

GAMES

How can you create a fun and lively atmosphere in the classroom?

Games provide stimulating ways to practice a variety of skills, including vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and listening. Classic and innovative games, such as Twenty Questions, Hot Potato, and Change Chairs, add enjoyment to learning. Depending on the teacher's goals, games can be used as a warm-up, as additional practice, or as a review.

These Games can be adapted for use with different skills and with different levels. Handouts are not usually required.

Games	Use to practice	Use with
Ask the Right Question	Grammar	Levels 2 and 3
Bingo	Listening, Vocabulary	All levels
Chain Game	Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening	Levels Intro, 1, and 2
Change Chairs	Vocabulary, Listening	Levels Intro and 1
Concentration	Vocabulary, Grammar	Levels Intro and 1
Hot Potato	Grammar, Speaking	All levels
Just One Minute	Speaking, Listening	Levels 2 and 3
Kim's Game	Vocabulary	Intro Level
Line Up!	Vocabulary, Grammar, Speaking	Levels Intro and 1
Mime	Vocabulary, Grammar	All levels
Picture It!	Vocabulary	All levels
Prediction Bingo	Listening, Reading	Levels 1, 2, and 3
Run For It!	Grammar	All levels
Sculptures	Vocabulary, Grammar	Levels Intro and 1
Simon Says	Vocabulary, Listening	Levels Intro and 1
Split Sentences	Grammar	Levels 2 and 3
Tic-Tac-Toe	Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation	All levels
True or False?	Grammar, Speaking, Listening	All levels
Twenty Questions	Grammar, Speaking, Listening	Levels 1 and 2
Vocabulary Tennis	Vocabulary	All levels

Ask the Right Question

Aim: Give Ss practice making Wh-questions.

Levels: 2 and 3

Preparation: Bring three index cards for each S.

Comment: Use to practice grammar.

- Write this statement on the board:
Evan's a chef at Ricky's Restaurant.
- Elicit Wh-questions that the statement could answer (e.g., *Where does Evan work? What does Evan do? Who's the chef at Ricky's Restaurant?*).
- Give each S three index cards. Ss write one statement on each card that could answer several Wh-questions. Go around the class and give help as needed.
- Collect all the cards and mix them up. Then divide the class into two teams (A and B).
- Explain the game. S1 from Team A chooses a card and reads the statement aloud. S1 from Team B makes a Wh-question for it. If the question is correct, Team B gets a point. If it is not correct, S1 from Team A makes a Wh-question. If the question is correct, Team A gets a point. Then S2 from Team B chooses a card.
- Model the game a few times.
- Play the game until all the cards have been used. The team with the most points wins.

Bingo

Aim: Help Ss improve listening and vocabulary in a fun way.

Levels: All

Preparation: Prepare a list of at least 15 words you want to review.

Comment: Use to practice listening and vocabulary.

- Tell Ss to draw a bingo card with nine squares on a piece of paper:

- Read and spell each word on your list. Then make a sentence with it. For example, say: “Family. F-A-M-I-L-Y. There are three people in my family.”
- Ss listen and write each word in a different square on their bingo cards. Point out that they can write the words in any order.
- Play the game. Read out the words from your list in a different order. As you read each word aloud, spell it and use it in a sentence. Ss circle the words on their cards. (Note: Cross the words off your list, so you can check Ss’ cards later.) The first S to circle all the words in one row shouts “Bingo!” If the words are correct, the student wins.

Variation 1: Use this game to review vocabulary, the alphabet, sounds, numbers, or grammar (e.g., verb forms).

Variation 2: Instead of reading out the word, read out a definition. For example, when you say “This is the opposite of *hot*,” Ss circle *cold*.

Chain Game

Aim: Give Ss listening practice while reviewing vocabulary.

Levels: Intro, 1, and 2

Preparation: None

Comment: Use to review vocabulary and practice grammar and listening.

- Ss sit in circles in small groups.
- Explain the task. S1 makes a sentence. S2 repeats the sentence and adds to it. S3 repeats S2's sentence and adds to it. For example:
S1: Last weekend I went dancing.
S2: Last weekend I went dancing and read a book.
S3: Last weekend I went dancing, read a book, and . . .
Ss continue until a S can't remember what to say. Then the next S continues the sentence.
- Point out that the information in the sentence can be false.
- Model the game with one group.
- Ss play the game.

Variations: Use this activity to review specific groups of vocabulary, such as food (e.g., *I like . . .*), clothes (e.g., *I went to the store and I bought . . .*), or family members (e.g., *Tonight I'm going to call . . .*).

Change Chairs

Aim: Review vocabulary and improve listening in an active way.

