

# THIAGI GAMELETTER: February 2008

*SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE CONSULTANTS, AND MANAGERS.*

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## **THIAGI GAMELETTER:**

***SERIOUSLY FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TRAINERS, FACILITATORS, PERFORMANCE CONSULTANTS, AND MANAGERS.***

### ***Mission***

To increase and improve the use of interactive, experiential strategies to improve human performance in an effective, efficient, and enjoyable way.

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## ***Feedback Request***

Thiagi believes in practicing what he preaches. This is an interactive newsletter, so interact already! Send us your feedback, sarcastic remarks, and gratuitous advice through email to [thiagi@thiagi.com](mailto:thiagi@thiagi.com) . Thanks!

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*In Memorium*

## Marie Jasinski

Marie Jasinski died peacefully on January 21, 2008.

Marie was a wonderful mentor. She guided many people in their professional and personal life.

Marie was a supportive catalyst. She selflessly helped other people to enhance their ideas—about games, about roleplay simulations, and about approaches to creativity.

Marie was a creative thinker. She had the amazing ability to synthesize powerful ideas from different disciplines.

Marie was a great organizer. She planned systematically, double-checked everything, and implemented her plans flawlessly.

Marie was a polyculturalist. She traveled widely and made friends everywhere in the real and the virtual world.

This is how I met Marie: Intrigued by the session description, I attended a session at the 1998 annual conference of the North American Simulation and Gaming Association. After the session, I chatted with the presenter—Marie Jasinski—and found out that we had a common philosophy about learning and training. Marie came up with grandiose plans for me to do a series of training workshops all around Australia. I agreed with her plans just to humor her. But before I knew it, Marie was dragging me all around Australia from Hobart to Perth as a part of the LearnScope project.

Marie was a personal friend, a family friend, and a professional colleague. She was the Aussie associate of our training group. We plotted together to make the world safe for playful learning. My wife Lucy and I stayed with Marie in Adelaide, with her mother in Hobart, and her sister Jenny in Canberra, and spent happy times with her brother John's family and her nephews and her niece. Marie visited our family in St. George Island, Florida and Bloomington, Indiana.

Marie introduced us to a Marty Cielens, her partner and her husband. Marty was the best thing that happened to Marie—and to us. Thank you, Marty, for taking such wonderful care of our Marie.

Just a few weeks ago, Lucy and I spent Christmas and New Year's Day with Marie and Marty in Hobart. Marie was at her usual playful and courageous best. We made plans to spend the next Christmas together. But alas...

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*Rapid Instructional Design*

## **Learning Activities That Incorporate Different Content Sources**

Here's an important piece of advice for faster, cheaper, and better training design:

*Do not spend your resources in creating new **content** or new versions of existing content. Instead, invest your resources in designing **activities** that require participants to interact with existing sources of content (and with each other) to achieve specific training objectives.*

When I use the term, *existing sources of content*, I am not limiting myself to training materials. I am thinking of all types of content resources including those that were designed for purposes other than training.

We have created different types of training activities associated with each type of content source. Although there is considerable crossover among these activities, it is convenient for us study them within these convenient categories.

### ***Types of Content Sources***

We have divided content materials into two major categories: *Recorded* sources that can be reproduced in a consistent form, and *live* sources that depend on presentations and participation from different types of people.

There are four major classes of recorded content sources:

- Text

- Graphics
- Audio and Video recordings
- Real objects

We can divide text into different subcategories:

- Books, manuals, and articles
- Job aids
- Tables
- Tests, questionnaires, and other instruments
- Samples
- Cases
- Unorganized information
- The Internet

Some of these subcategories can also apply to other types of recorded materials.

Live content sources can be classified according to the type of person who is critically involved:

- *Subject-matter experts* who know the content but may not have abilities related to teaching or training
- *Coaches* who are expert practitioners of different skills and who usually work on an individual basis
- *Informants* who belong to different categories of people (such as *Austrian citizens* or *domestic-abuse victims*)
- *Fellow learners* who have a variety of experiences and expertise associated with the training topic

- *Fellow participants* with a shared experience (such as participation in a simulation game)

### ***Types of Training Activities***

Here are brief descriptions of different types of training activities that are associated with different content sources. As I mentioned earlier, there is a lot of overlap among the activities. However, this classification system provides a convenient approach for comparing and contrasting training activities.

