

DESIGN TEAM NAME: _____

CHEMISTRY BOARD GAME PROJECT MANUAL

MR. SCOTT

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

2015-2016



<http://www.callcentrehelper.com/images/stories/2010/games-510.jpg>

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We are living in a board game renaissance

By Cody Carlson For the Deseret News
Published: Friday, Aug. 30 2013 7:15 a.m. MDT



Battlestar Galactica, from Fantasy Flight Games, Star Trek: Fleet Captains, from WizKids, and DC Comics Deck Building Game, from Cryptozoic Entertainment, are examples of fun and dynamic movie and TV board game tie-ins. (Cody Carlson)

You may not realize it, but you are living in the middle of a board game renaissance.

In a recent video post on his website [Shut Up & Sit Down](#), British game journalist Quintin Smith noted that we are living in a golden age for board gaming.

“For the last 10 years board game sales have been going up every single year between 10 and 20 percent, that’s enormous,” Smith said. “There are two things that are amazing about this: first of all is the sort of phoenix-like return of board games. Why did that happen? And the other thing is that the

sales are still going up.”

Smith answers his own question: “It’s because games themselves are getting better.”

He also notes that traditional games like Monopoly have not benefited from this sales increase. “People are realizing there are better board games out there.”

These better games, Smith states, are the result of a coming together of different cultures — European and American. Not so long ago there were two kinds of board games: “Eurogames,” which boasted dynamic and inventive game mechanics, but had largely uninteresting themes; and so-called “Ameritrash” games, which had wonderful themes and beautiful components, but game play itself remained quite basic.

About 10 years ago, Smith says, American game designers started looking closer at Eurogames. At that time, Eurogames like



Cooperative games like Pandemic, from Z-Man Games, Flash Point: Fire Rescue, from Indie Boards and Cards, and Zombicide, from Cool Mini or Not, offer players the chance to work together against the game. (Cody Carlson)

Mayfair Games' Settlers of Catan were achieving popularity in the United States, and American designers began to incorporate some of their more dynamic mechanics into their own games.

Unlike many American games, which boasted concepts such as “roll-the-dice-and-move,” long player turns and player elimination, Eurogames found ways to keep all players invested from start to finish, actively engaged even when it was another player’s turn.



Twilight Imperium, from Fantasy Flight Games, is an American-style strategy game that incorporates European gaming mechanics. (Fantasy Flight Games)

“German games embrace the physicality of the medium,” Smith said, “which is a big deal because Western games didn't even have color manuals 10 years ago.”

Smith offered a sign in his power-point presentation that read: “European Design Ethos + American Storytelling = Perfection.”

As an example of this marriage of European and American games, Smith presented the evolution of Fantasy Flight Games' best-selling product, [Twilight Imperium](#). The first two iterations of Twilight Imperium, a sprawling galactic adventure with different species engaging in trade, politics, science and war, had fun components and a wonderful theme, but suffered from a problem typical of American strategy board games — players' turns took a very long time, causing other players to disengage and get bored.

According to Smith, for the third edition of Twilight Imperium, designer Christian T. Peterson introduced strategy cards, which could be played by one player during his or her turn, but required the involvement of other players to vote on political agendas, establish trade agreements or research technologies.

“You pay attention to the game because you don't know when you're going to have opportunities to do cool stuff,” Smith said.

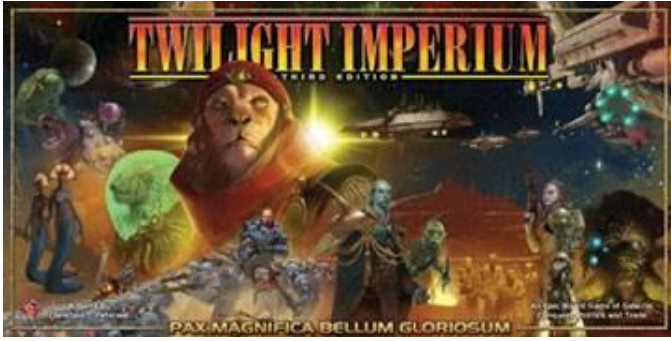


Courtier, from Alderac Entertainment Group, is an American board game that plays like a Eurogame. (Cody Carlson)

Kalinda Patton, communications manager at Z-Man Games, offered her opinion on just why board games have really been taking off in the past 10 years.

“Families have started to play with more 'new-wave' games compared to more traditional games like Monopoly,” Patton said. “Games like Carcassonne, Agricola and Pandemic are very popular games for families that are getting introduced to a different kind of gaming. On the other side of things, the avid gamers are still an important part of the industry and are searching for a game with that little something that they have never seen before. That makes game companies like us always on the

lookout for that new aspect that could make a game that much better.”



Twilight Imperium, from Fantasy Flight Games, is an American-style strategy game that incorporates European gaming mechanics. (Fantasy Flight Games)

The European and American game integration has led to the current explosion of great games with no shortage of fun and engaging themes. In [Courtier](#) from Alderac Entertainment Group, gamers can try to influence the Queen in a royal court. In [Twilight Struggle](#) from GMT Games, players can experience firsthand the shadow world of the Cold War. There are also old-fashioned war games with a fantasy twist, like “[Warparty](#)” from Lock 'n

Load Publishing.

In the past, film and TV tie-ins rarely made for original and interesting board games. Today, games like [Battlestar Galactica](#) and Star Wars: X-Wing Miniatures from Fantasy Flight Games, as well as WizKids' [Star Trek: Fleet Captains](#) are top-notch productions. Cryptozoic Entertainment's [DC Comics Deck-Building Game](#) has an immersive theme, as does Upper Deck's [Marvel: Legendary Deck-Building Game](#).

Some people may be turned off by the competition of games and may enjoy a new trend out there: cooperative games. In games like Z-Man Games' [Pandemic](#), players work together to stop a series of plagues and diseases from ravaging the planet. In [Flash Point: Fire Rescue](#) from Indie Boards and Cards, players are firefighters who must combine their skills to save people from a burning building. In [Zombicide](#), players work together to defeat a number of undead ghouls in a variety of scenarios.

Jeremy Stomberg, operations manager for Fantasy Flight Games, said that the wide variety of games available attracts new board gamers.

“It used to be that most gamers were only interested in one or two different types of games,” Stomberg said. “But more recently, I’ve seen people going from a huge galaxy-spanning game with hundreds of miniatures to a small, 45-minute worker placement game, to a deckbuilder, and back again, all in one day of gaming. There are still holdouts, but we see a lot more people that are picking up different games from outside of their comfort zones, and that’s awesome.”

“It’s a great time to be a gamer,” said Scott Gaeta, chief operating officer for Cryptozoic Entertainment. “The general public has really caught on to the fact that games aren’t just for kids.”

Geoff W. Dearing, owner of Game Haven, a chain of board game stores in Utah, said that board games are a great way for families to interact.

“We specialize in family games,” Dearing said, “so it’s not surprising that those titles sell. I believe families love to game in Utah, hence why we decided to open in northern Utah and St. George.”

Smith cited a most basic reason to play board games: “We are hard-coded to sit down with our friends and just enjoy one another’s company. And board games let us do that.”

Cody K. Carlson holds a master's degree in history from the University of Utah and currently teaches at SLCC. He has also appeared on many local stages, including Hale Center Theater and Off Broadway Theater. Email: ckcarlson76@gmail.com

Modern Educational Gaming Needs You!

Despite the booming popularity of modern board games, educational board games are still not very popular, and most educational games tend to be poorly designed. Many educational games that are developed employ poor mechanisms or completely sacrifice fun for “learning.” (Others are fun but involve the player learning virtually nothing.) A good educational game should teach a concept, but should ALSO be fun. We want to avoid trivia games or re-themed Monopoly variants (i.e. Chemistry-opoly) and instead create interesting, good games.

So what exactly does it take for an educational board game to be successful? The truth is that...it’s complicated. There are definitely examples of successful educational board games (The Dice Tower has a Top 10 list about their favorites in fact), but they are the exceptions rather than the rule. So why are most educational board games not successful? What exactly does it take to make a good one?

That’s where you come in! Your Design Team is going to spend the next few weeks designing, developing and testing a new educational board game to teach our next unit on Solutions and Acids/Bases. Your team will need to learn not only the content for these units of study (the Chemistry is a little important since this IS Chemistry class after all) as well as how to design and develop a good game. Additionally, you’ll want to keep a record of your design process so that you can reflect on your work at the end.

If you need tips and advice throughout the process, please feel free to schedule a Design Meeting with me, and I’ll be happy to meet with your team and discuss any issues that you’re having.

Your Final Project must be submitted no later than Friday, May 22. You may of course, submit your final project early.

A Few of the Games Found on the Dice Towers’ Top 10 Games for the Classroom

(You might consider looking into some of these as examples of good educational games .)

Freedom: The Underground Railroad

Diplomacy

Pastiche

1960: The Making of the President

Memoir ‘44

Battle Cry

Twilight Struggle

Anachronism



Creating and Working with Your Design Team

While each member of your group will be responsible for learning the content within these units and contributing to the design process of your board game, it would be unwise to expect everyone to help with every step. Rather, an important part of working with a team is delegating parts of your project to others and trusting that they will carry their own weight within the team. To that end, your group will be assigning each member to one of five different roles (a team of four will assign the same person to the roles of Scholar and Editor). None of these roles are easier or harder than the others, and no matter to which role you are assigned, you should expect to invest a great deal of time and effort into this project (and should be able to rely on your group members to do the same).

But what exactly does “contributing to the group” or even “contributing equally” mean? Each person is likely to interpret the importance of their role and behavior differently, develop their own assessment of the group needs, and define success in their own terms. It may lead to problems of Jose and Suzy want to design a game with production quality art that they believe will earn a 100, while their Illustrator, Sarah, believes that her well thought-out stick figures are more than adequate for the B that she wants to earn. It will be important for your group to determine your goals, expectations and vision of success early in the project if you want to do well. You’ll list and describe all of these in a group contract to which you all must agree and then keep on file with me.

However, sometimes, your group won’t exactly see eye-to-eye. If a conflict arises within your group, you need to have a protocol to handle it quickly and appropriately by coming to an agreement that satisfies all parties. Usually, these conflicts arise when one or more students does not complete the tasks that they are assigned. When members of our group don’t pull their own weight, it is sometimes necessary to let them go in order to ensure the success of the rest of the team. Therefore, as part of your group contract, you need to have a procedure for dealing with these issues and bringing them to my attention. If I believe that a group would be better served by letting one of their members go because there is strong evidence to suggest that they are making little effort to contribute, then I will let the group “fire” that individual. That individual will become responsible for their own project and will not be eligible to join another group (or create a group with other fired individuals). You should take this risk seriously and do everything within your power to avoid this option as it will inevitably lead to more work for everyone.

I hope that you enjoy working with your team mates. Please take the time to listen to their ideas and suggestions and remember that they have value to the team. The best projects that will be turned in will undoubtedly be those that represent the equal, combined efforts of all of the members of a group working together.

Design Company Name: _____

DESIGN TEAM ROLES

1. DESIGNER

- Responsibilities include:
 - i. Designing the board game and its underlying mechanisms
 - ii. Balancing game play
 - iii. Redesigning game elements based on feedback from play testers

• Student Name: _____

2. ILLUSTRATOR

- Responsibilities include:
 - i. Creating all game art (boards, cards, tokens, etc.)
 - ii. Creating all box art
 - iii. Creating the final layout and draft of the rules for printing

• Student Name: _____

3. DEVELOPER

- Responsibilities include:
 - i. Fitting the game theme to the board game mechanisms
 - ii. Organizing playtesting for the game
 - iii. Recording play tester feedback and working with the Designer to incorporate it into the game

• Student Name: _____

4. SCHOLAR

- Responsibilities include:
 - i. Leading content research by team and ensuring that all group members are caught up with content-related assignments.
 - ii. Proofs the game to make sure that all scientific concepts presented are accurate and aligned with standards.

