

**Dear Barcode** is a storytelling game.

It invites people to think deeper about the products they consume, by linking the last digit of a product's barcode with fun and thought-provoking prompts.

The instruction is printed on business-card-sized leaflets, making it easy to distribute and carry around.

Single-colour print on recycled paper minimises the environmental impact of the leaflet.

This game can be played between families and friends, or as a reflective exercise for oneself.



The game seeks to engage the audience with their daily consumption habits, making the mundane visible.

Players are encouraged to think from an environmental perspective, thinking about pasts, futures, and the more-than-human world.

I hope this game is highly replayable because it anchors itself with real-world personal (purchasing) events and features intriguing questions that can be applied to each unique instance.



Photo by Anna Shvets: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-in-red-shirt-holding-fruit-covered-plastic-3683212/>



# How to Play

Look at the last digit of a barcode.  
Take this number and ask yourself the  
corresponding question on the back  
side of this leaflet.

In EAN-13 barcodes, the last digit is a “check digit.” About the check digit: while all other digits say something about the product, the check digit is more unpredictable. It is calculated using a simple equation: multiply every second digit by 3, multiply the remaining digits by 1, sum all the results, and subtract the last digit of this number from 10. This doesn’t mean anything to anyone but the machines with error detection.

A single digit is used for this prompt because of its simplicity and ability to work across all barcode formats. The check digit was chosen because of its poetic property. It is seemingly a random number, but it only exists based on an interaction between all numbers. The fact that it is used for error detection also echos the game’s theme in questioning what seems so ordinary and legitimate.



# Prompts

1. You are an alien anthropologist. Present this product to your fellow aliens.
2. How would a seagull rate this product?
3. Find the descriptive or storytelling text (often on the back or side of pack). Read it, then try describing your own day using a similar style.
4. If this product is made by a smaller local producer, what would be different?
5. You time travelled back 100 years while holding this product. Explain to the locals what this product is and why it exists.
6. In an ideal world, does this product still exist? Why?
7. Where will the components end up one month from now?
8. How do you think the product development team describe their target audience (you)?
9. You and your friend are two politicians arguing about whether to ban this product. Make your case — it's very serious!
0. Think of one of the ingredients in this product. Tell an adventure story about all the places it's been through.

## A STORYTELLING GAME

Dear Barcode is a storytelling game to play with friends, family, or yourself.

We want to think deeper about mass-produced products' positions in the world, their impact, and alternatives.



Look at the last digit of a barcode. In EAN-13 barcodes, this is a "check digit".



Take this number and ask yourself the corresponding question on the back side of this leaflet.



Fun fact about the check digit: while all other digits say something about the product, the check digit is more unpredictable. It is calculated by a simple equation: multiply every second digit by 3, multiply the remaining digits by 1, sum all the results, and subtract the last digit of this number from 10. This doesn't mean anything to anyone, but the machines with error detection.

Share your story with us #dearbarcode

Feel free to reprint and share this leaflet.

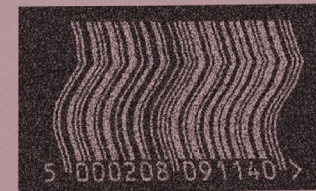
Developed by  
@beth.xia

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## DEAR BARCODE,



## LET'S TELL PRODUCT STORIES DIFFERENTLY.

## **Distribution**

The leaflet will initially be printed in black and white on coloured paper. It will be distributed for free at local flyer racks and local zine fairs.

At a later stage, it may partner with other organisations to cover the production costs and gain wider distribution.

For collaboration or to request a print file for free (so you can print your own copy), please contact me at [bethxia48@gmail.com](mailto:bethxia48@gmail.com).

**Thank you.**