### ***Recorded Content Sources***

#### **Books, manuals, and articles**

A *textra game* combines the effective organization of well-written documents with the motivational impact of games. Participants read a handout and play a game that uses peer pressure and peer support to encourage recall and transfer of what they read.

#### **Job aids**

An *application activity* involves supplying participants with copies of a job aid for performing a specific procedure. In a typical application activity, teams of participants learn different steps and reorganize themselves to master the other steps from each other.

#### **Tables**

*Table games* help participants to extract information from tables, discover interesting relationships among variables, predict what will happen outside the current table, identify key trends, and recall useful facts.

#### **Tests, questionnaires, and other instruments**

An *ABLA (Assessment-Based Learning Activity)* involves participants taking a test (or completing an instrument) and receiving personalized feedback. Whenever appropriate, ABLAs encourage interaction and discussion among participants about future actions.

#### **Samples**

The key element in a *sampling technique activity* is a collection of different samples (examples: email subject lines, conference session descriptions, lead paragraphs of

articles, or names of popular products). Participants analyze the samples, arrange them in different orders, identify key features, and list quality standards. Later, they apply their discoveries to create new products that meet their needs.

## **Cases**

The *case method* is a learning activity that involves a written account of a real or fictional situation (usually surrounding a problem). Participants work individually and in teams to analyze, discuss, and recommend appropriate solutions. They also critique each other's work. In some cases, the facilitator recounts the actual decisions implemented in the real-world situation upon which the case was based.

## **Unorganized information**

In an *item processing activity*, participants organize bits of information, ideas, facts, questions, complaints, or suggestions. In some cases participants themselves generate these items. Item processing results in deeper understanding and easier recall of different types of information.

## **The Internet**

The *4-D approach* uses four metaphorical doors: library, playground, café, and assessment center. This approach combines the effective organization of online documents (in the library), with the motivational impact of web-based games (in the playground), the power of collaborative learning (in the café), and authentic performance tests (in the assessment center).

## **Graphics**

*Graphics games* involve photographs, paintings, drawings, or cartoons as an essential element. Some graphic games require participants to create these types of graphics. In most of these games, participants review the graphic, analyze its elements, discover relationships, and discuss their findings. Training objectives for these games are not limited to graphics; they can be related to different types of skills and concepts.

## **Audio and video recordings**

A *double exposure activity* enhances the instructional value of audio or video recordings. In a typical double exposure activity, participants listen to an audio recording (or watch a



video recording) and play one or more games that help review and apply the new concepts and skills.

## **Physical Objects**

*Object lessons* incorporate physical objects and equipment as a main source of training content. Working individually or in teams, participants explore the components and functions of the object. As a result they master different motor skills and knowledge associated with effective use of the object.

## ***Live Content Sources***

### **Subject-matter experts**

An *interactive lecture* involves participants in the learning process while providing complete control to the facilitator. Typical interactive lectures include presentations that are interspersed with (or followed by) game-like activities (such as built-in quizzes, group tasks, and teamwork interludes). Some of these activities incorporate participant control of the presentation.

### **Coaches**

*Coaching activities* involve an individual coach supporting and improving the performance of a learner through questions, guidance, and feedback. Most of these activities feature just-in-time and just-enough presentations and demonstrations.

### **Informants**

A *brain-pick game* involves one or more “informants” who share a common background. Participants interact with these informants (and with each other) to learn specific knowledge and skills.

### **Fellow Learners**

A *structured sharing activity* facilitates mutual learning and teaching among participants. Typical structured sharing activities create a context for a dialogue among participants about their experiences, knowledge, and opinions. Structured sharing is particularly effective for sharing best practices among participants.

