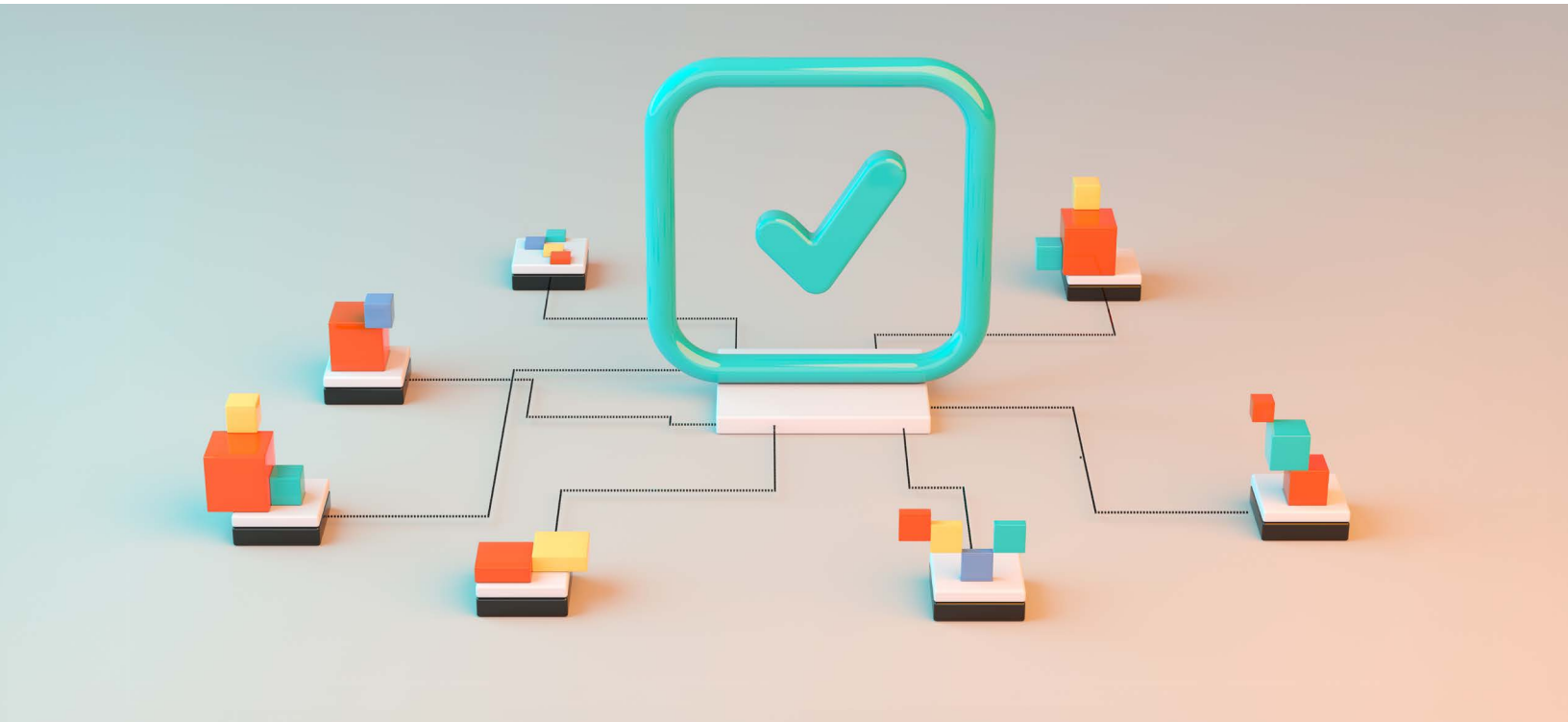
HARVARD BUSINESS IMPACT

A collection of popular articles
from *Inspiring Minds*

MUST READS

Teaching with Simulations

How to Design, Facilitate, and Debrief a Successful Simulation Play



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Foreword

You wouldn't license a pilot who hadn't logged hundreds of practice flight hours. And you would never let a surgeon operate on a patient without years of training, mentorship, and experience.

What's the equivalent training ground for future business leaders? Before making high-stakes decisions in the workplace, they need opportunities to analyze information, weigh trade-offs, collaborate with others, and experience the consequences of their choices. Simulations provide that opportunity.

More than interactive exercises, simulations immerse students in complex situations that mirror the ambiguity and pressure of real-world decision-making. They give students the chance to apply what they know and practice essential professional skills in real time.

Creating these active learning experiences, however, requires thoughtful planning and facilitation from the educators guiding them. In this collection of *Inspiring Minds* articles, we've gathered practical guidance and best practices for teaching with simulations.

Whether you're exploring simulations for the first time or looking to strengthen your existing approach, you'll find insights on when (and when not) to use a simulation, how to prepare and guide students through in-class simulation play, and how to lead effective debrief discussions that help students consolidate their learning.

These articles will help you confidently teach with simulations in the classroom—so your students will confidently lead in the real world.

Lucy Swedberg
Executive Editor
Harvard Business Impact

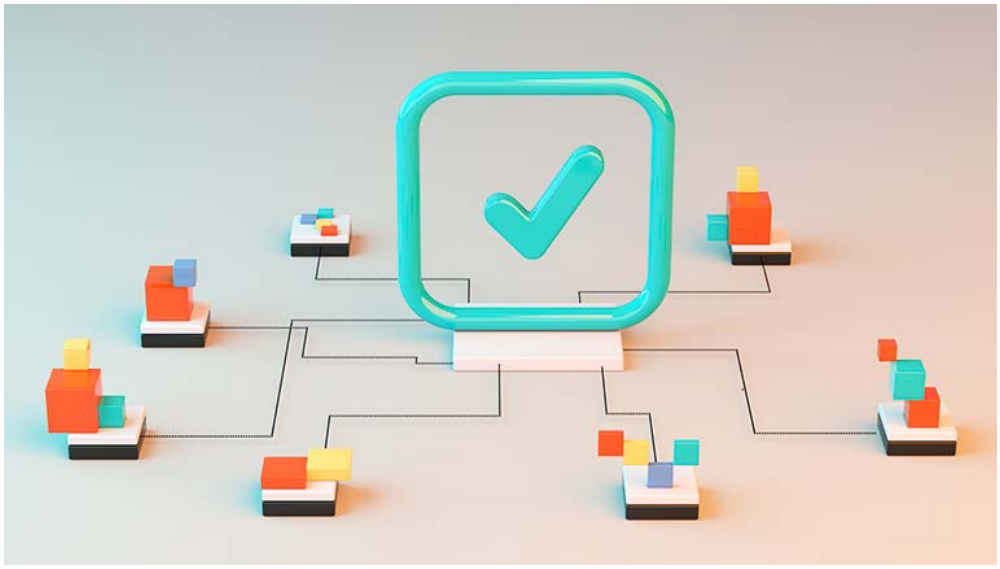
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Never Taught with a Simulation? Start Here.

One Educator's Tips for Success

by Cameron Conaway

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Last semester, I taught a simulation for the first time in my decade-long career as a college educator. It went so well that, as soon as it ended, I started thinking about when I would teach another. My advice for those considering teaching a simulation is twofold: There's more risk in *not* teaching a simulation than in going for it, and the reward will be worth the effort.

Initially, I hadn't planned on a simulation. It was my first time teaching the course, an elective for graduate students in professional communication called Strategic Digital Marketing, so I built the syllabus from the ground up. It was also a hybrid class, with about half

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of the students showing up in person and the other half joining via Zoom from multiple countries.

