

ESL GAME IDEAS

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Flip a Card

Level: Any Level

Rationale: Students develop vocabulary and, at higher levels, practise proper word order by forming sentences.

Materials: Standard deck of playing cards.

Method: For each card from ace to king, assign two letters of the alphabet, and write these on the board. Assigning letters can be done at random, but it is logical to have some sort of order, e.g.:

A	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	J	Q	K
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

For beginners: Flip a card. The student must think of a word beginning with one of the letters that card represents. If, for example, the card is a 3, the student must say a word beginning with C or P. Variation: The word must fit a category, e.g. animals, occupations, etc.

For higher beginners and intermediate: Flip a certain number of cards—say, seven. Each student must write down a sentence using words beginning with the given letters, in order. If the teacher so wishes, the students can work in small groups. Students then read their sentences aloud.

For advanced: Taking turns with each card flipped, students orally form grammatically and syntactically correct sentences. For example:

Cards: A, Q, K, Q, K, 6, 8, 7, 5, 4, 4, 10, 2, K, 2, 2, 8, 9, A, 7.

Sample sentence: A lovely monkey laughed merrily, for his green elephant drank quickly while orange zebras brought over hungry, intelligent, naughty giraffes.

Bingo! (with irregular verbs)

Level: Easy

The teacher prepares a 5x5 grid with 25 irregular verbs in the past tense in each square. Make enough variations of these grids so each student has one that is slightly (or very) different.

The teacher then calls out the verbs in their present tense form until a student gets five in a diagonal or horizontal row. Bingo!

While it may seem time-consuming to make the grids, they can be used over and over. This game is received very enthusiastically because often, students are already familiar with it. It is great as a warmup activity and can have many variations (past-participle, time of day, vocabulary)

Submitted by Sharon Stokoe

"Jeopardy"

Level: Medium to Difficult

Select 4 or 5 categories - either general (I normally use countries, sports, animals, food and drink and names) or areas from the textbook that is in use - and then divide the board into three - assigning each area with a point score (100, 200, 300 - etc...). Divide the class into teams, or get them to work individually and ask them to select a category and a score.

Countries Sports Animals F&D Names

1
0
0

2
0

0

3
0
0

During your preparation time, think about the easiest and hardest answers for each category and the level of the students and consider how many possible answers there are for each letter of the alphabet (in the case of sports: Archery, Basketball, Cricket, Diving, Equestrian, etc).

If a team or individual is unable to answer or gives a incorrect reply, then that letter remains in that point range until someone answers correctly. If a stalemate situation ever occurs - give correct answers and encourage the students to repeat them a few times, so as they will remember them.

This game is lots of fun, and my students always want to play.

For variation, you can draw a soccer park or basketball court on the board and assign areas in the same way.

Submitted by Stephen John Morrison

Adverbial Charades

Level: Any Level

Each student is given a card with a familiar adverb on it--i.e. quickly, angrily, loudly, happily. Then the class tells the student to do something so they can guess what adverb is on the card. They can tell the student to do things in pantomime, like drink a bowl of soup, or really do it in class, like open a door or take a book from the teacher. (Can't recall where I read this idea, but it is fun and can be played in teams.)

Submitted by Gail Shuster-Bouskila

Who am I??

Level: Any Level

You can use this with any subject. Write the names of famous people (mixed nationalities) on small pieces of paper. Tape a name on the forehead of each student. The individual student should not see his or her paper, but the others should. Then, like with 20 questions, only yes or no questions should be asked. Perhaps start with yourself and ask "Am I a man?" If the answer is yes, I can ask again, but if the answer is no, it's the next person's turn. Play until everyone has guessed who he or she is! This can be played with nationalities, countries, household objects, anything and it's a gas, especially for adult students!!

Submitted by Laura Loder

Guess the Object

Level: Any Level

The teacher prepares cutout pictures that are pasted or taped to index cards. One student selects a card and must describe it in English until another student can guess the object. This is very much like "20 Questions" but instead of the challenge being to ask questions, the bonus is on the cardholder to verbalize the description.

