

# Engaging undergrads remotely with an escape room game

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To prevent the spread of COVID-19, many universities canceled classes or held them online this spring—a change likely to continue for many this fall. As a result, hands-on chemistry labs are no longer accessible to

undergraduate students. In a new study in the *Journal of Chemical Education*, researchers describe an alternative way to engage students: a virtual game, modeled on an escape room, in which teams solve chemistry problems to progress and "escape."

While some lab-related activities, such as calculations and data analysis, can be done remotely, these can feel like extra work. Faced with the cancelation of their own in-person laboratory classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, Matthew J. Vergne and colleagues looked outside-the-box. They sought to develop an [online game](#) for their students that would mimic the cooperative learning that normally accompanies a lab experience.

To do so, they designed a virtual escape game with an abandoned chocolate factory theme. Using a survey-creation app, they set up a series of "rooms," each containing a problem that required students to, for example, calculate the weight of theobromine, a component of chocolate. They tested the escape room game on a class of eight third- and fourth-year undergraduate chemistry and biochemistry students. The researchers randomly paired the students, who worked together over a video conferencing app. In a video call afterward, the students reported collaborating effectively and gave the game good reviews, say the researchers, who also note that it was not possible to ensure students didn't use outside resources to solve the problems. Future versions of the game could potentially incorporate online simulations or [remote access](#) to computer-controlled lab instrumentation on campus, they say.

**More information:** Matthew J. Vergne et al. Escape the (Remote) Classroom: An Online Escape Room for Remote Learning, *Journal of Chemical Education* (2020). [DOI: 10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00449](https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00449)

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