As a fairly seasoned educator, I had finally reached that magical state many of us imagine: I had somehow completed the syllabus and mapped out all in-class lectures and assignments an *entire month* in advance of the first session. This preparedness granted me the space to see beyond the individual sessions to the course in its entirety, and the perspective enabled a newfound curiosity that led to these important questions:

1. Digital marketing is a competitive field, especially in the San Francisco Bay Area. How can I take this class to the next level so my students develop a differentiated skill set?
2. Readings, discussions, videos, guest speakers, papers, and in-class assignments—rinse, repeat. Is there a way I can take my teaching to the next level so I am differentiated as an educator?

I flipped through my syllabus, seeking answers. One of the first assigned readings covered Michael Porter's Five Forces; I thought back to when I was an executive MBA student being guided through a simulation. It was a fun in-class exercise that helped our cohort bond, but I felt the instructor's delivery would have been more impactful had they facilitated a conversation that helped us connect lessons in the simulation to real-world experiences.

I couldn't help but think how incredible it would be if I could use a simulation in my course to facilitate student-to-student connection while also making the links between the simulation and the real world crystal clear. What if I could find a simulation that asks students to leverage everything they've learned in the class *and* challenge them to be truly strategic digital marketers?

At the same time, fear arose in me as other questions crept in. What if I botch this whole thing? What if the Wi-Fi cuts out or students can't use

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the simulation on their various browsers? As you may have guessed, none of my worst fears became a reality. The students loved the simulation so much that a few of them talked to our program director about it—and the program's Instagram account gave it a shout-out. The experience also led to the best post-class survey scores of my career.

I've reflected on what made it such a success, and I've come up with the following six steps to help those new to teaching simulations achieve a similar outcome.

1. Recognize the need

Before leading a simulation, I was an educator who worked hard to maintain subject matter expertise but who didn't spend nearly as much time thinking about improving my pedagogy. Sure, I had started using tools such as Miro for a few interactive assignments, but I was otherwise teaching in the same way I had been 10 years ago. So the first lesson was to recognize my need to evolve as an educator—not only to keep my students interested in the subject matter but also to be a better, more motivated teacher.

Before leading a simulation, I was an educator who worked hard to maintain subject matter expertise but who didn't spend nearly as much time thinking about improving my pedagogy.

The second lesson grew from empathy for my students: I recognized their need for practical and modern learning experiences. Many had told me that, after my class, they planned to apply for jobs. I couldn't help but imagine their resumes in a slush pile of others. They trusted me, in part, to help them be successful in landing interviews and jobs.

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Teaching with a simulation served both needs; it expanded my relatively narrow pedagogical range and, in simulating some of the challenging marketing questions my students will need to address throughout their career, it trained them to be more confident marketing candidates.

I saw their confidence develop through one-on-one conversations and when I compared the pre- and post-class surveys. On the survey, one question I asked was "On a scale of one to five, with five being most ready, how ready would you feel to step into a digital marketing role at a Fortune 100 company?" At the beginning of class, two-thirds of students responded with a one or two; at the end of class, all students responded with a three, four, or five. I believe the simulation played a key role in positively shifting their sense of readiness.

2. Browse the stacks

There are many simulations to choose from out there, so I highly recommend taking your time at this stage. As experienced simulation instructor Lilian Ajayi-Ore advised, "A big part of narrowing down the right [simulation] option for your class is to do your homework."

I'd suggest being creative in this process. You may find, like I did, that the most beneficial simulation for your class isn't directly in your discipline. After browsing the marketing discipline, I ventured into other categories and eventually chose *Strategy Simulation: The Five Forces*. I planned to cover the Five Forces framework early in the semester, and each scenario in the simulation offered excellent conversation starters about the downstream implications for digital marketing.

Ease Into Simulations With These Five Picks

Every simulation in this list can be played asynchronously and in single-player mode, which means setting them up for any classroom (in person, virtual, or hybrid)

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is particularly straightforward. This also means that the simulation can be opened for student play outside of class time so you can reserve your class session for debriefing the experience.

Business Essentials Simulation: Coffee Shop Inc.

This simulation takes students through three levels of complexity, starting from the operational basics of a single shop, continuing with staffing issues and changing conditions, and ending with developing an international chain of franchised coffee shops.

Strategy Simulation: Value Champion

Value chain analysis and competitive advantage come alive when students make strategic decisions as the manager of a technology-enabled athletic footwear manufacturer.

Innovation Simulation: Breaking News

Students manage the innovation process for a struggling newspaper company. Working with limited time and budget, students must source a pool of ideas, then review and test to make the best possible selection.

New Venture Simulation: The Food Truck Challenge

Students learn how to build a business through experimentation. This simulation asks students to analyze market data and make decisions about location, menu, and prototyping. It is ideal for discussions of innovation, product development, design thinking, lean startup, entrepreneurship, strategy, marketing, and organizational learning.

Sustainability Management Simulation: Net Zero

Acting as the general manager of a hotel with a goal of reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, students consider financial feedback to make management decisions related to energy, purchasing, training, and guest communication. Technical solutions and behavioral changes work in concert to achieve the hotel's goal.

And for more advice about engaging students through simulations, check out Harvard Business Impact's Teaching with Simulations resources page.

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3. Find the fit

Once you've landed on a simulation you think might work, spend some time figuring out where it will fit in your syllabus. I found my fit in a few ways.

First, I wanted to run it only after students submitted their first big assignment. I have found over the years that students tend to have a burst of energy and a general willingness to be creative after they've accomplished a milestone. Plus, I wanted to have enough time with the students beforehand to build a psychologically safe environment in which they felt comfortable experimenting.

Second, I wanted them to be halfway through our course textbook so they had a basic grasp of some of the classic business frameworks and an understanding of digital marketing processes such as search engine optimization and programmatic advertising.

Third, because I knew this simulation would take every minute of our three-hour class, I wanted to ensure nothing major was due the following week. This would also encourage students to let their guard down and have some fun.

4. Be the student

I spent many hours playing with the free trial of the simulation. While I also viewed the quick-start guide and teaching note, getting into the simulation and seeing all parts of it was essential to understanding how it worked and getting comfortable with the controls. I reviewed the sample results and played the simulation from all six available roles.

I also thought critically about all the questions posed for each role in the simulation, taking notes as I went so I was prepared if students had any questions about the simulation content. I even tested it on various web browsers.

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I considered how students would react if we couldn't get the simulation to work due to internet outages, access issues, etc. I addressed this by creating a backup lesson that I could pivot to quickly if anything went wrong. Again, preparation paid off. I was still anxious, but I knew the simulation inside and out and felt comfortable navigating it all in front of the class.

5. Plant the seed

In a few classes leading up to the simulation, I talked about how excited I was for us to work through it. I had the students read Porter's classic article from 1979 and I'd occasionally make cold calls with various questions about the Five Forces. I even brought up a few digital marketing examples related to the chocolate industry (the industry I chose for the simulation).

> **Any fears I had about teaching with simulations were minuscule compared to the outcomes I would have missed had I not done it.**

I also provided a general sense of how the simulation would work—that in teams of two they would represent one of the forces and compete against each other. These elements ramped up their excitement and willingness to prepare before we officially launched the simulation.

