I saw your email asking about puzzle competitions. We've had two so far at the Fremont Library and they went very well. We let up to 10 groups sign up in groups of four people. At the last one we opened it up to teams of three also, because we still had some openings for groups close to the event.

We used the same puzzle for everyone (I feel that's a MUST). I also feel like you shouldn't get any puzzles that are incredibly difficult pictures with too much of the same color or anything like that. You want them to finish and have a winner within your time slot. We blocked off an hour and half for the event. At the first one, we did a 300-piece puzzle and the first couple groups finished in 20-something minutes, so at the second one we got a 500-piece puzzle, and the first group finished in 37 minutes. But then the rest of the groups definitely took longer. We just told them they could keep going until whatever time we needed to stop to clean up.

To begin, we put a puzzle on each table with the box already unsealed and covered it with a tablecloth and made sure they didn't remove the table cloth and start until we said go. And then basically the only other rules we had were don't mess with other people's puzzles or try to distract them, and when you're done make sure everyone's hands are in the air when you yell done (no last second sneaking more pieces on).

We let people keep the puzzles if they wanted, and we did some prizes, but I know that would vary depending on your situation.

I hope that helps, let me know if you have any questions. :)

--

Stephani Gibson

Outreach Librarian

Fremont Area District Library

231-928-0270



I didn't have anything to do with the Brighton District Library puzzle competition that took place earlier this year, but I have a cousin who LOVES attending these at area libraries. Her main critique is that everyone must have the same puzzle, otherwise it doesn't feel fair or fun. (She recently went to one where each team had a different puzzle and she and her team decided not to go back to that library for puzzle competitions because of it.)
Hope that helps!

Sarah

--

Sarah Perry

Youth Services Librarian

Brighton District Library

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sperry@brightonlibrary.info

My Director forwarded me the Michlib email and I'm reaching out to give you some advice regarding the puzzle competitions. I have carried out a few competitions here at the library and have had great success. Below are some of the rules I follow for each program.

Typically, we have a stop clock at the front of the room that will count down the time and each table will have the same puzzles. Our competition usually runs for 2 hours at a time. I've also played music very low in the background to make the silence less awkward. I made groups of 4 - 5 people for each table and had 6 puzzles in total. I suggest using puzzles that are 500 - 750 pieces as anything above that will take a longer time to complete in a two hour span. I also suggest sending a message to other libraries for puzzles as that is what we have used to run our competitions before. We have not had this program for over a year now as we are preparing for renovations here shortly and I may be missing some suggestions and/or comments that were made to me from our patrons.

*Puzzle Tournament Rules*

*1.  One puzzle per table - all the puzzles are the same.*

*2.  Give them some time before starting to take the pieces out of the box and turn them over.*

*3.  Start the teams at the same time.*

*4.  Put out drinks and snacks - your choice; as they work.*

*5.  Take photos as they work and of the winners with their prizes.*

*6.  Give updates on time left if needed.*

*6.  Whoever finishes 1st (or has the least amount of pieces at the end wins)*

*7.  Give out prizes:*

*1st place – DQ gift cards*

*NOTE: Sometimes the winners will help the other teams finish up.*

Hope this helps and Good Luck with your program!

Thank you,

Amanda Murphy

Adult Services Librarian

(586) 445-5407

Yes, we've been doing puzzle competitions for a number of years and they are very popular.  I'm including a copy of the rules we use (very basic).  I like teams of up to 4 people and we usually get 10 copies of the same puzzle.  I find the sweet spot is 750 pieces and about a 3 hour time frame.  I always get early finishers (often around the 90 minute mark) but there are always some teams that don't finish in the allotted time. You can do 500 pieces and a 1.5- 2 hour time on a weeknight but the bigger one is usually on a Saturday afternoon.  We've done up to 1000 pieces but that takes a good 4 hours.

 We aim this program at adults but allow all ages to participate.  We purchase the puzzles new (usually from Amazon), provide snacks and beverages and award prizes (small gift cards usually) for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place finishers so there is a significant price tag on this, but it's still less than most performers would charge.  We allow smaller teams and individuals to combine forces up to 4 players so they can compete against the groups of 4 on more even ground.  This can be a great program and it doesn't have to be a lot of work for the staff.

Good Luck,

Brent Efing

Sterling Heights Public Library

I've done a few puzzle competitions. Here are my rules:

Everyone does the same puzzle, up to four people per team, puzzle is hidden in box or under tablecloth until timer starts, and I only do 500 piece puzzles.