• Student Name: _____

5. EDITOR

- Responsibilities include:
 - i. Writing the final draft of the rules
 - ii. Proofing the final copy of the game for spelling and grammatical errors

• Student Name: _____

SAME STUDENT IN A GROUP OF 4

Design Team Group Contract

Design Team Name: _____

Article I: Membership

The following individuals are members of the Design Team:

1. _____ Role: _____ Contact Info: _____
2. _____ Role: _____ Contact Info: _____
3. _____ Role: _____ Contact Info: _____
4. _____ Role: _____ Contact Info: _____
5. _____ Role: _____ Contact Info: _____

Article II: Design Team Mission Statement

Article III: Group Expectations

We expect that members of this team will... (List and describe your 3 most important expectations for all members)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Article IV: Communication

Our group is committed to communicating openly and frequently in order to ensure that all members have all of the information necessary to be successful and are comfortable seeking help from one another. To that end, we will... (List and describe your top 3 rules for communicating within the group)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Article V: Attendance

It is essential that all group members be available every day of class. How will your group handle absences and/or tardies?

Article VI: Conflict Resolution

List and briefly describe the types of behaviors that might lead to group conflict.

If your group encounters conflict during this project, what steps will you take to resolve it? (This should be a numbered list of steps that start with the lowest level of resolution and escalate to the highest – member removal.)

Article VII: Amendments

In addition to the articles agree to above, our group would like to add the following to our group contract:

Signatures

By signing below, each group members promises to adhere to all of the guidelines and policies described within this contract. Each member agrees to the terms of the contract and acknowledges that failure to adhere to this contract may result in disciplinary action by the group, up to and including a recommendation for dismissal of a member to Mr. Scott.

Printed Name	Signature (Do Not Print)	Date
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
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<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
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The Importance of Playing Games

Sarah Reed 26 July 2013

As a game designer, it is very important to continue playing games while designing. I know some people think this is not a good idea as you'll find yourself influenced by the games you play. However, the benefits far outweigh any possible negatives. When you play other games, published and unpublished, you can actually avoid copying, find great inspiration, learn the language of games and recharge your batteries.

Avoid Copying

The old saying that great minds think alike is very true in the gaming industry. Several different people that don't even know each other can come up with the same idea at the same time. And there does seem to be some sort of odd group subconscious that cycles. If you don't play other games, you won't know when someone else has already come out with what you're designing. This will help you change your course or affirm that you're on the right track.

If someone has made a game like yours, it's not the end of the world. Now you have the opportunity to examine the other game and see what's the same and what's different. There may be something very unique about yours that will make it stand out and prove it's not a mere copy. But if it is too similar then you have the opportunity to change yours to make it different, or move on to another game design.

Great Inspiration

Along the same thread of copying, you could find great inspiration from playing other games. You just have to be careful not to copy exactly. There is not a whole lot of innovation left out there. Sometimes, someone comes up with something truly unique, but most game design is about taking standard, established mechanics and combining them in new and different ways. So the more you play, the more ideas you will get.

Some examples from our personal experiences are:

- Getting inspired to make micro games after playing Love Letter.
- Liking the mechanic of cards having multiple purposes in Pixel Tactics so I came up with Dragon's Dinner.
- Manifestations is a combination of mechanics from several different games played on International Tabletop Day

The Language of Games

The more you play games, the more you learn the language of games and will have an easier time communicating with others about your own games. Even if you don't know the name for a certain mechanic, knowing what game you saw it in enables you to tell someone else about it. You'll say, "My game has the same mechanic as this game," and the other person, if they've played it, will know what you're talking about.

This can also be supplemented by doing research on the internet to see what terms people use. As you read reviews, articles and other references, you'll pick up terms like tableau, rondel, worker placement, 4X, dice drafting, feedback loop, etc. And if you don't know what some of those terms are, then you've got some homework to do.

Recharge Your Batteries

Another important point about playing games is to relax, recharge your batteries and re-affirm why you're designing games. It's very easy to lose your motivation, your reason for designing, in the minute detail of the work. Game design is work and that can drain you and make you irritable. So take some time off, don't analyze while playing and just enjoy yourself. After all, playing games is supposed to be fun.

Conclusion

I'm sure there are other reasons to play games as a game designer. Can you think of anything? It's not always easy to find the time to play games for fun, so how do you do it? Do you designate some time for fun play and some time for design work? Regarding the language of games, what did you find the most interesting or odd when learning how to talk about games?

Game Evaluation Form

by Bruce Whitehill

Game Title: _____

Group Member Names: _____

What age range do you think this game is suitable for (circle one):

3 – 6 6 – 9 9 – 12 12 – adult

How many minutes did it take you to finish the game

Under 10 10-20 21-40 41-60 61-90 Over 90 mins.

If this was an abstract strategy game, would it be better if it had a theme?.....Yes No

If this was a themed game, did you like the theme?.....Yes No

If this was a themed game, does the theme fit the play (mechanisms)?.....Yes No

Is there an unfair advantage depending on whether you move first or last?.....Yes No

Rate these on a continuum; circle one number in each area:

Complexity:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
very simple average very complex

Game Instructions/Rules:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
very simple average very complex

Luck vs. Skill:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
pure luck half luck, half skill all skill

Uniqueness / Game Mechanics (How different was this game from other games?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Not much different – Very different

Playing time (Was the game too short, too long or just right?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Too short Just right Too long

Appearance (How much did you like the graphics/illustrations?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Did not like – Loved

Materials (How much did you like the materials and/or game pieces):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Did not like Average Loved

Game Idea (Concept) or Theme:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Boring or weak OK Terrific

Interest (How much did you like this game?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Hated it It was OK Loved it

Repeat Play (How often will you play this game?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
never again now & then a lot

Interaction (How much did the game play cause you to interact with other players?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Never Only on my turn All the time

Down Time with nothing to do (How much waiting between your turns without anything to do?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Very little Normal amount Too much

Published Review Comparison

Using a published review of the game that you evaluated above online (may be a video or text review), complete the following:

Name of the Reviewer: _____

URL for Published Review: _____

In the space below, please briefly describe what elements of your review were similar to the comments of the published reviewer:

In the space below, please briefly describe what elements of your review differed from the comments of the published reviewer. After hearing their review, have you changed your mind about these elements of the game or do you disagree with the reviewer. Please explain your answer either way.

About Theme and Mechanics

When designing your board game, you will need to carefully consider both the theme and mechanics of your game. In our case, your options for theme will be somewhat limited as you are required to produce an educational game that teaches specific content. However, that requirement still leaves a lot of room for freedom and creativity. You'll also want to carefully consider the mechanisms around which your game is built. Good mechanisms and theme are what separate really great games from really awful ones. (I'm looking at you Monopoly! An investment and property management theme based on a roll and move mechanic that takes hours to finish?! Blegh! No thanks!) So you don't want to make this decision too hastily or without proper consideration.

Wait...did you just ask what I mean by "theme" and "mechanics?" If so, then definitely take a moment to look up these terms in the glossary! You'll definitely want to understand what we mean by each one before we move forward.

Okay...so now you understand theme and mechanics, and you vaguely understand why each is important. But what types of themes are popular in games? And what types of mechanics exist? (You thought all board games were based on roll-and-move mechanics didn't you?) And what's more important – theme or mechanics? There's no easy answers to these questions. Themes for games and include nearly anything so your only limit is your imagination, and the Glossary contains definitions for many different game mechanics. I wouldn't recommend that you look them all up at once, but rather look them up as you research and play games that have the different mechanics. (If you look any board game up on BoardGameGeek, it will list the different mechanics in the game.) And finally, which is more important? That's the most difficult question of all, but I've included a few articles for you to pursue as you try to answer this question.

The Dice Tower – “Top 10 Mechanisms That We Find Really Annoying”

Tom Vasel, Zee Garcia and Sam Healy, of *The Dice Tower*, discuss the top 10 mechanisms that they find annoying. As you design your game, you’ll want to keep in mind that these mechanisms (for the most part) should be avoided. That having been said, you’ll notice that they do disagree slightly on some of these and others they comment are “okay” as long as the annoying aspect of the mechanic is in some way mitigated. It’s important that you have a good grasp on the different mechanisms that you can use in a game as well as a decent understanding of how to pick mechanisms that fit your theme (and avoid mechanisms that contribute to poor game design). In the space below, list and briefly describe each of the 10 mechanisms listed in this video in order.

10. _____

9. _____

8. _____

7. _____

6. _____

5. _____

4. _____

3. _____

2. _____

1. _____

THEME IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN MECHANICS

by [Peter Vaughan](#) | on June 23, 2014 |

**GAME
MECHANICS**



SURE, YOUR RAW GAME IS CHOCK FULL OF OMEGA3, PROTEINS AND ESSENTIAL VITAMINS, BUT... IS IT ENJOYABLE?

Does your latest design resemble flavorless tofu cubes, ready to mix with a flavor? Are the mechanics straight from a can, with a generic label? This will hopefully prove a delicious counter-post to Luke Laurie’s article, **“Mechanics are more more important than theme”**. If you can’t tell, I’m arguing the “TASTE’S GREAT!” to his “LESS FILLING!” in this debate. I’ll take a look at why designers should take a theme-first approach to designing games.

“THEME, IT’S WHAT’S FOR DINNER!”



SAVOR THE FLAVOR OF YOUR THEME, ART, DESIGN & COMPONENTS!

Oh no, what am I saying?? Is theme bad for you? Yes, it is the dark side. It’s pure temptation. It’s of the devil, I say! **Embrace it – and design the best games ever made!** Yes, theme is fattening. It’s going to rot your teeth. But you only live once, right? Theme is going to bring people to the table! If the number of calories in this post were a fraction of the dollars that theme-driven games are going to sell this year, why it would be as Egon Spengler once described, “a twinkie 35 feet long and weighing approximately 600 pounds.” That’s a big twinkie! There’s a lot of ground to cover, so let’s get a couple of caveats out of the way:

#1  **ROLE PLAYING GAMES ARE OFF THE MENU**
TOO EASY.

#2 **IT'S JUST A FUN AGE-OLD DEBATE**

THEME
MECHANICS

#3 **WE ALL KNOW THAT THEME SELLS**
THIS IS LESS ABOUT MARKET TOPICS THAN IT IS ABOUT THE DESIGN PROCESS

No RPGs? To make this a fair fight, let's put down the DM screen. No mechanics stand a chance in the light of glorious, story-driven, thematic role play. But we'll keep in mind RPGs in the context of what lessons they can offer board game designers for story.

The chicken and the egg. We all know that there's no actual winning side here. It's an endless debate, and that's fine. I'm just taking an extreme theme position for fun, even though I actually believe in a balanced meal.

Design vs market. We just eluded to "theme sells" above, but as Randy Hoyt pointed out in the comments on Luke's article, there is a big difference in these two sentences:

A) Theme or mechanics is more important for the designer to focus on.

B) Theme or mechanics is most important in a finished game.

What I'm going to do is focus on "A" and take market out of this. It means I'm going to give up talking about how Magic or mini figs are keeping FLGS alive, but I'm doing this to refute the ground that Luke raises on "publishers may change your theme." This is actually irrelevant to the design process.

Theme may change, mechanics could break down, you could just as easily argue that working in certain themes guarantees you that publisher meeting! After all, **"You Can't Over-Use a Good Theme!"** There are companies that are theme focused (Plaid Hat, Twilight Creations, Flying Frog, etc) and you could pitch to them or you might be self-publishing for all we know.

And by the time you're on a shelf, it's in the hands of each unique customer to decide what they want. The only thing we can do is design the best game we can, and the best blend of theme and mechanics. But what should you start with? **Theme, of course! But why?**

THEMATIC CONSONANCE = STRONGER GAME

I turned to [Seth Jaffee](#), Lead Designer at Tasty Minstrel Games, for an example of a design that had come to TMG that he felt had benefitted from theme-first design. He did me one better, he pointed me to a blog he wrote on this topic, **"Theme first vs. Mechanics first Design"**.

"...perhaps it's more accurate to say that I often have a main mechanism in mind, I look for a theme to use it with, and then I let the theme direct how the rest of the game shapes up. So even when starting with a mechanism, I pretty much approach a design "theme-first."

SETH JAFFEE Lead Designer, Tasty Minstrel Games

At the end of his blog post he captures it perfectly with the words, "thematic consonance." You have a better chance at harmony among your theme and mechanics, if you start with theme.