6. Take the leap

Part of confidently adopting something new is recognizing your ability as an educator. If something doesn't work, you'll navigate it. If you accidentally missed testing a role in the simulation and students have questions about it, you'll find a way to address them.

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For example, I ran into a simulation timer issue. Instead of the simulation screens moving forward after all students had submitted their responses, we had to wait three minutes until a timer ran out. This could have derailed the excitement, but instead it served as an opportunity for us to discuss the lessons rather than quickly rushing to the next screen.

Embrace the discomfort—and reap the rewards

Teaching a simulation taught me the immense value of taking strategic risks to create remarkable classroom experiences. It nudged me out of stagnancy and reinvigorated my love of teaching, and it allowed my students to see the strategy behind what they'll be asked to do when they land their first digital marketing roles.

In the end, any fears I had about teaching with simulations were minuscule compared to the outcomes I would have missed had I not done it. The final projects my students submitted, which pulled learnings from our simulation, were the best I've seen in my career. The simulation developed the skills and confidence of my students while pushing me to be a better, more modern educator.

Explore more

Interactive Learning **Perspectives** **Simulations**



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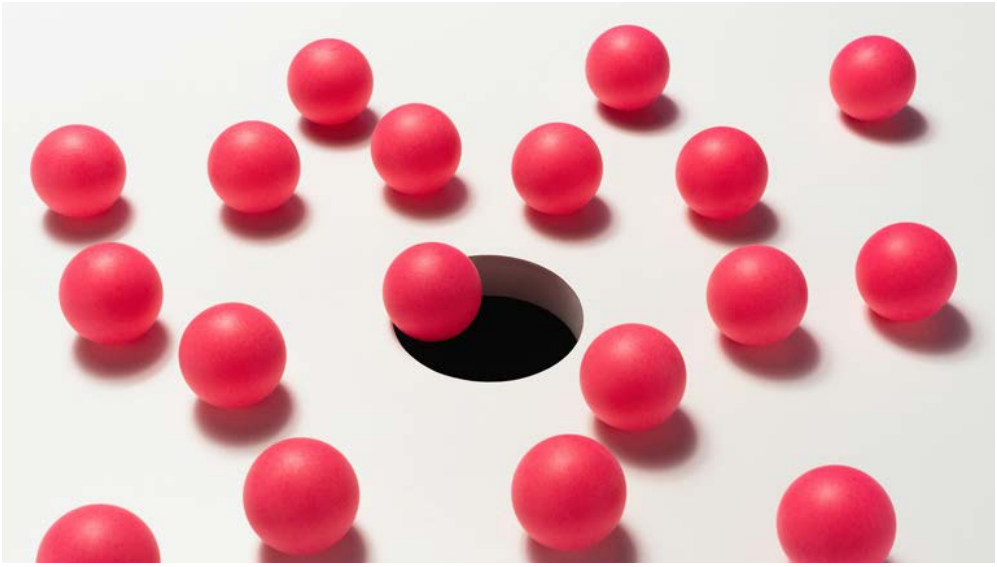
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When—and When Not—to Choose a Business Simulation for Your Course

A How-To Guide for Selecting Simulations

by Tim Rogmans

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I am a big advocate of using simulations in business classrooms. Not only do they offer valuable opportunities for students to practice decision-making, but they also create a challenging and interesting learning environment that allows students to think in new ways and better recognize their own strengths and interests.

Before you prepare and execute your simulation action plan, it's important to first assess when to use a simulation in your course. Whether including a simulation in a course syllabus or adding one mid semester, there are many factors to consider.

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How can you determine if a simulation will add value to your class? And once you decide to proceed, how do you choose the best simulation to achieve your course objectives? This brief guide provides best practices for deciding when (and when not) to use a simulation—and what factors to consider when determining which available simulations would be most suitable for your students.

When to use a simulation

The first step is to determine whether a simulation is likely to add value to the course. There is no point in playing a simulation just to liven up a class or make the instructor appear innovative. In some cases, other experiential or even traditional methodologies may be more suited to the learning objectives. These may include case studies, role-play exercises, online quizzes with gamification elements, or educational board games. The unique aspect of business simulations is that they provide students with internet-based, synthetic learning environments, where decisions are made within a complex and dynamic setting and where students experience real-time information and feedback.

> **There is no point in playing a simulation just to liven up a class or make the instructor appear innovative.**

Instructors should decide whether students will benefit from such an experience in the context of the learning objectives of the course. Typically, these benefits include gaining a deeper understanding of course materials and developing personal skills such as teamwork and critical thinking.

Another factor to consider is whether introducing a simulation can increase student engagement in the course overall. I have experienced firsthand how learners of all ages and from different cultural settings

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engage more with the course content—and with each other—once I introduce a simulation. This often represents the first opportunity students have to start meaningful discussions with each other about topics related to the course, and the benefits extend well after the simulation exercise is finished. For blended and online courses in particular, simulations can provide a more engaging way for students to learn and work together, and the issue of time constraints arises less often than in traditional classes.

Business simulations can add value to student learning in many disciplines and across different course settings. In all cases, instructors need to consider a simulation as an integral part of the course in order to maximize the student benefit. The simulation should illustrate concepts that are central to the course rather than separate or additional to the curriculum.

Selecting the right simulation

Once an instructor concludes that a class can benefit from the use of a simulation, the next step is to consider which potentially suitable simulations are available. This process can be an iterative one in conjunction with the previous step, as the availability of an engaging simulation may help you decide whether to use one at all.

Where to Search for Simulations

A simple internet search with appropriate search terms will usually identify the most commonly used simulations in a particular discipline. Harvard Business Impact has an expanded portfolio of simulations; free demos are available after a short registration process.

Other sources for simulations include MIT Learning Edge, publishers of college textbooks, and independent simulation development companies.

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Categorizing simulations—by their level of customization, game setup considerations, simulation duration (or seat time), and complexity—can organize the selection process and help you choose the best simulation for your needs. Let's look at these categories in more detail:

1. **Customization.** Simulations can be developed from scratch for specific purposes; however, this is not generally cost- or time-effective for most professors. Luckily, there are already many off-the-shelf simulations on the market for a variety of disciplines, and you usually can tailor some parts of the simulation on your own, without the publisher needing to intervene. At a minimum, instructors can make some decisions on the duration and complexity of the simulation in order to suit the specific needs of their students.

2. **Setup.** Instructors can usually choose whether to have students play individually or in teams, according to the specific circumstances of the course. However, some simulations lend themselves better to one option or the other. Individual play is best if the simulation will be used to assess student performance, as this method will help to avoid issues of free ridership. On the other hand, if the objective is to build teamwork skills, then a team option is preferable.

3. **Seat time.** Simulation runs have different durations, ranging from short, 30- to 90-minute runs that can be played in one class session to longer, four-hour (or more) runs that require multiple class sessions. Longer simulations are sometimes used as integrative capstone experiences, whereas shorter simulations tend to align with specific learning objectives. Longer simulations are also more complex and require more preparation by the instructor. Shorter simulations can be run several times during the same course if the learning content is sufficiently rich. Alternatively, it's possible to run two different short simulations during a course. In such cases, I ask students to make a presentation that compares their learning from the two simulations.

