

How to design a race game

Making a game is a lot of fun, and you'll end up with something really special.

Why start with a race game?

Race games are some of the most widely played and easily understood games. Think about who will be playing your game, and if they don't play many games then a race game might be a good first option. It's also a great chance for you to add your own twists and innovations.

What's the theme?

Make a game about something you know about. It could be very simple, such as walking around your neighbourhood. Or it could be set in outer space or under the sea!

Where are you racing?

Are you on a grid? Or is it in a straight line? If it's a track, does it split into many parts — perhaps there are shortcuts? Perhaps some spaces are harder to get past?

What components are used and how do they move?

Components are all the bits used, including the player counters, dice, or cards. Will players just be using one special piece to represent them on a board, or will they have a whole team of little workers or soldiers? Can those pieces jump over each other? Can you ever move someone else's piece? If you have lots of pieces, do some of them have special powers, like in chess?

What choices do players make?

It's important that the players feel able to make choices. If everyone rolls dice and moves that number, or draws a card and does what it says, then it's simply chance. Instead, why not try giving players two or three dice, and asking them to choose one? Or drawing two cards, but only keeping one?

You could also give players options for how they move — what about backwards, or diagonally? And do they have to move their own player pieces, or could they use a turn to push their opponent further away from the finish line?

Different types of skill

What skills will you need to win? Is it just game strategy, or will there be other elements? Dexterity games are games when you balance or throw pieces. Social deduction games are when some of the other players are hiding secrets. Or perhaps you're making a knowledge-based game, where you score based on your answers to questions?

How do you score?

Maybe there are points. Or maybe you're collecting something important, and you have to get a set of different things. If you're collecting, then do you need to deliver the things somewhere?

How does the game end, and who wins?

Is there a set finish line, or is it about collecting a certain number of pieces? Is the winner the player who has collected the most pieces, or the player who finished first?

Are you interested in designing more of your own board or card games?

Submit your ideas to the Tabletop Game Design Challenge, a contest for anyone based in the UK and aged 7-16. Find out more at kidsgamedesign.org.