THE CURIOUS CASE OF UWE ROSENBERG

I never thought I'd use the designer of *Agricola* in a debate for theme-first, but in fact he has cited (on his [blog](#), and in an [interview](#)) that he designed *Agricola*, the #3 ranked board game on BoardGameGeek, with theme in mind as a starting point.

“I thought about a theme which justified a controlled and limited increase of your workers. To employ workers seemed to increase the workers more or less unlimited. But to conceive children as a couple needs time. Definitely!”

UWE ROSENBERG Game Designer, Founder Lookout Games

“Before Agricola, I only thought about mechanisms. After Agricola, I adjust mechanisms to suit farming. This has become a small universe for me, much the way that card games were at the end of the 1990’s. I’m always reading about the theme and try to make the games easier to handle while maintaining the same gaming and narrative depth. I try to tell grand stories.”

UWE ROSENBERG Game Designer, Founder Lookout Games

There you have it folks. Grand stories at the core. Now, I don’t believe Uwe conveyed the deeper ‘story-telling’ in *Agricola*. You can get a small taste in the occupation flavor, but I think *Dungeon’s and Dragons* has a bit of edge here in character backstory. I think Uwe primarily made a worker placement game that redefined the mechanic. But perhaps the success of this innovation with the mechanic is because he first tied it directly to a theme. People can say that farming is still boring, but it’s the #1 game about farming for better or worse.

MECHANICS ARE PLUG AND PLAY, THEME IS THE POWER SOURCE

A great quote in Luke’s article that I completely agree with is “Each element should have a mechanical purpose and function. It shouldn’t be included solely because the theme demands it.” *Absolutely*. In the comments, Norv Brooks brought up a great counter statement, which is, “It shouldn’t be included solely because it’s a cool mechanic.” Sure, you can design with a mechanic in mind. Go over to Boardgamegeek and check out their list of [game mechanics](#). Pick one and begin. Actually, you should pick two, in order to keep it interesting. How about area control and memory? (actually, this has been done **very successfully**). A lot of fun games come from the mechanics that are jotted down in a designer notebook but don’t fit in your current game. That’s fine, but I think this means you are looking for the right theme and experience to pair them with.

Don’t be afraid to change mechanics to make the right game. Brad Brooks wrote an informative example, [“Transmogrify Your Mechanics”](#). But how do you know what you should use or when you should shift mechanics? Let theme be your guide.

When I started designing *What the Food?!*, I’ll admit I began with a mechanic. I knew I wanted simultaneous action programming, such as attack and block. But these nameless cards took a shape when I decided on a food fight:



I turned to Stonemaier Games for a quote, because not only do they make mechanically solid games, but they also make fully thematic, rich experiences. This synergy has led to much success, with both *Tuscany* and *Euphoria* among the [top funded tabletop games on Kickstarter](#).

Certainly theme must be most important here, right? I couldn't pin Jamey Stegmaier down to say that, (he countered with "fun supersedes theme or mechanisms") but he recounted an example in *Euphoria* where theme was the defining factor in crafting a unique WP mechanic:

"One pretty clear example are the tunnels. When I was creating the various factions in the world of *Euphoria*, something that emerged was that each faction had something that another faction wanted. How would they get those things? By secretly tunneling into the opposing faction. The tunnel mechanism in the game is a direct result of that thematic element."

JAMEY STEGMAIER Co-Founder, Stonemaier Games

THEME ENHANCES INTUITION

When you have harmony between theme and mechanics and let theme dictate how the mechanics are used, you end up with a game that beautifully captures an experience. Players may not even be able to put their finger on why it's so good, because it's seamless. It's "**Verisimilitude!**", a subject written on by our guest posters Eric Cesare and Anthony Rando at Devious Devices.

In the second quote from Uwe above, there's a great line in there about "make the games easier to handle" while maintaining the same depth.

A comment from Eliot Hochberg on Luke's post also brings this to light, "Theme can help explain mechanics, especially complex mechanics, making them easier to understand". I agree here. You can find a game that works mechanically, you can even strip out all the art and graphics and say that since it functions and is still engaging, you have enough game, but I think theme (along with it's sidekicks art and graphic design) can actually make those mechanics understandable, and intuitive for your players.

A great example of this (despite being more of a mechanic-driven game) is *Manhattan Project*. Mechanics aside, I'll never forget how when I played that game, every single part of the board was clear and intuitive in theme. The workers roles made sense, and yellowcake might be the best themed reason to have yellow cubes, ever.

THEMATIC EXAMPLES

I know I'm going long here, and I've even focused too much on what little theme exists in euro games rather than featuring all the titles dripping in awesome mythos. I still have some great examples to give from five indie designer friends who have games where theme was first and the most important factor in the design. I want to highlight these games, so I'll mention them here and I promise to do a follow up article explaining more about their game and design process.

- *Boomtown Bandits* by Isaac Epp

- *Chaosmos*, by Mirror Box Games, Joey Vigour
- *Corporate America*, by Nothing Sacred Games, Teale Fristoe
- *Zerpang!*, by Whirling Derby, Mark Major
- *Gothic Doctor*, by Meltdown Games, Doug Levandowski
- *Dragon's Hoard*, by Mortensen Games, Nathanael Mortensen

That's right – you play the dragon in Dragon's Hoard!

FINAL THOUGHTS

I just want to take a minute to acknowledge [Luke Laurie](#) for starting this interesting chat on mechanics and theme. I also want to say thanks to all our great commenters. It's been fun to see all the remarks on Facebook, here on the blog and on BGG. Speaking of BGG, a reminder about our two geeklists with theme and mechanics:

I think a lot of folks are going to be happy with our third post in this series where [Mark Major](#) debunks it all and denies that it's either theme or mechanics. I've seen many readers touch on this with a holistic mention of “experience,” “art forms,” “systems,” “concept,” “presentation,” and “inspiration”, to name a few.

Until then, I leave you with this fun comment about theme from Judd Vance, who as part of a [Dice Tower you tube review](#) on top Ameritrash games, gave this guideline for determining if you have a heavily themed masterpiece – it's all in the description:

“If it uses lots of exclamation points, the word ‘dude’ and a heavy metal symbol, you got Ameritrash. I mean, think about it: ‘I just got this third pink building in my tableau... that gives me 4 extra victory points’ as opposed to ‘**DUDE! I totally squashed your zombie squad with my cybernetic dinosaur!!!!**’”

[JUDD VANCE](#)



MECHANICS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THEME

by [Luke Laurie](#) | on June 16, 2014 |

When talking non-RPG tabletop games, mechanics make the game. Mechanics *ARE* the game. Themes and components can enhance games and create more immersive experiences, but the core of a game is ultimately the mechanics. If you are a designer, that's where you should channel the vast majority of your creative energy. In situations where you must choose between preserving your theme and using the most solid, fun mechanics, go with the mechanics.

I don't always take such a strong stand. I usually encourage designers follow their instincts. And they should – as long as they don't neglect mechanics. Of course, opinions about this vary widely, as do the styles of different designers and players. For this piece, I'm going to deliberately take one side. If you feel differently, make your case in the comments!



GAME DESIGNERS SHOULD FOCUS ON MECHANICS



When you see a shelf of games like this one at [Games of Berkeley](#), do you look for theme? Do you look to see what mechanics the game uses? Who the designer is? Publisher? Once you've purchased a game, what makes you want to play it more? To teach your friends?

DEFERRING TO THEME MAY HOLD YOUR GAME BACK

You may be so committed and dedicated to preserving your theme, that it may interfere with your design. You're not **building a simulation**, and even if you are, simulations do not include every detail. People don't actually get killed when flight simulations crash.

Take economic systems in games, for example. In the real world, if you're going to make a little profit in business transactions, you need to sell things for more than you pay for them. You don't get anything for free. When you do make money, the profit margin can be very small compared to the costs. But copying those principles exactly can make for a fiddly and un-fun game. In a fun game, you often will leave out some aspects of your theme entirely, and concentrate your mechanics on the things that are fun to do.



The game "**Container**" uses fabulous supply and demand mechanics that might make you feel like you're a shipping mogul, but they're far from the incremental value-added economics of the real world.

IT'S OK TO FOCUS ON MECHANICS

Over the last year or so, I've discovered that my best design work comes from taking a mechanics-centric approach. I have suffered some guilt over this because of some guidance from some of my colleagues in the industry. Advice on game design can often sound something like this: "*Concentrate on your theme and let the mechanics flow naturally from it.*", "*Focus on the story you're trying to tell and everything else will naturally arise from that.*" Those words sound nice, but they're also kind of like new-age Facebook quotes. They make you feel good, but they don't actually help you learn any practical skills.

Don't get me wrong, I'm all about telling stories. I have three decades of experience designing and running dungeons and dragons adventures and a theatre background. But when I'm building a boardgame, no story is going to magically make



functional mechanics for me. They might inspire a concept or two, but from there, I need to get down into the nuts and bolts, and draw instead from my experiences with carpentry, automotive mechanics, building and designing robots, doing science, and doing math. To build my game mechanics, I need something borrowed, and something new, fused together in a seamless, integrated system.

EACH ELEMENT OF A GAME SHOULD HAVE A MECHANICAL PURPOSE AND FUNCTION. IT SHOULDN'T BE INCLUDED SOLELY BECAUSE THE THEME DEMANDS IT.



I learned to feel ok about a mechanics-centered design approach through conversations with my friend and colleague [Tom Jolly](#) and by reading about the design process of [Stefen Feld](#). Tom Jolly has had several of his designs re-themed. Stefan Feld builds his game systems to be fun and intriguing in an entirely mechanical sense, and then brings in theme late in his design work. In the words of Tom Jolly, “Theme is gravy.”

Like many designers, I enjoy inventing new mechanics, either from whole cloth or modified versions of existing mechanics. It’s perfectly acceptable to start piecing together mechanics and then go looking for a theme. It’s perfectly acceptable to build a mechanical system and let that system inspire a theme. It’s also perfectly acceptable to have no theme or a minimal theme. We have an entire genre dedicated to these games: abstract games.

PUBLISHERS MAY CHANGE THE THEME OF YOUR GAME ANYWAY

If you’re not planning on self-publishing, you’re eventually hoping to get your game into the hands of a capable publishing company. Imagine if a prospective publisher wanted to license your game, they really loved the feel of the gameplay, but they were not impressed with your theme. In fact, they hate your theme and everything it represents.

Do you walk away with your artistic integrity intact? Or do you accept the fact that the core of your game was never your theme at all, but the mechanics you built?

The truth is, re-theming games is incredibly common. Your theme isn't your game. If a publisher really, really, loves your theme but not your mechanics they won't publish your game. They'll find another design using that theme with better mechanics.

There's a list of games on Board Game Geek that were designed with one theme in mind, and subsequently changed by publishers, but this is far from a complete list. It will be your mechanics that distinguish your game, and your mechanics that will get your game published.

What's your take?

THEME VS MECHANICS: THE FALSE DICHOTOMY

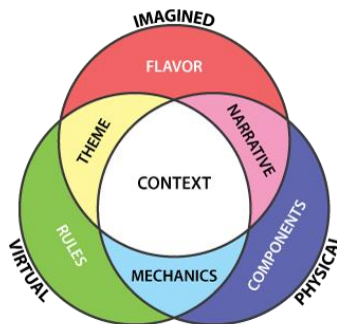
by [Mark Major](#) | on June 30, 2014 |

Most conversations about theme and mechanics treat games as if those are the only two elements a game has. Some comments make it seem like there's this linear scale with "theme" on one end and "mechanics" on the other. Other comments paint a picture of a Venn diagram with two non-overlapping circles.

THE REALITY IS THAT GAMES ARE MUCH MORE COMPLICATED.

"Theme" and "Mechanics" mean a number different things in different situations. So it becomes very fuzzy to have a conversation about which is more important in designing, playing, or purchasing games, because each participant in the conversation might have a different idea about exactly what those terms are encompassing.

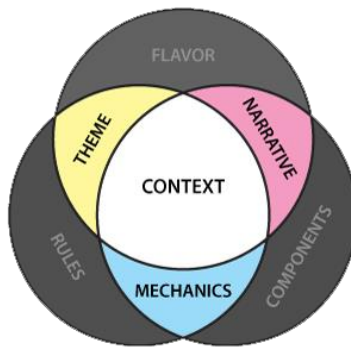
For the sake of this article, I'm going to define some different terms in hopes of presenting a more accurate model of a game's elements.



