

Creating an engaging online escape room activity for first year library sessions

Cheryl Francis

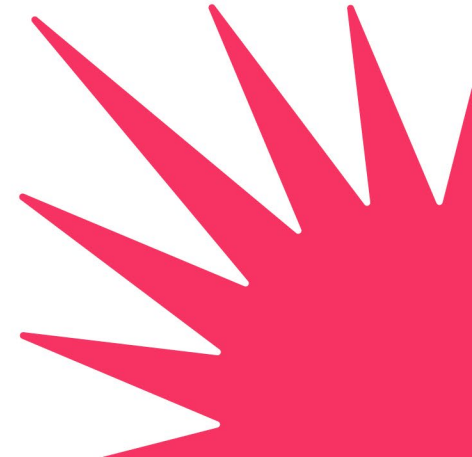
Academic Liaison Librarian

Schools of Medicine and Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Science



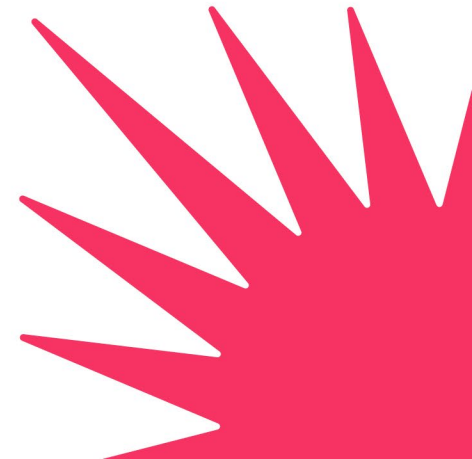
Why build an Escape room?

- Evolution of library orientation sessions:
 - Activities on paper
 - MS Forms quiz in groups of 30 (x4 sessions!)
 - Dr Paul Cannon shared using OneNote for an escape room for teaching systematic review methodological concepts and search skills at Health Libraries Group conference in 2024 ¹



Creating the escape room

- Use OneNote to create the escape room
- PowerPoint to create the timer
- Desktop version of OneNote for passwords to “unlock” the next question
 - I use the MCQ format (typing errors)
- Students access via the web version of OneNote with “view only” access



Running the session

- Session has 1hr 30 mins timetabled slot with 2 staff members and 120 students
 - Demo of library website and search tools for 15 mins
 - Additional reference/help pdf document available in the VLE
 - Timed 20 min escape room activity
 - 20 mins feedback, run through answers, congratulate the winners
- It's a competition first to escape wins
- Students can do it in groups, individually or in pairs
- Flexible format: in person or online, session length, content

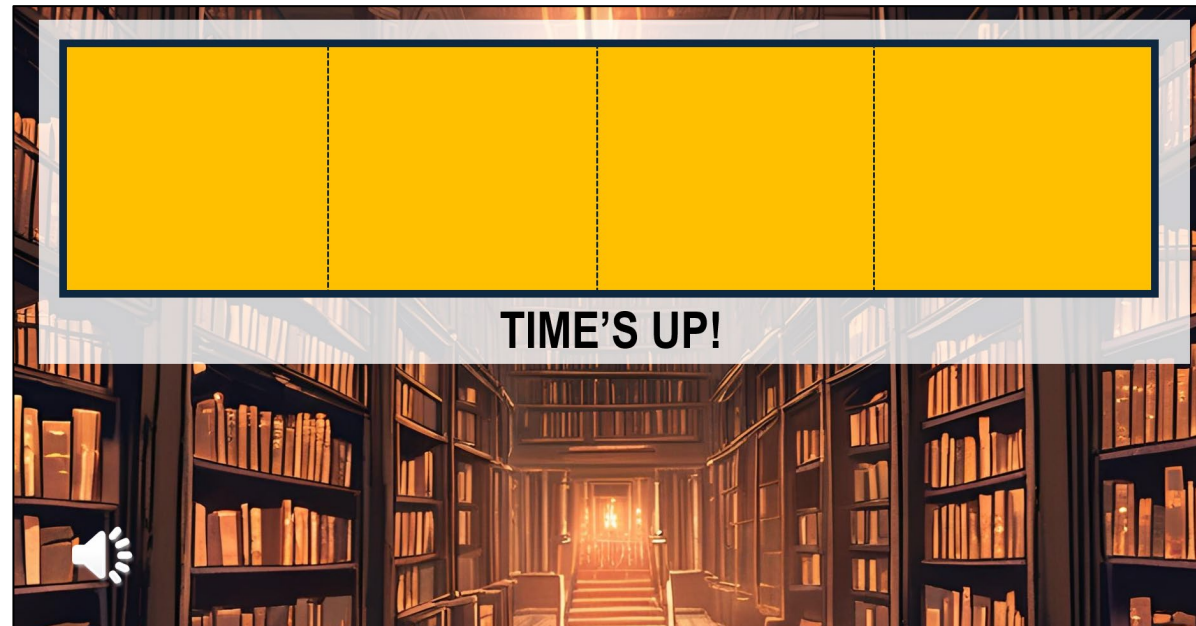


Session PPT slides

Activity : Trapped! Escape room

1. Answer the questions – in groups of 2 or 3
2. Assign an **online scribe** – this role is to fill in the answers in the escape room and keeps a record of all the letters used as answers (you'll need them at the end to escape)
3. This is a learning exercise for everyone in your group
4. Use the resources in Canvas to help you. Ask the facilitators questions to assist your learning
5. There is a prize for the first group to finish

****Make sure you are on the first page – it should say “Trapped!”****



Session OneNote

Medicine year 1 escape room

Introduction Trapped!

