

The Structure of Games

Core Dynamics

“If you can’t sum up your game in two sentences,
you don’t have a game.”

—Ian Schreiber & Brenda Brathwaite, *Challenges for Game Designers*

Some Examples

- Ratchet & Clank games are about blowing things up in creative ways
- Risk is about acquiring territory
- Candyland and Chutes & Ladders are about being the first person to get to the end of a path on the board
- Bejeweled is about moving tiles on a board to create a line of three or more of the same type of tile.

Typical Core Dynamics

- Territorial Acquisition
- Exploration
- Prediction
- Spatial Reasoning/Alignment
- Matching
- Survival
- Destruction
- Building
- Collection
- Chasing or Evading
- Trading
- Race to the End
- Capture
- Escape/Rescue
- Forbidden Act

Today's Exercise:

Formal Game Description

Walk-through in class; final write-up due by start of class on Thursday

Formally Describing a Game: Cards Against Humanity



**What are my
parents hiding
from me?**



Cards Against Humanity

**Harry Potter
erotica.**



Cards Against

**Peanut Butter
Jelly Time.**



Cards Against

Italians.



Cards Against

Grandma.



Cards Against Humanity

Summary

Cards Against Humanity (CaH) is a party game in which players take turns dealing a card with a statement containing one or more blanks, and the other players choose a card (or cards) from their hand to fill in the blanks. The dealer chooses the card(s) they feel are the best response, and that player wins the hand.

Core Dynamic(s)

This game has two core dynamics: *prediction*, as players must predict which of the cards in their hands is most likely to be chosen by the dealer as the winning answer, and *forbidden act*, since winning cards often create statements that would otherwise be inappropriate in a social context.

Players

The game has adult themes, and so is intended for players ages 17+. It describes itself as being for 4-20+ players, but number of players is typically constrained by available physical space (table size and number of chairs).

Procedure/Rules

- At the start of each round, players draw white cards, which contain words or phrases, until they have seven in their hand.
- The dealer draws a black card, which contains a sentence with one or more blanks, reads it to the other players, and places it face up on the table.
- Remaining players select one card from their hand to fill in each blank in the sentence, and place their selected cards face down on the table.
- The dealer shuffles the face-down cards, turns each one over, and reads the original sentence out loud once for each response.
- The dealer selects the card that they feel is the “best” response, and the player whose card is selected wins the hand and is given the black card.
- When play is complete, the player with the most black cards is the winner.

Conflict

- You are forced to choose only from the cards in your hand, even if you do not feel that any of them are a good choice to fill in the blank on the dealer's black card.
- You cannot predict with certainty what the dealer will find entertaining, nor can you control which cards the other players present.
- The adult themes of the game can create discomfort in playing some combinations of cards.

Boundaries

- The boundaries are created by the rules of the game, and include:
 - Players may not have more than seven white cards in their hand
 - Players may only draw white cards at the beginning of a round
 - Dealers must select a single winner for each round
 - All players must serve as dealer for the same number of rounds

Goals/Outcomes/Win Conditions

The goal of the game is to have the winning white card response to as many black cards as possible. The winner is the player with the largest number of black cards collected at the end of the game.

Dramatic Elements

There are no characters or stories in this game. However, the theme of the game is that it is “a party game for horrible people.” The underlying premise is that “anything goes,” and that social constraints on speech are relaxed within the magic circle of the game. This sets a definite tone for the game, encouraging players to play cards that create both humorous and transgressive statements.

This combination of transgressive speech and humor creates a strong emotional engagement with the game.