**Game Ideas for the Psychology Classroom**

**1) Heads Up.** “Heads up” is a mobile game that appeared on the Ellen Degeneres show and is sold by Warner Bros as a phone app. One player places their phone on their forehead and a word appears that other players can see. The others give clues until the player with the phone guesses the word correctly. This simple game can be modified for classroom use by using a mobile device delivery system (e.g. *Learning Catalytics*, *gosoapbox*, *TopHat*) in which the instructor can deliver psychology terms to teams of students. For a low technology alternative, psychology terms can be written on index cards, shuffled face down, and then drawn and placed against the forehead. In teams of 3 or 4, students take turns being the “guesser” and the “clue givers”. To intensify the game, ask students to time how long it takes to get through all the terms, and perhaps complete the game a second time trying to improve their response time. Or, teams can compete to see which group gets through the stack of terms first.

**2) Draw it!** The instructor provides teams of students with a stack of cards with key terms/course concepts. Alternatively, the instructor can use a classroom management software program and deliver the terms to students on their mobile devices. Similar to *Pictionary*, students see if they can get their teammates to guess the course concept correctly by drawing pictures. They may not use words or symbols in their drawing and may not talk or gesture while drawing.

**3) Scavenger Hunt**. There is something innately fun about scavenger hunts – the thrill of searching and then finding! On the first day of class when you go over the syllabus, you could finish with a game in which you divide students into teams and hand them a list of questions that can be answered by searching through the syllabus (e.g. On what day will you be taking exam #3? Where is your instructor’s office located?). When students complete the scavenger hunt they can turn in their answers to be corrected and perhaps receive a small reward such as a piece of candy. Another example would be to give students the challenge of searching for examples that illustrate lecture content. For example, you could ask students to use their mobile devices to locate an everyday example of classical conditioning. Or, you could ask students to search for famous people who have self-identified as having a psychological disorder. Students can work individually or in teams and can use their mobile devices. How many different disorders/celebrities can they or their team find in 15 minutes?

**4) Daily Puzzles.** Consider starting class with a “daily puzzle” of some type. One option is to provide a visual quiz item that students can work on while waiting for class to start. For example, you could show a cartoon and see if students can identify the psychological concept at work. “Psychology” cartoons can be found online on websites like [www.**cartoonstock**.com](http://www.cartoonstock.com). Another option is to start class each day with a “Dear Abby” type question that deals with the days topic and ask students to come up with a recommendation. Students will be interested to find out if their recommendation matches the one a psychologist would give based on the research in that topic area. There are also many free online template programs that enable instructors to insert content and make their own crossword puzzles (e.g. www.**puzzle**-maker.com/CW/)

**5) Describe it!** The instructor provides teams of students with a stack of cards with key terms/course concepts (e.g. theories of motivation, or parts of the brain). One student selects a card and attempts to get their team members to guess the term by giving verbal clues. The students can give any information they want, as long as they don’t use the word(s) on the card.

**6) Brainstorm Blitz**. For topics where you’d like students to generate examples, consider dividing students into pairs or larger teams and asking students to brainstorm and come up with as many answers as they can. For example, you might want students to generate examples of intrinsic or extrinsic awards, or names of psychoactive drugs they’ve seen in advertisements, etc. To “gamify” this activity you can either give teams a time limit to see how many they can come up with in that period of time, or give students a set number of examples they need to come up with and ask teams to ring their buzzer when they’re done.

**7) TV Game Shows.** Playing *Jeopardy* or *Hollywood Squares* can be an engaging way to review large amounts of material (e.g. when studying the structures of the brain, or when reviewing several chapters for an upcoming exam). Classroom games modelled after popular television game shows can be done using technology (e.g. powerpoint slides or mobile phones) or low-tech old-fashioned ways (photocopied handouts). In either case you will need to supply the questions and answers to be used, so there will be some prep time. There are a variety of templates, printable cards and options for online games:

* *Jeopardy*

<https://jeopardylabs.com/>

<https://www.superteachertools.net/jeopardyx/>

* *Hollywood Squares*, *Weakest Link*, *Smarter than a 5th Grader*

http://www.ircsd.org/webpages/dyoung/game\_templates.cfm

**8)** **Solve it!** Humans love a good mystery or challenge. Provide students with a scenario of some type – a case study of a person with a disorder, or an example of classical conditioning, etc. Give students rules or constraints (time limits, what resources they can use, team member they can work with, etc.) and consider using game elements for engagement. For examples, when teams have solved their mystery, send a runner to the front of the room to ring the buzzer.