Levels: Intro and 1

Preparation: None

Comment: Use with classes of six or more Ss to review vocabulary and improve listening.

- Ask Ss to move their chairs into a circle, facing the center. Stand in the middle.
- Explain the task. Give an instruction that starts with *Change chairs* (e.g., “Change chairs if you are wearing jeans.”). All Ss wearing jeans stand up and change chairs.
- Model the task a few times.
- Ask one S to stand up. Take away his or her chair.
- Explain the task. The S without a chair stands in the center and gives the next instruction (e.g., “Change chairs if you have one brother.”). This time, the S in the center also tries to sit down. The S left without a chair stands in the center and gives the next instruction.
- Model the task.
- Ss play the game.

Variations: Use this game to review specific categories of vocabulary (e.g., clothes, hobbies).

Concentration

Aim: Give Ss practice reviewing vocabulary and grammar in a fun way.

Levels: Intro and 1

Preparation: Make one set of cards for each group of Ss. Every two cards in each set match (e.g., word + picture, word + definition, word + opposite).

Comment: Use to review vocabulary and grammar.

- Ss work in groups of four.
- Give each group a set of cards. Ask the Ss to put all their cards face down on a desk.
- Explain the task. Ss take turns choosing two cards, turning them over, and saying the words. If the two cards match, they keep the pair of cards and take another turn. If the cards don't match, they put them face down again, and the next S takes a turn.
- Model the task with one group.
- Ss play the game. The S in each group with the most cards wins.

Variations: After Ss match cards, they use the word in a sentence with a specific verb tense (e.g., simple present).

Hot Potato

Aim: Give Ss practice asking and answering questions.

Levels: All

Preparation: Write questions on ten pieces of paper (one question per paper). Then wrap the papers around each other to make a paper ball. Bring music and an audio player to class.

Comment: Use to practice grammar and speaking.

- Ss sit in a circle.
- Explain the game. While you play music, Ss throw the paper ball to each other. When you stop the music, the S holding the ball takes off the outside piece of paper, reads the question, and answers it. Then start the music and the Ss throw the paper ball again.
- Model the game. Then play the game until Ss answer all ten questions.

Variations: Use this game to practice specific structures (e.g., present perfect, passives, and conditionals).

Just One Minute

Aim: Help Ss develop oral fluency and listening skills.

Levels: 2 and 3

Preparation: Bring a clock or watch with a second display or hand to class.

Comment: Use to practice speaking and listening.

- Write a topic on the board (e.g., customs, food, transportation).
- Explain the game. Ss work in pairs. S1 talks about the topic for one minute. Point out that S1 cannot repeat ideas, change the topic, or hesitate for more than five seconds. S2 listens for repetition, topic changes, or hesitations. After one minute, say, “Stop!” If S1 talked without any repetition, topic changes, or hesitations, he or she gets a point.
- Play the game. S2 tells S1 about any repetition, topic changes, or hesitations. If there are none, S1 gets a point.
- The Ss in each pair change roles. Write another topic on the board and S2 talks for one minute.
- Play the game with a few more topics. The S in each pair with the most points wins.

Variation 1: Write several topics on the board. S1 chooses a topic from the board.

Variation 2: At the end of each game, a S chooses the next topic.

Kim's Game

Aim: Improve Ss' ability to remember vocabulary.

Level: Intro

Preparation: Bring objects (or pictures of objects) to class.

Comment: Use to improve vocabulary.

- Put the objects on your desk and cover them.
- Explain the task. Uncover the objects and ask Ss to look at them for three minutes. Then cover them. In pairs, Ss list the objects they remember. Set a three-minute time limit.
- Ss complete the task.
- Uncover the objects. The pair with the most correct words wins.

Variation 1: Write words on the board. Then erase them.

Variation 2: Put a picture with a lot of details on your desk. Ss use a specific structure (e.g., *there is/there are*, prepositions of place) to write sentences about the objects.

Line Up!

Aim: Give Ss practice using a variety of skills in an active way.

Levels: Intro and 1

Preparation: None

Comment: Use to review vocabulary and practice grammar and speaking.

- Review or teach these expressions:
You're in front of / behind me.
- Write a question on the board. For example:
What time do you get up?
- Explain the task. Ss go around the class and ask each other the question on the board. Then they stand in line according to the answers (e.g., in time order). Point out that the board is the beginning and the other end of the classroom is the end (e.g., of the day).
- Model the task with a few Ss.
- Explain that when two answers are the same, Ss stand in alphabetical order of their first names.
- Ss complete the task.
- Ask Ss to explain their position in line. For example: "I'm number 1. I get up at 5:00."

Variation 1: Use this game to practice the alphabet (e.g., *What's your last name?*), dates (e.g., *When's your birthday?*), lengths of time (e.g., *How long do you sleep each night?*), and structures (e.g., *How many phone calls have you made today?*).