One thing I would change is with registration. Next time I will have people who don't have teammates email me and I'll keep a list where I try to build a team from random individuals who want to play but don't have their own team. That way I can get more teams in the game.

Also, I had complaints at my last event about the puzzle. It has letters on the back that help divide the pieces into quadrants. It's common on some newer puzzles. One team hated it, some didn't understand, and one team finished quickly because of it.

I hope that helps!

Jen Saul

Head of Reference, Bedford Branch

Bedford Branch Library

734-847-6747

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| **snoblenpa@myjdl.com** |

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| https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/images/cleardot.gif |

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I wanted to share some details about the puzzle activity:

* I purchased identical puzzles for everyone. It’s important to ensure the puzzles are new and still in their wrapping.
* I also provided black foam boards for participants to assemble the puzzles on.
* Each puzzle had 750 pieces, and participants were given four hours to complete it.
* They had a 15-minute break to grab a snack, use the facilities, etc.

For next time, I’m considering having teams of two people work on each puzzle to make it a bit more interactive and manageable.

Let me know if you have any thoughts or suggestions!

Best regards,

All of our teams had the same puzzle. The puzzles were on the tables unopened (not sealed, but no one was allowed to take the cover off. We had a timer going so we could record the official end time and when the first team finished, the others were allowed to continue if they chose to do so.  It was a smooth process that everyone seemed to enjoy. If you have any specific Qs, I'd be happy to try to answer. Ours was pre-Covid and I believe we passed the puzzles on to another library.

Candace Mahoney (she/her)

Circulation Supervisor

SSLDL 097 / zv312

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South Lyon, MI 48178

248-437-6431

We allow up to 8 groups of up to 4 people to participate. Participant groups get to keep the puzzle. The first finished wins, and we have little trophies we give out. Each group gets the same puzzle.

I don't put this program together, so this is just what I know of it off the top of my head. If you have more questions I can pass them along to the person who runs the program to get more in-depth information.

I hope this is helpful!

**Carly Pampuch** [(hear name)](https://namedrop.io/carlypampuch)

My Pronouns: She/Her – See [www.mypronouns.org](http://www.mypronouns.org/) to learn more.

Eastern Branch Manager

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pampuchc@myjdl.com

We just had our first one in Oct, and here are the rules I created for it:

* A team should consist of a Team Captain (must be an Adult), and 3 Team Members of any age, totaling 4 Team Members.
* All Team Members need to be present. If a Team Member needs to be replaced or if a team needs to drop out, please email marketing@gladl.org ASAP so the list can be updated.
* Teams must be at their table ready to go by 6:10pm. Announcements will be made and then the competition will start at 6:15pm.
* Each team will have an identical unopened puzzle box consisting of 500 pieces placed in front of them on the table. The puzzle box will be covered so they can't see what the puzzle is.
* When the timer goes off to start they will take the cover off the puzzle box and will begin to put it together.
* Teams must stick to their own tables and shouldn't bother other teams while they are assembling the puzzle.
* The first team who completes the puzzle (or has the most completed within the hour) will win! Each group will get to keep the puzzle at the end of the night, and the 1st place team will win a Game Night Prize Pack.

I will note I flubbed up on the prize mentioned - I ended up keeping the puzzles because they were $10 each and instead all the participants got to take a puzzle from our Puzzle Swap (which we had an abundance of). Only the first place winner got to keep their puzzle. I haven't had any kickback (yet) on this, and when I do it again I'm going to pay better attention to that. The winners still won something through, and everyone got to walk away with something.

On Mon, Dec 9, 2024 at 10:04 AM Jean Fellows <progcoord@gladl.org> wrote:

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Jean Fellows

Programming Coordinator

Grand Ledge Area District Library

131 E. Jefferson St.,

Grand Ledge, MI 48837

517-627-7014

We ordered 500 or 550 piece puzzles, all from the same brand and of the same basic difficulty (like, don’t give one team a puzzle with a bunch of individual objects and another a big section of greenery or sky).

The first batch were 550-piece puzzles from a common company, but I’m blanking on the brand name and a quick search isn’t turning them up. The second batch we bought were MasterPieces 500-piece. Those were nice — you can get different puzzles in the same theme, with about the same level of difficulty (ours were southwest road trips, but — for example here — Americana:

<https://www.amazon.com/stores/MasterPieces/500pieces_PuzzlesforAdults/page/0452C4CF-8CC4-46E9-8FD8-DE0F10104CA5?store_ref=bl_ast_dp_brandLogo_sto&ref_=cm_sw_r_mwn_ast_store_4W05DN7GW7X8FPZ9YTRG>). We did it that way rather than all the same puzzle so that we could put them in the circulating collection after using them for the competitions a few times. The teams would have been happy to all do the same puzzle, but we didn’t really need 8 circulating copies of the same one.