### **Fellow Participants Sharing a Common Experience**

*Debriefing games* are interactive strategies that are used for encouraging reflection and dialogue about an earlier activity (such as a roleplay or a simulation game). These games require processing of a common experience to extract key learning points from it. They encourage participants to identify and express their emotions, recall events and decisions, share the lessons they learned, relate insights to other real-world events, speculate on how things could have been different, and plan for future action.

### ***For More Information***

Back issues of *TGL* contain examples of many of these types of activities. You can locate them by typing the name of the activity in our [search engine](#). In future issues, I plan to provide additional information on all these types of activities.

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### *Application Activity*

## **CANCEL THIS SESSION**

An *application activity* involves supplying participants with copies of a job aid for performing a specific procedure. This application activity incorporates a job aid on persuasive writing.

### ***Outline***

During the first round, participants independently write a short piece suggesting that the training session be canceled. During the second round, teams of participants use a job aid to jointly critique a randomly-selected piece of writing. During the third round, the teams rewrite this piece to make it more persuasive.

### ***Index Tags***

Persuasive writing. Arguments. Application game. Job aids.

### ***Purpose***

To write short persuasive pieces.

## ***Participants***

**Minimum:** 4

**Maximum:** 30

**Best:** 12 to 30

## ***Time Requirement***

30 to 60 minutes

## ***Handouts***

Job aid: *How To Write Persuasively*

## ***Supplies***

- Paper and pencil
- Timer
- Whistle

## ***Equipment***

Copying machine (If you don't have access to a copying machine, see the *Adjustments* section after the description of the activity.)

## ***Flow***

**Give the writing assignment.** Ask participants to write a short essay (of less than a page) on why this training activity should be canceled. Announce a time limit of 10 minutes.

**Organize teams.** If participants are seated around tables, each table becomes a team. Move a few people around so each team has about the same number of members. Organize two to six teams, each with two to five members.

**Distribute the job aid.** Give a copy of *How To Write Persuasively* to each participant. Ask participants to study the handout and think about which items they violated in writing their essay.

**Make copies of randomly selected essays.** While participants are studying the

handout, collect all the essays from each table. From each of these sets, randomly select one essay and make enough photocopies for all participants.

**Conduct the critique session.** Distribute copies of the essay from each table to the members of the next table. (The essay from the last table goes to the first table.) Ask the team members at each table to work jointly and evaluate the essay, using the items in the job aid. Encourage participants to mark up sections of the essay that show the implementation or the violation of each item.

**Present the critiques.** Ask each team to present its evaluative critique of the selected essay. Give copies of the essay (previously made) to all participants so they can follow along with the critique. Repeat the procedure with each team until all selected essays have been critiqued.

**Revise the essays.** Thank the teams for their critiques. Now ask each team to rewrite the essay they critiqued. Announce a 10-minute time limit.

**Distribute revised essays.** After 10 minutes, collect the revised essays from each table. Reassure the team members that it does not matter if the essay is not completely revised. Send someone to make photocopies of the revised essays while you discuss the principles of persuasive writing with the participants. Distribute copies of the revised essays and invite participants to compare it with the original version at their own leisure.

### ***Adjustments***

**If you don't have access to a copying machine,** don't worry. Give the original copy of a randomly selected essay from each table to the participants at the next table. Ask them to mark up the copy with their evaluative comments. Later, ask participants to work from this marked-up copy to rewrite the essay.

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*Handout 1*

## **How To Write Persuasively**

1. Clearly communicate a specific proposal.
2. Summarize your proposal in a brief and easy-to-remember sentence.
3. Brainstorm an extensive list of reasons in support of your proposal. Choose a few strong reasons that will appeal to your readers.
4. Present the selected reasons with supporting information that will persuade the readers to agree with you.
5. Use a combination of personal and factual information to present your arguments.
6. Think about objections that your readers may have.
7. Establish a common ground between you and the people who may oppose your proposal.
8. State the other side's arguments. Point out why they are reasonable but your arguments are more reasonable.
9. Begin with an attention-getting opening paragraph.
10. Briefly explain why people should listen to you. Establish that you are a credible and trustworthy person.
11. Use a conversational tone that appeals your readers.
12. Organize your writing in a logical manner.
13. Use language that appeals to the readers' emotions.
14. Use many short paragraphs, each with a side heading.
15. End in an interesting way, restating your proposal, and calling for action.

