10 design mistakes to avoid for your ER

When creating a pedagogical Escape Room to foster language learning, here are several pitfalls to watch out for during the design process:

- **Designing game elements before deciding on the purpose of the ER:** You can lose sight of pedagogical targets when the focus is on scenario and enigma creation.

Instead: First ask yourself: "What should students have learned by the end of this ER?" to guide you in tying all game elements to the objective of the ER and your students' needs.

- **Not considering the practicalities of your ER:** Every ER has its possibilities and constraints which will influence the feasibility of the enigmas and scenario.

Instead: Refer to the "Setting the Practicalities" section of the Framework and Roadmap as guidelines on how to work within your practical limits

- **Lack of consistency between the different game elements:** If students are expected to learn about a certain topic, incorporating dissonant elements might be confusing.

Instead: Make sure to adapt the characters, elements of cultural heritage, tools and activities to the time and place of the setting for the ER

- **Creating enigmas that don't match students' proficiency levels:** Simple ERs might bore players; difficult ones might be time-consuming and leave players frustrated.

Instead: Save the riddles and brainteasers for more advanced learners, while elementary learners would do well with easier language exercises.

- **Not defining the extent of your role as Game Master:** Planning when to intervene in students' gameplay and when to step back is key for guiding students in the game.

Instead: Refer to the resource sheet "Game Master" for suggestions on your role as Game Master before, during and after gameplay.

- **Neglecting to prioritize soft skills acquisition:** Even if language goals are being met, pedagogical ERs should not be exercises in individualism and self-reliance.

Instead: Incorporate the features of each role in the design of your ER to emphasize interpersonal skills such as teamwork and communication.

- **Failing to create an immersive environment:** Although the enigmas and scenario can set the tone for the ER, do not rely solely on them to immerse students in the setting.

Instead: Form a list of decorations and tools that can serve as immersive elements, refer to the Framework and Roadmap.

- **Creating an ER that is untestable:** ERs with elements that are too convoluted or difficult to operate will spoil the entire gameplay for students.

Instead: Consider the testability of all segments of the ER during the design process (refer to the resource sheet "How to test your enigmas" for guidelines)

- **Overlooking the needs of students with SLDs:** Some ER elements are difficult to use for students with specific needs and could make them feel excluded.

Instead: Refer to the chapter about SLDs in the booklet "ER and languages: a perfect match?" for suggestions on fostering inclusivity.

- **Discounting the importance of student feedback:** The ER does not end after gameplay, as student input is necessary for crafting a better learning experience for all.

Instead: Set aside time after gameplay for the Debrief in order for students to reflect on their experience and offer suggestions on how to improve the ER.

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● **Further reading:**

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Grande-de-Prado, M. *et al.* (2020) 'Edu-Escape Rooms', *Encyclopedia*, 1(1), pp. 12–19. doi: 10.3390/encyclopedia1010004.

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Sanchez, E. and Plumettaz-Sieber, M. (2019) 'Teaching and learning with escape games from debriefing to institutionalization of knowledge', in Gentile, M., Allegra, M., and Söbke, H. (eds) *Games and learning alliance*. Palermo, Italy: Springer, pp. 242–257.

Veldkamp, A., Daemen, J., *et al.* (2020) 'Escape boxes: Bringing escape room experience into the classroom', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 51(4), pp. 1220–1239. doi: 10.1111/bjet.12935.

Veldkamp, A., van de Grint, L., *et al.* (2020) *Escape education: a systematic review on escape rooms in education*. preprint. SOCIAL SCIENCES, pp. 1–19. doi: 10.20944/preprints202003.0182.v1.

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