The teacher should be careful to select pictures that reflect the vocabulary level of the students. Simple objects, like "baby", "door" or "car" are good for beginners. Later on, more complicated pictures that suggest actions, scenes and relationships could be used, like: "mother bathing child".

Submitted by Betsy Walker

"Tic Tac Toe" or "Noughts and Crosses"

Level: Any Level

This is a good game for a revision or for a reader's discussion. Divide the class into two groups. Draw a grid of nine squares on the board and write a number on each square (from 1 to 9). Prepare nine questions and set one question for each number. The groups call out the numbers and if they answer the question correctly, they get the point. The goal of the game is to make a line (either horizontal, vertical or diagonal).

Question and Answer Game Activity

Level: Any Level

Usually students answer comprehension questions after a reading. Why not have students create their own comprehension questions? I have and it works well, especially if this activity is turned into a game. I do this by having students in small groups work together to write questions about the text. Only questions which can be answered by the text are allowed. Opinion questions are not allowed. After groups finish writing their questions, they ask their questions to another group which must answer within a specified amount of time (the teacher decides the time according the class level). If the answer is correct and given within the time period, the answering team receives a point. If the answer is incorrect or not found within the time period, the questioning group receives a point, but they must inform the other group of the answer. Each group takes turns asking and answering questions.

Submitted by Greg Goodmacher

Kim's Game on Video

Level: Any Level

The traditional "Kim's Game" uses a tray full of objects to stretch the memory and vocabulary of the players. This version uses moving pictures. Therefore, a larger range of vocabulary, word classes, and phrases can be elicited.

To Play

1. Select any sequence that scans over a large number of objects, people or includes many actions.

Examples:

- The opening of "Masterpiece Theatre"
- The opening of "Miami Vice"
- The toy store in "Home Alone II"
- A display of quiz game prizes

2. Allow players to view the segment once. They are not allowed to take notes.

3. Individually or in groups, form a list of as many of the objects, people or actions in the scene as can be remembered.

4. Play the scene again using still frames to check off the things on the list. Score one point for each correct item but minus one for any item on the list that is not in the scene.

Variation

Narrow the range of things allowable on the list.

Examples:

- Things that start with (pick a letter of the alphabet).
- Things that are (pick a color or quality).
- Things made of (pick a material).
- Things used for (pick an action).

Submitted by Donna Tatsuki

Video Scavenger Hunt

Level: Any Level

Choose a movie, a series of TV commercials or any other video-taped resource that you like or that learners are familiar with and compile lists of things for viewers or listeners to find. It is also possible to prepare a library of films and allow the players to search the tapes.

Each team gets a different list. If only one machine is available, a time limit may be set and the team that finds the most in the allotted time wins. It is also possible to assign this as a week long hunt (on student's own time). In such a case, one tape or many tapes can be used.

Here are some suggested categories:

Information: Ask players to find specific facts or figures. These facts may be verbal or visual. Information found on charts, graphs and in the closing credits of a film are good sources.

Counts: Count the number of times a certain word is said in a clip. Count the number

of people or objects of a certain quality (eg. people who are male, or people wearing blue, or objects made of wood). Count the number of people doing a particular activity (eg. people who talk to a particular character, people sleeping in class, people boarding a train). Count the number of times a particular action is performed (eg. number of times a character goes up and down stairs, crosses a bridge, lights a cigarette).

Scenes: Find a particular scene (eg. a love scene), location (eg. a river, Paris), view or social activity (eg. a picnic, a speech).

Speech Acts: Find an example of a speech act. (eg. inviting, refusing, requesting, making an introduction, apologizing).