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4. **Complexity.** The number of decisions and variables in the simulation model determines its complexity. More complex simulations can often seem more realistic but are not always useful. Additional complexity can inhibit the ability for students to determine the cause-and-effect relationships that the simulation is designed to demonstrate. On the other hand, overly simple simulations can fail to engage students. It's important to determine the right level of complexity to meet the learning objectives. If you're not sure whether a certain simulation is right for a particular group of students, run a small trial group to get feedback on whether and how to use the simulation in class.

> **Simulations should illustrate concepts that are central to the course rather than separate or additional to the curriculum.**

While these different aspects of simulations are important to be aware of during selection, instructors should not view them as obstacles to adoption. Instructors can greatly impact the experience of a simulation through the setup process and through an effective personal facilitation style. For example, regardless of the exact technical architecture of the simulation, an instructor can run it in such a way that particular factors such as teamwork, competition, or individual mastery are emphasized.

There are a host of reasons instructors may be apprehensive to use simulations. These include perceived administrative and financial hurdles, the expectation of the requirement for additional class preparation time, fear that instructors will not be able to explain the simulation to students, or the belief that there is not enough class time available to use a simulation.

But the decision to incorporate a simulation into your course planning doesn't have to be a daunting one. A good simulation from a reputable

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publisher will alleviate these concerns, as purchasing processes have become straightforward and ample support for instructors and students is available. In fact, simulations are usually net time-savers in class, as they replace the need for repeated explanations and extensive revision.

In the end, I believe it is always worthwhile to consider using a simulation. The most valid reason not to use one is if you cannot identify a high-quality simulation that supports the learning objectives of your course. The number of simulations available is still small compared to case studies, and not every learning objective is adequately covered by the existing supply. However, it is worth a look around, and most simulation publishers offer the opportunity to get an online demo, whether live or through a prerecorded webinar, which makes testing the waters simple and low risk.

For inspiration, you can also read how one New York University instructor fosters personal learning and engagement through the use of business simulations in her classes.

Explore more

Interactive Learning **Simulations**



Tim Rogmans is the managing director at Sim Institute and a faculty advisor for Harvard Business Impact. He is the author of several simulations, including the *Sustainability Management Simulation: Net Zero*, *Business Essentials Simulation: Coffee Shop Inc.*, and *Macroeconomics Simulation: Econland*.

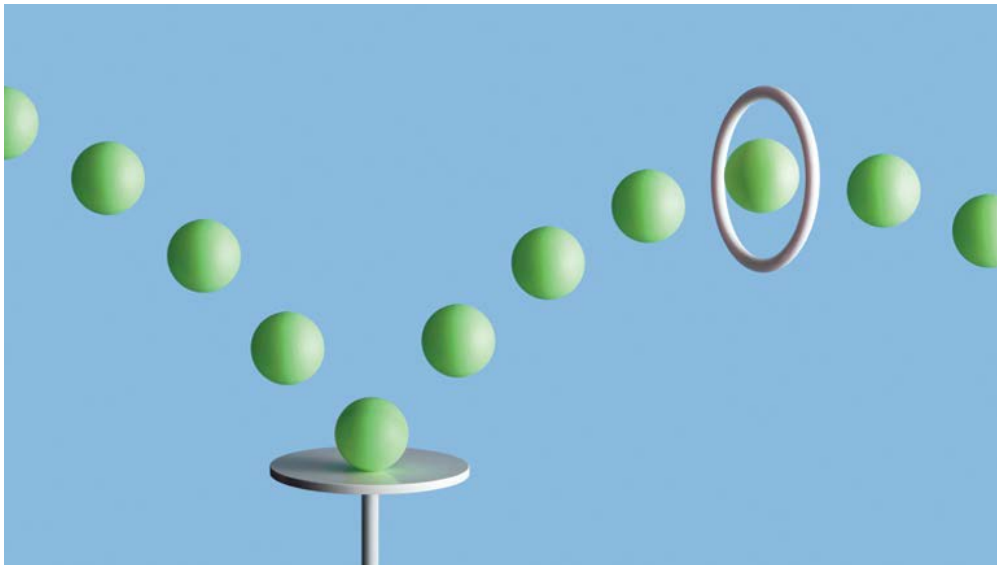
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Brief, Play, Debrief

An Action Plan for Using Business Simulations in Your Classroom

by Tim Rogmans

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Business simulations are growing increasingly popular as a classroom tool to both motivate student learning and encourage students to be more active learners. A 2016 survey by Wellington, Hutchinson, and Faria found that 56.8 percent of the respondents—business faculty members from 426 AACSB schools across all business disciplines—have used one or more business simulations during their teaching careers. That's up from 47.4 percent of those surveyed in 2004 by Faria and Wellington.

By integrating online simulations into the classroom, instructors can help students develop real-world business skills through hands-on experience and illustrate theoretical business concepts in an engaging and memorable way.

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However, in order to be successful, instructors must carefully prepare and plan for the use of simulations to ensure the experience is both practical and beneficial for students. Instructors need a solid action plan to ensure simulation play runs smoothly and evokes the learning it's intended to achieve.

Be prepared

An instructor should first decide whether the class can benefit from the use of a simulation: Will the tool add instructional value to the course? If so, instructors should next consider which available simulations would be most suitable for their class by looking at factors like customization, setup, seat time, and complexity.

> **To get students off to an enthusiastic start, the instructor can reinforce that the simulation is a new way of learning and that those who fully invest themselves in the exercise will get the most benefit out of it.**

Once you have decided on the particular simulation you would like to use in class, you'll want to ensure you're prepared with a few basics:

- **Detailed lesson plan.** Class plans for simulations are similar to typical lesson plans, although first-time users will need to plan the class in more detail to increase the chances of success. Instructors should use a brief-play-debrief structure, which I will explain shortly. Even long simulations stretched over several classes should follow this format.
- **Assessment.** Be sure to explain to students whether and how the simulation experience will be incorporated into the course assessment. Including the simulation score or student ranking as an element of a course grade is likely to spark strongly competitive

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behavior in class, and this may not be conducive to learning. Alternatively, instructors may assign learning reflections in the form of presentations or essays in which students are asked how they played the simulation, what results they obtained, and what lessons they learned. If the simulation is very closely aligned with the overall course objectives, no extra form of assessment may be needed.

- **Technical requirements.** Inform students of what device they may need to play the simulation and what, if any, software is required.

Before students play the simulation, instructors need to have a good understanding of it. This isn't as time-consuming as you might think. For shorter simulations of one class period or less, an instructor should be able to get the required understanding in about 60–90 minutes. This includes absorbing the teaching materials (including debrief slides, if available) and playing the simulation several times.

Your simulation action plan

Once you're familiar with the simulation and it's time to bring it to students, the lesson will proceed as follows—brief, play, then debrief:

Brief

- The brief consists of two components: (1) Explain and recap the theory that students will practice during the simulation, and (2) explain the simulation and how to play it.
- Instructors can decide whether to use a projector to show the simulation and demonstrate how to make decisions and move through it.
- Some simulations have practice rounds that allow students to get familiar with the game play and user interface without being concerned about results.
- The brief does not need to be overly long, but instructors should mention how students will be assessed.

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- To get students off to an enthusiastic start, the instructor can reinforce that the simulation is a new way of learning and that those who fully invest themselves in the exercise will get the most benefit out of it.

