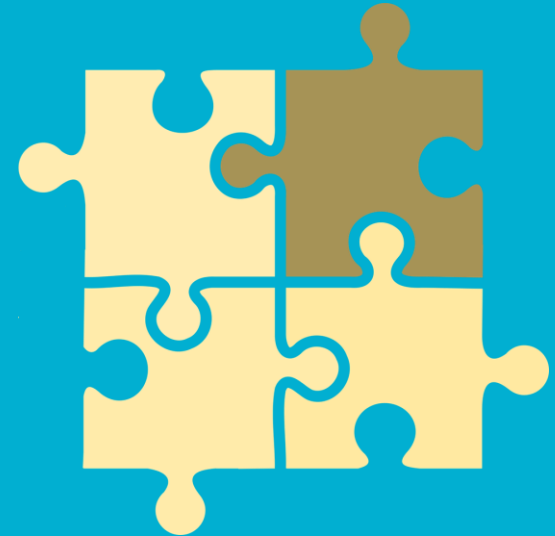


# The Gamification of Reference Training

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Intern Training at UPenn Libraries

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# Background

## Location & Currency:

Training games for reference interns have been utilized at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries for the last five years. Their latest implementations were discussed in the Summer 2019 issue of *Reference & User Services Quarterly*.

## Stakeholders:

The participants in this training model are an annual cohort of five to six reference interns who staff the information desk, and fall under the umbrella of Access Services within the Van Pelt branch of the UPenn Libraries.

## Need:

The variety of training games help in the onboarding process of interns, who in turn provide quality reference service support to all patrons of the library.

# Gamification Definition & Models

**Gamification** is “the process of applying game mechanics and game thinking to the real world to solve problems and engage users” (Phetteplace and Felker, 2014, p. 20).

## Gamification as a Major Trend:

Gamification within a library context has been gaining increased popularity: from library orientations and general resource usage to information literacy instruction and staff training, there are many opportunities to situate learning within a game or puzzle.

## The **Amazing Library Race** at the Starke County Public Library System:

Staff members engaged in a race that “increase[d] engagement between departments and help[ed] staff to recognize what other departments do, and how it affects them and their department.” At each station, there were games that reflected different duties at the library, from technical services to circulation to the children’s department (Roy, 2014).

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# Known Item Relay, Access War, & More

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For the interns' training, the library staff created the following games:

Known Item Relay, Photo Scavenger Hunt, Services Taboo, Access War, & a culmination of them all, Penn Libraries, The Game.

My favorite was **Services Taboo**: An intern must describe a location or service to their teammate without using the name of said service or place, like in the traditional Taboo. For example, explaining a 3-D Printing Lab without using the words “3-D” or “Printing.”

The materials costs were kept low by using and recycling materials on hand, such as printer paper, card catalog sheets, and cardboard. All the same, interns seemed to enjoy the competition and camaraderie of the games.

“To training staff, though, seeing the mere desire of interns to bring out the game and play meant that the time spent developing these training tools had been worth it” (Kirk, 2019, p. 218).

# An Assessment

## Active Learning & Scaffolding

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These games encourage active learning of concepts. For the Photo Scavenger Hunt, for example, players must correctly understand the layout of and navigate the library's seven floors in order to photograph the necessary locations and landmarks.

In addition, the scaffolding of concepts -- with games building on one another over time -- proves to be effective in interns remembering necessary information.

## A Possible Addition

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However, I feel as if these interns could have benefited from “microskills” training, in the form of learning how to acknowledge patrons, ask appropriate questions, include them in the search process, and ensure positive closure. (However, these skills may be addressed in other trainings that UPenn libraries conducts, such as mock reference interviews).

# A Summary

**Libraries & Games:**  
For fun, for learning, for  
assessment.

**Gamification is a way for libraries to stay engaged with staff and patrons alike.**

**Building these games, while at times challenging and time-consuming, encourages learning, team-building, and play among users.**

**And in addition to being learning tools, these games can serve as their own assessment tools: In play, one can see who grasps and remembers concepts, and who may also need a refresher.**

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# References

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Kirk, S. (2019). Creating analog and digital games for reference training: Overview and examples. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 58(4), 215–218.

Phetteplace, E., & Felker, K. (2014). Gamification in libraries. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 54(2), 19–23. <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/10.5860/rusq.54n2.19>

Roy, M. (2014, July 29). Team-building with the amazing library race. Retrieved from <https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/team-building-with-the-amazing-library-race.html>