Flavor: Flavor is thematic detail in a game that has no impact on how the game plays. It exists purely in the Imagined circle, which deals with emotions and feelings you want the player to bring with them. Bits of text giving a glimpse into a city's history, atmospheric art in the rulebook, or a portrait of a random, nameless side character are all examples of flavor.

Rules: This is the theoretical system or parameters of the game. It exists purely in the Virtual circle, which deals with concepts you're introducing to the player. "You select one option and pass the rest" is an example of the rules you'll be imparting to the player.

Components: These are the bits that make up the game, cards, boards, dice, pawns, and so forth. These exist purely in the Physical circle, which is all the real-world parts of a game (including the players).



WHEN YOU START COMBINING THESE, YOU GET MORE COMPLEX LAYERS.

Imagined + Physical = Narrative

Narrative is the unique sequence of events that players experience during any specific game session. In a themeless, abstract game, this narrative is literally the actions that players take, such as “I place my stone at the intersection of the 4th row and the 5th column.” But in a game with a theme, the narrative changes. Rather than “I put my wooden token at the intersection of those three hexes,” it becomes something more like, “I build my settlement by the wheat, sheep, and wood”.

Physical + Virtual = Mechanics

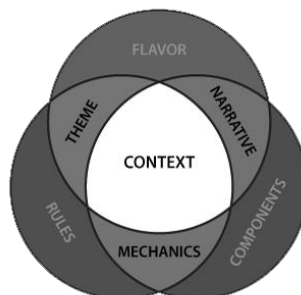
Where the rules set up the game’s conceptual parameters, the mechanics are the game’s engine. Mechanics are an interactive concept: They’re how the players use the rules to come up with strategy.

Virtual + Imagined = Theme

Where flavor has no impact on the game, theme does. Themes set up parameters for how you expect the game to take place, what behaviors you expect to take, and how you’ll be interacting with others. For example, a zombie theme would probably include the expectation of suspense and perhaps cooperative play, but not include the expectation of political intrigue or medieval warfare.

Put them all together and you get...

CONTEXT



As you might guess from the fact that it rests in the intersection of all three circles, context is really important! Context is how players understand the game as a whole and their role in it.

CONTEXT CAN CHANGE BY SCOPE.

Context is a high-level view of what the players are doing and why they are doing it. You can look at it in the moment (What are you doing and why are you doing what you're doing it: You build cities in this game to increase the reach of your civilization) Are you yourself or are you playing a role?

CONTEXT IS SCALEABLE.

Simple games may not need a strong theme, since they are easy enough to understand. The more complex or seemingly contrary a game's mechanics are, the more important theme is as an ingredient because of how it modifies and builds the context. This can also allow a personal narrative to take the forefront, such as how well you know your fellow players.

CHANGING THEME CAN CHANGE CONTEXT

Even an abstract game has context. In a game of *Go*, a player understands they are trying to best another player by pitting strategic skill against strategic skill. This illustrates another function of theme. A theme can alter the context of a game to make the social interaction less contentious. If you see the game as being Cyber Bunny vs Gigazaur, when one of them stands triumphant in Tokyo it says nothing about Josh or Gary the players. When the theme is abstract, there's less of a buffer and the game becomes more competitive.



But when a theme is poorly matched to the mechanics and narrative, the context suffers. Take a game like *Trajan*, which makes no attempt to fit the theme and the mechanics together into a good context. It paints a blurry picture of Roman society, but there is nothing to explain the mancala mechanic, making it an awkward method of choosing actions. Theme makes you question why you don't have options you think you should for your role and your goals, creating dissonance and an imbalanced context.

CHANGING MECHANICS CAN CHANGE CONTEXT

The components you use and the rules you follow also have a big impact. In *Oceanica*, I deliberately chose the mechanics of rolling dice to create random results and drafting those resources. The mechanic of randomization creates a scarcity. The current theme, which is that you're competing for the last remaining resources of a flooding planet, was overlaid on top of this to create a unified context of a chaotic environment.



The flavor and theme could completely be changed – spaceships mining a dangerous field of asteroids, perhaps – and work equally well. But if the theme were changed to something other than that chaotic environment – building a static civilization, for example – the mechanics as they are would not reinforce that, and the context would suffer.

CHANGING NARRATIVE CAN CHANGE CONTEXT

The trickiest thing for a game designer to affect is narrative, because this is the thing that's most reliant on the players, not the components. If your friends invite over their alpha gamer friend to cooperative game night, that will affect the narrative. If you break for pizza in the middle of a game, that will also affect the narrative.

This is where good marketing and graphic design comes in. Are you making your game attractive to the people who will create the best context for the mechanics and theme to thrive? Are you using flavor graphics that let them know what their role will be? Are you conveying how long the game plays or how complicated it will be with your components? Did your publisher get that key reviewer to talk it up and guide your audience's expectations? Did the player find it at Toys R Us or in a war game hobby store?



Good marketing will help people come into the game with the narrative most conducive to building the right context, whether that's "I'm here for a fun game that will have me out of my seat pantomiming the chicken dance with my kids" or "I'm here to match wits with my smartest friend and build a strategically poised galactic empire over the next 8 hours".

This is not meant to be a definitive, authoritative breakdown of all the aspects of a game. Feel free to disagree with the specifics of how I've defined terms, or where I've put labels in the diagram. But the takeaway you should be getting from this is that games are complex entities. Reducing them to a flat heads-or-tails picture ends up missing a lot about how the physical parts of the game, the imagined parts of the game, and the way players interact with the game all have an effect on each other.

"WHAT SHOULD A DESIGNER FOCUS ON?"

This is the core question debated by **Luke Laurie** and **Peter Vaughan** in their corresponding articles on this topic. This tends to be a polarizing question, but the reality is that it doesn't really matter. Whether you should start thinking about the imagined parts of a game (such as theme) or other elements first depends largely on **what you want your players to experience**.

I talked a bit before about **designing for the experience**. Theme makes sense if you want the play experience to be driven by the imagination (Fantasy or Narrative aesthetics). Mechanics make sense if you want the play experience to be driven by more intellectual activity (Challenge or Discovery aesthetics). You can start with any of the other categories I defined above too. The main thing is, after you find a starting place, you need to quickly reach a point where you can **tie everything together with a strong context**, and then maintain the integrity of that context as you add and change different parts of your game.

Possible Learning Objectives for Your Board Game

Below you will find a list of all of the learning objectives for the Solutions and Acids/Bases units. This is the content that you should know by the end of these units. The most important objectives are marked with a diamond, while the supporting objectives are marked with a square. You will need to select at least one major objective and 2-3 supporting objectives that will make up the theme of your game. **Remember – your game should actually teach this content!**

Solutions:

Students will:

- ❖ Identify the unique properties of water
- ❖ Describe how Hydrogen bonding of water affects properties such as surface tension, vapor pressure, specific heat capacity, heat of vaporization and boiling point
 - Describe anomalous expansion of ice
 - Explain why ice floats on water even though ice and water are forms of the same chemical compound
 - Describe how the unique properties allow water to play an important role in the living functions of organisms as well as the environment.
- ❖ Define solute, solvent, solution
 - Explain how colloids and suspensions differ from solutions
- ❖ Investigate the dissolution of different types of solutes (polar, nonpolar, and slightly polar) in various solvents (polar, nonpolar, and slightly polar)
 - Explain why polar solutes dissolve in polar solvents and nonpolar solutes dissolve in nonpolar solvents
- ❖ Distinguish between strong, weak, and non-electrolytes
 - Give examples of strong and weak electrolyte
 - Explore properties of supersaturated, saturated and unsaturated solutions
 - Investigate the factors that affect solubility - nature of solute, temperature, pressure (for gas solutes)
 - Investigate factors that affect the rate of dissolution (speed up or slow down the rate of dissolution)
- ❖ Describe the factors that affect rate at which a solute dissolves; agitation, temperature, and particle size
 - Explain why the factors such as agitation, temperature, and particle size affect the rate of dissolution using the collision theory
 - Analyze solubility curves
 - Calculate the solubility of a solute in a given solvent from the solubility graph/curve
 - Describe the equilibrium of the solution system for unsaturated, saturated, and supersaturated solutions. (Basics of the Le Chatelier's Principle may be introduced for advanced students at this time)
- ❖ Define the term "concentration" of a solution
 - Calculate concentration as percent by mass and percent by volume of a solution
 - Define molarity
- ❖ Calculate molar concentrations of solutions

- ❖ Perform calculations for dilutions of solutions using $M_1V_1 = M_2V_2$
 - Explain why the boiling point of a solution is greater than the boiling point of a solvent
 - Explain why the freezing point of a solution is lower than the freezing point of a solvent
 - Describe the application of elevation in boiling point and depression in freezing point in real life.

Acids and Bases:

Students will:

- ❖ Investigate the general properties of known/commonly used acids and bases
- ❖ Describe the general properties of acids
- ❖ Describe the general properties of a base
 - Name the acids from given formula
 - Name the bases from given formula
 - Write formulas from given names of acids
 - Write formulas from given names of bases
 - Describe the formation of H_3O^+ in aqueous solutions
 - Relate the concentration of the H_3O^+ and OH^- to the acidic, basic, or neutral nature of the solution
- ❖ Define pH
- ❖ Classify a solution as an acid, base, or neutral when given the pH or $[H_3O^+]$
 - Calculate pH or pOH of a solution from given H_3O^+ or OH^- concentrations
 - Measure pH of a given solution using appropriate lab equipment
- ❖ Compare and contrast Arrhenius acids with Bronsted-Lowry acids
- ❖ Compare and contrast Arrhenius bases with Bronsted-Lowry bases
 - Identify conjugate acid-base pairs in acid-base reactions
- ❖ Define strong acids and weak acids on the basis of degree of ionization
- ❖ Define strong bases and weak bases on the basis of degree of dissociation
 - Name common strong acids
 - Name common strong bases
- ❖ Identify an acid-base reaction from a set of given reactions
- ❖ Predict the products of an acid-base reaction
- ❖ Define a neutralization reaction
 - Describe the characteristics of an acid-base or neutralization reaction
 - Perform titrations in a lab setting to determine the concentration of unknown acid
 - Use indicators (phenolphthalein) and pH probes to determine pH during titrations
 - Differentiate acid-base reactions from oxidation-reduction reactions and precipitation reactions (learned earlier in the course)
- ❖ Perform stoichiometric calculations for neutralization reactions.

Selection of Game Theme, Mechanisms and Objectives

Theme:

Please briefly describe the theme of your game. Make sure that it clearly relates to the learning objective that you will select later in this document:

Mechanisms:

Place a check mark in the boxes next to each of the mechanisms used in your game. Your game may use more than one mechanism (and most games do). If your game is going to use any of the mechanisms listed in the Dice Tower Top 10 List of Mechanisms That We Find Really Annoying, you must provide an explanation about why that mechanism is a good choice for your game and what steps you have taken to mitigate the “annoying” aspects of the mechanism. You may submit this explanation to me as a separate page.

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acting | <input type="checkbox"/> Commodity Speculation | <input type="checkbox"/> Pick-up and Deliver | <input type="checkbox"/> Singing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action/Movement Programming | <input type="checkbox"/> Crayon Rail System | <input type="checkbox"/> Player Elimination | <input type="checkbox"/> Stock Holding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action Point Allowance System | <input type="checkbox"/> Deck/Pool Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Point to Point Movement | <input type="checkbox"/> Storytelling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Area Control/Area Influence | <input type="checkbox"/> Dice Rolling | <input type="checkbox"/> Press Your Luck | <input type="checkbox"/> Take That |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Area Enclosure | <input type="checkbox"/> Grid Movement | <input type="checkbox"/> Rock-Paper-Scissors | <input type="checkbox"/> Tile Placement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Area Movement | <input type="checkbox"/> Hand Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Role Playing | <input type="checkbox"/> Time Track |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Area-Impulse | <input type="checkbox"/> Hex-and-Counter | <input type="checkbox"/> Roll/Spin and Move | <input type="checkbox"/> Trading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auction/Bidding | <input type="checkbox"/> Line Drawing | <input type="checkbox"/> Route/Network Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Trick-Taking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Betting/Wagering | <input type="checkbox"/> Memory | <input type="checkbox"/> Secret Unit Deployment | <input type="checkbox"/> Variable Phase Order |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Campaign/Battle Card Driven | <input type="checkbox"/> Modular Board | <input type="checkbox"/> Set Collection | <input type="checkbox"/> Variable Player Powers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Card Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Paper-and-Pencil | <input type="checkbox"/> Simulation | <input type="checkbox"/> Voting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chit-Pull System | <input type="checkbox"/> Partnerships | <input type="checkbox"/> Simultaneous Action Selection | <input type="checkbox"/> Worker Placement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Co-operative Play | <input type="checkbox"/> Pattern Building | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Pattern Recognition | | |

Objectives:

Please list all of the objectives that your game is designed to teach (exactly as they appear earlier in this document).