Play

- During simulation play, the challenge is for instructors to intervene as little as possible. The students should be at the center of the action without distraction. Instructors can walk around the class discreetly and offer help to students facing obstacles. Many simulations allow instructors to follow the progress of students online through the facilitator section.
- At the start of play, instructors should indicate how long the simulation play lasts.
- Students who progress very slowly or not at all may not have understood the instructions. Students who progress quickly are probably not giving it the thinking effort that is required. In both cases, instructors can give support; however, be sure to give students room to solve problems on their own.
- When time is short in in-person classes, simulation play can be split between in class and out of class, allowing more class time to focus on the brief and debrief.

Debrief

- Once students finish playing the simulation, the instructor can begin to facilitate the debrief.
- Even if time is short, it is best to have at least a quick debrief during the same class period in which the simulation was played.
- Start the debrief with an open and relatively unstructured discussion that allows students to express how they felt when playing. Then

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move to a more structured discussion and link it to the course learning objectives and to applications in the real world.

- As an addition or an alternative to a full debrief, it is possible to ask students to give presentations or write reports about the simulation experience and to treat these as an assignment that counts toward the course grade.

Once an instructor completes the entire brief-play-debrief cycle with students, they can evaluate the experience and plan any changes for the next iteration.

Note that there are many ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a simulation: its impact on student exam results, student engagement levels, or course evaluations, to name a few. It's risky, however, to evaluate the success of the simulation exercise based only on a personal impression or anecdotal evidence. Instead, a brief anonymous online survey, an analysis of student course evaluations and learning journals, or a focus-group discussion are low-cost ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the exercise.

The use of online business simulations is well established across the world and continues to gain momentum, even among more reluctant professors. Once instructors try teaching with simulations, their confidence and enthusiasm usually grow quickly, while the investment in preparation drops.

Explore more

Interactive Learning **Simulations**



Tim Rogmans is the managing director at Sim Institute and a faculty advisor for Harvard Business Impact. He is the author of several simulations, including the *Sustainability Management Simulation: Net Zero*, *Business Essentials Simulation: Coffee Shop Inc.*, and *Macroeconomics Simulation: Econland*.

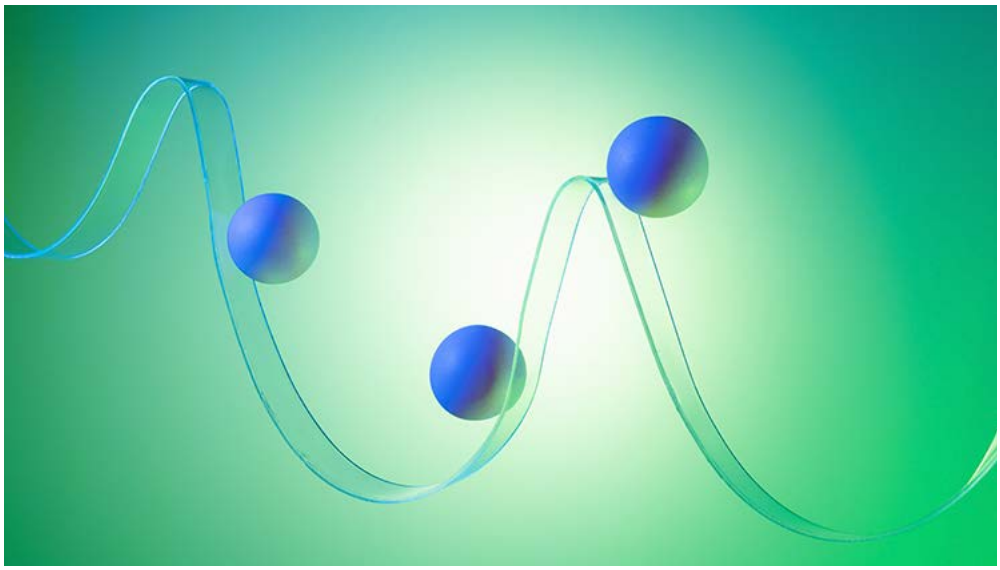
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Leading an Effective Simulation Debrief

A Practical Guide to Getting the Most Out of Post-Play Discussions

by Tim Rogmans

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Simulations are a popular way to engage students, improve learning outcomes, and add variety to teaching methods. Within the safety of the classroom, simulations put students into real-world scenarios that test their understanding and let them apply the concepts and frameworks they're learning in a course.

Typically, facilitating a simulation involves a brief-play-debrief cycle:

- In the **brief** phase, the facilitator introduces the simulation to students and discusses any necessary pre-play knowledge, such as

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sharing a foreground reading or giving students a summary of an industry or a framework they will see in the simulation.

- During simulation **play**, students should be in a state of flow, with minimum intervention from the facilitator.
- The **debrief** is the final, and in many ways the most important, step in the cycle. It's when experiences are shared and interpreted, and where most of the learning happens.

While the brief and play phases are relatively straightforward to structure and plan, the debrief phase is often a source of anxiety for instructors who are new to simulations or less comfortable with inductive learning. As a result, some educators simply ask students if play went well, assuming they've gleaned key learnings without discussing and reinforcing them as a class. Others use the time to take back control of the session and end up lecturing about the experience without students' input. In extreme cases, instructors skip the debrief altogether.

But simulations are typically not designed to be self-debriefing: Even AI tools that guide or prompt students through simulation play or assign written reflections afterward don't produce the benefits that arise from a productive class discussion. Strong debriefs can consolidate lessons learned, link those lessons to course concepts and the real world, evaluate personal performance and team dynamics, and communicate the fruits of personal critical thinking. When done poorly, debriefs represent a lost opportunity for lasting learning; good debriefing shapes the lessons and memories that students will hold for years to come.

In my own experience building and using simulations in a variety of business disciplines (including general management, sustainability, economics, and international business), each debrief reveals new insights from students that may not have come up in past debriefs,

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and these lessons are often deeper or different than what I might have expected.

Here, I'll share a short guide to help educators facilitate effective, enjoyable simulation debriefs. The guide consists of three key steps to structure the conversation.

Three steps to structure your simulation debrief

When I prepare to debrief a simulation that's new to me or that I haven't taught for a while, I like to play through the simulation myself to flag or remember points that students might bring up. I also review the portion of the teaching note that covers the class discussion, especially focusing on how the debrief links back to my larger course objectives. I put the debrief in the context of the entire course and ensure that it is set up to help students with any assessments that may follow.

Additionally, when planning for a debrief, I make sure to allocate sufficient time for the conversation. Knowing how much time you need depends on the length of the simulation and the learning objectives involved: The shortest simulations can be played in 30 minutes, while some are built to last an entire semester. If a simulation can be played in one sitting and I have a class of 90 minutes, I generally use about 30 minutes for the debrief phase. If simulation play extends over multiple class sessions, you should have at least a short debrief at the end of each session. Never end simulation play without some discussion with participants, since lessons from experiential learning are best captured and consolidated when the experience is fresh.

For the purpose of the following steps, we will assume you're planning a 30-minute debrief; however, each step could be extended as needed if you want to spend more time or if you are using a more lengthy or complex simulation.

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1. Let participants share their experience (about five to 10 minutes)

At the end of simulation play, students will have different emotions, comments, or questions that they may want to share. A useful first step in a debrief is to invite participants to express their thoughts in a free format. I often ask questions such as "How did you feel during the simulation? Where did you have trouble? How do you feel about your results? How did it go for you? How did you enjoy the experience? Any thoughts or comments are welcome."

