

## **Advice on Making Games**

The best way to learn is to jump right in and test out new ideas with a group of players. This first page will give you the short version of live action game design. The rest of this guide contains more in-depth instruction for creating your first and subsequent games. Good luck!

### **The Process**

Create a Concept > Design > Playtest > Reflect / Respond / Iterate > Repeat!

#### **Create a Concept**

Every game starts with an idea. Sometimes the idea is a game mechanic (such as tagging or catching) or a specific action. Sometimes the idea is an outside inspiration (such as a video game) or a story. Sometimes the idea is simply a feeling or word.

Brainstorm a couple of concepts with your group and vote to find the top two or three. Don't take too long, argue, or overthink the idea!

#### **Design**

Once you have an idea or two, each one will need a preliminary game design. This is the most complex step, but don't worry -- you won't get it perfect the first time, or even the second or third... The goal of this step is to define the first playable version of the game so you can move on to the next step. Your first playable should at the very least define the goal(s) of the game (such as "Be the first team to score five points") and the rules of the game.

Create a game design for your concept(s) with your group by defining the goal(s) and rules. Don't be afraid to experiment!

#### **Playtest**

Run through the basic game design that you created with a group of players. The first time you do this, try to follow your design precisely. If you notice problems, which you will, you can make small changes during the playtest after everyone has played for a little bit.

After you play for a short while, sit with the group and discuss the game. What was fun? What needed improvement? What felt right? Where could it break?

#### **Reflect / Respond / Iterate**

This discussion leads back to the concept and design. The feedback will identify the opportunities to improve your game -- or it will show that the game isn't fixable. Even if everyone is having a great time, the game isn't done. Experiment with different directions. Be creative!

Revisit, update, and expand your game design with your group.

#### **Repeat!**

Good games are only the result of many hours of playtesting and iteration. Play the game and don't be afraid to try big changes.

## **How to Make a Live Action Game (Expanded Version)**

If you are seeking further inspiration or explanation, check out the information below. Creating a new game is hard and creating a good game is even harder! You need all the help you can get.

### **Part 1 - Define the Essentials**

#### **Who is the Audience?**

This is a straightforward question. For right now, the answer will be between 6 and 8 Players, as this is a reasonable size to work with when starting out.

Another aspect to consider is the average age of your Audience. Participants of different ages are going to have different gaming desires and abilities. Are you designing your game for children, teens, adults, or a combination? You don't need to answer that question now -- the best answer is to design it for yourself!

#### **Do you need any Props for your game?**

Some games require items and some don't. If you're stuck without an idea, grabbing a handful of strange Props is an excellent way to start off the game creation process. Also, if you're well into the iteration and playtesting, changing up the Props can help inspire and expand your game.

#### **Where can you play the game?**

Is this game made for a classroom? A lecture hall? A hallway? The end goal is to cater to the context as much as possible. Although many games can be played in many spaces, it is definitely worth thinking through what games are appropriate for what spaces. Some games get dangerous if there isn't enough space or there are obstructions.

#### **How long does your game run?**

This question also already has an answer: 10 minutes! Why? Because when you start creating games, short rounds give you a shot to iterate and improve. Sure, there are longer games, but those games require a lot more work and are more complex than can be achieved today.

On a sheet of paper, write down your preliminary essentials: Audience, Props (if any), Space (a field), and Time (10 minutes). These may change as you design, but they are the most important place to start.

## Part 2 - The Actions

Tag + Throw + Catch + Goal + Rectangular Boundaries = American Football

Tag + Retrieve + Rectangular Boundaries = Capture the Flag

Tag + Hit + Base + Catch + Diamond Boundaries = Baseball

Kick + Goal + Rectangular Boundaries = Soccer

Shoot + Dribble + Rectangular Court = Basketball

Throw + Catch + Goal + Rectangular Boundaries = Ultimate Frisbee

Competitive outdoor games are made up of smaller elements that are commonly found in other games as well. Tag, a staple of playgrounds and a universally nostalgic childhood pastime, is one of the main building blocks of many games and sports.

Live action game creation can be as simple as remixing game mechanics that are common in many sports and games, and combining them in new ways. Here is a small slice of the elements that you will encounter in popular outdoor games.