**9) Act it out!** The instructor provides teams of students with a list of key terms/course concepts (e.g. historical figures in psychology). Like the game *Charades*, students try to get their team to guess the term using only non-verbal cues such as acting, mimicking, or gesturing. The “actor” must remain silent.

**10) Dice and buzzers.** Sometimes an ordinary exercise or activity can be energized by using game mechanics/materials such as dice or buzzers commonly found on teaching/educator supply websites. One option is to purchase giant foam dice that can be used to call on people (e.g. one die can determine the row and the second die the seat). Dice can also be rolled to determine the amount of extra credit to give to a class following an activity or game. If students are timed doing an exercise or you want to encourage participation, consider using buzzer buttons. Buzzers can be purchased in a variety of crazy sounds, and add an element of humor and fun.

**11) Sculpt it!** The popular board game *Cranium* requires players to engage in a variety of tasks including one in which they use modeling clay to sculpt an object that their teammates must correctly identify. This is called a “sculpturade”. This same activity can be modified to review or apply psychological concepts. You will need to purchase play-doh (I recommend black play-doh that can be purchased in individual containers from Walmart for .99). This game can be particularly useful when the goal is application or deeper processing. For example, you can ask students to sculpt various monocular cues for depth. In order to sculpt “linear perspective”, for example, you have to have done more than just memorize the definition, you have to understand how it creates depth in order to sculpt it for others.

**12) What’s on my back?** A psychological concept written on a small index card or sticky note is placed on each student’s back when they enter the classroom. Students try to find out what’s written on their back by asking their classmates questions that can only be answered with yes or no. You may or may not want to allow students to use their books or notes as aids. Certain topics, such as those that have lists of different items make good candidates for this game. For example, students can review the various psychological disorders by placing a different one on each person’s back. Once the student has guessed their disorder they remove the card from their back, but are still available to play the game with others by answering their classmate’s questions.

**13) Classification Games.** Most people enjoy the challenge of sorting, categorizing and classifying information. For example, you could have students sort statements or examples according to what psychology theory they belong to, the type of therapy, the class of disorder, the form of learning, etc. Another idea is to give students information on individual slips of paper and have them physically manipulate them into the correct sequence (e.g. ordering the correct steps in systematic desensitization therapy or the correct order of Erikson’s developmental stages).

**14) Survival Games.** There are a variety of games in which students are given a scenario involving a major catastrophe -- the world is ending, people are stranded on an island, or left on the moon, and decisions have to be made about which individuals should be kept and which should be given the boot. These survival games can be used to introduce or discuss social psychology topics such as conflict resolution, group dynamics, stereotyping, social roles, etc. The following website offers a list of free survival scenarios including lost at sea, survival on the moon, plane crash survival, nuclear holocaust, island survival, and more.

<http://www.wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/SurvivalScenarios.html>

**15) COTS** – Commercially available off the shelf games aka COTS are few and far between in psychology but they do exist. Most COTS were not developed for educational purposes, and do not warrant spending precious classroom time to play a full game. However, the games can be used in educational ways. For example, after a few minutes of playing the game, students could be asked to analyze the game for accuracy or to categorize playing cards (e.g. by therapy type, or psychological perspective).

Examples of Current Games:

* + PSYCHOPOLOGY: This is a monopoly type board game with a psychology theme. [www.thepsychstore.com/thepsychstoreshop.html](http://www.thepsychstore.com/thepsychstoreshop.html)
  + THERAPY the Game: This is a 3-6 player board game invented by a psychiatrist, a journalist, and a psychologist and is intended to be used by mental health professionals and students alike.

[www.therapythegame.com](http://www.therapythegame.com)

* + PSYCHOLOGY IQ GAME: NATURE VS. NURTURE: Students roll dice, read cards, and move around a game board to see the impact of both nature and the environment on their outcomes.

<http://pluralistspeaks.blogspot.com/2012/02/psychology-iq-game.html>

* + PSYCHOLOGY TRIVIA GAME CARDS: Created for high school students, the game includes 300 questions designed to help student learn about psychology.

http://www.teachersdiscovery.com/psychology-trivia-game-cards.html

Vintage games can often be purchased at yard sales, thrift stores or on *ebay* and can be used to get students to think critically about changes over time in stereotyping, gender roles, approaches to therapy, etc.

Examples of Vintage Games:

* BLACKS AND WHITES (1970*) Psychology Today*
* GROUP THERAPY: IS IT REALLY A GAME? (1969) *Park Plastics Co.*
* WHAT SHALL I BE? THE EXCITING GAME OF CAREER GIRLS (1966/1970) *Selchow & Righter*
* WHAT SHALL I BE? THE EXCITING CAREER GAME FOR BOYS (1966/1970) *Selchow & Righter*



