

Serious Game Essay

LP304 – Major Project

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This essay will provide context and justification for the creation of the serious tabletop board game: *Cue Comms!*.

Learning Objectives

To begin, it's important when looking at any serious game to understand and continuously reference the learning objectives. If not built around the achievement of its predefined learning objectives, a serious game is just a game (Susi et al, 2007). '*Cue Comms!*' is built on three core learning objectives. The first is to give players a simulated experience of what it is like to work in a live television gallery environment. The primary purpose of the game is to open the possibility of a career in live television to those who have not previously thought about it, and so trying to recreate the experience as closely as possible is key to serving the players a true-to-life experience. Simultaneously, as players learn about the environment of a live television gallery, the second learning objective is to develop players' understanding of live television's processes, hierarchies, equipment, and workflows. The world of live broadcast can be intimidating to someone who isn't necessarily technically minded or experienced in events of any kind. To combat this, the game makes sure not to hide away from referencing real technology and takes opportunities to subtly educate both by integrating learning into the gameplay, but also in the presentation through various pieces of flavour text sprinkled across the components. Players should walk away with a workable understanding of the different kinds of equipment used in a live broadcast. The third learning objective of the game is to allow players to work through scenarios of working in the live television industry, apply their knowledge, recognise patterns of common accepted protocol and behaviour, and revise their errors. This learning objective is largely tackled through the scenario cards which comprise half of the event deck. A number of these cards mention similar equipment or scenarios and allow players to apply previous knowledge in a new context. Mastery of this learning objective is not defined through eventual correct answering of the same card, but the application of learned knowledge to answer a different card correctly first time. If viewed through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), the game largely consists of the lower levels of the hierarchy: remembering, understanding, and applying, suitable for a game that

introduces a lot of new concepts and structures to its players. In the ‘warehouse phase’ of the game, there is also an element of analysis and evaluation, as players must consider what equipment they bring to a gig, based on the transport space, quality, and suitability of the equipment at their disposal.

Design Choices

When designing a serious game, it's important that your design choices support either the achievement of learning objectives, or keep the player engaged. Other serious games can struggle with becoming too dictatorial, or becoming a glorified flash card exercise (Rahm, 2025). Particularly when designing with a younger audience in mind, who are natives to high stimulation video games and other modern media, lack of engagement is a short journey to a game’s teachings falling on deaf ears.

For ‘*Cue Comms!*’, this danger was kept at the forefront of decision making. One of the tough decisions to make as a designer was the nature of the core gameplay. There was the option of emulating other crisis management games, which introduce a large plethora of possible player actions and a closer approximation of the simulated live television workplace. However, this carried the risk of bulking up the components list and increasing the initial cognitive load on the players (Sweller, 1988), which were counter-intuitive for a game meant to be taught and played in a single classroom session.

At risk of making the game less ‘serious’, the decision was taken to have the bulk of the gameplay include exciting but not necessarily educational features, such as a large amount of dice rolling. This and a focus on short rounds allow for the game to progress rapidly and continue to engage players. As a consequence of this, the most active learning element of the game in the event cards also comes around more often without leaving the game feeling like a pack of flashcards or an exam. Overall, this approach to the game’s design helps it straddle the best line of ‘flow’ as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) would describe it and supports the learning objectives outlined above.

The use of chance in the game also creates a game that can feel quite volatile. Depending on the player’s style (Bartle, 1996), this can make the game engaging, unpredictable and exciting, or arbitrary, difficult to master, or simply unfair. The scenario cards in the Event deck therefore are often

the difference between a gig's success and a gig's failure, and places further emphasis on the learning.

Board game enthusiasts may find the game too akin to Monopoly or Snakes and Ladders for their taste, as agency is admittedly limited. But, given the game's target audience as students and young people who aren't necessarily serial board game players, it seemed like the right decision.

Another important that had to be considered in the design of the game from an aesthetic standpoint was understanding the context under which the game is likely to be played. '*Cue Comms!*' is a product that could be sold like a non-serious game, but because of the orientation towards education and educators, there must be accessibility accommodations made. Notably, elements of the component list have addendums attached that suggest different ways to make the game more 'print and play'. These include notes for playing the game with numbered dice as opposed to the custom dice, printable game cards in the back of the rulebook, and a sample round of play to enable the educator's acquisition of components and understanding of the rules is as swift as possible. In addition, deliberate measures were taken to ensure that the game was either vague in its representations of people (gender neutral pronouns, etc), or, where it couldn't, included a range of names from different cultures and genders. This felt particularly important given the dominance of men in live television roles (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015; Percival, 2019), which would be harmful to reinforce when introducing the industry to new people.

Learning Context

'*Cue Comms!*' is a serious game for educators to use in their classrooms as a method of introducing a creative industry to their students. Therefore, it has to be considered how the game can be best used to make an impact on the students it is presented to. '*Cue Comms!*' would be an ideal game for a module that takes a generalised approach to creative careers. The 'Media Lab' modules in Warwick's Media and Creative Industries course is a great example, as the module features a year-long project, with the sessions each week devoted to trying new things, getting familiar with new technologies, and

exploring opportunities for the students' futures. The game would struggle as a repeated exercise among the same students, as the nature of having card-based questions can blur the lines between understanding and applying knowledge and simply remembering the answers to specific cards. This could be combatted with an online question system that can be updated like the game '*Outsmarted!*', but this approach is cumbersome to develop. Event card expansion packs could also be a solution, but only delay the problem, not fix it.

The ideal academic setup for '*Cue Comms!*' would be a few tables running independent instances of the game simultaneously, as the game is capped at four players, and students could rotate in and out of play to ensure every student gets an opportunity to play in every role the game offers.

The Future

It is always wise to consider the future of a board game of any kind, but serious games, where effective learning only works if information is kept up to date and accurate, and the game must be kept accessible to both strangers and enthusiasts of board games, must consider their future comprehensively.

The increased opportunities and rising adoption of hybridisation in board game design, while not enjoyed as a matter of personal taste, cannot be understated or ignored, particularly in serious games (Linden, Paay and Taylor, 2025). Setting aside a personal dislike for the increased development labour required for digital technology integration in board game design generally, the requirement for players to have digital devices that are powerful enough to support the digital integration, which economically disadvantaged students and players may not, and the necessity of more complex game setup when digital technology is present (downloading apps, making accounts, scanning QR codes, etc.), there are a number of benefits that a limited approach to digital technology can offer games like '*Cue Comms!*'. Notably, digital versions of the game that can be played entirely on digital tabletop software such as *Tabletop Simulator* or *Tabletopia*, allow for those who take their education remotely to also participate in the benefits of serious games. Additionally, digital resources such as print-and-play documents and free digital rulebook documents make the game more accessible to more

educators in a way that a physical product isn't, particularly for educators with limited resources. For 'Cue Comms!', digital integration in the future is likely best used as a tool mainly for accessibility, keeping the game either entirely physical or entirely digital.

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