### Throw

A player projects an object from their hand at a target, to another player, or in the air.

### Tag

One player (normally designated "It") chases and tries to catch another player(s).

### Jump

A player leaps in the air.

### Catch

A player grabs a projectile out of the air.

### Shoot

A player projects an object upwards in the air (normally in an arc) toward a ring or similar target.

### Tap

A player uses his/her body, normally the hands, to keep an object in the air without catching it.

### Retrieve

A player or group of players gets an object from one spot and brings it to another.

### Goal

A line, set of boundaries, or structure that represents the end location for an object in play. Goals generally deal with objects, not players.

### Boundaries

A set of lines or other discrete markers that form the playing area.

### Base

A line, set of boundaries, or structure that represents a "safe" location or endpoint for the player(s). Bases generally deal with players, not objects.

**Hit**

A player uses an object, such as a stick, bat, or body part to launch a projectile.

**Kick**

A player uses his/her foot to launch a projectile, such as a ball.

**Dribble**

A player keeps a ball bouncing. Conventionally done with the hands.

**Dodge**

A player avoids a projectile or other player(s).

**Blindfold**

A player's sight is restricted.

**Balance**

A player must stay upright.

**Shout**

A player must use a designated vocalization.

**Replicate Action**

A player must repeat an action(s).

**Follow**

One player must stay directly behind another player(s), in some cases replicating their action(s).

**Race**

The player(s) attempt to run faster or finish a task faster than another player(s).

This list is only a basic reference to get you started mixing and matching. For example, take one of the elements above, like Tag. Tag is simple, right? But add the twist of Bases and the game becomes more complex and more fun. Add Replicate Action of a player becoming frozen and you have Freeze Tag. Add a Shout and you get Zoolander Tag. Add some Boundaries and make the field smaller with each round. Add a Rubber Chicken!

Ok, now you are aware of some basic game elements and you have a better idea of the many ways to combine them. Add your own actions to the list, remix, and create!

On your game sheet, write down some actions that you want in your game. Don't just use this list -- that's lazy! Come up with your own actions as well.

### **Part 3 - The Goals**

There are still a couple of elements missing. Sure you know who's playing and what they're doing -- but what exactly is the goal of the game? How do you win?

The same way that actions make up what you do in the game, win conditions dictate the actual goal of the game. Most sports have the same win condition: the most points after a set amount of time. Tennis, however, has no time restriction and a win is merely about winning more than half of the sets. Here are some win conditions to get you thinking about what kind of goal(s) you would like to create.

#### **Loss Avoidance**

The last team or player remaining wins, such as in Knock Out.

#### **Prop Elimination**

The last team or player with a certain prop wins, such as Capture the Flag.

#### **Race**

The first to accomplish a certain task or tasks wins, such as an obstacle course.

#### **Territory Control**

The first to capture and control a certain amount or percentage of spaces or areas.

#### **Victory Points**

The first to reach a certain score, such as Taps.

Again, like the other list on this document, this is by no means comprehensive! And, such as the actions, you can mix and match as much as you'd like. Perhaps players have different win conditions -- in Freeze Tag, "It" wants to capture everyone to win, while everyone else wants to stay unfrozen (and unfreeze others). There can even be layered goals, like in Hearts, where players want to avoid collecting the Queen of Spades and Heart cards, unless, of course, they decide to Shoot the Moon and collect all of those cards. Add your own goals to this list, remix, and create (again)!

On your game sheet write down some win conditions that fit within your game. Write down a bunch so you have options to work with while testing.

## Part 4 - The Rules

And you're done. Actually, not quite yet. There's another whole set of terms that need definition: the rules. You probably already have most of the rules defined, but it's worth writing them down anyway. Are there boundaries? That's a simple one to start with. Is there a time limit? What happens if someone drops a prop? What happens when you are tagged?

On your game sheet write down the rules. They need to reflect your goals and actions and they shouldn't break the game. Also write down the penalties for breaking the rules (if any). Does gameplay stop? Do you switch teams?

Once you have the actions and the goals completely set, the rules are the easiest way to experiment with a game. You can use the rules to manipulate boundaries or keep players from doing certain behaviors that make the game too easy or too hard. If you find in testing that the game feels right and players enjoy the gameplay, experiment with different rule sets to see how you can challenge the players to think different ways and create a good balance.

