

# Gamify Anything

**I** WANTED TO NAME THIS CHAPTER “Bored Games.” When I am faced with a task that I particularly do not like, I feel bored. Just like the teenagers and kids I interview will describe their least favorite or most difficult subject in school as “boring.” What they are really telling me is that they have no interest or motivation to engage in the subject so it feels HARD! When things are hard the brain effectively is in the “off” position. So how do you turn it “on”? Turn the task into a game. Thank goodness we live in a time when “gamification” is an actual thing.

Gamification is the use of game design elements in non-game context. So how do you take a task that is typically considered “not a game” and turn it into a game?

Think like a game designer. Think of your favorite game. What makes it fun? What keeps you wanting to play?

Games typically involve clear rules and goals, a level of risk, constant feedback or rewards, challenge, and momentum. They are voluntary and involve a sense of fun.

- Goals provide a way to keep score and to determine who wins.
- Rules keep things predictable and consistent.
- Having a level of risk makes the “player” consider the strategy for playing and keeps them focused.
- Feedback provides encouragement and lets the player assess their progress and strategy.
- It’s important that the level of challenge keeps the player interested by not being too easy, but not overwhelmed by being too hard.
- Rewards are frequent and provide immediate gratification to keep the player motivated to continue. Rewards can include verbal feedback, badges, points, “leveling up,” increased status, immunity, currency, and loot.
- Fun keeps the player smiling and is an indication of the intrinsic (internal) reward involved in playing a satisfying game.

Using these pointers, you can start to “gamify” those hard-to-do, much avoided, often procrastinated, head-banging tasks you have been putting off at home and work. Or you can get your kids to do them!

## Gamifying dreaded tasks

Assign a point system to everything you don’t enjoy (sucky tasks) and rewards you can enjoy (happiness). The

harder the task (this is subjective) the higher the point value. Likewise, the more you like a reward the higher the point value. The concept is that you have to accrue enough sucky task points to buy a reward.

To get started make two lists: one of the sucky tasks and the other of your rewards. Then assign point values. You may have to tweak these as you go along. Keep track of points and identify the rewards you are “playing” for.

Here’s a quick and dirty example:

SUCKY TASK	REWARD
Load of laundry, 3 points	Trampoline park, 10 points
Clean bathroom, 5 points	Go out for dessert, 15 points
Dreaded email, 2 points	Buy new hat, 30 points
Clean yard, 6 points	Disney World, 300 points

For instance, if you want to go to the Trampoline Park, you need to earn 10 points. This might involve having to do the laundry (1 load = 3 points), clean the bathroom (5 points), and reply to that email from your boss that you have been putting off (2 points).

When you are working on big goals or long-term projects, you can gamify your progress by breaking down the goal into bite-sized chunks that can be done in short spurts. Set milestones for yourself and each time you complete one, reward yourself. Have a system to visualize and track your progress. For example, if you want to plan a trip to Disney World as a family, you can gamify and track everything it takes to prepare for the trip. You have to save money, plan activities, and make reservations.

I personally like the challenge of racing against time. This can involve timing myself and trying to beat my own time on tasks; racing another person to see who can get their task done the quickest (without errors); or setting a time limit and seeing how many tasks I can get done in a set time. Whenever I am driving somewhere, I like to call ahead and give an exact time when I will arrive. I have been doing this since before GPS told me when I should arrive. It’s a little game to see how close to that time I actually arrive. There is something about the pressure of short periods of time that is invigorating. I’m sure it is related to my affinity for procrastinating until the very last possible moment on a task.



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### **There's an app for that**

There are many apps and online platforms to gamify even the most dreaded activity:

- For me, household chores are a dreaded activity. That is, until I discovered *Chore Wars* ([www.chorewars.com](http://www.chorewars.com))! **Chore Wars** turns doing the dishes, vacuuming the floor, taking out the trash, and doing the laundry into a game for the whole family! As you progress, you'll randomly encounter monsters, pick up dropped loot and gold, unlock treasure, and improve your character. The "dungeon master" can assign new quests and challenge the party with something new. When you encounter monsters, your HP (health points—I had to ask one of my kids about that one!) and character progression comes into play—you'll actually fight the monster, and how well you've built up your character to this point will make a difference, so there's incentive to actually do the chores.
- Running is also not my favorite thing to do unless my attention is distracted by something else. Good music is one way to keep me going. There are also apps, such as *Zombie Run* (a story) or *Couch to 5K* (verbal encouragement and time markers). If having a community behind you in your quest for health is motivating, **Fitocracy** ([fitocracy.com](http://fitocracy.com)) might work for you.
  - Have a long to-do list? Apps like **Epic Win** ([rexbox.co.uk/epicwin](http://rexbox.co.uk/epicwin)) gamify getting done your "to-dos." Want to develop better habits? **HabitRPG** ([habitica.com](http://habitica.com)) turns better behavior into a game of survival. As you get things done, you'll gain levels, which unlock more features. When you miss your to-dos, your health takes a hit, and if you miss too many things on your to-do list, your stats begin to take a hit and you lose momentum toward the next level or set of bonuses you were aiming for.
- Well-known game designer Jane McGonigal developed **SuperBetter** ([superbetter.com](http://superbetter.com)) to help people tackle one challenge at a time. SuperBetter breaks down your goal into a journey to be a better you—with all the trials, challenges, and setbacks that come with trying to make a major change.

Need an app for some other sucky task? Search the web for "gamify anything."🔍

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