Submitted by Donna Tatsuki

Concentration Using an Overhead Projector

Level: Any Level

This is a game for the overhead projector. It is a version of the game "Concentration" in which students flip over cards of items to find matching pairs. For the overhead projector you will need to make a grid of squares on a transparency. Five squares across by four down. I make the square about 1.25 inches on a side. At the top of the grid write the letters THINK, one letter over each column. Down the left side of the grid write the numbers 1234, one number to each row. Make a transparency of your grid. Next, cut out cardboard or heavy paper "tents": small rectangular pieces just large enough to cover each space. I call them tents because they have a little flap which I use to pick them up. Prepare the game in advance. You have to think of ten pairs of any item. For example, ten pairs of opposites, ten pairs of irregular past tense forms (get,got) or ten pairs of a picture and a word. Write (or draw) one word or picture in each space in a random fashion. Place the transparency on the OHP (with the light off) and cover each space. When you turn the light on, the students will see the grid but each image or word will be dark. (You will be able to see the words and images illuminated through the paper)

TO PLAY: Instruct the students (and model of course the first time) that they are to pick two squares by calling out a number and a letter for each square. For example T2 and N4. You uncover the spaces as a student calls out the letter. If the two spaces uncovered are a match write the student's name in the spaces with a marker and toss them a prize (a piece of candy serves nicely). If the two spaces are not a match, cover

them back up and call a different student. As spaces are uncovered, excitement builds in the classroom until the last two spaces. Since these are obvious winners, you can take the opportunity for teacher inspired humor and call on either the class "comic" making a big display of "Are you sure?" or any other individual who maybe had repeated incorrect answers.

An individual game usually takes between 15 and 20 minutes to complete.

If you keep several transparencies of the grid handy, you can prepare a game pretty fast for the last part of the class. If you are doing a unit on irregular past tense, you can prepare a grid using the specific verbs that you reviewed in the lesson. This game was introduced to me by veteran Los Angeles Unified School District teacher Vida Hellman (now retired).

Submitted by Barry Bakin (bbakin@lausd.k12.ca.us)

Prove it

Level: Easy to Medium

Give your students one or more statements to prove or disprove. The statements can tie in with the topic or the grammar point of the class. Examples: Nobody in this class likes winter. Everyone here can draw a Volkswagen Beetle car.

Students talk to as many other students as possible to prove/disprove the statements. Then they give feedback to the class: 'This statement is not true. There are at least 5 people in this class who like winter.'

Submitted by John Raby (jraby@jiu.ac.jp)

What's the Word?

Level: Medium to Difficult

On an index card, write a word (example: school) and write 4 or 5 key words that cannot be used to describe that particular word. (Example: teachers, blackboards, students, desks, tests) Any other words can be used except for the words written on the index card. A sample card would look like this:

SCHOOL

teachers
blackboards
students
desks
tests

Submitted by Sandra Duncan

Twenty Questions

Level: Any Level

First one member of the class chooses an object, an occupation, or an action which ever you decide. Then members of the class try to discover what it is by asking questions which can be answered by "yes" or "no"

For example, if the subject is "occupations" then the questions might be like these.

Do you work in the evenings?

Do you work alone?

Do you work outside?

Submitted by Sandy Herman

Simon Says

Level: Easy

This game which is often played by native-speaker children is very useful in the ESL classroom. The person chosen as "Simon" stands in front of the classroom and issues commands. The rest of the class only follows these commands if prefixed with the words "Simon says". If someone follows a command not prefixed by "Simon says", he is out of the game. The last person remaining becomes the next "Simon". Some examples of commands are: stand up, sit down, touch your left ear, say "yes"

Submitted by Joe Brooke

Whispering Game

Level: Easy

Divide the class into two teams. Line up the players. If there's an odd number of players, one can be the teacher's "helper". The teacher or his helper whispers a message to the first person of both group A and group B. The game only starts when both players know the message. Then each player whispers the message to the next player in his group sucessively until the last player gets the message. The team which can repeat the message first and correctly receives a point. Start the game over with the second student of each group becoming the first ones in line.

Submitted by Vera Mello

Hangman

Level: Any Level

Divide the class into two teams. On the blackboard, draw spaces for the number of letters in a word. Have the players guess letters in the word alternating between the teams. If a letter in the word is guessed correctly, the teacher writes it into the correct space. If a letter is guessed which is not in the word, the teacher draws part of the man being hanged. The team which can guess the word first receives a point, then start the game over.

Submitted by Charles Kelly