



What Is Game-based Learning?

A GAME-BASED
LEARNING GLOSSARY

basics

edtech

Also known as educational technology, edtech refers to the many different types of technology that may be used in the classroom to increase student engagement.

educational games

Video games where the main focus is to learn. [Check out our two-part series on making great learning games.](#)

efficacy

The ability of an educational game to facilitate learning that is usefully applicable in a player's real life and longitudinally retained.

engagement

In game design, engagement refers to designing a compelling experience that fosters intrinsic motivation in the learner.

game-based learning

Includes game mechanics and strategies on how to tie the content or practice itself to gameplay. Embodies that content in the act of play itself.

game design

The vision, concept, mechanical structure, and creative direction behind a game.

game development

The process of coding and producing a video game.

games for impact

Includes both educational games and serious games.

gamification

A practice that refers to the integration of content-agnostic game-based tools.

These include things like points, badges, quests, and feedback. Game characteristics that don't necessarily tie to the educational content itself.

intrinsic motivation

Performing an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence.

serious games

Video games where the main focus is to expose the audience to an important idea, event, or social/cultural phenomenon. These games aim to do more than simply entertain the player.

environments for learning

at-home

Learning that is not necessarily aligned with K-12 paradigms, and is parent-led or parent oriented to enable at-home learning.

informal

Refers to learning environments that are not age-specific, and includes but is not limited to libraries, media centers, community centers, and after-school clubs.

K-12

A formal learning environment (such as a classroom) for students between the ages of Kindergarten and their senior year of high school.

post-secondary

A formal learning environment that occurs after K-12 is completed, including colleges, universities, trade schools, and graduate schools.

workplace/enterprise

A learning environment (such as an office) that is integrated with one's place of employment or own company, where training takes place.

design

assessment

Design and technology systems in a game that establish and record learning metrics on player behavior in order to measure how much they grasp the material.

content

The audio and visual information found in a game.

game mechanics

The identities, verbs, and systems found in a game.

identity

The role a player takes on in an educational video game.

In some cases, learning objectives are best attached to an embedded identity or character that can be used to empower the player. Identity-based objectives are one of the best ways to provide context for additional, more complex ideas by creating a situation where the player feels like their choices are significant.

learning objectives

A statement that describes what the player should be able to do or understand at the end of the game, provided they've mastered the game during play.

scaffolding

A design modality where an educational game serves the player distinct segments of material, and gradually provides less guidance over time.

systems

The rules that control the interactions of all the components in a game.

Systems are best suited for capturing complex ideas that are comprised of multiple intricate components. Systems in educational games provide a way for the player to anticipate and predict the outcome of their actions, and the influence they will have on the game world.

transference

Creating knowledge in the player that bridges the gap from the game experience to application in real-world contexts.

Facilitating transfer involves a host of strategies, including reflection activities that ask players to apply/explain their understandings and reapplication activities that ask players to take a skill they've mastered and use it in a novel way.

verbs

Actions that define the player's gameplay capabilities.

Determining the range and type of verbs within a learning game must be centrally informed by the key learning objectives and an understanding of what actions are fun and motivating to the target audience. Ideally, these actions provide a way for the player to directly interact with the learning objectives in a way that still feels playful.

types of learning facilitated by games

passion-based learning

A method of teaching that combines innate student interests and passions with curricula to facilitate more in-depth learning.

project-based learning (PBL)

A pedagogy that emphasizes active, hands-on exploration of real-world challenges and problems, particularly through the production of holistic, cross-curricular, personally meaningful projects.

social-emotional learning (SEL)

An enhanced focus on building social skills and competencies that will help students be successful in school, work, and life beyond the classroom.

SEL is not a single program or teaching method – rather, it involves coordinated efforts across classrooms, schools, and districts to promote key skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, negotiation, delegation, and empathy.

subject-specific learning

Topical learning that focuses specifically on an in-depth exploration of one subject at a time, such as math, spelling, biology, etc.

games and platforms

chromebook

A game that is playable only on a web browser or through Android or Chromebook applications.

mobile

A downloadable game that is playable on Android or iOS mobile devices.

PC/mac

A downloadable game that is playable on PC and/or Mac operating systems.

VR

A game that is playable on virtual reality headsets, such as the Meta Quest 2 or VIVE XR Elite.

web/browser

A game that can be played directly in one's web browser.

Discover more about game-based learning terms on the [Filament Games blog](#).