

**Final Report of the
Reacting Short Games/Microgames (SG/M)
Working Group
1 September 2022**

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Executive Summary

This document constitutes the Final Report of the Reacting Short Games/Microgames (SG/M) Working Group (WG). The purpose of this report is to answer the July 2021 directive of the Reacting Editorial Board (REB).

In July 2021, the REB directed the formation of the SG/M WG to provide structure and guidance to the growing number of SG/M available to the Reacting Community. The WG held an initial organizational and goal-setting meeting in August 2021, and began having regular meetings in February 2022. The WG provided two draft documents to the REB in June 2022, and the REB approved sharing them in draft form with the Reacting Community to get feedback:

- a. Frameworks for SG/M that provide a clear definition of Short Games (2-4 sessions) and Microgames (1 session) in the Reacting context and templates for author use.
- b. Options for standardizing review and publication of Reacting SG/M. These options include 1) using the existing Flagship review mechanism, 2) formation of a new REB subcommittee, and 3) a partnership with an outside organization. The WG currently assesses that using Option 2 for Short Games and Option 3 for Microgames would be ideal, but that Option 2 could be used for both if necessary.

The SG/M WG presented the draft documents during the 2022 Game Development Conference and shared them in the Reacting Faculty Lounge as well. As a result of those feedback sessions, the SG/W WG made the following changes:

- Page 2: Clarified that historical vignettes are not required in Short Games, but may be included if the author believes it is helpful
- Page 9: Changed “field test” to “play test” in Option 2 to make clearer that playtesting is desired

The SG/M WG unanimously endorses the framework and review options, and recommends their adoption by the REB. Members of the WG indicated a willingness to support these recommendations as follows:

- Ray Kimball is willing to serve as the “gatekeeper” for option 3 if adopted.
- Jon Truitt will work to support option 3 as link between the REB and CLGS and the review process of microgames.
- Scout Blum is willing to be involved with the effort as needed.
- Nick Proctor anticipates being involved with the administration of this effort.
- Bill Offutt is willing to serve on and/or chair an SG/M subcommittee in support of Option 2.

Questions and/or feedback on this Report should be addressed to Ray Kimball at ray@42ed.games.

Reacting Short Game Framework

Short Games require 2-4 sessions. “Sessions” are understood to include any necessary in-class prep time and debriefing (e.g., if a game requires preparatory organizing time aside from usual class lecture, 1-2 full class sessions for the game itself, and a follow-on debriefing, it is a short game). The below proposed short game framework deliberately mirrors the standard Reacting structure in multiple ways. It contains provisions for a game book, instructor manual, and individual role sheets. It mandates some use of primary sources, albeit not as extensively as Flagship Reacting. It uses factions, but does not mandate indeterminacy. It makes provisions for students to receive historical context, short documents, and role sheets that are used for class preparation. **The documents themselves and components listed for each document have a suggested length; these should be considered illustrative rather than prescriptive (i.e., these are goals, not limits).**

Game Book

Overall suggested length short of Primary Sources: 6-10K words. Primary sources may make up another 8-10K words or more, but see cautionary note in #6, below. Intent is that students read the game book prior to the start of the game, and may periodically refer back to it over the course of the game.

1. Situation/Historical Context (20%). Unlike Flagship games, this section does not require a historical vignette (although authors may include a short one if they believe it is illustrative). This section allows students to quickly understand:
 - a. The historical situation in which the game is set.
 - b. How their role has reached the starting point of the game
 - c. The major issues they will face in the game.
 - d. It can presume a broad familiarity with the time period derived from in-class study up to that point. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. This section should end with the location/setting of the game itself.
2. Pedagogical Goals (5%). Lays out what the student as a learner should take away from the game. Note that this is different from what the student's in-game role is seeking to achieve. It should also include the overall objectives in the game itself and how they serve the pedagogical goals. Generally speaking, a short game should help students explore dilemmas faced in a particular historical moment from the perspective of different historical roles.
3. Gameplay (10%). Details the steps of the game itself. Key details to include:
 - a. Any factions or categories that impact the play of the game.
 - b. Game phases, with clearly stated phases of the game and recommended timing
 - c. Significant actions that can be taken by all characters
 - d. Conditions that end the game
4. Roles (10%). Lists the name of each role and 1-2 sentences of key facts about him/her that everyone in the game would reasonably know. This section should empower students to identify others in their faction and potential allies /

adversaries. To the greatest extent possible, students should be primed to engage other roles at the start of the game (see Role Sheet note on this).

