



How FlexGames became a Constructivist Designer's Best Friend

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How often have you been asked to develop learning interventions when the redesigned processes are not completed, the equipment is not available before the training session, or the new computer application is changing right up to the time when the training takes place? Developing training when the content is not stable until days or minutes before the session, or is not stable until well after the session is over, is a fact of life. The good news is constructivist designs and the use of performance support tools has made this increasingly feasible. What has remained a challenge is to find a way to test for understanding and performance during the learning intervention. How does one develop an evaluation tool when one does not know what one is evaluating?

One approach that has been proven to work is the use of FlexGames. So, what is a FlexGame? How kind of you to ask! A FlexGame, as described by Harold Stolovitch and Sylvie Vanasse in their February 1998 article in *Performance Improvement*, contains all the attributes of a game:

- an artificial structure
- a conflict
- a set of rules governing player behaviour
- a closure or win mechanism

FlexGames have the added attribute that the content can be quickly and easily changed without affecting the game itself. This means that the content can be



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loaded at the very last minute by the instructional designer, the facilitator, or even by the learner.

How are FlexGames different from FlexSims and Frame Games? Another excellent question! You must be reading my mind!

- In FlexGames everything is stable except the content.
- In FlexSims everything including the content is stable, except the debriefing strategy.
- In Frame Games only the structure is stable.

FlexGames can be fun, fast moving activities which let you evaluate learning and identify problem areas by having the learners answer knowledge and skill-based questions and/or performing job-related tasks. The game provides a structure which is readily adaptable to a variety of content in that you can use it in technical, hands-on training, information technology related training, and process or product related sessions equally well. Content can vary from employment equity, through accounting, and all the way to welding rail quickly and effectively. The game should also be easy to use and the rules quickly understood.



So what are some examples of FlexGames in use? Once more, an excellent question!

- in a course which taught performers to use the performance support system for a new call center application the game required learners go to the new application and find a piece of information or perform a task thereby demonstrating that they could use the performance support tool to guide them through the functionality of the application.
- in a technical course the game had some of the performers locate, remove, and return to the game with a component of the equipment while others had to answer questions related to proper safety and repair procedures.
- in yet another course the game required that the performers quickly sketch the steps in a new process that had just been defined, in class, on the previous day.

So the last question I am sure you are all asking yourselves is "Where can I use FlexGames?" Some suggestions:

Use FlexGames to:

- review key course material at the end of a course
- as a refresher exercise at the beginning of a component of a training program
- as a brainstorming tool
- to evaluate pre-requisite knowledge before a course or program



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Just remember you can use the same FlexGame over and over since the content changes with each course. That makes them easy to use, a great value, and the constructivist designer's best friend!