Board Game Design Resources

Design Tips from Amateurs:

- Wiki How's "How to Make Your Own Board Game"
 - <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Your-Own-Board-Game>
 - So the actual game that is designed in this is based on absolutely awful game mechanics, BUT it does have some good ideas for how to plan out your design process from the beginning all the way through a completed game.
- Daniel's "10 Tips for Making Your Own Board Game"
 - <http://www.nerdsandnomsense.com/diy-2/10-tips-for-making-your-own-board-game/>
 - Another blog entry about game design based upon the advice of someone who was creating their own.

Design Tips from Professionals:

- John P. Doran's 12 Tips for Starting Game Designers
 - <http://johnpdoran.com/12-tips-for-starting-game-designers/>
 - Some of these tips will be more relevant to you than others, but it's an interesting read.
- Jordan Goddard's "Stop Reading This and Go Build Your Own Board Game"
 - <http://www.popularmechanics.com/culture/gaming/a11376/stop-reading-this-and-go-build-your-own-board-game-17314604/>
 - Advice from a new game designer who recently, successfully published his own game using Kickstarter.
- Mike Selinker, et al.'s Kobold's Guide to Board Game Design
 - http://www.amazon.com/Kobold-Guide-Board-Game-Design/dp/1936781042/ref=asap_bc?ie=UTF8
 - This is actually a book, and it's entirely unnecessary for you to purchase or read this, BUT in case you're interested...
- Matt Leacock's Website and Blog
 - www.leacock.com
 - Matt Leacock is an award winning designer who has produced many very popular and well-designed games. His website has a Blog with some good advice for prototyping as well as a Talks section with links to some good interviews and talks that he has done about board game design. Some of you may recognize him as the creator of *Pandemic* and *Forbidden Island* – two of the games we played in class.

Design Forums:

While reading about the process of others can be incredible insightful and helpful for designing your first game, it's as helpful to share your ideas with others in the field. To that end, I am linking a few different forums where game players and designers get together to discuss game design online. Please note that, as is always the case with the internet, our school cannot control the content of these pages. Be careful while navigating the forums; do not share personal information with strangers, and do not communicate with strangers without permission from your parent or guardian. However, even if you don't choose to create a thread in which to discuss your game with other players and designers, there is still a ton of information that you can get from reading others' threads.

- Board Game Designers Forum
 - <http://www.bgdf.com/>
- Board Game Geek
 - <http://www.boardgamegeek.com>

Game Art

Good game art can do a lot to make a game interesting before you even sit down to play it. Consider some of the game art that you have seen while you have been working on this project. What helps make game art good? What inspires the player to be curious or excited about the game? What type of artistic choices might dissuade someone from wanting to play a game? In the space provided below, sketch out some of the art that you might use in your game (this might include any of the following: card art, board art, art used in the instruction book, box art, custom dice faces, etc.)

Game Art



daVinci

HOW TO WRITE A STANDARD GAME RULEBOOK

A good rule book should be structured along these lines:

- Number of players, age**
- Aim of the game / short description of its spirit**
- Preparation**
- Course of the game, i.e. actual rules**
- End of the game / victory conditions**
- Strategy tips (if needed)**
- Game examples (if needed)**
- Special rules for other numbers of players (if needed)**
- Game variants (warning: do not exceed)**

Each section must have a title. Use only short and clear statements. Don't try to use a complex or intricate style.

An image is worth more than a thousand words: using an illustration could save you a lot of words.

When writing to a game publisher, anything that is not directly connected to the game (e.g. a list of all the accessories needed, technical suggestions on how to realize the game) should be clearly kept separated from the rulebook, and sent enclosed. The best choice is to list all the components needed to play right before the actual rules.

Writing rules deals with resolving a didactical problem. Your goal is to make people who don't know the game understand its content and how to play after reading once through the rulebook. If necessary readers should be able to explain correctly the rules to other players. Last but not least, they have to be able to identify clearly which rule or section of the manual to refer to in case any doubt arises.

The main requirement of a good rulebook, is to be consistently made of sequential steps: it is better to avoid references to rules that are still to be explained and that will be found later on.

Let us examine in detail the logical sequence of all the elements.

Number of players, age

No further explanations are needed.

Aim of the game / short description of its spirit

Players knowing an outline of the game can understand the rules in an easier way, because they are able to insert every single element into a bigger picture.

Preparation

By setting up the game, players become familiar with the structure of the game itself, with its concepts, and with the rules they'll find subsequently in the rulebook. Understanding the rules is made easier by setting up the pieces, by placing the board, by getting the dice ready, by shuffling the cards, by distributing the money, and so on.

see next page...



daVinci

Course of the game, i.e. actual rules

Unfortunately there is no codified recipe for this purpose, because every game stands on its own. In any case, it is better to use clear, short and easy-to-understand explanations. In case of more complex games, it is generally better to introduce the essential rules, and to collect particular cases in an appendix. A good way to be clear is to divide the rulebook into two columns: a bigger one for the actual rules, and a smaller one for headers and/or synthetic information. This system allows the players to summarize the rules quickly, and to have a clear point of reference when looking for specific information.

The terminology must be consistent! Using different names for the same object is extremely misleading. If a piece is called once pawn, then token, then again chip, players will end up confused.

End of the game / victory conditions

Even if already stated during the description of the game, it is better to specify again, clearly, when or on which conditions the game finishes, and how players can determine the winner. As an example, a game can end only when an established amount of points have been scored, or after a determined number of turns, or by specifying a time limit.

Strategy tips (if needed)

Sometimes the description of the rules or the board can lead to approach the game in a way that is not the most logical one, even if in compliance of the rules. If you want to avoid that players abandon your game judging it dull or stupid, give out some strategy tips. This is not a fixed requirement, but it is recommended when you notice that all the people playing the game for the first time always fall into the same, trivial and unforced errors.

Game examples (if needed)

It can be sometimes useful to provide players with some examples, to be sure that they understand the game mechanics exactly. Also, a whole turn/game example can be provided, in order to demonstrate strategic moves.

Special rules for other numbers of players (if needed)

In some games, rules may change depending on the number of players. In order to avoid confusion, special rules should not be provided during the explanation of the rules, but rather at the end of the rulebook. It is necessary to describe the complete course of the game with the number of players for which the game was originally intended, and then, in a separate paragraph, the relevant rules for a higher or lower number of players.

However, if the only change regards the game material to distribute to the players, then the variant must be presented in the relevant section regarding the preparation. For example:

Players place their tokens in the starting space:

with 2 players, each player places 8 tokens

with 3 players, each player places 5 tokens

with 4 players, each player places 4 tokens.

Remember that a game should be always equally fun, whichever the number of players; an optimal range exists for many games. It is useless to introduce additional exceptions, rules or other “crutches”, for a non-optimal number of players, in the attempt to maintain the fun of the game.

Game variants (warning: do not exceed)

Understanding a new game implies a massive process of learning. The variants surely increase the stuff to “study”. Why should players find the best way to play the game, if the author didn’t?

edited by Roberto Corbelli and Andrés J. Voicu, from *Practical tips for game inventors*, by Tom Werneck, Ravensburger
www.davincigames.com

Game Evaluation Form

****Have another group in class complete this form to evaluate your game!**

Game Title: _____

Group Member Names: _____

What age range do you think this game is suitable for (circle one):

3 – 6 6 – 9 9 – 12 12 – adult

How many minutes did it take you to finish the game

Under 10 10-20 21-40 41-60 61-90 Over 90 mins.

If this was an abstract strategy game, would it be better if it had a theme?.....Yes No

If this was a themed game, did you like the theme?.....Yes No

If this was a themed game, does the theme fit the play (mechanisms)?.....Yes No

Is there an unfair advantage depending on whether you move first or last?.....Yes No

Rate these on a continuum; circle one number in each area:

Complexity:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
very simple average very complex

Game Instructions/Rules:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
very simple average very complex

Luck vs. Skill:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
pure luck half luck, half skill all skill

Uniqueness / Game Mechanics (How different was this game from other games?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Not much different – Very different

Playing time (Was the game too short, too long or just right?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Too short Just right Too long

Appearance (How much did you like the graphics/illustrations?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Did not like – Loved

Materials (How much did you like the materials and/or game pieces):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Did not like Average Loved

Game Idea (Concept) or Theme:

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Boring or weak OK Terrific

Interest (How much did you like this game?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Hated it It was OK Loved it

Repeat Play (How often will you play this game?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
never again now & then a lot

Interaction (How much did the game play cause you to interact with other players?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Never Only on my turn All the time

Down Time with nothing to do (How much waiting between your turns without anything to do?):

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
Very little Normal amount Too much

Game Options: Are there not enough options for what you can do on each turn, too many options (too many choices) or just the right amount?

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
not enough just right too many

Gameboard size: Was the gameboard too small, too big, or just the right size?

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
too small just right too big

Game pieces (size): Were the pieces too small, too big, or just the right size?

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
too small just right too big

Text size: Was the text on the board, cards or instructions too small or just right?

0 – 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10
too small just right too big

What other specific complaints or precise suggestions do you feel would make the game better, especially in terms of the theme, game mechanics, game balance, or object of the game? PLEASE BE SPECIFIC!

Published Review Comparison

Using a published review of the game that you evaluated above online (may be a video or text review), complete the following:

Name of the Reviewer: _____

URL for Published Review: _____

In the space below, please briefly describe what elements of your review were similar to the comments of the published reviewer:

In the space below, please briefly describe what elements of your review differed from the comments of the published reviewer. After hearing their review, have you changed your mind about these elements of the game or do you disagree with the reviewer. Please explain your answer either way.

Notes for Revision

This form is to be completed AFTER your game has been play-tested.

List and describe the 3 biggest problems that the play-testers encountered while playing your game.

Based on the above feedback from your play-testers, what changes do you intend to make to your game in order to address the issues that they encountered?

If you had more time to spend developing your game, what other issues would you like to fix and what changes would you make to your game to fix them?

How Will Your Project Be Graded?

Board Game Rubric

Attached you will find a rubric for your final project. Your final board game is worth a major test grade! Please use this rubric to help you design your final product and use it to score your project on your own so that you know what grade to expect! There is no reason to get a grade lower than what you want if you use this rubric effectively.

Group Evaluations

At the end of this project, each group member will be asked to evaluate the other members of their group and help score their contribution. We will discuss how this will work at the end of this project. Until then, make sure that you are working hard and continuing to contribute to your group; your grade will depend on it!

Unit Exam

Of course, there is more to this class than designing board games. At the end of the day, I still need to make sure that you also learned some chemistry. To that end, you will continue to receive assignments related to the learning objectives listed earlier in this document. Please do NOT ignore the content that you are expected to learn! The game design portion of this unit is important, but it's as important that you learn the chemistry on which your game will be based.

