What is Gamification?

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (1993) defines gamification as a process of “adding games or game-like elements to something (as a task) so as to encourage participation.” You may find this definition confusing when you hear other phrases or terms like “game-based learning”. In the rush to incorporate the latest technology into learning environments, these terms can become blurred and often are mistakenly interchanged.

Gamification can be viewed as a larger effort of adding game-like elements into your course. Instead of courses consisting of only lectures and textbooks for information, students are provided opportunities to choose or search on their own within the course to achieve learning goals. This approach is self-paced; students’ progress through a series of educational activities. Because it is student-driven, it boosts student engagement. Typical strategies used involve recognizing achievements through points, badges, and leaderboards or progress boards.
What is Game-based Learning?

Game-based learning is a smaller effort where individual games or technology are used to enhance a particular learning experience. Examples include using already existing popular games like Monopoly, SimCity, or Minecraft and applying these games to individual learning outcomes (Isaacs, 2015). A game that is used needs to have instructional content, a process, and a corresponding outcome in order to be effective.

Why is it important to know the difference?

Understanding how they are different will help you determine when and how you choose to use them to maximize learning experiences.

If you wish students to experience concepts, ideas, and issues from the course in a variety of different ways you may want to consider a gamification approach. This may provide opportunities for students to be engaged with peers and ultimately motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning. (Boud & Prosser, 2002)

If instead you need a supplemental approach to a learning outcome within a course, a more game-based learning method may be more appropriate. Students, for example, could perform a formative assessment of the content learned from the classroom instruction. (Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009).

Yi Yang, of Franklin University, identifies three questions to help guide you in your decisions of which approach to use:

- What is the purpose of my e-learning/training/instruction?

  If the purpose is to change learner behavior and to motivate students, then a gamification approach may be more appropriate. If the purpose is to help teach specific knowledge and skills, then a game-based approach maybe more in line with your objective.

- Are there specific learning outcomes involved?

  Game-based learning supports very specific well-defined learning outcomes. Yang states that game-based learning aligns with Bloom’s Taxonomy (Allen Interactions, 2014). Gamification, on the other hand, may not need as well-defined learning outcomes.
Review “Taxonomy of Cognitive Learning” in the HBO toolkit, to learn more about Bloom’s Taxonomy and “Measureable Learning Outcomes” for a more detailed discussion.

- What are my desired end-results and how do I get there?

Yang believes that both gamification and game-based learning can be used to develop highly motivating and engaging learning experiences. Both approaches are examples of active learning. Active learning strategies can be used to enhance learning during all phases of the teaching–learning process. Gaining feedback from peers, educators, and technology greatly influences learner satisfaction and must be harnessed to provide effective learning experiences (Phillips, 2005). The decision on which approach to use however needs to be based on pedagogy.

Regardless of which approach you use, the ultimate goal is to design highly effective learning experiences. As Aristotle is often quoted, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

For more information review “Taking Your Traditional Syllabus Online” in the HBO Toolkit.

References:


