Organizations that have invested heavily in online learning environments need to answer this question. Statistics reveal mixed results on how well online learning is utilized. Quite a few e-learning modules are still gathering dust! E-mail games are now a part of the promotional package that encourages the use of online learning.

E-play

In an e-mail game, sending and receiving e-mail messages addresses a key issue. The players constitute a facilitator and a group of learners. Several rounds of play are spread over a few days or weeks. E-mail games test the participant's ability to generate and process content by posing open-ended questions. In the early rounds, the interaction is mainly between the players and facilitator. Eventually, players come together to discuss content via a bulletin board.

Real-time games involve fancy graphics, state-of-the-art programming and simultaneous play. On the contrary, e-mail games use low technology and text messages. E-mail games can also be used to increase participation in idea-sharing activities.

Virtually More

Online learning was meant to increase interactivity. However, a look at online programs reveals that this interactivity is limited to connecting the learner with online content. While e-mail has been overlooked as a learning tool, it does offer a platform for supporting learner-to-learner and learner-to-facilitator interactions. This is done through game-based instructional strategies designed to encourage interactions.

Virtual games use open-ended, provocative questions to create and process content. Assessing participant understanding, using simulations and role-play for problem solving,

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decision-making and feedback are also possible through virtual games. Virtual games can be played with the combination of e-mail, chat, web pages and the bulletin board. However, e-mail games are the most popular because Net users are more comfortable and familiar with e-mail.

The success factors of e-mail games include:

- **Widely used and priced low.** User comfort and confidence levels are high with e-mail. Since the learner doesn't have to compete with unfamiliar technology, he or she can focus on the learning process. Additional technical and programming skills aren't required. Both online experts and novices can participate equally.
- **Readily available.** A user requires no passwords and faces no download hold-ups while accessing e-mail games. Also, since e-mail games can be integrated with the player's daily work, the effort in initiating participation is minimized.
- **Collaborative approach.** An e-mail game methodology promotes person-to-person interactions, unlike other computer games.
- **Experiential.** During the play, participants have to generate and process content. Hence, participants have to experience the process before active participation.
- **Asynchronous.** An e-mail game can have participants from all over the world, as it is a distributed, asynchronous process.
- **Less time-consuming.** Just like all games, e-mail games are motivating and engaging. Hence, the dropout rate is low. Also, the division of games into rounds makes them less time-consuming.
- **Anonymity.** This feature attracts players who are normally passive and fear reprisals. E-mail game players can be candid with their opinions.
- **More productive.** Games generate fun and a fun environment is more conducive to new ideas and problem solving.
- **Inclusive and versatile.** Informing, applying, analyzing and synthesizing - games can accommodate all these learning tasks. Organizations have used games to address topics from strategic planning to issues like workplace harassment.
- **Uncomplicated design template.** The frameworks of e-mail games are designed to permit content replacement. Since the process remains the same even after a change in content, players find it easy to adapt.

Role of Facilitators

Advantages aside, the success of virtual games relies on effective facilitation. While players generate and process content, it is the facilitator who conducts the game. A qualified facilitator should have working knowledge of communication technologies. He should also have the ability to process e-mail game responses quickly and accurately.



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To monitor the game and ensure smooth running and fair player participation, facilitators must have good interpersonal skills. This ensures timely and unbiased feedback and facilitates change. This also makes the instructional process dynamic.