5. Miscellany (5%). Contains additional information needed for game play (e.g., a money system within the game, content warnings). May not be needed for every game.
6. Primary source documents (50%). Contains all readings needed to play the game. Every role should have 1-2 primary sources (or sections of a larger source) identified in their role sheet. Recommend not exceeding 10 pages of reading per role.

Instructor Manual

Overall suggested length: 16-20K words. This may vary widely depending on how much additional information authors wish to provide instructors. A general rule of thumb is to err on the side of more material, especially material that gives instructors additional options or flexibility for the running of the game.

1. Pedagogical Goals (10%). Lays out the learning goals of the game, including courses that could best benefit from its use and the clash of ideas/ideologies in the game.
2. Situation/Historical Context (30%). This can use much of the same material from the Game Book. Authors should consider including expanded descriptions for topics that students struggle to understand or that can lead to controversial classroom events.
3. Gameplay (20%). Again, this can use much of the same text from the student section. Additional points that should be included:
 - a. Likely overall dramatic arc with the climax or end point of the game
 - b. Recommendations for classroom layout
 - c. Materials required to play the game (e.g., dice, a bell)
 - d. Potential “wrong turns” in the game and how to deal with them
4. Role Management (10%). Should include a chart for how to assign roles in classes of different sizes, and recommendations for student personalities that can best support key roles. These include:
 - a. Role assignment sheet
 - b. Name cards/badges
5. Supporting Materials (20%). Put items here that can help a teacher quickly get the game off the ground without having to do resource-intensive prep, such as:
 - a. Ballot formats
 - b. Money tokens
 - c. Voting tracker
 - d. Slideshows or visuals that support class play
6. Supplementary Readings for Instructor (10%). Bibliography of additional readings that a teacher can reference if they need a stronger background or understanding of the topic.

Role Sheets

Role sheets should not exceed 500 words, with an aim to have a role sheet fit on a single page front and back. There is no minimum or maximum number of roles, but consider scalability for different class sizes in the design of the game.

1. Name (including pronunciation), Title, Faction.
2. Key Biographical Notes. These can be in bullet format, and should be easily digestible elements that a student can use to “inhabit” the role.
3. Goals/Objectives. These are what the role wants to achieve by the end of the game. Ideally, these should consist of a primary or ideal goal, followed by some acceptable compromise goals.
4. Responsibilities in the Game. This is a concise list of mandatory actions in the game, with some potential actions listed below.
 - a. Read (e.g., “core texts 3 and 5 in the Gamebook”)
 - b. Speak (e.g., “present speech in support of X :15 into the first session”)
 - c. Do (e.g., “engage with another role on a specific topic” or “serve as chair”)
 - d. Write (e.g., “one page reflection for the debriefing session”)
5. Resources/Powers. This may include:
 - a. How the role interacts with the game mechanic (e.g., money held, number of votes, etc.)
 - b. Unique actions available to the role
6. Strategy Advice (Optional). This can be a short section with recommended actions, additional optional reading, or “watch out for” comments.

Reacting Microgame Framework

Microgames run in a single, self-contained session, including any required preparation and debrief. Microgames' greatest strength is also their greatest challenge: flexibility. Because of their shorter length and lower preparation threshold, microgames can potentially be used as course openers, summations of themes or blocks of instruction, bridges between blocks of instruction, or even final exams. In a microgame, players receive very brief materials on game day (or have minimal preparation time beforehand). GMs have additional supporting materials that are used during the game to support player activity. Therefore, two opposing design principles are paramount in the creation of microgames and should be understood to inform the elements below:

- For all student-facing materials (Role Sheets), shorter and more directive is better. Microgame student materials will generally be more concise and structured than Flagship and Short Games. Note that microgames only use Role Sheets, not an additional Game Book, so the key rules of the game must be in the Role Sheet.
- For all instructor-facing materials (Instructor's Manual), more options are better. Think about the different ways the microgame could be used in a course, and provide guidance and material that can support an instructor using it in that way.

The documents themselves and components listed for each document have a suggested length; these should be considered illustrative rather than prescriptive (i.e., these are goals, not limits).

Role Sheets

300-500 words (without Primary Source) is the optimal length. There is no minimum or maximum number of roles, but consider scalability for different class sizes in the design of the game.