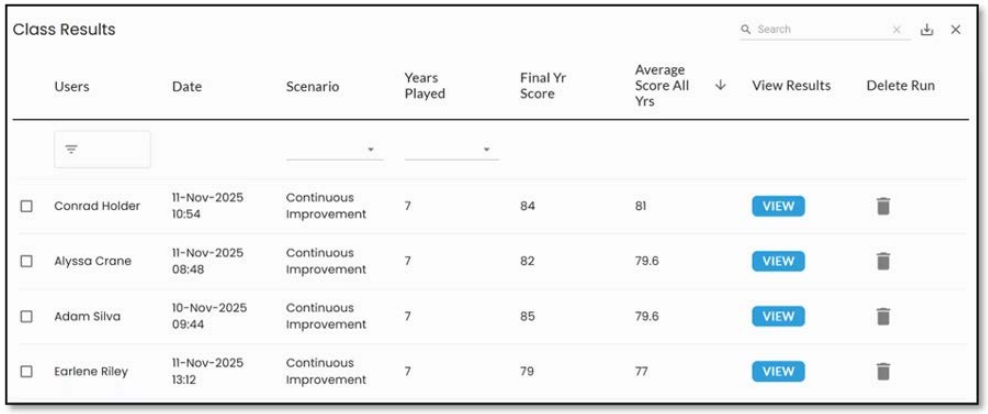
> **The debrief is the final, and in many ways the most important, step in the cycle. It's when experiences are shared and interpreted and where most of the learning happens.**

When someone has made a comment, it is usually best not to respond, but to simply move along to other students so that as many people as possible are involved in the debrief. This is not the time to get into detailed discussions. But facilitators should take note of comments or questions that they want to respond to once students have had a chance to share their initial reactions to the simulation.

2. Review the class results (about 10 minutes)

Once the initial discussion concludes, you should share the class results. Many simulations include a leaderboard that contains key details from each student's simulation play (Figure 1). It is often possible to sort the leaderboard based on criteria such as time spent, decisions made, average scores, etc., so that the best performance appears at the top. Showing this on a projector or a shared screen (in online sessions) captures everyone's attention.

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Class Results

Search

Users	Date	Scenario	Years Played	Final Yr Score	Average Score All Yrs	View Results	Delete Run
Conrad Holder	11-Nov-2025 10:54	Continuous Improvement	7	84	81	VIEW	
Alyssa Crane	11-Nov-2025 08:48	Continuous Improvement	7	82	79.6	VIEW	
Adam Silva	10-Nov-2025 09:44	Continuous Improvement	7	85	79.6	VIEW	
Earlene Riley	11-Nov-2025 13:12	Continuous Improvement	7	79	77	VIEW	

Source: Tim Rogmans, 2026.

Figure 1: A sample leaderboard from Healthcare Management Simulation: Hospital Operations. Student names are fictionalized.

If the simulation you are using does not include a leaderboard, there should still be a section on the facilitator side of the simulation that shares class results. This will often include decisions that each student made, the time it took them to complete a task, or other relevant data about their simulation play. If you want to share this with your students, you can either share your screen or use the results you see as a jumping-off point for discussing student strategies.

If the simulation you are using has a leaderboard, sharing it can generate excitement but can also make those with poor scores feel frustrated. Such feelings can sometimes lead to unproductive discussions that take away from the learning experience. It is worth remembering—and reminding students—that in many simulations there is no "winner." And even with simulations that have scores, there are various paths to arriving at the top of the leaderboard.

Some simulations incorporate randomness in ways that mean "good" outcomes are completely out of students' control. Others set specific students up for "failure" intentionally, as some players in certain simulations must take on fewer resources or less flexibility when making decisions. Overall, it is worth emphasizing that simulations

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provide a safe space to learn and that mistakes can make students perform better when they play the simulation again or when they face similar situations in real life.

After sharing results or showing the leaderboard to the class, the facilitator can then invite students to discuss their strategies. Some simulations allow instructors to view the play of each individual student (sometimes there is a View button or an impersonate student mode). As you guide the discussion, you can walk through specific student decisions and ask them to share their decision-making process with the class.

> **Never end simulation play without some discussion with participants, since lessons from experiential learning are best captured and consolidated when the experience is fresh.**

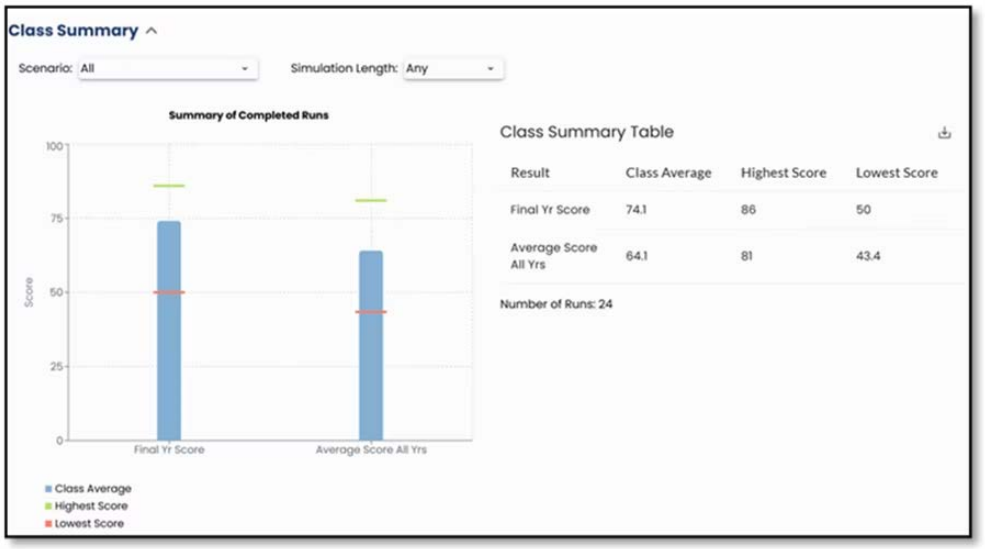
For students with the best results, this can be done as a celebration but also as an evaluation of decisions and strategies. I may say, "Sofia, please share with us how you achieved these excellent results. What decisions worked out well or not so well for you?" For students with results that are not at the top of the leaderboard, the facilitator could say, "Is it OK if we view your decisions and results, and see how you progressed through the simulation?" After a discussion of the lessons that can come from lower results, for some simulations it is appropriate to encourage students to play the simulation again and apply the lessons learned.

From my experience, these discussions are a great way for students to develop analytical and critical-thinking skills. Sometimes a student will say, "I hired more staff and my performance improved, therefore hiring more staff was a good decision." Challenging students about the logic of cause-and-effect relationships and discussing that the improved result

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may have many other implications (like ongoing or growing personnel costs) is often an eye-opener for students.

Showing overall statistics on the performance of the group can also help students put their results into perspective, although the importance of a "score"—if there is one—should not be overemphasized at the expense of a discussion of the learning outcomes. The most important part of sharing results is to prompt more discussion: What strategy did a student take and why? What outcome did they get from that strategy? How might someone else's strategy have performed better or worse? If they were to play again, what would they do differently?



Source: Tim Rogmans, 2026.

Figure 2: A sample summary of class results from Healthcare Management Simulation: Hospital Operations.

3. Use debrief slides to consolidate learning and link the simulation back to the themes of your course (about 15 minutes)

Most simulations come with a set of slides that support the debrief discussion. These slides are only a first step in deciding what materials

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to share with students; they do not necessarily need to be discussed from beginning to end. In this part of the debrief, the facilitator should focus the discussion on those aspects of the simulation with the most relevance to the course.

