Gamification

How to use Totara Learn to engage and motivate learners with gamified learning.

Using gamification to improve learner engagement

Building gamification into your online and blended learning programs has been shown to improve learner motivation, engagement and performance.

We've put together a few ideas on how to take advantage of some of the configuration-based gamification features Totara Learn offers and some general tips on adding gamified elements to your courses.

Riddle me this...

Adding gamification to a learning environment is primarily about setting learning challenges and rewarding the completion of these challenges; however it is important to think carefully about the why, what, how, when, where and who of setting challenges.
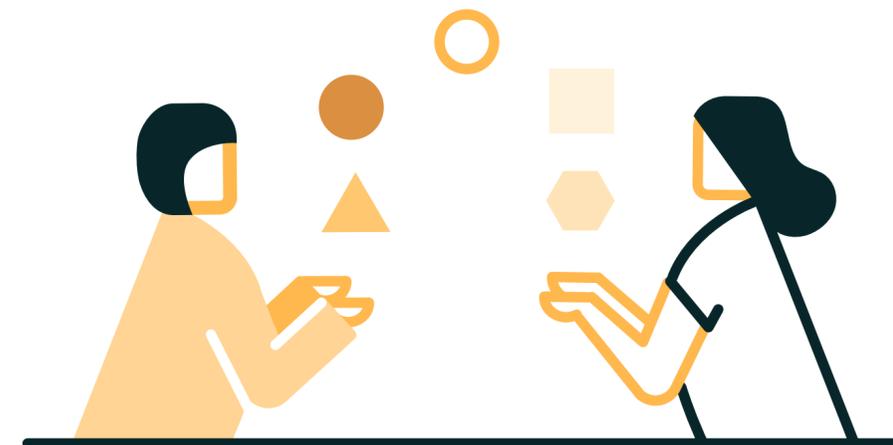
Why

Why are you setting the challenge? Not all activities or even courses lend them themselves to gamification, so ask yourself the following why questions before getting started:

- Are you encouraging learners to compete for the best results?
- Are you trying to get learners to share, communicate or collaborate with each other?
- Are you hoping learners will engage further with the course and content?
- Are you simply trying to make a complex subject more fun?

What

What is the challenge? Are users collecting a score, rating, a badge or something else? Will there be multiple levels of reward?

How

How are you going to track who completes the challenge? Will the system do this automatically or will this require manual intervention from a trainer or course manager? If there is a manual process, is this scalable?

When

When are you setting a challenge within the course? Does it make sense and feel authentic for the activity, topic or section of the course? Do the challenges you set connect and provide a journey or narrative through the course?

Where

Where are you setting challenges? Are they distributed throughout the course or clustered at the start and/ or the end? Are you setting too many challenges and diminishing the value and interest of gamified elements?

When

Who are you setting the challenges for? There are different types of learners, motivated by different challenges, so consider creating elements that appeal to different types of learners.

This might include:

- highly competitive learners
- users who like to explore a course on their terms
- learners who compete with themselves to complete and discover everything
- individuals who enjoy interacting with or helping other learners

And perhaps the most important question to ask:

Is this a good idea? Consider whether adding gamification is appropriate for the course content. Tone and context are important to consider – for example, should we create a gamify content around spotting cultural insensitivity or identifying and treating a global health pandemic?
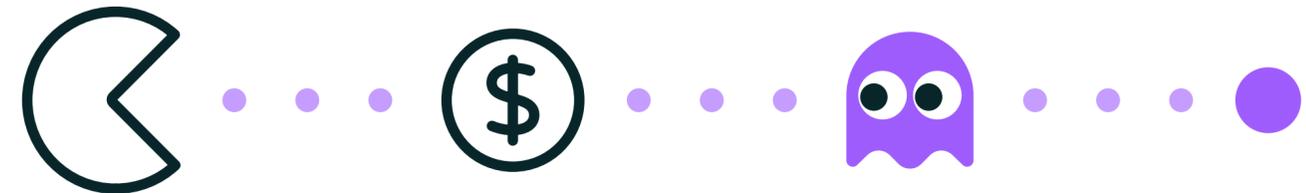
Types of challenges

After considering these questions, you will need to create a variety of challenges and gamified elements across your courses in order to appeal to a broad spectrum of your learners and to ensure you're promoting some or all of the following behaviors:

Exploration

Combination of engagement and completion and tracking the number of activities attempted / unlocked.

Participation

Involvement in activities, submissions / updates / posts, number / over all percentage of completions etc.