1. Situation / Historical Context (1 paragraph). Quickly orients the student to the setting of the game, both temporally and geographically. If factions are used, this paragraph should contain descriptive names of the factions.
2. Name / Title / Faction (if used) (1 line). Should include pronunciation of the name.
3. Key Biographical Notes (4-5 bullets). These can be in bullet format, and should be easily digestible elements that a student can use to "inhabit" the role.
4. Goals/Objectives (2-3 bullets). These are what the role wants to achieve by the end of the game. Ideally, these should consist of a primary or ideal goal, which might be followed by some acceptable compromise goals.
5. Responsibilities in the Game (1 paragraph or 2-3 bullets). Players need clear direction about how they should enter into the game. This section describes required actions for each role in the game. Responsibilities vary from role to role. Here are some examples:
 - a. Speak (e.g., say something in support of topic X)
 - b. Do (e.g., engage with another role on a specific topic; serve as chair)
 - c. Write (e.g., short reflection at game's end)

6. Resources/Powers (bullets as needed). This may include:
 - a. How the role interacts with the game mechanics (e.g., Money held, number of votes, etc.)
 - b. Unique actions available to the role
7. Strategy Advice (Optional). This can be a short section with recommended actions or “watch out for” comments (e.g., “Watch out for Maddie. She will try to foment trouble.”)
8. Primary Source (Optional). Ideally, the role should be playable without the need to resort to primary sources. However, if a primary source is essential to the role, it should not exceed 250-500 words. Images, charts, or diagrams may also be useful primary sources for a microgame.

Instructor Manual

Overall suggested length: 5-10K words. This may vary widely depending on how much additional information authors wish to provide instructors. A general rule of thumb is to err on the side of more material, especially material that gives instructors additional options or flexibility for the running of the game. It is especially important to think about the different points in a course where an instructor might choose to use the game, and provide resources that can support those options.

1. Pedagogical Goals/Utility (10%). Lays out the learning goals of the game, including courses that could best benefit from its use and the clash of ideas/ideologies in the game.
2. Situation/Historical Context (30%). Sufficient material to give a non-specialist a fundamental understanding of the events and forces leading to the moment of the game. The intent of this section is to allow the instructor to answer student questions on “how did we get here” without doing further research. Authors should also consider including expanded descriptions for topics that students struggle to understand or that can lead to controversial classroom events.
3. Gameplay (20%). Details the steps of the game itself. Key details to include:
 - a. Recommendations for classroom layout
 - b. Materials required to play the game (e.g., dice, a bell)
 - c. Any factions or categories that impact the play of the game.
 - d. The overall likely arc of the game
 - e. Recommended timing of game phases. Consider scalability for different class lengths (i.e., guidance for 50-, 60-, 75-, and 90-minute classes).
 - f. Significant actions that can be taken by all characters
 - g. Conditions that end the game
 - h. Potential “wrong turns” in the game and how to deal with them
4. Role Management (10%). Should include a chart for how to assign roles in classes of different sizes, and recommendations for student personalities that can best support key roles. These include:
 - a. Role assignment sheet
 - b. Name cards/badges

5. Supporting Materials (20%). Put items here that can help a teacher quickly get the game off the ground without having to do resource-intensive prep, such as:
 - a. Ballot formats
 - b. Money tokens
 - c. Voting tracker
 - d. Slideshows or visuals that support class play
6. Supplementary Readings for Instructor (10%). Bibliography of additional readings that a teacher can reference if they need a stronger background or understanding of the topic.

Short Game/Microgame Review Options

Problem

The Reacting Consortium currently has no systematic process for review and approval of Short Games/Microgames (abbreviated to SG/M from this point forward). At present, the Chair of the REB reviews submissions that come in via the website and unilaterally decides whether the submissions are appropriate for hosting on the RC portal. If Reacting is going to offer high quality SG/M on a paid basis, it requires a structured and transparent mechanism for reviewing and publishing those games. This mechanism should also address subject matter coverage between Flagship Reacting Games and SG/M and the existing SG/M posted on the Reacting portal (more on both below).

Publication Objective

SG/M serve a fundamentally different purpose than Flagship Reacting Games and course textbooks. “Publication” in the context of SG/M means that the game is made available for purchase and download (**in digital versions only**) from the Reacting Consortium website or affiliated entity in a way that is faculty- and student-friendly, financially supports the Consortium, and provides some form of royalties to the author. All offerings should look polished and high quality to offer value for money.

SG/M should not cover identical intellectual collisions that are presented in existing Flagship games. However, SG/M may cover similar time periods and societies (e.g., an SG/M about the Terror in the French Revolution would not conflict with the existing Flagship French Revolution Game.)