To achieve this, facilitators will usually omit some slides from the debrief and may add others, depending on the audience and learning objectives of the course. For example, in the *HR Management Simulation: People Analytics*, a class on people analytics can focus on the use of data for decision-making, a class on strategic HR management can discuss the business impact of HR decisions, and a class on compensation and benefits or workforce planning can emphasize these elements of the simulation. Other simulations also usually cover a range of topics and learning objectives, with varying degrees of relevance for the class.

During this final step of the debrief, there is also an opportunity to link the simulation to the real world. In some cases, this can lead to participants criticizing the simulation for not being in line with their own experience. When such comments are made ("The simulation is wrong!"), the key for the facilitator is not to get defensive but to invite reflection on how the simulation differs from the context participants have.

It is worth pointing out that a simulation represents only one example of a management challenge, and the simulation model can't take into account all possible scenarios or all the complexity that exists in the real world. Simulations do not replicate reality in a perfect way; rather, they help make learning more enjoyable and effective.

The absence of a perfect and universally applicable model is sometimes difficult for students to accept. In my experience, when these limitations are discussed in a productive way, students end up with a greater appreciation of the value of different types of models (e.g., financial, economic, behavioral). One way to bring this to life is to ask students for a suggestion that would make the simulation more

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realistic and then evaluate whether the new model would in any way be perfect. Students typically identify a new shortcoming and will start to understand that no model is perfect. This will enable the facilitator to shift attention back to the simulation's learning points.

> **Strong debriefs can consolidate lessons learned, link those lessons to course concepts and the real world, evaluate personal performance and team dynamics, and communicate the fruits of personal critical thinking.**

It can be challenging for facilitators to stay in the background during the play phase, and there can be a desire to revert to a traditional lecturing role during debrief. However, if students are told (rather than asked) what they have learned from the simulation, they are likely to disengage. Learning happens through active participation in the process from beginning to end.

If you want students to give presentations to share their learning and reflections, the structure of the debrief can be adapted to accommodate this. Presentations with room for follow-up questions and discussions can be a useful component of a debrief and fulfill learning requirements.

If the debrief is time-bound to 30 minutes, this part of the discussion can take around 15 minutes. However, this step can vary, and in some cases the discussion gradually flows into a more traditional class discussion on relevant course topics.

From afterthought to effectiveness driver

Following the steps outlined here can make a simulation debrief effective and enjoyable for everyone involved. Strong debriefing is a

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key ingredient in a simulation's success and should not be treated as an afterthought. A rich discussion allows students to consolidate their learning and will help you (as the instructor) gain new insights into the simulation's effectiveness in your course.

Students have told me that these discussions have helped them feel more comfortable with their course and keen to implement their learning in the real world. From my personal experience, I have been pleased that debriefing has developed from being a source of personal anxiety to something I look forward to.

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Interactive Learning **Simulations**



Tim Rogmans is the managing director at Sim Institute and a faculty advisor for Harvard Business Impact. He is the author of several simulations, including the *Sustainability Management Simulation: Net Zero*, *Business Essentials Simulation: Coffee Shop Inc.*, and *Macroeconomics Simulation: Econland*.

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Why Confused Students Learn Better

Confessions of an Evil Teacher

by Delphine Genin

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DariaRen / Getty Images

With endless competition for our attention, from news to social media and beyond, getting students to fully focus on classroom learning is more challenging than ever. As educators, we are struggling to manage attention spans and deliver effective learning experiences to all our students. This can be both overwhelming and frustrating.

So many of us, then, are trying to reinvent how we teach and how we interact with learners. I believe that doing so effectively takes courage, dedication, and a bit of "wickedness." By constructively and intentionally adding some confusion and emotional muddle to a course, we can capture students' attention and dramatically shift the course dynamic.

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In this article, I'll discuss the benefits of managing emotions in class. I'll offer specific examples of interactive learning that tap into these emotions for increased engagement, deeper comprehension, and improved critical thinking. And I'll share how I embrace the role of an "evil teacher" to help students learn better.

> **We must acknowledge emotional engagement as the starting point to any learning. What once were considered frivolous or nice-to-have options—teasers, games, simulations, role plays, music, hands-on activities—are now a crucial part of the teacher's toolkit.**

The role of emotions in learning

While the study of emotions in learning was once purely philosophical, neuroscience and cognitive psychology are now exploring specific emotions as game changers when tackling learning challenges such as memorization, attention, or cognitive bias. Epistemic emotions, such as surprise, confusion, and curiosity, are already at work in our classrooms. By understanding their impact, we can harness these emotional states not only to get students' attention but also to support deeper learning.

Enhancing motivation and attention

There are many emotional states that we assume are involved in learning: Curiosity comes immediately to mind, but even frustration can drive learning. Telling a student, "No, not yet. Just wait; you are not ready to learn this yet," may actually urge a motivated student to prove the teacher wrong—an old trick that can work well with kindergarteners to graduate students.

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Looking specifically at what are considered epistemic emotions, we find a large range of emotional states including courage, astonishment, interest, wonder, surprise, and the feeling of certainty, along with feelings of doubt, the fear of the unknown, and the joy of verification. Some research even finds that confused learners are actually more successful at applying knowledge to new situations.

Driving critical thinking and deeper learning

Epistemic emotions have broad transformative effects on learners, informing their learning beliefs, values, and understanding of what is true. While critical thinking involves forming a judgment based on factual analysis, epistemic emotions can actually drive students to exercise logic and build critical thinking.

Cognitive science has shown us that emotional ties to deeply rooted beliefs can be a barrier to the exercise of critical thinking. I saw this firsthand in one of my business ethics courses at César Ritz College, where younger students would automatically defer to the ideas of older peers as a show of deep respect for their elders. However, this stance tends to kill potential debates, undermine arguments, and weaken the discussion for the entire group.

> **By constructively and intentionally adding some confusion and emotional muddle to a course, we can capture students' attention and dramatically shift the course dynamic.**

Regardless of the beliefs and cognitive biases learners bring with them into the classroom, how can we shift students' mindsets to encourage critical thinking and a logic-driven approach? Cognitive dissonance can be avoided by shifting the learners into the right emotional mindset—let's call it the epistemic emotion zone—where they can experience,

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learn, and question ideas more easily and with more satisfaction. Emotions such as confusion can open up mental space for responding to new situations. Managing epistemic emotions can help learners exercise critical thinking by addressing the feelings that arise around facts but with low risk or mental discomfort.

Avoid Cognitive Dissonance

When challenging a deeply held belief, one approach that is generally counterproductive is to simply overwhelm learners with contradictory facts. Festinger's classic theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that such experiences tend to provoke a feeling of mental discomfort, one that we try to escape as quickly as possible. This can happen in the classroom as well; students are forced into the following responses:

- Changing a deeply held belief (energy consuming)
- Adding new beliefs (risky)
- Reducing the importance of beliefs (refusing the facts)

None of those three options strengthen critical thinking—which is, of course, the ultimate aim. Implementing epistemic emotion management in the learning process helps not only to better manage attention and deepen learning but also to debug cognitive biases.