Achievement

Achieving specific grades, scores, scales, passes etc.

Completion

Completing a selection of activities as well as the course itself.

Engagement

Overall participation, number of logins, time spent in the course, number of activities completed, use of social activities etc.

Positive behavior

Demonstrating soft skills such as helping others, being constructive in forums or contributing in other social activities.

Types of
rewards

When designing a variety of challenges that will appeal to a variety of users, you will also need to consider the different rewards and awards you wish to issue. These might include:

Rewarding major accomplishments

Issuing certificates for learners who achieve a certain grade or for completing a difficult task will appeal to learners who strive for personal and professional development success.

Including hidden, non-course-related activities within a course for learners to discover

This will appeal to individuals who enjoy a sprinkling of frivolity and excitement to break up more serious course content.

Rewarding small achievements

Issuing badges for learners who complete smaller tasks as part of progressing through their course will appeal to learners who require a little encouragement to stay engaged with their learning material.

Acknowledging positive and constructive behavior within the course

This will appeal to individuals who appreciate receiving recognition for their contributions.

Types of
rewards

When designing a variety of challenges that will appeal to a variety of users, you will also need to consider the different rewards and awards you wish to issue. These might include:

Providing access to restricted areas or activities

This will appeal to learners who enjoy exploring all parts of a course and a feeling of exclusivity from the wider group.

Awarding financial incentives or other prizes

This will appeal to learners who need external drivers to engage in, and complete the learning material.

Collecting and displaying points

This will appeal to learners who like to compete with others and themselves.

Getting started

It's not essential that you plan every gamified element across your course ahead of implementation. In fact, seeing how the course evolves and items work together arguably yields more cohesive and authentic results. However, having a rough idea of what you're trying to achieve from the outset will definitely speed up the process. Try roughly sketching out a few different learner journeys through the course as a first step.

Allow yourself some time – especially the first time you add gamification to a course. There can be a lot of jumping back and forth within your course and administration areas as you add items.

To reduce this back and forth, it's recommended you (or your administrator) do the following in advance of setting up your course:
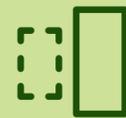
Design and set up any relevant **scales** (Admin menu > Grades > Scales) – rather than using traditional points or percentage – based grading for activities, you might want to create custom scales to award to learners or have their peers award to them.

Also consider whether you'd like to use different **certificate** designs to distinguish different types and levels of achievement. If so, you might like to upload some custom images, borders, signatures etc. via Admin > Plugins > Activity modules > Certificate.

Consider having some **badges** designed (Admin menu > Badges and Course administration > Badges) – You can use different colors, shapes and designs to distinguish between badges of different types or to represent different subjects and/or levels of achievement. For example, the Totara Academy badges are different for each course and the Totara Certification badges sport a different design to course completion badges.

Getting started

Create **event monitoring** (Admin > Server > Event monitoring rules) at the site level for course managers and trainers to subscribe to at the course level. It's recommended that when creating new rules, you provide an obvious, unique rule name and a clear and fairly detailed description. Additionally, because of the vast number of options available within this tool, come up with ideas for monitoring rules / alerts when designing your gamified course, then implement them within this feature.

If you've run this course before without any gamified elements, consider generating some benchmark reports on the success of previous learners. This might include statistics like:

- Average number of activity and course completions;

- Ratio of learners who enroll versus complete the course ;

- Average course grade;

- Average rating of any course evaluation.

Create **dynamic audiences** for applying content restrictions for users within courses - such as users based in certain countries or belonging to particular organizations or positions.

To save yourself a little time changing settings each time you add an **activity results** block to a course, you can set the default options via Admin > Plugins > Blocks > Activity results.

The build

Because applying content access restrictions and adaptive learning paths is a complex, back-and-forth process, it's recommended that you add all the activities and resources to the course (including any bonus content), then go back through this content and add the relevant activity completion requirements and content access restrictions.

For those activities you wish to hide and provide direct link based access to (rather than use restrict access options), you can leverage the orphaned activities functionality. This might be used to host optional and non-subject related course material. Links can be shared within access-restricted activities and resources such as in quiz feedback and labels.

Once you have your content added to your course, go ahead and set your course completion requirements. This might be based solely on activity completion or can be a combination of factors.

Some of your gamified elements might be designed to require learners to apply points, scales and/or grades to their peers, so ensure you make the required capability permission changes to the 'learner' role at the course and/or activity context.

Next you should upload any course badges you want to issue and set the relevant badge criteria. In order to appeal to different kinds of learners and offer a variety of challenges across your course, this is likely to be a mix of activity completion, course completion and manual issue.

