



CIS 5640: Introduction to Game Design

## Lab 1: Scientific Observation

Welcome to our first in class lab! Today we're going to take a classic card game, Egyptian Rat Screw, and make some changes to it to see how those changes impact the player experience of the game. The goal of the lab is to sharpen our ability to understand how game mechanics affect the player experience.

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### Egyptian Rat Screw

This is a variant of a classic, simple card for two or more players. Because it's very simple, the game is easy to modify and quick to playtest.

**Goal:** Win all the cards

**Setup:** Divide the cards evenly among the players

**Play:**

Going around in a circle, each player puts a card face up on a center pile. If at any point a TRIGGER condition is met, players may slap the center pile. The first player to slap the pile correctly wins all the cards in the pile, and adds the pile to the bottom of their deck (don't shuffle). If a player slaps incorrectly, they add a card from their deck to the bottom of the center pile.

Triggers:

- A pair: two cards of the same value in a row
- A "sandwich": two cards of the same value with some other card in between
- A run: three cards in a sequence (eg. 4-5-6 or 6-5-4)
- A sub: top and the bottom of the pile are of the same value

### Task Details

Play through each version of the game, starting with the original and then the listed variants in order. Once you have played through all the listed variants, start creating your own. Aim to create at least three new versions of the game. Try to work quickly, rather than carefully.

For each version of the game, including the original, do the following:

1. Think through the rules and make a prediction about the play experience.
  - How will the game play? Will it be long? Short? Fast? Slow?
  - What is the player experience? How does the player feel when they are successful or unsuccessful?
2. Palette cleanse with a dance move (really)
  - Have one player teach another a dance move, then dance the move together.
3. Play one or two rounds of the game
4. Write down your observations. How do they differ from your predictions?
5. Make a change to the rules. Write it down.
  - Change ONE thing [goal, trigger, action, penalty, extra rule]. Once you've made 3 versions, you can go nuts and change a bunch of things.
  - The resulting game does not need to be "good"

VERSION	GOAL	RULE: TRIGGER	RULE: ACTION	RULE: PENALTY	RULE: EXTRA
Original	Get all the Cards	Pair, Run, Sandwich, Sub	Slap the cards	Put a card on the bottom of the deck	
Royals		Original triggers + any face card or ace			
Quick draw	First successful slap wins				
Perma-death				You lose	
Say my name			If top card is red, say player 1's name If black, player 2's		

## Tips

KEEP IT SIMPLE. You'll be able to learn more from small incremental changes than giant sweeping ones that completely change the game. Don't worry too much about making *good* rules. Even bad changes can teach you something. Start by changing ONE element of the game. Once you've done a few versions, then go bigger.

## Modification ideas

Need some prompts? Try one of the following:

- Replace slapping with a different physical action
  - (since we're in person, what are things we can only do in person?)
- Replace slapping with a cognitive action
- Try to make it cooperative
- Try to make it really hard to slap correctly (so that the penalty triggers a lot)
- Try to make it strategic
- If one player has been dominating in your playtest, make a version of the game that makes the other player win more often

## Playtesting

Near the end of class, we will swap groups to playtest your ~favorite~ original version. So keep track of the rules you create.