## Part 5 — The Story

The Name of your game can make or break it. Really. It can.

There are many games that have very basic, explanatory names, such as “Capture the Flag.” The Facilitator has the extra job of adding story to the explanation to get the players interested and excited to play. When you observe some people playing “Capture the Flag,” there’s a certain imaginary world that people enter. They are no longer running around a field with fellow Players — instead they are fighting a territory war. The act of grabbing the flag and running toward your side is an emotional experience that is very compelling.

Sometimes the name alone makes people want to play a game. Like “Angry Birds” or “Zombie Tag” or “Ridiculous Fishing.”

And sometimes the story isn’t just the added piece that makes the game exciting—sometimes the story IS the game. What’s “World of Warcraft” without a story?

Games are not about only the goal or the rules — they are about the entire experience. Part of that experience is the story that surrounds the circumstances presented to the player. You need to find a way to capture the imaginations of your players, and every detail that you give will make the game more immersive and engaging.

Your game has the essential ingredients. It has some game elements. Now you need to ADD A STORY. The story does not need to be terribly complex. Some games work (almost) entirely because of the name. You completely control this part of your creation. You can create an epic narrative around your vision, or just come up with a goofy name. But make sure whatever you have is unique and creative. Remember, silly sells!

On your game sheet write down a name for your game, or a couple. Discuss with your group what the name means? Is there a story? Write down a couple sentences that tell the players *why* they’re doing what they’re doing. For instance, “Your castle has been stormed by an evil emperor and your job is to regain control by any means necessary!” That’s much better than, “Your team needs to go into their boundary and take the flag.”

## Part 6 - The Secret

Ready for the big secret?

Some games work. Some games don't. Most new games are somewhere in the middle. Your game is not going to be perfect after only a day. With the right facilitator and audience, any game will work for 10 minutes. All that effort for 10 lousy minutes!

Once you have completed the previous 3 steps and sewed them together into a tight little package, you need to playtest your game. Again. And again. You should have been testing little bits right along! Run the game and take note — you have only 10 minutes for the test. Your players will follow instructions and attempt whatever you throw at them for a short period of time. Especially this audience, since they're here to create a game. They're the easiest audience that you'll get.

Around the 10-minute mark is when the players will realize whether the game is working or not. At this point, you need to cut it off, even if it's a great success, because the goal is to leave the audience wanting more. And if it isn't a great success? Do not fret. Games need lots of work and refinement.

Once you're done testing a new game, even if everyone praises your game, there is still work to be done. Your game works with this group when you're there - but does it work with a different audience? Does it work in different spaces? Will it work with more players? These answers are not easy to come by without actual testing and once you feel like the game is "done" (although it never really is), you need to have blind playtesting. This means you need to have someone read your game write-up and play it without you there. And they need to tell you about it, too. That's the important part!

Writing up games is a great way to capture what you have created and share it with others. Who knows? Perhaps someday you'll be out at a games festival and someone will teach you your own game — what a great experience that is!

The best outcome is for your game to live on, beyond your group. Try to make the game viral and continue to improve it. You will not make any money and perhaps you will not even be recognized, but it's nice to know that something you made is making others happy.



# Game Explanation Sheet

## Game Name

## Type

This is a short description that quickly tells people what kind of game it is, like "Large & Short" (lots of space needed and quick gameplay) or "Big-time Fun Indoors" (a longer activity for a lot of people inside).

## Description

This is a short summary of the entire experience.

## Pitch

The "Pitch" is a shorter version of the summary that is intended to get people excited to play the game. It should be short and punchy.

## Source

Did you create this game? Were you inspired by any other games?

## Audience

How many? What ages can play this game?

## Space

Where does this game take place?

## Time

How long will the game last?

## Props

What objects are needed?

## Prep

What needs to be set up? How long will setup take?

## Gameplay

Describe the entire experience in detail from beginning to end.

## Rules

What can players do or not do?

## Goal

How do people win the game?

## Variations

Are there different ways to play?

## Game Design Notes

How many times did you play the game? What were some of the challenges that you faced with your group? How could the game be improved?