Open them ahead of time and make sure the picture inside (if there is one) matches the puzzle.(We had one team absolutely obliterate their box trying to open it quickly!) Open the bags and dump out the puzzle dust. Make sure that the pieces are all cut similarly from one puzzle to the next— we had one turn out to be a more traditional jigsaw cut than the regular grid cut, even though they were the same brand, and it was harder.

At the events, I gave out puzzles various ways — random assignment, choose but they’re wrapped … but what worked best is to have a couple more puzzles than teams and ask a trivia question or do a random drawing to determine the order the teams choose an unwrapped puzzle. This cut down on allegations that someone else’s puzzle was easier, since every team had a choice.

The participants registered ahead of time in 2-4 person teams. I asked just that one person sign up and tell us how many people on their team as part of registration.

The rules were pretty simple … start when we say to start. First 2 or 3 teams done get a prize. Trash talk is okay but don’t Interfere with other teams’ puzzles (said jokingly). Leave your puzzle put together when you finish (so I could put them away and be very careful to get all of the pieces.)

The first team was usually done in about 75 minutes. After the placing teams had finished most other groups usually stayed to finish their puzzles socially.

The last time I did it, a team asked about bringing sorting trays. I said yes and worried it might be unfair … and then they placed last.  If I were doing it again, I might offer black plastic takeout containers to teams as trays.

Prizes were either library swag or $5 gift cards to a coffee place or a free book from the Friends’ book sale. Honestly, a small package of candy or notepads or something else little would probably have been enough. They weren’t really doing it for the prizes.

Saturday afternoons got good turnout — I capped it at 8 teams and it would fill right away. We have another staff member doing them Monday evenings, but she’s only getting about 3 teams at that time.

Once the puzzlers were going, I was able to do work on a laptop while they put their puzzles together.

Our puzzle programs so far have all been for teens and adults, but we’ve had requests for family ones and will be scheduling that soon.

Hope this helps! Happy to answer any other questions this sparks.

Jennifer Foster

Reference Librarian

Grace A. Dow Memorial Library (Midland, MI)

We have been doing competitions since 2018 and they are a huge hit here. We end up doing at least 6 or more every year. Teams between 2-4 people pre-register, and we can only take up to 10 teams due to space constraints in our meeting room. We didn't charge for years and just set out a donation box, but we now charge $5 a team to help with costs. Each team has their own table and we get the same puzzle for each team. We have always done 500 piece puzzles, and I usually try to find them for between $8-$10 each. Amazon typically has some from decent brands in that range, but I've also had luck ordering directly from certain brands when they have sales. I also was able to score a bunch of Gallison puzzles from Ollie's once for $4.99, so I'm always on the look out. This month's were purchased at Hobby Lobby; their Christmas puzzles were half off for quite a while.

I have a program time of 10 with a puzzle start time of 10:15, and I set the stopwatch on my phone so I can give the winners their times. Some of them have started keeping track! We have them on Saturdays when we are only open until 2, so they have the entire time if they need it, but our winning team generally finishes between 35-40 minutes, depending on the difficulty of the puzzle. Our slower groups lean towards the 1.5-2 hour mark.

I also get light refreshments-coffee cake, cheese and crackers, etc. for people to snack on. The prizes for the winners is small-usually a $5 gift card for each person on the team to Amazon, Dairy Queen, Tim Horton's, etc. We do it so often that we really can't afford to give more, or give to more teams.

We don't allow people to bring in accessories like trays for sorting or special lights. We just don't have the room and it makes it a little more even playing field.

I think that's about everything-but if you have any questions please don't hesitate to ask!

--

**Julianne Kammer**

Library Director

Lois Wagner Memorial Library

(586) 727-2665

We have a quarterly puzzle tournament at our library. It is one hour (usually 7-8p.m.) and I have a one hour timer from Youtube that counts down on the projector from when we start.

We have some competitive people participating so I keep everyone outside of the room until all of the teams have gathered or it is 7p.m. I tell everyone to stand by their table but not to touch the puzzle until I say go and begin the timer.

Also, no puzzle tools like sorters are allowed.

The puzzles are always the same one and have found 500 pieces are perfect for the hour time limit. Before the event, I flip the puzzle pieces face up on the tables since they only get an hour to put it together. I keep the box and any additional posters at the table as well.