Once the Frameworks (pp 2-7 of this Report) are approved by the REB, existing SG/M authors will be encouraged to update their games to the new framework. Authors will be given a fixed timeframe (e.g., one year) to update their games; SG/M not conforming to the Frameworks after that time will be removed from the portal.

Given the current technical constraints of the Reacting Consortium website, the most likely retail model for Short Games is student purchases of Game Books, with faculty able to download Instructor Manuals and Role Sheets. Microgames would be available for free to Reacting Members and available for individual purchase by non-members, who could leverage the purchase towards a discount on RC membership.

The Reacting SG/M Working Group (WG) has identified three possible options for review mechanisms that support this publication and retail objective, listed below and on the following pages. All of these options presume extensive playtesting via the author. The WG’s recommendation is listed after the three options.

Option 1: Flagship Review Mechanism

SG/M go through the existing Level 3/4/5 process for review. The current L3/L4 evaluation documents are amended to create a version that only includes elements germane to SG/M.

Pros:

- Quickest option to implement
- Avoids perceptions of a parallel or unequal system

Cons:

- Would likely overwhelm current system, which is already stretched in covering submissions in a timely manner
- Flagship system is optimized for an outside publisher, not Reacting internal management of documents

Option 2: SG/M REB Subcommittee

The REB establishes an SG/M Subcommittee of the REB. This body is charged with review of SG/M, to include creating appropriate evaluation documents.

The subcommittee uses a system similar to Flagship review as follows:

1. **Reacting Central** posts templates, series standards, and language on the importance of field testing on Reacting Portal. Authors are encouraged to submit nascent ideas for SG/M to the BLORG with the understanding that those submissions do not constitute “holds.”
2. **Author** writes game, play tests it, and sends prototype to Subcommittee Chair.
3. **Chair** disseminates prototype to volunteer reviewers for play testing. Reviewers may be identified through the subcommittee, via solicitation (though not file posting) through the Reacting Faculty Lounge, or posting on the Reacting Consortium website.
4. **Reviewers** complete written reports of play tests.
5. **Subcommittee** reviews field tests and decides if the game is ready to post.
6. The game will likely go through multiple revise and resubmit cycles similar to a journal article, but will not go through a “levels” approach.
7. As part of the revise and resubmit cycle, the subcommittee may identify SG/Ms for a conference or online playtest. Authors may also apply for playtest spots at RTTP conferences.
8. **Reacting Central** formats the game materials and posts them to the publication portal referenced above.

Pros:

- Uses familiar format for review while sharing more of the implementation burden
- Could draw more people into Reacting governance
- Inexpensive
- Could count for promotion and tenure for the author if the peer reviews are anonymous.

Cons:

- Requires free labor at a time when many faculty are already overcommitted on service
- Must identify individuals with expertise for subcommittee and drafting of review documents
- Puts additional labor on Reacting Central personnel for formatting and polish.

Option 3: CLGS Partnership

Reacting partners with [Central Michigan University's Center for Learning through Games and Simulations](#) (CLGS). SG/M submissions are reviewed by an initial gatekeeper (individual or committee) within the Reacting Consortium who evaluates the submission's appropriateness and fit for Reacting. The submission is then routed to CLGS, which assigns 2-3 paid peer reviewers to evaluate its game mechanics and historical accuracy. Once the reviews are complete, CLGS returns the reviews to the RC. Based on the reviews, the Reacting gatekeeper accepts the submission for publication, requests a revise-and-resubmit, or rejects the submission. The specific mechanism for post-review publication (CLGS-only vs. joint Reacting/CLGS) would need to be worked out. This option may be better suited for Microgames instead of Short Games.

Pros:

- More timely review process
- Opportunity to strengthen Reacting's partnership with CLGS
- Creates a peer-reviewed system that may count for tenure and promotion
- Less burden on overtaxed RTTP volunteer reviewers and REB

Cons:

- Needs initial infusions of funding (possibly through Kickstarter) to support the process until it can be covered by game sales
- Will require payment to CLGS for the use of their review network (either as fee for use of the system or royalty cut from joint publication)
- Requires agreement of CLGS

Working Group Recommendation for Review Options

If the Reacting Editorial Board wishes to have a single system to manage both Short Games and Microgames, Option 2 is best suited to handle both. However, if the REB is willing to consider separate systems for Short Games and Microgames, then Option 2 is best suited for Short Games and Option 3 would work best for microgames.

Reacting Small Games / Microgames Working Group Membership

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