Two ways to get into the epistemic emotion zone

As an educator and a learning strategist, I have used various paths to get learners into the epistemic emotion zone. But first, we must acknowledge emotional engagement as the starting point to any learning. What once were considered frivolous or nice-to-have options—teasers, games, simulations, role plays, music, hands-on activities—are now a crucial part of the teacher's toolkit. I have witnessed how simulations and games deliver the right mix of knowledge, challenge, and emotion to take the learning experience to a new level.

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Here are two examples of how I take on the role of the "evil teacher," challenging students with a bit of discomfort, confusion, humor, and surprise to get them in the zone.

Simulations: *Patient Zero*

Simulations can be an excellent way to tap into emotions and challenge students for deeper learning, especially if they feel real enough to fully immerse learners in the cognitive process while maintaining the safety of a classroom exercise.

With *Leadership Simulation: Patient Zero*, for example, the undergraduate students in my Hospitality Business Ethics course experience a one-hour emotional roller coaster that is combined with academic elements. Here is the premise: As leaders of their country, the students must suddenly deal with a massive zombie pandemic. Their reaction? First, they are surprised by the simulation's very cool trailer, which generates excitement about the experience before it even starts. I use music to heighten the emotions around the simulation, playing Michael Jackson's "Thriller" as an introduction, and in a dramatic voice announce, "The world is falling apart. Save as many lives as possible. Good luck."

Then confusion sets in and students often look to me, the lecturer, for the answer to "What do we do next?" The simulation sets the stage for participants to experience crisis leadership, put ethics at the center of the experience, and question their long-held beliefs about what is right in this scenario. I have found that the uncertainty of the game makes students more likely to fully explore and envision options and consequences. Often, this confusion is where the magic happens: Through meaningful questions and debates, the students are compelled to discuss the ethical issues that arise. They argue, they doubt, they laugh. During a three-month course, there is a before and an after of this simulation—it's a foundational experience, leaving students with the feeling that we went to battle together.

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Source: Delphine Genin, "Teaching Patient Zero," 2019. César Ritz College, Le Bouveret, Switzerland.

The *Patient Zero* simulation in Genin's Hospitality Business Ethics course, taught on César Ritz College's Le Bouveret Campus, prompts emotional responses and challenging discussions around ethical dilemmas and crisis decision-making.

Gamification: The RIP game

Leveraging epistemic emotions effectively can also help convey very traditional business concepts. Consider a lesson on SWOT analysis—and the conventional peer feedback that goes along with it. The lesson can easily flop due to lack of focus and interest, but also because of students' cognitive biases and emotions related to criticizing peers.

In my undergraduate marketing and business plan courses, for example, I found that it was often challenging for students to give each other accurate and relevant feedback; many students struggle with this out of fear of being seen as rude or impolite.

Thus the "RIP game" was born. I developed this game to create a space where learners can voice their feedback without any social risk.

The setup is designed to heighten curiosity: In a dark room, with Mozart's "Requiem" playing in the background, I take a dramatic

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approach to surprise and overwhelm students. It's not every day you walk into a class with a lecturer shouting, "Enough with kindness and unicorns! I am transforming you into assassins. Your job is to destroy the project you have in your hands. Picture all its flaws, weaknesses, threats, and run-ins with bad luck. Vocalize them. Kill the poor thing properly." When I play the role of the evil teacher, I free my students to be evil, too—but also more strategic and accurate when pointing out the weaknesses or threats of their projects.

During the second phase of the game, I create more confusion by shedding the typical role of supportive, motivational teacher. When students get feedback on their project, they often hear something from me such as, "I am sorry your business idea failed. You lost time, money, and a bit of self-esteem, too." They usually laugh uncomfortably a bit—and then go on to pay more detailed attention to deploying an efficient SWOT analysis for their project.

5 Tips for Becoming an Evil Teacher

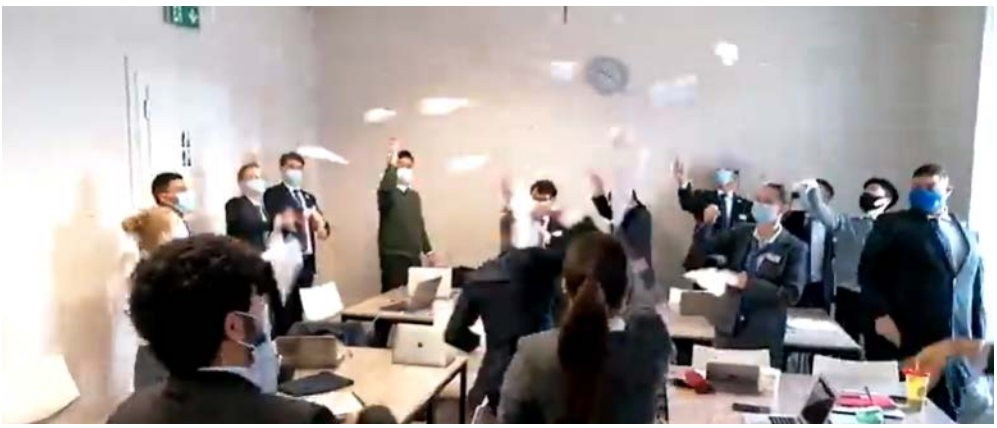
1. Understand the power of emotions management in the classroom and incorporate it into your teaching approach.
2. Use confusion constructively to drive your students toward critical thinking.
3. Add to your teaching toolbox—with music, games, and simulations—to get learners into an epistemic emotion zone.
4. Use classroom activities to tap into epistemic emotions, creating scenarios that feel real enough to immerse but that also offer the safety of a simulation.
5. Foster enjoyment. Epistemic emotions get the brain to release endorphins, which builds learning and memorization.

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Epistemic emotions + endorphins = engagement

Any task that evokes strong desire or enjoyment releases endorphins in our brains. The resulting endorphins support the process of neurogenesis (the development of cells), which abundantly contributes to learning acquisition and memorization. Harnessing epistemic emotions in the classroom through experiential learning, hands-on activities, music—even paper airplanes, games, escape rooms, and quests (see photos below)—can not only capture students' attention but also enhance their enjoyment of learning, leading the way to deeper engagement with the content we teach and creating space for the critical thinking that is key to the learning process. That's when everyone wins.

So this evil teacher urges you—embrace some wickedness every now and then. Your students will be better for it.



Source: Delphine Genin, "Paper Planes in the Classroom," various lectures, 2019. César Ritz College, Le Bouveret, Switzerland.

Paper airplanes in the classroom are a novel way to randomly distribute peer work. Students write their concept or project on a piece of paper, fold it, throw it, and collect the closest one to start the next activity.

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Source: Delphine Genin, 2019.

In an undergraduate marketing course, students defined target groups and created virtual influencers to reach their audience, creating detailed personas with dolls or digital characters, including things such as hair and clothing. Some of these virtual influencers still have Instagram accounts.



Source: Genin, 2019.

Activities from Genin's Hospitality Business Ethics course include a Middle Ages–themed, Excalibur-type quest in which students create a code of conduct and then are challenged to follow it as they solve an escape room problem.

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Interactive Learning **Simulations** **Student Engagement**



Delphine Genin is a lecturer, columnist, and learning strategy consultant. Genin has a master's degree in management from ESCP Europe and has studied neuroscience for business at MIT Sloan. She joined The Swiss Education Group in 2018 to deliver meaningful learning experiences in business planning, marketing, and ethics courses. As a learning strategy consultant, Genin has a deep understanding of both neuroscience and entrepreneurship. She is also an opinion columnist covering education, neuroscience, and management for various international publications.

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