Board Game Final Product Rubric

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Progressing to Expectations	Needs Improvement
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives are clearly defined and appropriately selected from list. (This must include at least 1 major and 2-3 supporting objectives.) The player can clearly demonstrate growth toward mastering the major learning objective and all 2-3 supporting objectives after playing the game. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives are clearly defined and appropriately selected from list. (This must include at least 1 major and 2-3 supporting objectives.) The player can clearly demonstrate growth toward mastering at least the major learning objective after playing the game. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives are clearly defined and appropriately selected from list. (This must include at least 1 major and 2-3 supporting objectives.) The game does not help the player demonstrate growth toward mastering the major learning objective at this stage of development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Objectives are not clearly defined The game does not help the player demonstrate growth toward mastering any of the learning objectives.
Theme _____/ 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The theme of the game is well matched to the objectives and mechanics. The Design Team has invested clear effort in selecting the best possible theme for their game and the theme is strong. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The theme of the game is interesting and engaging. The theme of the game is clearly linked to the learning objectives and mechanisms. The theme is evident but may not be strong. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear effort was made to select a theme that relates to the learning objectives and game mechanics, but the theme may feel "pasted on." The theme is clear and evident but is not interesting or engaging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The game lacks a proper development of theme and is instead an abstract game.
Mechanics _____/ 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mechanics of the game are well chosen and all of the mechanics discussed within the Dice Tower Top 10 list are avoided. The mechanics in the game work smoothly and provide a fair and balanced gameplay experience to all players The game can easily be taught and played in less than 45 minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mechanics of the game are well chosen and all of the mechanics discussed within the Dice Tower Top 10 list are avoided. The mechanics in the game may contribute to the game being slightly unbalanced or unfair or may be exploitable. The game can be easily taught and played in less than 60 minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-chosen mechanics are present in the game but they may not be ideally suited for this game. The Dice Tower Top 10 list mechanics are avoided (or used but with proper explanation). The game is clearly unbalanced and exploitable. The game can be easily taught and played in less than 90 minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mechanics in the game were chosen poorly and may include some of the mechanics listed in the Dice Tower Top 10 list. The game is clearly unbalanced and exploitable The game cannot be easily taught and played in less than 90 minutes.
Art _____/ 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the art in the game is either original or cited All art in the game is in color Font and size for all text is appropriate and clear Components used in the game are of high quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the art in the game is either original or cited All art in the game is in color or black-and-white Font and size for all text is appropriate and clear Components used in the game are of high quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The game has no original artwork and borrowed artwork is not cited. Art in the game is all black-and-white Font and size of some text makes it clear or difficult to read Component quality needs improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Game has no artwork Font and size of text is extremely difficult to read and interferes with the gameplay. Components are missing from the game and/or their quality is very poor.
Instructions _____/ 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rules are clear and easy to understand without additional explanation Rules are in a logical order that follow setup and gameplay order Rules are free of spelling and grammatical errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rules are clear and easy to understand without additional explanation Rules are mostly in a logical order that follow setup and gameplay order Only minor errors in spelling and grammar are present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rules are somewhat confusing The order of the rules is difficult to follow and does not match the order of setup and gameplay Spelling and grammatical errors interfere with the clarity of the rules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rules are extremely confusing and the game cannot be played without additional explanation Rules have many spelling and grammatical errors that make them impossible to understand.
Group Collaboration	Based on group scores			
Extra Review	Your group may review additional games together for extra credit on this project.			

Board Game Terms Glossary

A

abstract

adj. Generally means simplified instead of detailed. In the context of games, it is an overloaded term which usually means "without theme or story" or "not highly detailed; simple, elegant rules without lots of chrome" but "abstract" also sometimes used to mean "pure strategy (no randomness)" Often used as opposite of thematic. See the term abstract strategy game and article Abstract Strategy.

abstract strategy game

n.
1) A game generally limited to two players and perfect information (i.e. no randomness) often with incidental or irrelevant theme. (Chess does have a theme, but it can be ignored. A bishop is just the name of a piece that moves diagonally.)
2) A game with no theme.

accessory

(BGG usage) Accessories are items that are used in games, but do not add rules or change game play. For example, a collection of upgraded components is an accessory. An accessory must be specific to a game to receive an entry. Accessories not specific to a game can be found in Miscellaneous Game Accessory, Miscellaneous Card Game Accessory, and Miscellaneous Miniatures Game Accessory.

acting game

n. A game where players must represent another/perform theatrically.

action point allowance system

Players get a certain number of action points each turn to spend on executing actions of their choosing, where actions have varying action point costs.

action selection

A game mechanic where a player selects an action to perform from a menu (possibly changing) of possible choices.

alpha player

Also called, "Quarterbacking" and "leader effect." In a derogatory sense, it is where one player tends to take the lead and may boss others around, telling them how to play. This has been a common complaint to Cooperative games in general. In a positive sense, it can also refer to a true leader who would listen to the group and guide them to consensus, share insights, teach others to see the angles and develop a team mentality.

Ameritrash

n. A catchphrase for "American style boardgames". In general, this means games that emphasize a highly developed theme, player to player conflict, and usually feature a moderate to high level of luck. Examples of classic Ameritrash games include Axis & Allies, Dune, Cosmic Encounter, Talisman, and Twilight Imperium. See the Ameritrash page for more information.

analysis paralysis (AP)

n. When overanalysis and mini/maxing increase the downtime in a game beyond a desirable level. Sometimes abbreviated as ap in the forums. (See also overanalyze)

area control game

n. A type of game where players score for having the most pieces in particular areas of the board. Examples: El Grande, San Marco, Louis XIV. See majority control game.

area enclosure

This term refers to the mechanism that has a player attempting to surround or fence off an area - usually in order to control it, cause it to score, or eliminate it from play.

area-impulse

Area-impulse is a game mechanism. Each impulse, players activate map areas and move units in those areas to accomplish movement and combat. Used in Avalon Hill titles such as Storm over Arnhem, Thunder at Cassino, Turning Point: Stalingrad and Breakout: Normandy.

area movement

A mechanism used chiefly for war games, movement traverses irregular areas rather than a grid.

ARG

n. Acronym for alternate reality game. A definition of an ARG may be found in Wikipedia here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternate_reality_game

auction game

n. A game that features players bidding on resources as the main mechanism. Also called a bidding game. Examples: Modern Art, Ra

B

BBG

n. A common error made when referring to this website BoardGameGeek - should be BGG.

balance

1. n. The way in which elements of a game are equalized relative to each player. Often balance is established by giving all players similar starting positions and maintained by using mechanisms to hurt the apparent leader or help the likely loser.
2. n. The state of a game where equally skilled players have a roughly equal chance of winning the game regardless of starting position, turn order, etc. Does not imply equality between the sides--a game like Ogre, where one side has a single huge tank vs. a side with many small ones can be considered balanced if both sides have an equal chance of winning.
3. v. To modify the opening setup of a game in order to create a more equal starting position. Bidding for sides and the pie rule are common ways of balancing a game.

betting

Risking valuables (usually currency) in the hopes of winning more, based on the terms of the bet. This game mechanism generally increases the air of tension in a game, and is often employed for precisely that reason.

BGG

n. A short form used when referring to this website BoardGameGeek. The short URL for BoardGameGeek is bgg.cc.

BGG Patron

n. See patron.

bidding game

n. See auction game.

bits

n. The assorted components used to play a game. Most of time this term is applied to game components of higher quality. Note that the singular, bit, is almost never used in a gaming sense.

block wargame

n. a style of wargame where the units are wooden blocks with their identities shown on one side of the block and only visible to their owner. This promotes "fog of war" as the identities/strength of each unit in concealed. Typically, blocks are also rotated to show their current strength on the top edge allowing an elegant method of "step losses". Columbia Games publishes most of their wargames as block games--though other companies are starting produce them. Well-known block wargames are Napoleon, Hammer of the Scots, East Front (and expansions).

bluff

v. To give a false impression of the value of hidden items in one's possession (such as cards) or one's intentions. This can either be explicitly by direct

statement or implicitly through actions in the game. Poker is the best known bluffing game.

broken

adj. (usually applied to a game) Having problems that result in a disappointing play experience. A game might be considered broken if even poor play can lead to a victory, if it frequently ends in a stalemate, or if one strategy invariably wins. (See also solvable)

C

card drafting

n. a game mechanic where the primary way players acquire cards is by selecting them from a face up display. Designer Alan R. Moon has designed many games using this mechanic. Examples: Union Pacific, Freight Train, Ticket to Ride, Alhambra, Thurn and Taxis

n. a game mechanism where players select cards from a subset of the available cards to form a deck or hand or to select the next card to play. Examples: Fairy Tale, 7 Wonders, and Agricola (variant), where a hand of cards is passed around and players select individual cards before passing the cards remaining in the hand. Magic: The Gathering (multiple variants) and Race for the Galaxy (variant) where players draft cards to form decks that they then use to play the game.

CCG

n. Abbreviation for Collectible Card Game. This type of game uses a basic rule structure and a large assortment of cards which each have characteristics that contradict or supplement the basic rules. Each player selects a number of cards that they own to create a deck which they use in the game. This allows players to predetermine their strategies. The game rules define how many cards must be used and how many copies of each single card are allowed. Cards are sold in "booster packs". Packs contain a fixed number of cards and usually include one "rare" card, some "uncommon" cards, and the bulk of the pack contains "common" cards. Rare cards are generally more powerful or efficient than uncommons or commons, which can lead to the problem that the person who has spent the most money on cards wins. The original collectible card game was Magic: The Gathering. Its incredible success spawned dozens of copycat games. Some were good; many were awful. Other examples are Middle-Earth, Pokemon and Netrunner

CDG

1. n. Abbreviation for Card Driven Game, typically in reference to wargames that use cards to drive the action.
- 2: n. Many wargamers restrict the use of the term to games that in the family of games that specifically, the cards are for one of following:
 - Operation Points for generic actions like activating units for movement/combat, adding reinforcement units or exerting political control of a region, etc.

- Event (usually represent a specific historic event).

Examples: We the People, Hannibal, Paths of Glory, and Twilight Struggle.

3. n. Abbreviation for Collectible Dice Game. For examples, see Geeklist - Collectible Dice Games. See also, Collectible Card Game.

chit / counter

n. Small, usually square piece of cardboard that represents a unit or a game element. Commonly found in wargames. The terms chit and counter are often used interchangeably.

chrome

n. A superfluous mechanism or components added to a game to add a feeling of theme. Like the chrome on a car--chrome really isn't necessary, but it may make the game more fun. Example: In WW2 infantry game, adding rules to cover the exceptional heroics of Audie Murphy.

closer

n. A game with very simple rules and strategies that does not require deep thought and can be used at the end of a gaming session, when everyone's brain is worn out. (See also light)

collectible game

n. a game where the pieces (usually cards or miniatures) are sold in randomly sorted packages. The purchaser usually does not know which cards/miniatures they are buying. Since each player will usually have a different selection of cards/miniatures, in theory, the players should face interesting strategic challenges and find it interesting to trade with other players. In practice, the game takes over often the player with the most toys wins.

computational

adj. Overtly using mathematics to determine victory conditions. (See also dry)

cooperative games

Games where all players work together on the same team, trying to beat the built-in artificial intelligence of the game system. Examples include, Pandemic and Castle Panic.

core group

n. (or 'core game group') The people or person that you most commonly play games with in person. (One may have several gaming groups, but most gamers have only one 'core group'.)

crayon rail system

Crayon Rail System is a game mechanism. Players draw (usually railroad) tracks between cities.

crib sheet

A crib sheet, or *reference card*, is a concise set of notes used for quick reference. (Wikipedia, 2008) It provides the player with short information on key elements of the game; the succession and availability of actions in the turn sequence; conversion-charts; rules; explanation of symbols and/or commands.

Example of crib sheet from Power Grid.

