

# “How to Fail Your Research Degree”

## Sample game script

These suggestions for game facilitators are derived from long experience of playing the game with students.

Tutor action	Commentary and sample useful phrases
Play the introductory video	The video introduces the rules but also importantly sets the comedy tone of the game.
Use the Quick Rules cheat sheet to verbally explain the rules.	Reinforce the basic rules, especially the rule about every tile having to connect to the framework with an arrow. Ignore ‘blocking out’ rules, you can explain that only if it happens as a result of an Event card.  Keep this as short as you can.
Deal out 8 PLAN tiles to each team and explain that this is a ‘practice’ round where every tile placement is legal. As they play:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw attention to the Think tiles – explain that a tile can never be played directly above this tile as it has no upward arrow. If necessary, provide tactical advice about NOT playing Think tiles on the end of a row.</li> </ul>	Blocking yourself in by playing a blank edge on the edge of your framework is a common tactical mistake which is not obvious to players at the start of the game.  <i>“Remember, if you play that tile there, you can’t ever expand out sideways... you might want to move it into the middle so you can bridge the gap later?”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell players not to worry about the exact order of the cards, just to match the arrows at this stage.</li> </ul>	<i>“Don’t worry about joining them up in a logical order, what’s written on the tiles isn’t important just now, that becomes important later. Think of each round as ALL the things you did that month...”</i>
‘Review’ each plan in turn, explaining in particular what Milestones are, defining Research Data Management Strategy, and talking very briefly about work-life balance with reference to Holiday Time tiles. Don’t repeat yourself just briefly reiterate once you’ve covered something.	<i>“RDM Strategy – this just means how you deal with your digital data, at its simplest it’s ensuring you have regular backups to a safe file location, at its most complex [subject-specific example here]”</i>  It’s important to define Milestones and RDM Strategy, especially if you have players with English as an additional language.
Remind the players about the Work Late rules and encourage them to spend one to fill in any obvious gaps in their plans.	Consider limiting Work Late tiles to one per round, certainly in the PLAN – a PLAN that is too perfect results in fewer fun disasters later on and potentially less learning.  <i>“*cough* Ethics!”</i>  <i>“I dunno... I’d stay late to sort out your backup schedule if I was you...”</i>
Remind the players of the following rules: draw one tile at once then play it, if you can play you must play, no moving the cards around once they	Try to ‘drip feed’ the game rules like this instead of trying to make sure everyone understands absolutely everything

<p>are played (you can waive this rule if you like).</p> <p>Make sure each team can reach a pile of cards.</p>	<p>at the beginning of the game. Keep reinforcing the matching rules throughout play until they get the hang of it.</p>
<p>Remind the players to not wait for each other to take turns but to play as fast as possible.</p>	<p>“Remember, doing a master’s project is an intense time... you’ve got to do as many activities as you can!”</p>
<p>Set a timer and count them in.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help out teams that are lagging behind.</li> <li>• Make sure you visit every team, pointing out any mismatches and offering advice on tile placement.</li> <li>• If teams are dawdling in placement or trying to make logical connections between tiles, remind them that the tile’s contents only become important in the next phase.</li> <li>• When the buzzer goes (audible buzzer is best) allow teams to play the tile they are holding (if possible).</li> </ul>	<p>This round is about getting them used to tile placement to set up the learning that comes from the Events cards.</p> <p>I tend to give players 90 seconds instead of 2 minutes but provide lots of help. Do not be shy about helping teams out and bending the rules as needed – the rules are only there to serve the learning outcomes.</p> <p>At the end of the round, emphasise the metaphor of the research project: <i>“Phew, well that was your first month [or first year for PhDs] – it went quickly eh?”</i></p>
<p>‘Review’ each team’s CONTEXT in turn, reflecting and commenting on notable things (e.g. if a team has lots of non-literature Resources or zero methodologies). Talk about the importance of Refine Research Questions and define Resource (Policy) if it comes up. Explain and emphasise the importance of Reference Management System.</p>	<p>Try to relate your commentary to the subject(s) you know they are studying and when it doesn’t match (e.g. painters using a Laboratory) just emphasise the fiction:</p> <p><i>“Oh, it looks like you folks are doing some sort of cutting-edge healthcare research here... you’re using a Lab and you’re linking it with real-world priorities with that Policy tile there..”</i></p> <p><i>“Discussion with Experts – yeah, it’s really important to remember that not all context is written down – you’re surrounded by people who know things, your supervisors, your peers – use them!”</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove any illegal (non-matching) tiles.</li> </ul>	<p><i>“Ah, a Very Relevant Article, but look – it’s just not closely enough connected to your research question – no arrow joining it up see...”</i></p>
<p>Introduce the Events phase.</p>	<p><i>“Well all this Contextual Research looks great. Now, let’s see what else happened that month...”</i></p>
<p>Take the relevant Events deck and get the first team to pick a card.</p> <p>Ask them to read out the card in a clear voice and then follow the instructions on the card.</p> <p>Help the team follow the instructions and, crucially, then contextualise it</p>	<p>Overreact your reactions to the Events on the cards – usually teams laugh a lot at these cards but if they aren’t finding it funny, try to model the humour.</p> <p><i>“Oh no! Did you set any Milestones in your planning phase? Oh you did? – Great, well, you got a bit distracted but then you realised you’d missed a deadline so you got on with it – could have been worse.”</i></p>