1 eBook collections

Enter answer 1

2 Reading Lists

Enter answer 2

3 Subject guide for m...

Enter answer 3

4 Referencing

Enter answer 4

5 Databases

Enter answer 5

6 My account


Enter answer 6

7 Find books

Enter answer 7

Trapped!

17 September 2025 16:24



Luck is on your side, however! In order to save you, the Medical School

Medicine year 1 escape room

Your reading list

22 May 2026 15:16

Reading lists link directly to the most important library and web resources for your course, and are selected by lecturers in the School of Medicine. Here's a screenshot of the Medicine year 1 reading list in Canvas:

Lists for MDL100 (2023/2019): MDL100 - Foundations Of Biomedical, Behavioral And Social Sciences For Medicine (2021/2 - Sunderland - ASUND - SEM3)

5 lists Sort: Last updated Filter

- Scientific Basis of Medicine (Year 1) Updated 2 days ago 56 items in 14 sections
- Behavioural, Social and Population Science in Medicine (Year 1) Updated 2 days ago 40 items in 6 sections
- Professionalism, Law and Ethics (Year 1) Updated 2 days ago 10 items in 2 sections


In the Reading list: Scientific Basis of Medicine Year 1

Medicine year 1 escape room

CODEBREAKER

17 September 2025 15:18

Now with 13 letters you have gathered (leave out the word answer from question 5) add them up using the codebreaker below



CODEBREAKER

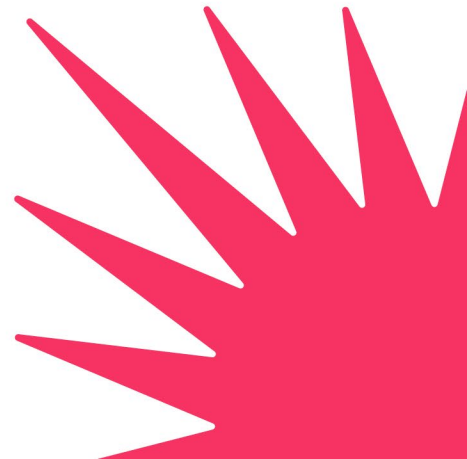
Answer	score
A=	1
B=	2
C=	3
D=	4

Example:
If the answers (excluding the word from answer 10) were all letter A, then the code to type in would be:
1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1=13

And you would enter 13 in the ESCAPE! password box

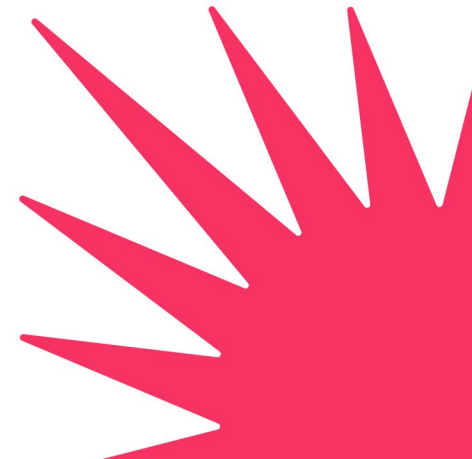
Benefits

- Active learning
- Using transferrable skills – teamwork, problem solving
- Problem-based learning central to the Medical School's curriculum
- Students engage well with the session



Challenges

- Is sensitive to changes in structure and resources
- Maintenance and checking questions
- Fun, but how much is learnt and retained about using library services? Future: structured evaluation of the escape room
- Needs a laptop or tablet; not for mobile phones



Escape!

Have a go at an online escape room I created for today:

Activity : Locked in! Escape room

- Use the internet to answer the questions – individually or in groups of 2 or 3
 - You'll need a tablet or laptop to play
 - One person open the Escape Room on their device : others can research answers on their mobiles
 - One team member also needs to keep a record of the first letter in each answers (you'll need them at the end to escape)
 - Use lower case and spaces only

****Make sure you are on the first page – it should say “Locked in!”****



3 Minute Story

Use the HINT pages where they are available

Remember to keep a record of the first letter of each answer

<https://tinyurl.com/TMsheff>



The OGs, with many thanks:

1. Cannon P, McKee T. Evaluation of an online systematic review escape room for early career clinicians and doctoral students. J Med Libr Assoc. 2025 Oct 23;113(4):342-348. doi: 10.5195/jmla.2025.2167



Supporting materials

- YouTube create an escape room video: Mr Exham's EdTech. (2020) OneNote escape rooms! [Video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suKBV82sJOk> [accessed 22 May 2026].
- The Tech Train. (2016) Create A Custom Progress Bar Timer In PowerPoint [Video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKbKjzlpTE0> [accessed 22 May 2026].
- Demo game I created for today: <https://tinyurl.com/TMsheff>