Acknowledgment: Idea adapted from *The Grammar Activity Book* by Bob Obee, Cambridge University Press.

Mime

Aim: Help Ss personalize and review vocabulary and grammar in an active way.

Levels: All

Preparation: Make sets of vocabulary cards (one per four Ss). Put each set in an envelope.

Comment: Use to review vocabulary and grammar.

- Ss work in groups of four.
- Give each group a set of cards.
- Explain the rules. One S in each group chooses a card and mimes the activity (e.g., wash your hair, watch a comedy on TV). The first S to guess the activity correctly keeps the card and chooses the next one.
- Point out that Ss cannot speak while they are miming words.
- Ss continue until they use all the cards. The S with the most cards wins.

Variation 1: Use this game to review specific structures, such as present continuous (e.g., *She is washing her hair.*) or simple past vs. past continuous (e.g., *He was cooking when the phone rang.*).

Variation 2: Ss make sets of vocabulary cards in small groups. Then they exchange cards with another group and mime the activities on the new cards.

Picture It!

Aim: Help Ss understand vocabulary in a visual way.

Levels: All

Preparation: Make sets of vocabulary cards (one per four Ss).
Put each set in an envelope.

Comment: Use to review vocabulary.

- Ss work in groups of four.
- Give each group a set of cards.
- Explain the rules. One S in each group chooses a card and draws a picture of the word on a piece of paper. The other Ss try to guess the word. The first S to guess the word correctly gets a point and chooses the next card.
- Point out that the S drawing the picture cannot write numbers or letters, talk, or make gestures.
- Model the task by drawing a picture of a word on the board. The class guesses the word.
- Play the game until Ss use all the cards. The S in each group with the most points wins.

Variation: Use one set of cards. Divide the class into two teams (A and B). One S from Team A chooses a card and draws the picture on the board. The Ss in Team A have two minutes to guess the word. If they guess correctly, Team A gets a point. Repeat with Team B and continue until Ss use all cards. The team with the most points wins.

Prediction Bingo

Aim: Give Ss practice predicting the content of an audio program or text.

Levels: 1, 2, 3

Preparation: None

Comment: Use to practice listening or reading.

- Tell Ss the topic of the audio program they will listen to or the text they will read (e.g., our lives in the future).
- Explain the task. Each S draws a bingo card with nine squares. Ss predict content words (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives) related to the topic individually. Then they write one word in each square. For example:

robots	cell phones	computers
school	work	cars
money	travel	time

- Ss listen to the audio program or read the text. When Ss hear or see a word that's on their bingo card, they circle it.
- The S with the most circled words wins.

Variation: Ss make bingo cards in pairs. Then they exchange cards with another pair.

Run For It!

Aim: Help Ss practice prepositions of time.

Levels: All

Preparation: Prepare a list of sentences with missing prepositions. Write each missing preposition on a separate card and post the cards around the classroom walls.

Comment: Use to practice grammar.

- Divide Ss into two teams (A and B). Assign each member of the teams a number (e.g., S1, S2).
- Read out the first sentence without saying the preposition (e.g., “I always get up [BLANK] 6 A.M. on weekdays.”). S1 from each team runs to find the card containing the missing preposition. The first S to reach the correct card gets a point for his or her team.
- Play the game until you use all the sentences. The team with the most points wins.

Variation 1: Use this game to review prepositions of place or time, modals, and auxiliaries (e.g., *do, did, have*).

Variation 2: If Ss cannot move freely around the room, they can point to the correct wall.

Sculptures

Aim: Give Ss practice reviewing vocabulary in an active way.

Levels: Intro and 1

Preparation: List vocabulary you want to review.

Comment: Use to review vocabulary and grammar.

- Divide the class into teams of three.
- Explain the task. Whisper an activity to one S (e.g., *play soccer*). This S whispers the activity to the other Ss on his or her team. The team has one minute to form a sculpture that illustrates the activity (e.g., S1 pretends to kick a ball, S2 pretends to be a goalkeeper). The other teams guess the activity. The first team to guess correctly gets a point.
- Model the task with one team.
- Play the game until you use all the vocabulary. The team with the most points wins.

Variation 1: Use this game to review vocabulary such as household chores, celebrations, or entertainment.

Variation 2: Ask Ss to use specific grammar structures when guessing the activity (e.g., present continuous, simple past).

Simon Says

Aim: Give Ss active practice developing listening skills.

Levels: Intro and 1

Preparation: None

Comment: Use to review vocabulary and practice listening.