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### *Brain-Pick Activity*

*A brain-pick activity involves one or more "informants" who share a common background. Participants interact with these informants (and with each other) to learn specific knowledge and skills.*

## **HOW TO BECOME A RICH CONSULTANT**

"How can I become a consultant like you?"

People ask me this question all the time. The honest answer is "I don't know". Probably there are as many different answers to this question as there are consultants. Here's an activity that involves rounding up some practicing consultants and helping participants pick their brains.

### ***Key Idea***

Each team is armed with a question that is frequently asked by people who want to become consultants. The team interviews five different consultants and collects practical guidelines. Teams share collections of guidelines related to different questions.

### ***Index Tags***

Consulting. Brain-pick activities. Interviews. Practical guidelines. Business startup.

### ***Purpose***

To collect and implement practical guidelines for succeeding in the consulting business.

### ***Participants***

**Minimum:** 5

**Maximum:** 35

**Best:** 15 to 30

### ***Human Resources***

Assemble a panel of five experts from among practicing consultants. Strive for as much diversity among these experts as possible in such areas as age, gender, levels of experience, educational qualification, and industry.

### ***Time Requirement***

**Minimum:** 45 minutes

**Best:** 90 minutes

### ***Handouts***

- *Instructions to Teams*
- Short biographies of the five experts

### ***Supplies***

- Sticky note pads
- Pens
- Flip chart pad
- Felt markers

### ***Equipment***

- Countdown timer
- Whistle

### ***Room Setup***

Set up a table for each team. Arrange enough chairs around each table for each team member, plus an additional chair for the expert.

### ***Flow***

**Collect questions.** Come up with five key questions related to becoming a consultant. You may choose suitable questions from the sample handout below. Alternatively, you can come up with these questions from reading books on consulting, talking to participants, and talking to your expert panel. Incorporate these questions as part of the instruction sheet for teams. List all the questions and circle any two.

**Organize teams.** Divide the participants into 5 teams of two to seven members each. Make the teams equal in size, although it does not matter if some teams have one more member than others. Seat the teams around their tables.

**Distribute questions.** Circle two of the questions in each instruction sheet in such a way that each question is distributed to two different teams. A fast way to do this is to assign a number to each team and then circle the question number that is the same as the team's

number and the next question number. For the last team (Team 5), circle the fifth and the first question.

**Conduct the first round.** Ask teams to read the instruction sheet and clarify any instruction if necessary. Emphasize the 5-minute time limit and the importance of focusing the interview on the two specific questions assigned to the team. Distribute the biographies of the expert panel. Announce the start of the first round. Send out an expert to each team. Ask team members to begin interviewing the expert on each of the two questions. Encourage them to take notes, focusing on the goal of coming up with five practical guidelines related to each of the two questions. Set the countdown timer for 5 minutes and start it.

**Conduct additional rounds.** At the end of 5 minutes, blow the whistle, announce the end of the round and ask the experts to move to the next team. Ask team members to begin interviewing the new experts about the same two questions. (The experts will field a new question from each new team.)

Repeat the process until each team has interviewed all five experts.

**Ask teams to prepare practical guidelines.** At the end of the fifth round, ask team members to spend another 5 minutes to review their notes and come up with five practical guidelines related to each of the two questions assigned to them. Distribute pads of sticky notepaper and ask the teams to write each of the ten guidelines (five related to each question) legibly on a sticky notepaper.

**Post the guidelines by topics.** While the teams are writing their practical guidelines, tape five sheets of flip chart paper on different areas of the wall, each with a topical heading related to the five questions. At the end of 5 minutes, ask participants to stick their guidelines on the appropriate flipchart paper. (Each topic will contain two sets of practical guidelines because it was assigned to two different teams.)