We generally have six teams of up to four which we ask to register beforehand using a Google Form to sign up the team. I’ve had trouble with people signing up only themselves (even if we say each person in the team needs to sign up in the marketing) and then bringing a whole team and then being short puzzles so I have found the form to be best.

I hope that helps. Good luck with your competition.

Analiese Mattson

Head of Patron Services

Ransom District Library

180 S. Sherwood Ave.

Plainwell, MI 49080

(269) 685-8024

[www.ransomlibrary.org](http://www.ransomlibrary.org/)

The Loutit District Library did a series of jigsaw puzzle events last winter, and we're going to start again in January. They were very popular!

Here's a link to our event post, which has all the rules for patrons. Please let me know what you have questions you have & I'd be happy to answer them:

<https://www.loutitlibrary.org/calendar/#/events/NwLJfJcnLk/instances/e3htP6ZQWl/>

We have purchased a few sets of 10-12 puzzles each. Many other libraries in Michigan are doing the same, and somebody started a Goggle doc for libraries willing to share their puzzles. We usually send them via RIDES or a local ILL system. Some of our puzzles are already spoken for this winter, but we do have some slots available. Here's a link to the doc:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GHfZAlunFXi09Ni25Vv_oIqNYT_IHqGIVxOQbfM-MgM/edit?usp=sharing>

Finally, we got many of our puzzles for free from a local game store. The big puzzle company Ravensburger has a program where they will give out sets of puzzles for events just like these. I think their rule is that each independent games store can sponsor two events per year. Many don't even know about it, and we were the first to ever sign up with our local store. It might be something worth looking into. Our only expense is buying a puzzle or two for the teams who finish the event first.

The only difficult part is having a hard cap on attendance - if we have 10 puzzles, only 10 teams can participate. We've had to turn away people who just showed up, which is why registration is required, timed, and mentioned several times in our event description.

I definitely think it's a fun program! Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kevin

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| --- | --- |
|  | **Kevin Hawley****Library Assistant III**616.850.6951 | [LoutitLibrary.org](http://loutitlibrary.org/)407 Columbus Ave. Grand Haven, MI 49417 |

We have done a puzzle competition for the last few years. Last year we got puzzles from You the Fan ([New Page — YouTheFan](https://www.youthefan.com/new-page)) that were U fo M and Michigan State. They were identical except for colors and logos, which I think is important to eliminate grousing about fairness. YtF gave us a wholesale price and included a couple extra for free because we didn have two full cases. I passed them to another library shortly after we were done with them.

The first time we did a competition it was in our meeting room with 8' tables that were divided in half with cardboard and tape. There were a few minor complaints about the table moving when trying to place pieces because of the other team. Last year we did it at a local restaurant and that worked out great, with the exception of some tables not having great lighting. The big advantage was players could order drinks and since we did it from 3:00 to 6:00 pm many teams stayed for dinner. We offered gift certificates to the local bookstore to the winners (3 person teams).

If there are any other questions please let me know.

Mark

--

**Mark Morton**

Director

Leland Township Public Library

203 E Cedar St

PO Box 736

Leland, MI 49654

231-256-9152

We did our first puzzle competition in October.  Sadly we only had two teams register, but they has a really great time.  Ours was a team competition, and later I heard from one patron that she wanted to participate but couldn't find anyone that wanted to be on her team.  I don't know if you are doing teams or individuals, but that was one take away for me.

I've attached the rules I used.  I do have 8-500 piece puzzle, two opened the rest sealed.  They are the ones that have letters on the back of the pieces to make it easier to put the puzzle together.  I'm happy to send them through rides if you want them.

Kristina

Kristina Knezic, Director

Berrien Springs Community Library

215 W. Union St.

Berrien Springs, MI 49103

269-471-7074

[www.bsclibrary.org](http://www.bsclibrary.org/)

We give all teams the same puzzle, usually 300-500 pieces depending on how difficult the image seems, and plan about two hours. 2-4 people per team, registration required because we include lunch. Each member of our winning team gets to choose their prize (we always have a wide variety of stuff on hand). We keep it really simple and everyone always seems to enjoy it.

I keep the puzzles (occasionally someone wants to take theirs home which is fine) but write on them the year(s) they were used so we don’t repeat them too often. Let me know if you have another question I didn’t think of. It’s fun and definitely one of our easier events to host. Planning one for February here too.

Bethany Romanowski

Library Director

Richfield Township Public Library

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