D

D6

n. Common abbreviation for 'six-sided die'. Similarly D8 refers to 'eight-sided die'. d10, d12, and d20 are also common terms. A pair of six-sided dice is sometimes called 2D6. These abbreviations are most common in RPGs and wargames.

deck building game

n. a game featuring a mechanism where players each play from their own deck of cards but, through the course of the game, additional cards are selected for inclusion in the players' decks which will be drawn and used in future reshuffles of the deck. Often these games require players to discard their hand each turn forcing a high rate of card turnover. The founding father of this genre is Dominion with many examples following including Puzzle Strike, Nightfall, A Few Acres of Snow, and Thunderstone.

designer game

n. synonym for German game This term emphasizes the credit usually given to designers of such games, unlike mass-market games which usually credit only the publisher.

dexterity game

n. A game where the major skill needed is a physical action, such as flicking (Crokinole), balance (Topple), or deft manipulation (Jenga).

die / dice

A die is ONE regular solid, most often a cube, marked with pips or numbers that is cast to generate a random result. Dice is the plural form. Example: One die is used in Ludo, while two dice are used in Parcheesi.

dice-fest

n. 1. A game that uses a whole bunch of dice to determine game outcomes. 2. A game that has a very random nature because of die results.

dice game

A dice game is a game where rolling dice is a primary feature. Examples of dice games include Can't Stop, Escape, and Sharp Shooters. Merely because a game has dice does not make it a dice game, the game must have its primary focus on rolling the dice for game-play.

dice rolling

Dice rolling is a mechanism for a wide variety of games. In games that feature dice rolling, one to many dice are rolled and used in a variety of ways, including determining movement, determining results from a combat table, or for compared against other die rolls as combat strength. Merely because a game has die rolling does not make it a dice game.

downtime

n. The time that a player spends doing nothing while waiting for other players to complete their turns. (See also player interaction)

dungeon crawl

A type of scenario in fantasy role-playing games in which heroes navigate a labyrinthine environment, battling various monsters, and looting any treasure they may find. Examples include, Mice and Mystics, Descent: Journeys in the Dark (Second Edition) and Claustrophobia.

DOAM

Acronym for "Dudes on a map." Phrase used to describe a type of game in which players place pieces representing units on a map. The phrase was coined by Ken B.

DRM

n. Abbreviation for Di(c)e Roll Modifier. Often used in wargames with a CRT, a number added or subtracted from the value of a di(c)e roll to modify its possible results.

dry

adj. Overly mechanical or lacking in thematic elements.

E

economic game

n. A game that models a micro-economic (i.e. business or industry) or macro-economic (i.e. nation or colony) system. Typically, players will have to invest in various factors of production: capital improvements (like power plants, RR track, settlements & cities), raw materials/resources (fuel, wheat/sheep/wood/brick/rock) & labor, in order to gain income, which is then re-invested into more factors of production to produce more income, etc. Money is NOT always present in an economic game, but it often is. Likewise the presence of money may not necessarily indicate an economic game. Examples: 1830: Railways & Robber Barons, Monopoly, Puerto Rico and Catan

end-game

n. The final time period in a game, which will usually determine the victor. Strategies during this period often vary slightly from strategies used during the earlier portion of the game.

euro / eurogame

n. synonym for German game This term emphasizes the more frequent publication of German-style games in other countries in Europe.

eurodude

n. Humorous term to describe some of the pictures of people on eurogame box covers (see Caylus cover).

eurotrash

1. n. A derogatory catchphrase for "European style boardgames"
2. n. A boardgame designed/published in Europe that seems to emulate Ameritrash games in style and mechanics.

expansion

n. additional equipment for a game, usually sold separately. Expansions can be used to add a variant or add additional scenario, to add more players for the game, add new maps or tracks for a game, etc. Some game companies have distributed small expansions for free at conventions or on the internet.

experience game

n. A game that emphasizes "the experience of playing" over achieving victory. Role Playing Games (RPG's), party games, open ended games are sometimes called experience games.

F

family game

n. A game that typically has simple rules, a short playing time, relatively high levels of abstraction and player interaction, and requires three or more players. A large percentage of these games originate in Germany. (See also German game)

fiddly

- 1) adj. Requiring frequent & excessive mental manipulations to play a game, which tends to detract from strategic/tactical planning and to bog down the ebb and flow of the game. Examples: Multiple modifiers for each dice roll (+2 for leader rating, -1 for brush terrain, +1 for ambush....), cumbersome arithmetic (I am selling 3 items at \$377 each...), special chrome rules (Patton gets +2 combat DRM vs. Rommel "I read your book!"), etc.
- 2) adj: Physically fiddly (the normal definition): having multiple pieces that have to be manipulated excessively in order to play the game, like stacking multiple counters in a small hex in a wargame, requiring multiple denominations of paper money, etc.

filler

n. A game with very simple rules and an extremely short playing-time. This type of game is frequently used between heavier games. (See also light)

FLGS

n. 1. Abbreviation for "Friendly Local Game Store". This represents a "brick and mortar" game store as opposed to an on-line establishment, and normally will also exclude large (and hence less friendly) stores like Target and Wal-Mart.

n. 2. Abbreviation for "Full Line Game Store". Older term used by stores and distributors to describe stores that carry full product "lines" and not partial selections of a game manufacturers catalog.

Friendly Tie

n. A scoring feature when a game awards the full VP bonus to all players who are tied.

G

game abbreviations

Click on the link for a list of frequently used Game Abbreviations.

game system

n. A set of components and/or rules that are intended to be used to create games. Game systems are listed under Games by equipment.

gamer

n. A person that likes to spend a most of his or her free time playing games.

gamers' game

n. The phrase "gamers' game" refers to games which are heavier, more mathematical, or otherwise less accessible (longer, more fiddly, more rules) than standard games. This designation has gained use with the rise of Euro Games as a way to differentiate heavier, longer titles from the normally family friendly, lighter games of that school. While the qualifications for this designation are contentious, a few relatively safe examples are: Die Macher, Roads & Boats, 1830: Railways & Robber Barons, The Republic of Rome and Dune.

n. 'gamer's game' is any game that demonstrates an elongated learning and experience curve, requiring multiple plays for the acquisition of strategic and/or tactical efficiency.

gamey

adj. In wargames, a mechanism or rule that seems contrived and/or encourages ahistorical or unrealistic tactics or strategies. Good example are:

- "factor counting" where an attacking player will move his units to avoid wasting attack points on unfavorable attacks (Moving a stronger unit in to get a 15:5 (or 3:1 ratio) rather than 14:5 (which rounds down to 2:1)
- "soaking off losses" where a defender, if he can choose which units will take losses/be eliminated, will pair off a strong unit with weak ones, so the

weak ones will "take the hit" so the strong unit can survive and remain at full strength.

gateway game

n. A game with simple rules that are easy to teach non-gamers in order to attract new players into boardgaming as a hobby.

German game

n. A game from Germany. Such games typically have relatively simple rules, short playing times, fairly high levels of abstraction and player interaction, and attractive physical components. Games not from Germany that otherwise meet the criteria are occasionally included in this group, but are more frequently described as 'German-like' (See also family game)

Get it to the table

(slang) Phrase describing wanting to play a particular game ('I just got a new version of Monopoly. I can't wait to get it to the table!')

GM

n. Abbreviation for Game Master or Game Moderator or Game Manager--a person who facilitates a game or tournament. GMs are most common in co-operative games and role playing games where players work together against the GM or a GM created scenario. GM's are also common at conventions where they may teach new players a game or run a tournament.

n. or v. Abbreviation for Geek Mail, as in "if interested, please send me a GM."

going nuclear

v. Deciding to disregard one's personal standing in the game and simply destroy or harm other players' chances of winning. Generally, this is done in response to another player's actions. (See alsometagame)

graphical user representation

n. the set of icons used by the Geek to represent a user. All about the Graphical User Representation

group think

n. The general approach adopted by most of the players in a game, which to some degree determines how other players will need to play in order to succeed.

H

heavy

adj. Having very complex rules and/or complex strategies that require deep thought, careful planning, and long playing times.

heft factor

n. The physical weight of the game, used to describe the quality of the components. A game with a well-

made board and lots of cool wooden bits will have a high heft factor.

hex

n. Short for hexagon. Hexes are a regular six-sided shape that can entirely be used to cover a flat plane without leaving gaps or having adjacent shapes meet only at a point. Thus they are commonly used in game boards (especially for wargames).

I

J

JASE

adj. Acronym of *Just Another Soulless Eurogame*. Highly subjective derogatory description applied to euro-style games judged to be unoriginal or mediocre.

K

kingmaker

n. A player, himself in a losing position, that has the power to decide who will win a given game.

L

LARP

n. Acronym for Live Action Role-Playing, a form of Role-Playing Game in which players are encouraged to physically act exactly how they think their character would behave with other characters and the surroundings. (See also RPG)

Leeching or Leaching

v. The act of benefitting from or using someone else's information or effort while usually not providing any in return. Leeching is often done with the implication or effect of exhausting the other's resources. Synonyms: Mooching or piggybacking.

Living Card Game (LCG)

n. A Fantasy Flight Games trademark for Collectible Card Games (CCGs) sold in non-random booster packs.

light

adj. Having very simple rules and strategies that do not require deep thought. Also can be used to describe a game with an extremely short playing time. (See also filler, opener, closer, and beer & pretzels game)

luck

n. A result of randomness giving one or more players an advantage within a game. (See also random)

M

majority control game

n. A type of game where players score for having the most items of a particular type (such as stock in

various companies). (North Americans might consider this a misnomer due to their distinction of plurality/majority where other countries might use majority/absolute majority.) Examples: Union Pacific, Acquire, Freight Train. See area control game.

mass market game

n. A game often sold by mass market retailers, like WalMart, Toys 'R' Us or Target. Hasbro (Parker Brothers, Milton Bradley) and Mattel are large manufacturers of mass market games. Examples: Monopoly, Risk, Scrabble, Uno, etc. (Note: Most BGGers have played mass market games, often in childhood, but generally prefer more complicated, strategic or elegant games from smaller publishers or from Europe.)

meaty

adj. Requiring a lot of thinking, tense, with little or no downtime. A meaty game does not have to have complex mechanics or rules (see heavy).

mechanism

n, -ic. Part of a game's rule system that covers one general or specific aspect of the game. For more information, see mechanism.

meeples

n. "Meeples" is a term that describes anthropomorphic playing pieces (image) in games, originally used to describe those used in Carcassonne. It is now more broadly used to refer to nearly any pawn or figure in a game. It is believed that the term was first used by Alison Hansel as an ad-hoc abbreviation for "my people", as noted in this 2001 session report and described in detail in this history. See the Intelligence Report for a detailed description of this species. See Poll: What exactly is a meeple? for more details of community consensus on what a meeple is.

metagame

v. To use reasons not strictly related to the game at hand to change one's playing style and attitude towards other players. Choosing to attack player A instead of player B simply because player A owes you money is an extreme example of metagaming.

min/max

v. The process of analyzing a particular turn with an emphasis on getting the best ratio of personal resources expended to realized gains.

miniatures game

n. A type of wargame that uses small three-dimensional lead or plastic figurines to represent military units to represent tactical-level conflict. Often these games have a high level of simulation or re-creation. Often such a game is not played on a board with marked off with spaces, but directly on the table or on model terrain and the determination of distances to be moved or fired is done by using a measuring

tape or stick. (Wings of War (even without physical miniatures) is a good example--the maneuver cards are used to measure the movement of each plane.

multiplayer game

n. A game with 3 or more players. Used in this sense mainly because there are fundamental differences between 2 player games and games that use 3 or more (diplomatic elements, choosing whom to attack or interfere with, kingmaking, ganging up on the leader, etc.) and is less cumbersome than "3 or more player games"

N

negotiation game

n. A game in which players make deals and trade resources or favors as the main mechanism. Diplomacy is perhaps the best example of this type of game. Negotiation is one of the game categories used at BoardGameGeek.com.

non-gamer

1. n. A person that does not spend every waking moment thinking, talking, playing, and breathing games, a.k.a. a normal person.

2. n. A person that is a neophyte to the world of tabletop gaming. Sometimes this person will develop over time into a more of a gamer, but sometimes they will only play games when asked or coerced. ('I would consider your grandmother a non-gamer. She would rather do a word search than play Dominion with us.')

O

OLGS

n. Abbreviation for "On-Line Game Store".

OOP

adj. Acronym of *out of print*.

opener

n. A game with very simple rules and strategies that does not require deep thought and that can be used at the beginning of a gaming session to get people warmed up for heavier games or can be used while waiting for more players to arrive for the game that is the main attraction. (See also light)

operational

adj. In a wargaming sense, a medium scale game in which units represent mid-size military formations (platoons & companies up to brigades, or so) over a moderate area (like a city or an area containing several cities). Typically these games represent a middle ground between strategic and tactical games and sometimes use mechanics common in both scales. Such a game usually depicts a single battle or small campaign.

overanalyze

v. To use an exorbitant amount of time to find an optimal move, especially when the resulting move is virtually equal to all other choices. (See also downtime)

OverText

n. A short text message that appears whenever a user hovers their mouse over an avatar or badge (there is separate text for each). Overtex costs 100 GeekGold per type (avatar or badge), and you can change your OverText at any time.

