



## EDU-ESCAPE ROOM OR BRAIN TEASERS FOR STUDENTS IN GERMAN

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### Abstract

*How to make German lessons more interesting for students? How to motivate them to work more independently, to be creative and to think critically? What else is interesting for them when they use smartphones, social networks, etc. on a daily basis?*

*The widespread use of ICT has not only changed the daily activities and lifestyles of individuals but has also had a profound impact on education at all levels.*

*The joint foreign languages session of secondary school students and ninth graders had to be prepared in a way that was close to them. The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated quarantine have left many of us feeling trapped in a constant state of escape. Therefore, a virtual escape room entitled "Who Stole the Goldfish?" seemed appropriate for this workshop. Using their mobile phones, students entered a virtual world where they could communicate and collaborate without boundaries. The online escape room offered a series of clues, challenges, puzzles, and visual elements that led them to the solution - the discovery of the culprit.*

*The goals of the session were to promote problem solving and team building, develop group problem solving and listening skills, and build better communication skills for collaboration.*

**Keywords:** *German lessons, use of ICT, escape room, team problem solving, communication skills*

### Introduction

To give ninth graders a glimpse into the daily life of our school and make them a part of it for the next four years, we finally opened the school gates this March. We invited students to actively participate in workshops in various subject areas and become part of the pulse of the school.

The foreign language teachers teamed up to create the 'With Languages towards Treasure' workshop. The ninth graders who registered were randomly mixed with our students to form heterogeneous groups, which included students from class 1. a who study English as their first foreign language and German or French as their second foreign language. The ninth graders had the opportunity to learn all three languages or review the basics with the help of the students.

I created a single digital Escape Room format for all three foreign languages and my colleagues provided me with English and French tasks, which I then coded and integrated into the educational escape game.

In the next part of this article, I will first define the concept of an Escape Room or Edu Breakout and its key elements and present how I planned and designed the digital escape game "Who Stole the Goldfish?" and its challenges in German.

### What is an Escape Room?

The Escape Room is a themed room where participants must work together as a group to find hidden objects or clues, decipher various puzzles and codes, observe well,

piece things together and come up with the final solution that will lead them to freedom within a given time (Rüter, 2020).

### *Escape Room in Education*

Teaching and learning have changed during and since the pandemic. Flexible forms of teaching became exceedingly popular. Educational escape games, also called Breakout EDU or Edu Breakout, are a popular form of teaching as they can be used in both digital and analogue formats.

#### *What Exactly is Behind the Term Edu Breakout and What Are Its Benefits for Teaching?*

The term EduBreakout (also Breakout EDU or Learning Escape Games) is relatively new and comes from English and can be translated as *breakout* on the one hand and *edu* as an abbreviation for education on the other. It was derived from the phrase Escape Room, which was used earlier and is now mainly used in school contexts (Bollinger, 2022).

The educational escape game has many advantages: It is fun and motivates students, encourages participation, logical thinking, and creativity. Students learn social skills such as communication and teamwork, they use their strengths and help the team win.

#### *Characteristics, Planning and Design of an Educational Escape Game*

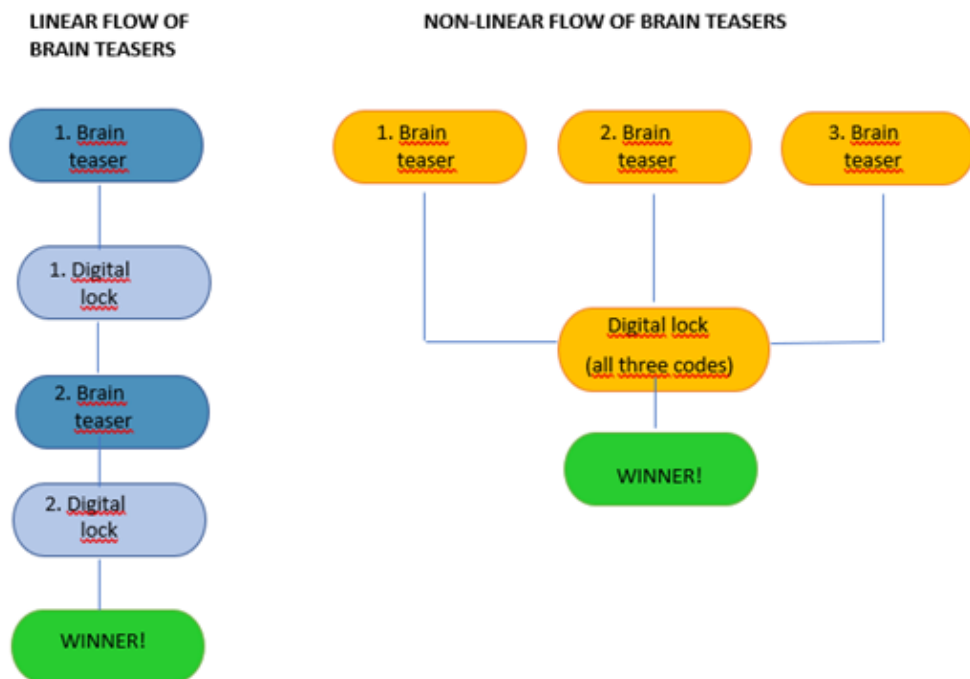
The Escape Room can be designed for different themes and all subject areas. Students work in groups to solve a variety of tasks to be completed in a given time, using different approaches.

Escapes can take place on a small scale, as part of a single lesson, or on a larger scale, e.g., as an introduction to a topic, for consolidation and revision, at the beginning of the school year to meet new classmates, or as a diversion during the school year. (Lehrerweb.wien, b.d.)