**Conduct a gallery walk.** Ask team members to review the guidelines on all five flip chart sheets, noting down any items for immediate implementation. Invite the experts to also participate in this review. Announce an appropriate time limit.

**Conclude the session.** Thank the experts and the participants.



**Follow up.** Collect all the practical guidelines and type them up. Send them as an attachment to an email note to the participants (and the experts). Also upload them to a web site where you can accumulate the guidelines from future activities.

### ***Adjustments***

Depending on the number of participants and experts, you can increase or decrease the number of teams.

### **HOW TO BECOME A RICH CONSULTANT *Game Plan***

<b>Step</b>	<b>Facilitator</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Collect questions.	Come up with five key questions related to becoming a consultant.	
Organize teams.	Divide participants into five teams of two to seven members each.	Sit around the team table. Introduce yourself to other team members.
Distribute questions.	Distribute instruction sheets to different teams with two questions circled.	Study the two questions and come up with other questions related to them.
Conduct first round.	Send an expert to each team. Keep time.	Interview the expert. Take notes on the responses related to the two questions.
Conduct additional rounds.	Conduct four more rounds using the same process.	Interview the other experts on the same two questions.
Ask teams to prepare practical guidelines.	Give instructions. Keep time. Prepare five flip chart pages with suitable headings.	Review notes from all five interviews. Come up with five practical guidelines related to each of the two questions.
Post the practical guidelines.	Give instructions.	Stick the guidelines on the appropriate flip chart page.
Conduct a gallery walk.	Invite team members and experts to review the	Walk around the room and review the guidelines.

	guidelines.	
Follow up.	Type up all the practical guidelines and send them to participants and experts. Upload the guidelines to a web site.	Review the guidelines.

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## Handout 2

# Instructions to Teams

1. Your task is to interview a group of experts (one at a time) and come up with a set of practical guidelines.
2. Your team will focus on the two questions that are circled in this list:
  - What important skills are required for becoming a successful consultant? How do I acquire these skills?
  - What are the advantages and disadvantages of becoming a consultant? How do I increase the advantages and decrease the disadvantages?
  - Should I specialize in a specific area or should I work on a broad field?
  - Should I join a group of other consultants?
  - What are the legal requirements for starting my own consulting business?
  - How do I market my business and get enough clients?
  - Should I have a website? What should my website contain?
  - What type of support staff should I hire? Where do I find suitable people?
  - What do I do if I get more work than I can handle? What if I don't have any work during long periods of time?

- How much should I charge for my work? What other suggestions do you have for figuring out appropriate fees and discounts? How should I handle people who want free consultation?
  - What types of expenses should I anticipate?
  - How do I negotiate with a client?
3. You will interview five different experts, one at a time. You will have 5 minutes to interview each consultant.
  4. Take notes during the interviews. Remember that you are looking for practical guidelines related to the two questions.
  5. After interviewing all five consultants, select five practical guidelines related to each of the two questions.
  6. Write these guidelines on sticky notepaper, each guideline on a separate piece of notepaper.
  7. Stick your notes on the flip chart paper with the appropriate heading.

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*Jolt*

## **SNAKE BITE**

You use these two different handouts in this jolt. They look the same, but a couple of sentences are different:

You will die within 3 hours.

An extremely poisonous East Niger Swamp Snake has bitten you. Your only chance of survival is an antidote stored in a hospital in Zorzor. You need to

drink 5 ml (about a teaspoon) of this liquid antidote.

You need to drink the antidote within the next 45 minutes. You have been rushed to the hospital.

Here comes the doctor with a container of the antidote.

You will die within 3 hours.

An extremely poisonous East Niger Swamp Snake has bitten you. Your only chance of survival is an antidote stored in a hospital in Zorzor. You need to drink 500 ml (about 2 cups) of this liquid antidote.

You need to drink the antidote within the next 45 minutes. You have been rushed to the hospital.

Here comes the doctor with a container of the antidote.

Make enough copies of the handout for all participants and mix them up. Distribute one copy (of either handout) to each participant.