P

parakeetitis

n. An affliction suffered primarily by Spielfreaks, it causes the gamer to be enthralled by gorgeous components. Sufferers can often be heard to softly murmur, "nice bits" while examining a game and can be easily distracted by the sight of shiny objects.

parasitic conflict

n. A type of indirect conflict in which at least one player (the parasite) tries to gain a benefit from the actions of another player (the pioneer) who in turn tries to select actions in such a way so as to minimize the benefits that others might gain.

party game

n. A game that is designed for large groups of people and emphasizes social interaction, creativity, and/or volubility. Examples: Taboo, Charades

pasted on (theme)

adj. A term given to a game by people who think that the links between the game's theme and mechanism is weak. Or in other words, the designer created the game's mechanism first and abstractly, and applied the theme afterwards.

paste up

Graphic design; a layout of an image to be printed. (The Free Dictionary, 2008) In relation to language-dependent board games, the term refers to pasting a localized translation of game components' text onto the game components, so that players who don't understand the game's original printed language can still play the game easily.

perfect information game

n. A class of game in which players move alternately and each player is completely informed of previous moves, which implies there is no hidden information within the game. This class of game is frequently restricted to having no random elements during play - such as the roll of dice - but random elements are allowed during game setup. Examples: Chess, Through the Desert

petty diplomacy

n. a number of metagaming issues that arise in multiplayer (i.e. 3 or more player) games. These include kingmaking, bashing the leader, turtling, revenge, etc. Petty diplomacy problems can lead to accusations of excessive whining among the players. ("I am not the leader. He is!")

pie rule

n. a method of balancing a two player game where one player makes the first move in a game and his opponent has the option of either:

- becoming first player using the proposed move as his first move. The original first player now is second and may make any move of his choice. OR
- allowing the first player to keep the move and making any move of his choice as the second player.

The first player must make a reasonably fair first move--If it is too good, the opponent will switch sides and take the advantage. If it is too poor, and the first player will be at a disadvantage. Called the "pie rule" because it is analogous to "You cut, I choose" method of splitting a pie between siblings.

player interaction

n. The degree and frequency with which players can affect each other during a game. High player interaction can reduce a game's downtime. Games with little or no direct player interaction are sometimes referred as Multiplayer Solitaires.

playtest

v. To examine the rules of and play a prototype game in order to find possible improvements and determine its viability.

PnP

n. Print & Play. Print & Play games or expansions are files that contain artwork (boards/cards/etc.) and rules that are made available on the Internet. Anyone who wishes to may download them, print them out and play them.

point to point movement

n. Locations on the board are connected by lines which the pieces will move along. In wargames, point to point movement will emphasize movement along road networks.

point salad game

n. A game in which there are such a wide variety of ways to get VP so that game lacks strategic and/or tactical focus. Describing a game as point salad is usually derogatory as it derives from "word salad"--an incoherent, unfocused piece of writing. For examples, see: Point-salad games

power creep

The gradual unbalancing of a game due to successive releases of new content.

press your luck game

n. A game where players can repeatedly choose to perform a random event on their turn. They temporarily collect points each time, but usually receiving nothing on the turn if an unfavorable event happens. They must voluntarily end their turn to permanently keep the points. Examples: Can't Stop, Diamant/Incan Gold, Pass the Pigs.

processional

adj. Describes a game that tends to be very cyclical and/or monotonous. A processional game will often have little player interaction and high downtime.

publisher abbreviations

Click for a list of commonly used Publisher Abbreviations.

punch

v. The act of preparing a game for play by removing the manufacturing-process materials that are still attached to the game bits. Generally, games which have been removed from the shrinkwrap are still very "new" or "like new" if they are unpunched. While many geeks enjoy punching a game as soon as they receive it, un-punched status can be important for some wargames as the myriad ofchits can be hard to track once they have been punched.

PvP

Player versus Player.

Q

Quarterbacking

See "Alpha player"

R

race game

n. A game that features players vying to be the first to complete a given course of travel as the main mechanism. Examples: Formula Dé, Candy Land

random

n. -ness adj. When events or players' actions in a game are very unpredictable. Often players will have little, if any, control over the elements that control their performance in the game. (See alsoluck)

re-creation

n. A game that takes simulation to a new level by trying to duplicate original historical conditions in detail.

reference card

See *crib sheet*.

replay value

n. A game's capacity to remain entertaining after several playings.

RGB

n. Abbreviation for Rec.Games.Board, a Usenet newsgroup which has discussions about all types of board gaming. It can be very useful for researching information about games and for getting answers to rules questions.

rock-paper-scissors

Rock-Paper-Scissors is a game mechanism. Based on the simple children's game of the same name, players attempt to outwit opponents by correctly guessing and countering others' moves. Also, Rock-Paper-Scissors requires that some moves are 'better' than others.

roll-and-move

Roll-and-move is a term used to indicate a gameplay mechanism that drives the game by having the player roll a die, then mandatorily move according to the results of the die. Often the term *roll-and-move* is used in a defamatory or condescending tone, implying that a randomizer replaces tactical movement, and that the game involves relatively mindless play.

RPG

n. Abbreviation for Role-Playing Game, in which a gamemaster creates a progressive storyline and other players control the characters within the story. Example: Dungeons & Dragons See also LARP.

rules lawyer

n. A gamer who interprets rules in an overly literal sense or in such a way to significantly reduce the thematic or logical aspects of a game. (Note this term can be used in both a positive sense (A rules lawyer who takes great care in determining every nuance of a game's rules) or a negative sense (a rules lawyer who interprets rules in a manner to help him win the game or fails to correct an opponent's error unless it helps him win.))

S

SBW

n. Abbreviation of *Spiel By Web*, a website to play games by email with a graphical interface. (<http://www.spielbyweb.com>)

scenario

n. A set of rules for the set up of a game specifying starting position of units, victory conditions, map boards to be used, special rules, etc. Some games, especially wargames, have many different scenarios, which can enhance replay value.

secret unit deployment

Secret unit deployment is a game mechanism. Player's on-board resources are not implicitly known by all players, all the time.

set-up

n. The first time period in a game, during which players ready all the components that will be needed for playing.

simulation

n. A game that puts major emphasis on accurately depicting historical reality. (See also wargame and re-creation)

sleeve casualty

n. When a card becomes marked or unusable due to wear or cheapness of the card sleeve.

solvable

adj. (applied to a game) Where one player can always inevitably win or force a draw when a particular strategy is employed, regardless of any strategies used by the other player(s). Tic-Tac-Toe, Nim and Connect Four are examples of a solved games. (See also broken)

strategy

n. 1. The plan that a player uses in a game. adj -ic. 2. Requiring gaming decisions based on long-range goals. 3. Strategic: In a wargaming sense, a large scale game in which units represent large military formations (brigades & larger) over a wide ranging area (like a nation or continent). Typically these games have a high level of abstraction and a low level of detail to depict conflict. Such a game depicts an entire war or a major campaign.

T

tactics

n. 1. Decisions that are based primarily on current situations and short-term goals. adj -ical. 2. Tactical: In a wargaming sense, a small scale game in which units represent small military formations (platoon, squad or down to a single soldier/ship/tank/aircraft) over a limited area (such as a city or even a few blocks). Typically these games have a low level of abstraction and a high level of detail to simulate conflict. Such a game depicts a battle (or part of one) or a skirmish.

tag

n. a Geek User entered word which has been attached to a game. Tags are used since you can sort and select games using tags. See Tags.

TCG

n. Trading Card Game: See CCG.

territory building

adj. A game that involves adding regions (e.g., Risk).

teutonic

adj. Having a large number of variables for consideration and an essentially mechanical, slightly abstract, often repetitive structure [this is an almost direct quote from Sumo issue 8]. This quality is often found in German games.

Thematic Game

These are games that emphasize a highly developed theme, player to player conflict, and usually feature a moderate to high level of luck. Examples of classic Thematic Games include Axis & Allies, Dune, Cosmic Encounter, Talisman, and Twilight Imperium. See the Thematic Games page for more information. Gamer jargon often refers to these games as "Ameritrash".

theme

n. 1. The topic or subject matter of a game. adj -atic.
2. Having rules and mechanics based on assumptions regarding the subject matter of the game. Often considered the opposite of abstract.

tile-laying game

n. A game that features the placement of components onto a playing surface (rather than moving components along the playing surface) as the main mechanism. Examples: Carcassonne, Samurai

train game

n. A game that features route-building and/or picking up and delivery of commodities along particular routes as the main mechanisms. The crayon rail games, like Empire Builder and Eurorails, are good examples of train games.

trick-taking game

n. A card game that features players each sequentially placing a card down to make a trick, which is then awarded to one of the players. Bridge, Spades, or Hearts are examples of this type of card game. For more information, see Trick taking

turtling

v. to play a very defensive strategy (i.e. hide in your shell) in a multiplayer wargame, with the hopes that other players will attack each other thus weakening themselves. Generally seen as boring by players. Multiplayer wargames that avoid turtling usually do so by giving incentives to attack in the form of VP's, additional units/resources, stronger units, etc.

U

under-developed

adj. Having one or more mechanisms that are either too similar or insufficiently inter-connected, leaving a game that feels like the design was not completed.

UT

n. Abbreviation of *Ultimate Trades*.

V

variant

n. An alternate form of a game that may involve new or modified rules or pieces. Often played to add a change of pace to a game that has gotten stale. See expansion.

victory conditions

n. Mostly used in a wargaming sense, as the situation that must be attained for a side to achieve victory. This can involve destroying a specified number of enemy units, occupying or controlling specific locations, capturing or destroying a specific enemy unit (like a king or leader), holding out for a specified number of turns, etc. VP's can be used to allow several different victory conditions to be in the same game.

VP

n. Victory Points. Sometimes pronounced either "Veeps" or "Vee Pees". Plural can be spelled VP's, VPs or just VP. Points accumulated for completing various actions which count towards victory. Some games use the term "points" to refer to other factors--movement points, action points, etc.

W

wagering

See betting.

wargame

n. A game in which players put military units or military-type units in direct or indirect conflict with each other. The goal of these games is typically annihilation of opponents and/or the attainment of certain strategic conditions. These types of games will often have high thematic content and a varying degree of abstraction. (See also miniatures game). Wargames are subdivided into three general scales: Strategic, Operational and Tactical. (See also simulation)

waro / weuro

n. A wargame/eurogame hybrid. Usually, a light wargame that uses mechanics similar to eurogames--however, there are no distinct characteristics (such as cardplay, specialized dice, miniatures, etc.) that clearly define a waro or weuro from other wargames. Currently controversial. (See also wargame)

WBC

n. Abbreviation of *World Boardgaming Championships* (sponsored by BPA)

wiki

n. A wiki is a type of website that allows the visitors themselves to easily add, remove and otherwise edit and change some available content. For more information about the BoardGameGeek wiki go to [About the BoardGameGeek Wiki](#).

WIP

n. Abbreviation of *Work In Progress*

worker placement

n. A term used to describe the game mechanic which involves a "token-based, turn-limited, locking action selection menu." Players, in turn order, place tokens (aka workers) to select various actions presented on a board, cards, tiles, etc. Once an action is selected, it usually cannot be selected again on that round. Often players may think of this as a supervisor deploying workers on various jobs. A very popular game mechanic used in many recent games such as: *Agricola*, *Caylus*, *Stone Age*, *Pillars of the Earth*, etc.

X

Y

Z

zero-sum

adj. A property in games where all wins by one or more players are matched by losses of the other players. The wins and losses will always add up to zero. Poker is a good example, all money won by the players was lost by other players at the table. Most two player games are trivially zero-sum in that for one player to win, the other must lose.

ZoC

n. Wargame term. Abbreviation for 'Zone of Control'. The area surrounding a unit (usually each adjacent hex) in which they have the ability to disrupt an enemy unit's ability to move, retreat or stay in supply. Sometimes the term EZoC is used, meaning Enemy Zone of Control.