

Game master

Hints are an important part of escape room design. On the one hand, their presence is clearly related to the level of difficulty of escape rooms. In other words, the more hints there are, the easier the game becomes. On the other hand, hints might be of high importance to keep players engaged in the game when they get stuck. Therefore, it is important to balance hints and escape room difficulty, so that students do not feel demotivated by either difficult or very easy tasks.

How are game hints usually offered?

There are several ways to deliver hints. Below are some of them:

- Set number of hints available on request: players might have a maximum of hints (e.g. two or three) to ask for throughout the game
- Unlimited hints: players can ask for as many hints as they wish
- Earned hints: Although players might start off with a set number of hints, they can earn more when they solve puzzles or answer short quizzes/tests
- Hints and penalty: the first hints are given for free but, if more are needed, there is a penalty, for example to time or score
- No hints: although rare, there are some rooms which offer no hints whatsoever.
- Last-minute hints: these are the hints the game master decides to give to the players who are very close to escaping but they seem to have been stuck.

How can game hints offered when players get stuck ?

Depending on whether the game master monitors the game or is in the room, hints can be delivered:

- By voice, through a walkie talkie, a video or a telephone
- In person, when the game master is in the room or called in by players for help
- Via pen and paper, that can be even slipped underneath a door
- By pre-set hint cards, which means that escape room developers know precisely what players need at which time.

Reference

- Veldkamp, A., van de Grint, L., Knippels, M.C. and van Joolingen, W. (2020). 'Escape education: A systematic review on escape rooms in education'. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202003.0182/v1> (Accessed: 18 February 2021).
- M. Wiemker, E. Elumir, and A. Clare. (2015). 'Escape Room Games: Can you transform an unpleasant situation into a pleasant one'. [Online]. Available at: <https://thecodex.ca/wp-content/uploads/00511Wiemker-et-alPaper-Escape-Room-Games.pdf> (Accessed: 18 February 2021).