- Ss stand up.
- Explain the task. Give an instruction. If you start the instruction with *Simon says* (e.g., “Simon says touch your toes.”), Ss follow the instruction. If you give the instruction without *Simon says* (e.g., “Touch your toes.”), Ss do nothing.
- Explain that Ss sit down if they follow the instruction when you don’t say *Simon says*. They also sit down if they do the wrong action (e.g., they touch their knees instead of their toes).
- Model the game with a few instructions.
- Play the game. The last student standing wins.

Variation 1: Use this game to review action verbs (e.g., *sing*, *swim*) or sports (e.g., *play tennis*).

Variation 2: The winning S stands at the front of the class and gives the instructions for the next game.

Split Sentences

Aim: Help Ss understand complex sentences.

Levels: 2 and 3

Preparation: Write ten complex sentences and split them in half. Make sets of the split sentences (one per three Ss). Put each set in an envelope.

Comment: Use to practice grammar.

- Model the task with split sentences. For example:

If I found a wallet,	I would call the police.
If I saw a snake,	I would scream.
If I were rich,	I would share my wealth.

- Ss work in teams of three. Give each group a set of split sentences.
- Ask each group to match the split sentences.
- Ss complete the task.
- The first team to match the split sentences correctly wins.

Variations: Use this game to practice specific complex structures, such as conditionals, passives, two-part verbs, and tag questions.

Tic-Tac-Toe

Aim: Help Ss review words in a fun way.

Levels: All

Preparation: Make a list of words you want to review.

Comment: Use to review vocabulary and practice grammar and pronunciation.

- Draw a chart with nine squares on the board. Write one word in each square. For example:

know	give	think
fall	feel	buy
catch	sing	swim

- Divide the class into two teams (X and O).
- Explain the game. Team X chooses a word on the board (e.g., *buy*) and uses it in a specific way (e.g., changes the verb tense or uses it in a sentence). If the answer is correct, replace the word *buy* with an X. If the answer is incorrect, Team O tries to give the correct answer. If Team O's answer is correct, replace the word *buy* with an O. If neither team gives the correct answer, tell Ss the answer. Then replace the word *buy* with a different word.
- Play the game. The first team to get a straight line of three Xs or Os (across, down, or diagonally) wins.

Variation: Use this game to review question words (e.g., *what, where*), modals (e.g., *would, could*), adverbs of frequency, pronunciation (e.g., pronunciation of words, rhyming words), and vocabulary.

True or False?

Aim: Give Ss practice using grammar in a personalized way.

Levels: All

Preparation: None

Comment: Use to practice grammar, speaking, and listening.

- Each S writes six statements about themselves. Three statements are true and three are false. For example:
I can sing really well.
I have three sisters.
- Explain the game. Ss take turns reading their statements aloud in small groups. The other Ss guess which statements are true and which are false. Ss get one point for each correct guess.
- Ss play the game. The S in each group with the most points wins.

Twenty Questions

Aim: Give Ss practice asking yes/no questions.

Levels: 1 and 2

Preparation: None

Comment: Use to practice grammar, speaking, and listening.

- Ss work in small groups.
- Explain the task. One S in each group thinks of a famous person. The other Ss ask yes/no questions to guess the person. For example: “Is it a man? Is he a singer? Is he from Canada?” The S only answers “yes” or “no.” The S who correctly guesses the person gets a point and thinks of the next famous person.
- Model the task. Think of a famous person and the class asks yes/no questions.
- Ss play the game. The S in each group with the most points wins.

Variation 1: Write famous people’s names on pieces of paper (one name per paper, one paper per S). Attach the papers to the Ss’ backs. Ss go around the room and ask yes/no questions to guess the name (e.g., “Am I a man?”).

Variation 2: Use this game to practice present tense (e.g., *Is she an actress?*), past tense (e.g., *Was she an actress?*), or infinitives and gerunds (e.g., *Is it used to send information? Is it used for sending information?*).

Vocabulary Tennis

Aim: Help Ss review categories of words in a fun way.

Levels: All

Preparation: None

Comment: Use to review vocabulary.

- Divide the class into two teams (A and B).
- Explain the game. Call out a category (e.g., jobs). Team A “serves” by saying a word in that category (e.g., *teacher*). Team B “returns the serve” by saying a different word from that category (e.g., *nurse*). The teams take turns saying words from the category.
- The game continues until one team can’t think of any more words. The other team gets a point.
- Call out a different category (e.g., colors, furniture, leisure activities, adjectives) and play the game again.
- The team with the most points wins.

Variation: Bring a balloon to class. Teams A and B stand on opposite sides of the room. When Team A says a word, it “serves” the balloon to Team B. Team B must say a different word before the balloon reaches its side of the room. If Team B doesn’t say a word or drops the balloon, Team A gets a point.