Open badges are verifiable, digital awards, issued to individuals for learning or displaying skills or knowledge, or successfully undertaking a specific task or activity. Badges can also be issued for belonging to a certain group or sharing a common interest.

Badges are a simple, yet effective and visually appealing way to recognize achievement, as well as for learners to share and compare their development of skills and knowledge with their peers.

Badges can also advertise knowledge, skills and qualifications for new roles within an organization or to prospective employers and can add a level of gamification to your learning environments.

The build

You might also wish to add certificates to your course. To help motivate your learners to achieve the best possible results in your course, you may wish to create multiple certificates and, using content restrictions, issue different certificates based on the final assessment or overall course grade they achieve.

If you're planning on tapping into your learners' competitive spirit and pitting groups of learners against each other for the highest scores, remember to create those groups now (you can always allocated learners after enrollment) and set any activities to be group based. Group membership might be random, or it might be based on something like department or organization.

Next, add your other gamification elements to course such as leaderboards via the activity results block.

Leader boards showcase the top achieving learners across a particular activity and help foster a competitive spirit across the course participants.

Activity results blocks can be added to a main course page and to activity pages and are especially good for displaying the top grades for quizzes, assignments, forums and SCORM activities. This block can also be used to display group-based activity results.

You might also wish to add a latest badges block to your course so learners can easily review and display the awards they have earned.

In order to collect valuable feedback on the course and the learner's response to your gamification efforts, consider adding a course evaluation to the end of your course using the feedback activity. This feedback will offer insights to improvements you might make as well as successes you should celebrate.

Course managers can create custom certificates and issue them electronically to learners for the completion of activities within a course, or the course itself. Certificates can be personalized with the user's name, grade and custom text added to each award.

The **build**

Other ideas for adding gamification to your course include:

- Add access restrictions to the topic section (and therefore all activities and resources they contain);

- Consider using the 'Hidden sections are completely invisible' option under Course Administration > Course settings;

- Create passwords for quizzes and provide the details in access restricted labels or in the grade-based feedback of other quizzes

- Share an enrollment key for other courses on completion of an activity or the course (via an access-restricted label);

- Use the 'Time since completing an activity' access restriction to add an activity to the course if a learner leaves it too long between completing activities;

- Add different certificates to your course for learners achieving a passing grade versus a high grade;

- Use SCORM activities to create more complex games or simulations like we see on the Totara Community. One of the time trial simulation games saw **738 attempts** between **75 users** (average of around 9 attempts each). The top user saw a **92% increase in speed** between their first and final attempt showing they persevered and practiced to achieve a better result.

Preparing for launch

Before opening your course for enrollment or allowing learner access, there are a few final steps you need to go through. First is testing your course thoroughly with a sample learner account. This includes testing various learner journeys and trying to break (and cheat) your way through what you've just built. Once you're sure you've got everything in place and hopefully asked a colleague to help you test, remember to unenroll that sample user, and delete any grades and activity and course completions.

The second is to prepare the automated and manual processes that will alert you to a learner requiring you to issue a score, ratingor badge or provide personalized feedback. Providing timely rewards and awards is as important as the rewards themselves. These processes might include:

• Scheduled reports created via the Totara report builder;

• Calendar reminders to check course reports on:
  - activity completion (achievement)
  - course participation reports (engagement)
  - participants list (learners' last access)

• Adding the recent activity block to your course and checking the full activity report daily;

• Subscribing to the relevant event monitoring rules via your User menu > Miscellaneous > Event monitoring.

Once your course is ready to launch, remember to enroll the relevant learners or provide them access for users to enroll, unhide your course and begin adding users to the relevant groups.

Post launch

It's important to understand whether gamification is adding value to a course, so compare your benchmark course statistics with the results of your redesigned course. You may need to make minor tweaks to improve the learner experience, or gamification might simply not work for this particular course.

Ready to play?

Start the game today with
a no-obligation demo.

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About Totara

Totara builds employee engagement, learning, and performance management technologies that enable large multinational corporations, government entities, and mid-market companies to deliver enterprise-level talent and workforce experiences. **Totara's Talent Experience Platform (TXP)** unifies an industry-leading **learning management system (LMS)**, a user-centric **learning experience platform (LXP)**, and a comprehensive **performance management system** under a single and highly adaptable architecture. Totara's TXP and flexible architecture gives organizations the freedom to innovate, the freedom to choose, and unlocks critical resources for reinvestment into where it really counts.

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