Give these instructions in your own words:

*This is a thought experiment.*

*Read the information in the handout. Visualize yourself in this situation. Do not talk to each other.*

Pause for a suitable period of time.

Hold up a glass tumbler that's half full of a colored liquid (like grape juice).

Say:

*I am the doctor. This is a 500 ml container. At this time, we only have 250 ml. This is our complete supply of the antidote.*

*What's your immediate reaction?*

*Please remain seated if you think, "This is more than enough."*

*Please stand up if you think, "This is not enough."*

Half of the participants will stand up and the other half will remain seated.

Tell the participants, "Hmm...some of you see the glass as half empty while the others see it as half full."

Explain the difference between the two handouts.

Debrief participants to drive home the point that optimism and pessimism depends on a person's level of need (and of greed).

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*Brian's Words*

*Brian Remer is Creative Learning Director at The Firefly Group ( [brian@thefirefly.org](mailto:brian@thefirefly.org) ). In addition to writing 99 powerful words every month for this column, Brian invents games and interactive strategies to expand learning and deepen insights.*

## **The Accidental Leader by Brian Remer**

### ***The Accidental Leader***

Through the corridor, down the stairs, around the corner and into the copy room, all the way I was just a few paces behind Nancy. The coincidental similarity of our travels through the office caused her to tease, "Are you following me?"

"No," I quipped, "Are you leading me?" We laughed together but it made me think. If people have the same goal and objectives, there is really very little difference between leading and following. The distinctions, the status, the recognition, the responsibility all blur as we all work together.

We can play both roles, simultaneously.

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*99 Words*

## **Blended Learning**

We introduced the concept of 99 Words articles in our [May 2006](#) issue. Brian Remer has been writing a 99 words column each month. Here is a piece from Thiagi. —Raja

### ***Blended Learning***

This phrase usually refers to the combination of web-based and classroom training. For example, participants learn basic principles of feedback through online modules. Then they participate in face-to-face roleplays to integrate and apply what they learned.

Recently, instructional designers have pointed out that blended learning could involve other apparently opposite approaches such as presentation and facilitation, improvisation and careful preparation, independent learning and collaboration, and intuition and logic. Here's my advice: Find out what your biases are and deliberately blend them with their opposites. Remember, hybrid approaches are always faster, cheaper, and more effective than pure approaches.

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*Check It Out*

## **Bernie DeKoven ( <http://www.deepfun.com/> )**

Bernie DeKoven is a great thinker in the area of playfulness. You can learn more about Bernie and about his wonderful philosophy by visiting his [DeepFun website](#). Just to give you a feel for the richness of this website, here are labels under which its content is organized:

- Advergames
- Art
- Defender of the Playful
- Events
- Family
- Family Game
- For Kids
- Fun
- Fun Studies
- FunCast
- Games
- Junkyard Sports
- Major Fun
- Party Game
- Playfulness
- Politics
- Recess
- Sports
- Technology
- Theory
- Thinking Games

- Toys
- Virtual Toys
- Word Game
- Work

Click your way through this treasure chest.

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*Quick Poll*

## **Complaints About Training Games**

A couple of months ago, we conducted a single-item survey to collect complaints about training games.

We reviewed and analyzed your responses and summarized them into a dozen major complaints:

1. Developing an effective game requires a lot of time and money.
2. Games are contrived, irrelevant, and pointless.
3. Games are not intellectually stimulating.
4. Games are not suited for participants from some cultures (such as the Japanese) and from some professions (such as engineering).
5. Games don't work with technical training.
6. Games require special equipment and facilities.
7. In a game, too much time is wasted on learning too little content.
8. Most games are childish and frivolous.



9. Participants do not have the necessary skills to learn from each other.
10. Participants don't like making fools of themselves in front of others.
11. The focus on winning the game prevents participants from learning the content.
12. Trainers lack facilitation and debriefing skills that are required for effective use of training games.

Can you help us identify the most frequent complaint by participating in this month's quick poll? Review the list of complaints in the poll and select the one that you think is the most frequently-made complaint about games.

Please spend 30 seconds right now to participate in [the poll](#) .

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