Your Escape Room Starter Plan

SPACE

Assets

Challenges

STORY

Audience: Kids Teens Adult

Type: Escape Mystery

Theme

Plot

STUFF SOURCES

Businesses:

Staff/Volunteer Makers:

Prior programs?

Lenders:
GOAL 1: COMBO UNLOCK

Requires:

SEQUENCE NUMBERS/LETTERS

GOAL 2: MYSTERY

Requires:

SEQUENCE CONTENT HIDDEN/DETERMINED BY

INFORMATION HIDDEN/DETERMINED BY

GOAL 3 ____________________

Requires:

SEQUENCE CONTENT HIDDEN/DETERMINED BY

INFORMATION HIDDEN/DETERMINED BY

Story Theme ________________________________________________

Game Type: Mystery    Escape

TOOL NEEDED?
## Puzzle Ideas

### GENERAL PUZZLES

- Physical assembly (jigsaw puzzle)
- Manipulation (Puzzle Box; untie a knot; Tangrams; use magnet to retrieve a key from a cage)
- Close Examination (numbers inside lids; combination on back of lock)
- Hidden object (under the rug/tablecloth; maybe under two things!)
- Special conditions (needs darkness; backlighting; flashlight; or blacklight)

### ENCODING-TYPE PUZZLES

- Substitution Code (A=1; Green equals B; A=C)
- Counting objects (number of green gummi bears on poster)
- Textual Embedding ("poem" of instructions; repeated, nonsense, or out-of-place words)
- Sorting (Alphabetical; date order)
- Color coding (match number to color; quantity of color; inclusion in code (for letters))
- Visual Puzzles (Rebus; altered numbers; cursive writing)

### MYSTERY-TYPE PUZZLES

- Noticing the “obvious” (Handwriting differences, object placement, illogic)
- Textual Analysis (reading for comprehension)
- Instruction following (recipe to make a potion; travel itinerary to catch a thief)
- Sorting (by date, name, etc. to create a cohesive storyline)
- Visual puzzle (Wuzzles or Rebus to reveal a text statement; photographs to match with description)
- Non-Player Character (to interview, provide hints, or contact with information)
Important Lessons Learned...  
Sometimes the Hard Way

- **Never** put anything irreplaceable into a room.
- Have back-up locks and keys and boxes and briefcases and vials and **everything**.
- Have at **least** one volunteer for photography/onboarding/offboarding/reset.
- Budget **time for resetting rooms**. At least 5-10 minutes, ideally 15.
- Simple changes make the game **much** harder.

### More Important Lessons Learned...

**Definitely the Hard Way**

- **KISS** Make escaping the room easy & add other goals to increase complexity.
- **Watch the Flow.** Avoid puzzles that only one person can work on at a time, or that suck up the whole team’s time.
- **Don’t anger the Wookie.** Don’t involve staff who are also performing regular duties for non-players.
- **Sit, stay.** Fixed objects take less time to reset...and don’t get lost.
- “**Do Not _____” Labels** Label EVERYTHING, and assume players will ignore the label.
- **Don’t Wing It.** Have a detailed written plan and instructions for the players/staff.
- ***CLICK!*** Have photo props.
- **Oops...** Have back-up keys. And locks. And briefcases...and glass vials.

### Important Room Design Tips

- Have a place for players to amass clues—like a big central table or desk.
- Put paper and pencil into the room for players to use.
- Keep objects within physical reach of a 10 year olds and 80 year olds (aka, not high up and not on the floor).
- Players love the after-game photos. Have props and signs. (We succeeded/we ALMOST succeeded)
- For your first game, keep it simple. It makes people happy and leaves you room for elaboration.
- Make basic goals (escape) simple, and advanced goals (catching the thief) harder.
- Allow players to replay the game. (Or not, if you don’t have time.)
# Most Common Puzzle Types in Professional Escape Rooms

Hint: Consider using things from closer to the top of the list, as these represent what players will encounter if they go and do a “real” escape room.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Puzzle Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searching for physical objects hidden in the room</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Communication</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticing something &quot;obvious&quot; in the room</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol substitution with a Key (such as looking symbols up in a book)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using something in an unusual way (Out-of-the-box-thinking)</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching for objects in images</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly of a Physical object (such as a jigsaw puzzle)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebra and other Mathematics</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattern identification (such as visualizing a shape in a set of dots)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riddles</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciphers without a Key (such as letter substitution)</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirrors</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstract logic (such as Sudoku)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Puzzle Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research using information sources</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic thinking (such as Chess)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand-eye coordination</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rope or chains (such as undoing complex knots)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Word Puzzles (such as crosswords or word search)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazes</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Agility (such as a laser maze)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of facts not provided in the room</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shape manipulation (such as a matchstick puzzle)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquids</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social engagement with actors</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical engagement with actors</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Public Rooms
- Success and Community
- Recognizable Puzzles
- Multi-generational and Child-Friendly
- Educational and Community Oriented

### Professional Rooms
- Complexity and Yelp Reviews
- Unique and Exotic Puzzles
- Paying Adults (minimum legal age)
- Proprietary and For Profit

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**In a Public Library....**

**AVOID TRIVIA AND MATH!**
Don’t assume any knowledge.

**In a School Library...**

**TRIVIA AND MATH ARE GREAT!**
Use what the kids should know.

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**Escape Room Variations**

- Literary or Science Puzzle Space
- ARG—played and developed over time with all staff.
- Search the Stacks—Clues and locking boxes in stacks.
- Bulletin Board Visual Mystery