<p>using a story, example, or simple explanation.</p>	<p><i>“Bluescreen? That’s a nasty one! Good thing you worked late to set up your backups eh? That would have been really disastrous otherwise!”</i></p>
<p>Go round each team 3 times. Make sure other teams are listening when they read out the cards and that every person in the team gets to read out a card each.</p>	<p>Make sure you’re inclusive of shyer players, especially if one person is confident and starts to ‘run the team’.</p> <p>Comedically overact the disaster when teams have to remove tiles. (I sometimes ‘play the villain’ here, depending on the mood of the room).</p> <p><i>“Oh dear, I guess you never got time to read that article after all... goodbye lovely article!”</i></p>
<p>‘Re-review’ the frameworks briefly and provide explicit encouragement.</p> <p>Ask players if they want to Work Late to add any tiles to the CONTEXT row.</p>	<p><i>“Don’t worry, you’ve still got a bit of theory and you can still build a great research project based on those Interviews!”</i></p>
<p>Remind players that they can bridge any gaps left in their framework, as long as the bridging tile is connected by an arrow. Remind players they can expand sideways as far as they like (as long as every tile has a connecting arrow).</p>	
<p>Repeat the above steps for the Implementation Activity and Events phase.</p> <p>In your commentary, make sure you emphasise the ‘easy wins’ (e.g. RDM Strategy and Ethics).</p> <p>A few cards are not avoidable via Activities (Fire, Flood etc.) Address this. Comment that sometimes bad things just happen and no amount of preparation can avoid it. Use this opportunity to talk about minimising risks that are within your control and resilience. Similarly, use any card mentioning Holidays or Support from Family &amp; Friends as an opportunities to talk about managing work-life balance etc.</p>	<p>You can probably now step back and let the players get on with it as they’ll have the idea. However, keep an eye on teams getting stuck by unlucky draws or poor strategy and remind them that they can work late to create new arrow links if needed. If the game is looking very unbalanced, help out the ‘losing’ team.</p> <p><i>“You might think these thing will never happen to you but they can and do happen...”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s really important to plan your projects within the context of your own life – do you have a lot of hobbies on in the evenings? That’s great, it’ll keep you sane, but bear in mind you might not have as much contingency time as other people... Are you going away with your family for 2 weeks on holiday? You’ve got to work that into your plan... a master’s research project is very intense, you’ll come back refreshed but you have lost those 2 weeks...”</i></p>
<p>Before the Write-Up round, remind players that the aim is to connect up Thesis tiles and that they have to play if possible, so they might end up having to break up a nice long line.</p>	<p>Make sure the Write-Up tiles are thoroughly shuffled between games as if not, teams can get very easy long lines of Thesis cards.</p> <p><i>“Remember, descriptive writing is fine, but that’s not where you get the marks in a dissertation, so some of these tiles will support your Thesis but they won’t directly contribute.”</i></p>
<p>Repeat the above steps for the Write-Up Activity and Events phase.</p>	

<p>While reviewing the frameworks, note in particular the importance of Revisit Research Questions to maintain focus.</p>	
<p>In the final re-review, contextualise each result (try to avoid direct competition between players), and bring it back to the particular situation your players are in.</p>	<p><i>“Well you’ve still got a fairly strong line of 4 here, that’s the core of your research, and one secondary conclusion out on the end there.”</i></p> <p>[to a player with only one Thesis tile] <i>“Well, the good news is you’ve handed *something* in!”</i></p>
<p>At the end of the game, give players the opportunity to ask questions about terminology, cause and effect, what activities prevent what risks etc.</p>	<p>Ideally, the game session would be followed by a tutorial in which the players see all the other cards, reconstruct projects, reflect on what they’ve learned etc. See Tutor Guide for more ideas for non-game extensions which reinforce the learning.</p>