Educational escape games are characterized by three elements. The basic element is a frame story that should arouse the students' interest and be as exciting as possible. This can start with an audio message, a letter, or a film.

Next, we need to think about the flow of the game - whether the sequence of mental challenges should be linear or non-linear (Figure 1). A linear progression makes sense when the tasks must follow each other in a specific order, such as when they are in chronological order or when it is necessary to review the basics before moving on to more difficult tasks. In non-linear progression, students answer the questions in any order. They see all the tasks at the beginning, but the lock can only be opened when all the answers are present. The brain teasers and tasks should be designed in such a way that the solutions are not immediately obvious and only the correct solution will lead to the code that unlocks the digital lock.

**Figure 1**  
*Course of Brain Teasers*



The third element is the time limit, which can be seen as a motivational incentive for students to solve the puzzles within a certain time. It is also advisable to provide small rewards for the successful completion of the game, which is left to the teacher's discretion.

The tasks can be designed and solved in analogue or digital form. Including digital puzzles and locks in the Escape Room is a clever idea, as students are familiar with this type of task, and each of them already owns a "smartphone". The tasks to be solved are of different types, for example: logic puzzles, crosswords, math challenges, rebuses, puzzles, hidden objects in a picture, word problems, multiple choice questions... Tasks and questions where students can answer freely are not suitable.

An effective way to create an Edu Breakout is to use the Genially app. This is a web-based tool for creating Escape Rooms, interactive and animated presentations, interactive images, infographics, games, and much more. (Genially, b.d.) It can be embedded with interactive links to create a variety of digital content. The templates provided by the app are immensely helpful in this regard and can be used to design your own Edu Breakout.

To create your own content in Genially, you need to create a (free) account. Without an account, content can only be viewed, but not created.

*How Did I Design the Edu-Escape Room Who Stole the Goldfish (Figure 2)?*

**Figure 2**  
*Starting Page of the Edu-Escape Game*



**Figure 3**  
*First Challenge in German Made in LearningApps and Der Rebus-Club*



I chose the most appropriate template from those available and customized it to my needs. The animations were already there, I just needed to add the buttons for the following pages. It was also important to link the pages together - i.e., turn the navigation into a "microsite", otherwise the students would not play the game, but only look at the slides.

For the LearningApps and The Rebus Club apps (Figure 3), I created brain teasers and puzzles and assigned them a code - a word that appeared after successfully solving the task. Students had to write this code in the space provided so they could move on to the next challenge and the next win.

To get a better overview during the preparation and implementation of Edu Breakout, since I had to add English and French tasks, I created a tabular overview (Figure 4) that briefly describes the tasks and the digital locks with the correct code words. The overview also includes an introductory story.

**Figure 4**  
*A Tabular Overview of the Complete Edu-Escape Game*

Task	Short description	Code	Story
1. challenge (GERMAN)	Family members: Solve the tasks and then insert the terms for family members into the text.	WANTED	<p>Something strange is happening today. There are a lot of students on the school playground, and teachers are standing at the school gates, not letting them in. Someone said that the school was robbed last night. The headmaster tries to silence the crowd. He orders the students to go to their classrooms and wait in silence for the teachers who will explain everything to them. Someone has taken an aquarium and a goldfish from the IT room during the night. The headmaster has already called the police, who will arrive any time.</p> <p>Soon, the school loudspeaker is heard. The headmaster announces that the following students should report to the assembly hall ...</p> <p>Your job is to find out who did it. There are 10 tasks to solve. When solving, watch out for capital and small capitals (especially in German). Once you have solved a task correctly, you will receive a box, which you can then write down in order to continue with the next task. Always write the box in capital letters and punctuation. After the 10th task, you have to form a sentence from the individual words, which is the solution (11th task) and also reveals the perpetrator.</p> <p><i>Lots of fun!</i></p>
2. challenge (FRENCH)	Put the teacher-student dialogue in the right order.	THE ONE,	
3. challenge (ENGLISH)	Insert verbs in the correct tense into the text.	IS	
4. challenge (GERMAN)	Insert pronouns in sentences.	WHO	
5. challenge (FRENCH)	School supplies: link pictures to concepts.	TO CHARM	
6. challenge (ENGLISH)	Search for pairs	GREGORJEVO	
7. challenge (GERMAN)	Puzzle: map of Germany.	SPELO,	
8. challenge (FRENCH)	Complete the text with the missing words from the list of words heard in the song.	IS	
9. challenge (ENGLISH)	Fruit and vegetables: search for pairs	FOR	
10. challenge (common)	Find one term (= the cause of the plot in the story) in all three languages	MARKO.	
11. challenge (common)	A card from which the coating must be removed to display the complete sentence from the individual codes. (THEY HAVE TO FIGURE OUT THE PROCEDURE THEMSELVES)	THE ONE WHO IS FOR GREGORJEVO WANTED TO CHARM ŠPELA IS MARKO.	

## Summing-up

This was the first escape game I created. I have made three more so far, and the will to make more has not left me yet.

Learning material taught in this way makes lessons incredibly exciting and interesting, students are rewarded for their efforts with fun and enjoyment.

The benefits I have experienced as a teacher are: the escape game increases student motivation and interest in the subject, it encourages collaboration and communication, i.e., social interactions between students, and it is suitable for any group of students - regardless of age or subject area.

Planning and designing an Edu-Escape game and putting together the individual challenges takes a lot of time and effort. How interesting and entertaining the game is depends on the designer. It also demands certain technical requirements. The hardware and the Internet must be equally accessible to all students, because they are not equally good at using technology.

Even if the disadvantages do not outweigh the advantages, but are still a hindrance, your students will be grateful for your efforts!

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## Note

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